



## **Implementation of English Competency-Based Curriculum in Public Sandbox Schools in Thailand's Deep South**

**Singhanat Nomnian<sup>a\*</sup>, Watcharin Fonghoi<sup>b</sup>, Nasree Pitaksuksan<sup>c</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> singhanat.non@mahidol.ac.th, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand

<sup>b</sup> watcharin.f@pnu.ac.th, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Princess of Naradhiwas University, Narathiwat, Thailand

<sup>c</sup> nasree.p@pnu.ac.th, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Princess of Naradhiwas University, Narathiwat, Thailand

\* Corresponding author, singhanat.non@mahidol.ac.th

### **APA Citation:**

Nomnian, S., Fonghoi, W., & Pitaksuksan, N. (2025) Implementation of English competency-based curriculum in public sandbox schools in Thailand's deep south. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 18(2), 212-235. <https://doi.org/10.70730/JLAD7856>

Received 15/09/2024	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
Received in revised form 23/02/2025	An English competency-based curriculum (CBC) policy has recently been proposed and implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE) at public sandbox schools in education innovation areas around Thailand. Little is known about CBC policy implementation in Thailand's Deep South. This study explores voices of the key stakeholders—school administrators, teachers, teacher educator and parents—regarding CBC policy implementation in Narathiwat, one of the three southernmost provinces. Drawing upon a reflexive thematic analysis of the interview transcripts of fifteen stakeholders, the findings reveal four key factors underpinning effective English CBC policy implementation: policy implementation at the school level, influence of sociocultural and linguistic contexts, the support of the MoE, and the inclusive engagement of stakeholders. Though this study was
Accepted 04/03/2025	

	<p>conducted in only one southern province, its implications may help policy makers, educational administrators, and relevant parties recognize issues attending the implementation of English CBC in public sandbox schools in all of Thailand's southernmost provinces—this corresponds to the advocacy of equal opportunities and education equity (SDG 4 Quality Education) for all.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> English competency-based curriculum, policy implementation, public sandbox schools, stakeholders, Thailand's deep south</p>
--	--

## Introduction

Evidence-informed policies are necessary for Thailand to meet its ambitious education and development goals (UNICEF, 2019). For nearly seventeen years, Thailand's content-based Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) has been employed as a guideline for schools by focusing on instructional practices, prescribed expectations for student learning, and student performance assessments. But Vibulphol et al. (2021) claim that teacher confusion concerning the Curriculum leads to ineffective implementation of the policy and student underperformance. Thus, better communication and ongoing faculty professional development are warranted, especially when a new education policy will be implemented.

Drawing upon Ra-ngubtook and Bhongsatiern (2022), there are four levels of evaluating and measuring learner ability and achievement—classroom, school, local, and national—to ensure that all children are properly educated and actualize their full potential. Thummaphan et al. (2022) found that learner quality in Thailand is still below the Ministry of Education (MoE)'s expectations, with low levels of critical thinking, problem-solving, and an inability to apply classroom learning to everyday life. For instance, Thai upper secondary school students' English scores on the national exams from 2007-2020 were on average below the fifty-percent mark (Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023). To remedy such shortcomings, The Education Sandbox Act was approved and passed in 2019. It pilots innovative education policies and practices by adopting a competency-based curriculum (CBC) instead of the current content-based curriculum that has governed compulsory education since 2008 (Equitable Education Fund, 2021). To this end, the MoE has introduced education innovation areas (education sandbox) in different regions across Thailand, in the hope of reducing education inequity and increasing the quality of instruction. The three southernmost provinces of Yala, Natathiwat, and Pattani are part of this program.

Because the MoE launched CBC only five years ago (in 2019), few studies of it have been conducted anywhere in Thailand—let alone in its Deep South (e.g. Thipatdee, 2021; Thummaphan et al., 2022; Widiawati & Savski, 2020). Peace Survey Network (2019) claims that in order to avoid disappointing the local population, education reform in the southern border provinces must ensure that the public education system genuinely and sufficiently emphasizes and respects the diverse linguistic, ethnic, and religious identities and cultures of the area. This is the only way sustainably to resolve its longstanding sociopolitical unrest, for any offense against local sensibilities could provoke severe criticism and long-term loss of trust between the locals and educational authorities (Peace Survey Network, 2019).

Narathiwat, located on the Gulf of Thailand and the Malay Peninsula, is the terminus of the southern trainline and borders the Malaysian states of Kelantan and Perak. Most of its population is Muslim, and the province has long been riven by political unrest stemming from complex linguistic and sociocultural diversity. The attendant conflicts and insurgencies have inadvertently hindered students' academic achievement (Uddin et al., 2023). Students from this province acquired almost one year less schooling than those from the rest of the Southern region. Hence the urgent need to implement customized education reforms and policies (Uddin & Santisart, 2023). Peace Survey Network (2019) reveals that education quality in the Deep South was the lowest in the country based on the Office of National Economic and Social Advisory Council's (NESAC) 2017 Human Progress Index, with Narathiwat ranked 77<sup>th</sup>, Pattani 76<sup>th</sup>, and Yala 70<sup>th</sup>. It is thus imperative to gain insights from key stakeholders who are involved in the implementation of English CBC in order to determine whether this policy is suitable and effective for the public sandbox schools.

## **Literature Review**

### **English Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand**

English is one of the compulsory foreign languages prescribed by the MoE, which aims to equip young learners with communicative skills and knowledge of the global lingua franca (Hiranburana et al., 2017; Inphoo & Nomnian, 2019). Raising student English proficiency to national benchmark levels is a priority of governments, administrators, and policy makers around the world, Thailand included (Hiranburana et al., 2017; Shepherd & Ainsworth, 2017). A teacher educator in this study attempted to implement the MoE's CBC policy not only to meet national targets of student academic achievement, but also to enhance teacher English proficiency and

professional development based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR hereafter). The MoE has at all basic education levels adopted CEFR as a proficiency benchmark for English language assessments and ELT policy reform in order to promote a national standard of English competency among teachers and students (Hiranburana et al., 2017).

According to UNICEF (2019), high levels of government investment in education over the past two decades have helped Thailand markedly increase access to primary and secondary schooling. But education inequities persist, with outcomes varying according to geography, language, and socioeconomic status. The future of Thai society depends not only on improving the quality of its schools, but also on increasing the productivity and competencies of its citizens. It is, therefore, important to develop life-long learners, innovative co-creators, and active citizens despite the challenges of social inequality, education inequity, and the insufficiency of evidence-based education research and development (Ruksopollmuang & Fry, 2022; Rueangdej & Nomnian, 2021).

Savski (2023) argues that the McDonaldization of English language teaching (ELT) in Asia—with its emphasis on standardization and near-automation of English language teaching and learning—disempowers teachers and administrators through a reliance on global texts and tests that preclude them from tailoring material to their students' needs and culture. Because Thai students struggle with English, Thipatdee (2021) recommends implementing a competency-based curriculum policy designed with clear learning objectives, contents, and instructional procedures based on CEFR performative assessment. Teachers should integrate the three dimensions of competencies—knowledge, skills, and attitude—through the use of community-based contents, cooperative learning, conversation performances, reflections for improvement, and the assessment indicators mutually identified and agreed between students and teachers (Thipatdee, 2021; Saemee & Nomnian, 2021).

ELT in this southernmost region is vital for higher living standards and quality education. Teacher educators can implement strategies for education reform, teachers' professional development, and policy execution (Hoque et al., 2020). Working closely with teachers and schools to identify areas for improvement and provide constructive feedback for development, teacher educators are responsible for knowledge management among school networks within their jurisdiction and cross-jurisdiction, exchanging experiences with schools located in their own Education Service Area Office—also called the Education District Office, a central point for policy implementation and feedback (Equitable Education Fund, 2021, p.8).

Effective supervision of educators enhances teaching and learning and is accordingly a pillar of academic improvement that can increase the odds of successful policy implementation and of meeting the standards established by the MoE (Hiliya et al., 2022).

### **English Competency-based Curriculum**

The MoE in 2019 proposed and implemented a competency-based curriculum and established education sandbox innovation areas in various regions in Thailand. CBC is considered an effective learning approach for Thai students as it differs from the content-centric 2008 Basic Education Core Curriculum, which included five key competencies: communication, critical thinking, problem solving, application of life skills, and application of technological skills (Soparat et al., 2015). CBC, by contrast, focuses on the implementation of skills, knowledge and abilities constructed by individual learners whose teachers facilitate their learning. CBC aims to equip learners with six competencies: self-management, higher-order thinking, communication, teamwork, citizenship, and sustainable living in harmony with nature and technology (Thummaphan et al., 2022).

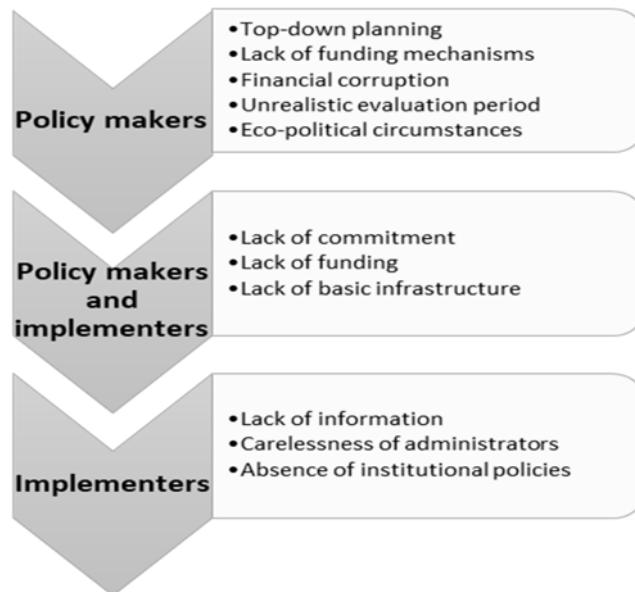
According to Thummaphan et al. (2022), CBC development proceeds as follows: first, the determination of core competencies and learning designs; second, learning management focusing on competency development and learning assessment of individual progress; and third, a suitable timeframe with sufficient preparation for action, and evaluation for continuous improvement. The framework consists of three main dimensions: 1) competence-based curriculum design; 2) learning management and assessment; and 3) learning evaluation and curriculum management. These dimensions underpin the school curriculum to enhance learners' competencies (Thummaphan et al., 2022).

### **Education Policy Implementation**

Education policy concerns a specifically prescribed set of educational goals that academic institutions are required to implement and achieve within a given timeframe. Muthanna and Sang (2023) propose a model of key factors driving education policy implementation failure, which is depicted below.

**Figure 1**

*Key Factors Driving Policy Implementation Failure (Adapted from Muthanna & Sang, 2023, p. 19)*



Muthanna and Sang's (2023) model illustrates a cascade of policy implementation failure from the top to the bottom. On the one hand, policy makers (e.g., the MoE) plan a policy or strategy from an ivory tower, without the involvement of any implementers. Drawbacks to this top-down approach include lack of funding mechanisms, financial corruption, unrealistic evaluation periods, and the prevailing economic and political circumstances. On the other hand, a bottom-up approach risks implementers—such as school administrators, teachers, and students—lacking important information and institutional policies. The middle ground, meanwhile, faults *both* policy makers *and* implementers for policy implementation failure, owing to a lack of commitment from both parties, financial constraints, and lack of basic infrastructure.

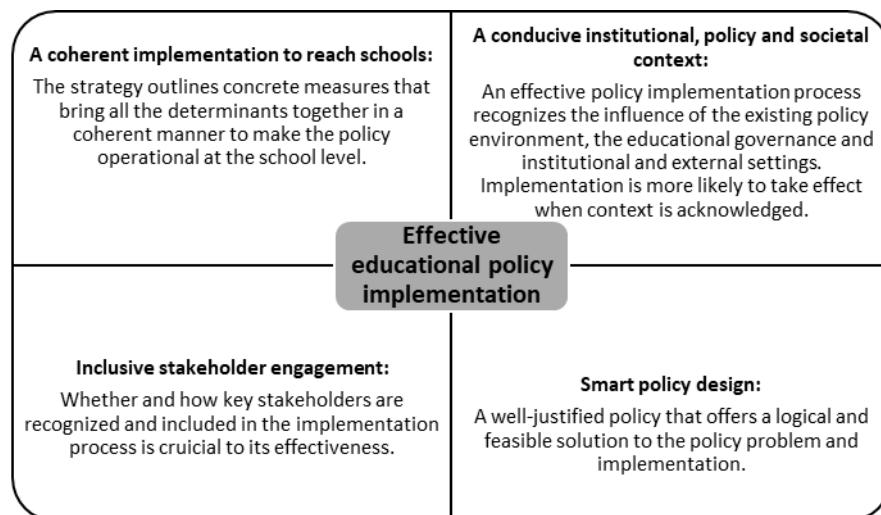
Nomnian and Arphattananon (2018) argue that effective English language education in Thai government schools requires the engagement of relevant parties—including the MoE, school directors, department chairs, education experts, teachers, students, and parents. In addition, school principals' core competencies—strategic thinking and innovation, managerial

and instructional leadership, personal excellence, and stakeholder engagement—should be well-developed, and principals should establish professional learning communities to facilitate the continuous development of English language teaching and learning in Thailand (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018).

Similarly, Viennet and Pont (2017) claim that practitioners' background knowledge not only enables policy implementation at the school and district levels, but also acquaints implementers with the strategies for meeting the needs of local imperatives. Figure 2 (Adapted from Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 42-43) illustrates effective education policy implementation.

**Figure 2**

*Effective Education Policy Implementation*



CBC policy implementation in this study can be viewed as a purposeful, multidirectional, non-linear, and contextualized transformation. Accordingly, it is vital for policy makers, administrators, and teachers to recognize how the current educational practices and existing sociolinguistic, cultural, economic, and political factors shape policy employment and translation for all sectors and stakeholders.

Chompucot's study (2011), for example, explored the factors affecting the success of education policy implementation in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand: Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Though these provinces are riven by political unrest, separatism, insurgency, and social discord, the study found that the schools there had achieved their

education policy goals. But their success was possible only with the help of the relevant stakeholders: teacher educators, school administrators, teachers, parents, and communities (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018).

## Methodology

### Case Study Research Design

Case studies concern real-life phenomena—individuals, groups, organizations, events, or problems—chosen for in-depth investigation (Halkias et al., 2022; Ridder, 2017). This present study explored each school as a case, investigating its stakeholders' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in implementing CBC policy in the sandbox schools of Narathiwat. Studying an individual school in this way may reveal and address its professional, social, behavioral, psychological, organizational, cultural, and environmental dynamics. And these insights may then fruitfully be applied to other, kindred, schools, notwithstanding the inherently limited generalizability of case studies (Drisko, 2025).

### Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted at three public schools that provide primary education for local students. Each sandbox school in this study was identified by its size as determined by the MoE; thus, there was School XL (more than 1,501 students), School L (between 601–1,500 students), and School M (121–600 students). These schools are located far from downtown.

Following ethical approval from the IPSR-Institutional Review Board (IPSR-IRB) and the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) of Mahidol University under project IPSR-IRB-2022-219 and COA. No. 2022/11-219, the participants in this study were recruited by snowball sampling technique. Considered a purposeful method of data collection in qualitative research, snowball sampling is employed when participants with the target characteristics are not easily accessible (Naderifar et al., 2017).

The teacher educator in this study was a female with a B.Ed. (Primary Education, Thai language major) and an M.Ed. (Teaching Thai). She had more than 10 years each of teaching and supervisory experience, and was responsible for three sandbox schools. Table 1 illustrates the research sites and participants.

**Table 1***Research Sites and Participants*

School	Number of students	Research participants	Number of participants
School XL (More than 1,501)	1,527	Vice Principal	1
		English teachers	2
		Parent	1
School L (Between 601–1,500)	904	Principal	1
		English teachers	2
		Parent	1
School M (Between 121–600)	500	Vice Principal	1
		Head of General Administration	1
		Head of Academics	1
		Head of Sandbox Project	1
		English teacher	1
		Science teacher	1
		Parent	1
			1
			1
			1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,931</b>	<b>15</b>

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The mode of data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview conducted via both online meeting and onsite visit. Due to the remote geographical distance between the researcher and the participants, the remote online interview was adopted to acquaint participants and researcher prior to the face-to-face meeting at their schools in Narathiwat. Engward et al. (2022) state that conducting an online interview requires researchers to be aware of their attitudes, knowledge, and skills before, during, and after the interview to ensure that the data is valid and meaningful, and that the confidentiality of the participants is guaranteed.

Each participant in this study was contacted via phone call to arrange a meeting time. But in keeping with the research ethics governing children aged 6–12, students were not participants in this study. Quintela Do Carmo et al. (2024) argue that because of inherent methodological and ethical challenges, traditional semi-structured interviews with children in educational or social settings may not yield valid and reliable data.

The researchers introduced themselves and explained the project and its ethical guidelines, which include protecting the privacy of the participants. Once the participants consented, the interview (see Appendix A) began and was recorded for research purposes.

The interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. The researcher and participants spoke Thai throughout. The interview was digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated from Thai to English by a specialist for further analysis. The transcripts were then analyzed by Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the interplay of the dataset, the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and the researcher's analytical skills and resources—ideally, multiple coders are employed to help cross-check ideas or validate data interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In this study, two local scholars (authors 2 and 3) served as research assistants—cross-validating the transcripts, initial codes, and interpretations of the participants' extracts of the interview transcripts—in the hope of increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.

## Findings

Drawing upon the thematic analysis of each stakeholder's interview transcript, the findings of this study reveal four key factors underpinning effective English CBC policy implementation: policy implementation at the school level, influence of sociocultural and linguistic contexts, the support of the MoE, and inclusive stakeholders' engagement; each of which is presented below.

### Policy Implementation at the School Level

The policy was implemented at sandbox schools, with principals playing a vital role. This top-down approach was endorsed by English teachers.

The school principal must be a leader of the policy implementation. We need clear direction from the top..  
(English teacher, School XL)

One of the main roles of the school principal was regularly attending meetings on CBC policy so that updated policy information could be shared with school administrators and teachers.

Throughout this CBC implementation, I lead the team and will not leave teachers and students behind. I regularly attend meetings to keep up to date with this new policy. (School principal, School L)

Changing teachers' mindsets to accommodate policy implementation was another role the school administrator focused on, because teachers were implementers of the policy in their classrooms.

Teachers must change their mindset to respond to the changes as a result of the new policy implementation. (Head of academics, School M)

CBC aims at fostering English teachers' creativity to design their lessons, develop materials, and initiate projects that could improve students' English.

Teachers have freedom to think outside the box to create projects that can promote students' competencies. (English teacher, School M)

Administration's support of a professional learning community (PLC) helped teachers co-create a share-and-learn space where they could discuss policy implementation and its attendant challenges.

Our school conducted professional learning community (PLC) to promote teachers' collaboration for the new policy implementation. (School principal, School L)

Non-English-major teachers' poor CEFR English proficiency adversely affected their performance, while English-major teachers tended to teach well. But the former could become competent teachers through continuous professional development.

Teachers who have attained CEFR levels A1 or A2 didn't perform well in their teaching, compared with their counterparts whose CEFR was at B1 and B2 levels. English-major teachers had better teaching skills. However, it's important to note that some non-English-major graduates are competent English teachers because they are passionate about English and have made significant efforts to improve themselves. They even teach students how to speak English, but their pronunciation may not sound like native speakers. (Teacher educator)

Successfully implementing CBC policy at the school level required a strong leadership and administration team to initiate and translate the policy into practice, and, through PLC, help teachers see the positive impact of the policy on their professional development and English proficiency. This successful policy implementation can in turn increase students' English proficiency.

### **Influence of Sociocultural and Linguistic Contexts**

Sociocultural and linguistic contexts played an important role in CBC policy implementation because school administrators and teachers had to integrate them into their lessons.

CBC encourages both teachers and students to learn more about their local communities and create community-based innovations. (Vice Principal, School M)

A teacher educator considered CBC important for sandbox schools because they were located near the Malaysian border, where Narathiwat and Malaysian local entrepreneurs frequently communicated for their international business transactions. Teachers should exploit this geographical advantage by integrating knowledge of local communities into their lessons and materials. Doing so would highlight sociolinguistic and cultural elements and increase students' intercultural communicative competence.

English competency-based curriculum is suitable for the school because students can use their English for international trade between Narathiwat and Malays. (Teacher educator)

Likewise, the principal at School L recognized linguistic diversity as a resource for learners whose communicative competence in Thai, English, and Patani-Malay would be beneficial for their family business or career opportunities upon their graduation.

Our school focuses on "language competence for Islam-based local wisdom and entrepreneurship." Because parents here have local businesses, their children often search for jobs after they graduate from the lower secondary school level. If they are equipped with Thai, English, and Patani-Malay, they can easily find jobs near Malaysia. (School principal, School L)

The school's emphasis on "language competence for Islam-based local wisdom and entrepreneurship" addresses the significance of language,

religion, and work, helping students both develop core competencies that meet parental career expectations, and further acquainting them with Islamic practices.

For example, an English teacher at School M was aware of the nationally well-known threadfin fish that is native to Tak Bai district in Narathiwat. She then integrated it into her English lessons and materials, and assigned projects requiring students to increase their English communicative competence so they could promote the fish products to the public in English via TikTok and other social media.

We took the students to the community to learn about local businesses dealing in Thailand's famous threadfin fish. They will learn how to use English to talk on TikTok and other social media about all aspects of this business.  
(English teacher, School M)

But Narathiwat's ongoing political separatism and insurgency make taking students on field trips a challenge.

The school recognizes the importance of social contexts on English teaching and learning. Yet, we need to be mindful of student safety because accidents can happen in our community.  
(English teacher, School XL)

The sociocultural and linguistic contexts of Narathiwat's sandbox schools were crucial to CBC policy implementation because the schools were surrounded by Thai-Malay communities. Integrating these communities' local knowledge into English teaching equips learners with the intercultural communicative competence necessary for both daily life and their future careers.

## **The Support of the MoE**

The MoE provides key resources such as budget, infrastructure, personnel, and an English testing center. These resources can facilitate CBC policy implementation in Narathiwat.

The budget from the MoE for sandbox schools was allocated for school supplies, materials, compensation for invited speakers, and professional learning community. (Head of academics, School M)

The teacher educator stated that it was her role to organize a series of workshops for teachers that would equip them with the knowledge and skills

---

necessary to pass the CEFR tests required by the MoE. She also recruited lecturers from a nearby university to improve local teachers' English.

We invited the best trainers from a local university for workshops to improve teachers' English proficiency. Additionally, we collaborated with the MoE's testing center unit in the area to assist teachers with registration and accessing the CEFR testing system. (Teacher educator)

Although the principal of School L and the English teacher of School XL stated their compliance with the CBC policy implementation and the practices prescribed by the MoE, the policy and the prescription proved inadequate for assessing student's competencies. So schools sought the help of local universities in this regard.

As a sandbox school, we need to comply with the MoE's guidelines and framework for innovative education areas. We also have the support of the teacher educator and mentorship of university lecturers. (School principal, School L)

A lot of teachers resisted the policy because they did not know why they had to change from the existing curriculum to the competency-based one. Now they have to consider how to assess the students on their own without any guidelines from the MoE. (English teacher, School XL)

According to the top-down approach, the MoE was supposed to provide the budget and educational personnel necessary for implementing CBC policy in Narathiwat's sandbox schools. But the schools requested continual academic support and clear guidelines for the translation of policy into practice—especially the assessment of students' competencies. The schools, therefore, sought help from local universities not only to develop teachers' English proficiency, but also to learn how to implement CBC and assess students' English communicative competence.

## **Inclusive Stakeholders' Engagement**

Employing a bottom-up approach, the inclusive engagement of stakeholders was established for effective CBC policy implementation in Narathiwat; stakeholders had to cooperate in order to implement the policy. The key stakeholders in this study included the teacher educator, school principals, school administration, English teachers, and parents.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the teacher educator strove to mitigate students' learning loss and underachievement.

One of the adverse effects of COVID-19 was student learning loss. This required the immediate attention of school administrators and teachers. I had to develop an e-book covering and summarizing the main content of each learning indicator, together with related examination items for the schools to enhance their students' performance. (Teacher educator)

The educational supervisor notes that parents attended school board meetings. This enabled them to voice their needs and provide feedback regarding their children's academic achievement and school policies, practices, and prospects.

As part of the supervision, schools hold meetings with parents and engage them in communication. (Teacher educator)

Regular meetings organized by the schools enabled parents not only to be informed about the policy of English subjects, but also to be engaged in school policy and missions, which led to mutual understanding between both parties.

It is important to acquaint parents with this new policy so that they will know what changes are made to the school's English teaching and learning. They can then reflect on these changes. (School principal, School L)

Likewise, English teachers at School L had to consider parental needs for their children's Muslim ways of life, such as the Islamic prayer times and halal school lunches that were integrated into the school's policy and missions.

Our school is located in a Muslim community, and parents would like their children not only to gain academic knowledge, but also to follow Muslim practices. Accordingly, school policy and the school's mission should include both academic and religious elements. (English teacher, School L)

A parent of a School L student was satisfied with the school's emphasis on and accommodation of Muslim practices.

I used to be a student in this school. I am happy to send my children to this school because they enjoy studying here. The school also values Muslim practices. (Parent, School L)

A parent of a School XL student would like English teachers to improve their English proficiency and teaching because that would enhance student performance. Such parental involvement with English teaching and learning demonstrates the roles parents play in their children's acquisition of English and academic distinction. They can support the school's academic mission.

I would like the teachers to have ongoing professional development so they can improve their teaching and English proficiency. (Parent, School XL)

Similarly, a parent of multiple School M students was satisfied with the online learning platform that enabled her children to be instructed by foreign teachers who helped them speak English more confidently.

My children can speak English by learning from foreign teachers on the school online platform called "Brain Cloud." (Parent, School M)

The inclusivity of stakeholders' engagement illustrates the bottom-up approach of CBC policy implementation, which enables all parties to take part in the development of students' English competence and proficiency. But this engagement can occur only if the school recognizes the importance of parental involvement. Then such involvement can improve students' positive attitudes toward English.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight the key stakeholders' contributions to effective CBC policy implementation in Narathiwat. These contributions were essential to improving students' English.

Although this study suggests that CBC policy both improved the efficiency of the basic education management system and promoted education innovation, there were unanticipated issues that could hinder the success of the CBC implementation that will be discussed next.

Drawing upon by Muthanna and Sang's model (2023), for instance, teacher educators attempted to negotiate with and balance the top-down and bottom-up stakeholders, as there were obligations from the MoE and local

parties that required closer attention to mitigate educational issues. In this study, the teacher educator strongly believed in her role as change agent and middle manager who had to liaise between the MoE and local schools in order to meet the national education goals. She thereby illustrates the recommendations of Hiliya et al. (2022) and Akkaraputtapong (2020), who emphasize the importance of teacher educators' cascading the MoE's policies to local schools.

This study of implementing the CBC policy of innovative English teaching and learning in sandbox schools found that all stakeholders played their part. Since the policy of the competency-based curriculum is not aligned with English teachers' CEFR proficiency levels required by the MoE, Savski (2023) argues that top-down CEFR implementation can cause unavoidable tension and a mismatch of expectations between the MoE and local ELT practitioners whose needs and concerns have not been addressed.

This study finds that the bottom-up and top-down approaches of CBC policy implementation must be negotiated by all relevant parties and stakeholders for satisfactory English teaching and learning in Thailand's Deep South. It is, therefore, essential to consider the alignment between national education policy and its provincial counterpart. That way, the needs of schools and stakeholders are met at local, national, and international levels. This appropriate alignment is in line with Viennet and Pont's (2017) conducive institutional, policy, and societal context, leading to effective policy implementation once educational settings and sociocultural contexts are recognized.

Although CBC implementation in this study was decentralized and allowed the sandbox schools to increase management flexibility and collaboration with the public and private sectors, Chompucot (2011) emphasizes that local contexts, conditions, and controversies, particularly in Thailand's Deep South, must be considered. Prior to the implementation of educational policies and practices, the Thai government should foster collaboration between educational personnel and local authorities by increasing resources for schools, strengthening schools' capabilities, increasing parental engagement in their children's education, and establishing clear and relevant educational policies and suitable incentives for all academic personnel in designated areas (Chompucot, 2011). It is thus important to recognize local sociocultural and linguistic contexts, policy design, and the human dimension of education policy when implementing it. The policy should translate into new learning materials for students, new methods for teachers, new management practices for school leaders, and new assessments, all of which influence the education system at the school and district levels (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

English educational reform in the Deep South cannot overlook the existing issues—such as under-resourced schools, incompetent teachers, and sociopolitical instability—which could adversely hinder the long-term success of CBC. The government must continue peace talks to resolve long-term sociopolitical conflicts, make a concerted effort to protect locals from violence, end drug abuse, conduct evidence-based investigations of human rights violations, allocate its budget more efficiently, decentralize governance structures and policies to meet local needs, and promote freedom of speech and safe spaces so people can share their thoughts on and debate politically sensitive issues without fear of punishment by any one party (Peace Survey Network, 2019).

Narrowing the gap between national education policy and local school practices requires including, heeding, and empowering the ‘silent’ voices of marginalized stakeholders—youths and Islamic leaders chief among them. Doing so can also foster potential peacebuilding processes and long-term reconciliation. Chambers et al. (2019) point out that human rights violations, bias against Islamic education and religious groups, inadequate increases in people’s standard of living, lack of judicial reform, insufficient administrative modifications, and the need to preserve Malay-Muslim cultural values are the primary issues underpinning the current conflict. Furthermore, Janpor (2024) claims that the Thai government has used a “politics-leading-the-military” strategy by highlighting political space over the use of force to solve problems; yet, it silences the political expression of young people, who are not only targets of security officials, but also the engine of Thailand’s Deep South. The government must recognize that this insurgency cannot be alleviated through its excessive reliance on suppression, but rather through the collaboration of the military, police, and local stakeholders whose rights, authorities, and responsibilities must be reciprocally well-respected and mutually agreed (Chambers et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

This study discovers four key factors underpinning effective English CBC policy implementation in public sandbox schools in Narathiwat province in Thailand’s Deep South: policy implementation at the school level, influence of sociocultural and linguistic contexts, the support of the MoE, and the inclusive engagement of stakeholders.

The stakeholders, including the teacher educator, school principal and administrators, English teachers, and parents, strove to implement the CBC policy in English courses in order to improve student performance. Teachers were also aware that they had to improve their English and teaching skills to

satisfy the CBC policy and principles. One challenge was that the MoE did not provide a satisfactory guideline for assessing students' English communicative competence. The schools then sought academic support from the teacher educator and local universities. Mediating between the MoE and local practitioners in Narathiwat, the teacher educator facilitated the translation of policy into practice at the school level. Most parents and children in this study were Muslim and lived in Muslim communities. Parents were involved in school activities and meetings to improve their children's English proficiency for intercultural communicative competence. They hoped that their children would become educated, multilingual, and devout.

This study helps policy makers, educational administrators, and relevant parties recognize the challenges of implementing English CBC in public sandbox schools. The voices of the stakeholders it includes may illuminate the existing body of knowledge, thereby facilitating effective English CBC policy implementation in this and other Thai provinces. CBC can potentially lead to a major reform of English teaching and learning in the country, and create a mechanism to increase learners' English proficiency and core competencies at the elementary school level—this corresponds to the promotion of equal opportunities and equity for learning and education (SDG 4 Quality Education) for all. Future research in the southern border provinces should explore the diverse opinions and attitudes of stakeholders—including local authorities, communities, and Islamic groups—from sectors other than education, not only to promote evidence-based educational reform from relevant parties, but also to create synergy for peacebuilding and social inclusion within the region.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research project was supported by Mahidol University (Fundamental Fund: Fiscal Year 2023 by National Science Research and Innovation Fund [NSRF]).

### **About the Authors**

**Singhanat Nomnian:** A past president of Thailand TESOL and a director of Mahidol University International Demonstration School in Thailand.

**Watcharin Fonghoi:** A chair of regional affiliates of Thailand TESOL and lecturer at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Princess of Naradhiwas University, Narathiwat, Thailand.

---

**Nasree Pitaksuksan:** A lecturer at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Princess of Naradhiwas University, Narathiwat, Thailand.

## References

Ai-man, E., Naree, K., & Ouppinjai, S. (2022). Modern supervisors: Adapting to challenges in a changing world. *Journal of Educational Administration and Leadership*, 10(39), 1-8.

Akkaraputtapong, P. (2020). *The supervisory behaviour preference of Thailand's in-service teachers* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of New South Wales, Australia.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

Chambers, P., Jitpiromsri, S., & Waitoolkiat, N. (2019). Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand: Never-ending stalemate? *Asian International Studies Review*, 20(Special Issue), 1-23.

Chompucot, C. (2011). *Major factors affecting educational policy implementation effectiveness for the three southernmost provinces of Thailand as perceived by school directors*. [Doctoral dissertation, National Institute for Development Administration, Thailand]. <http://libdcms.nida.ac.th/thesis6/2011/b171170.pdf>

Drisko, J.W. (2025). Transferability and generalization in qualitative research. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 35(1), 102–110.

Engward, H., Goldspink, S., Iancu, M., Kersey, T., & Wood, A. (2022). Togetherness in separation: Practical considerations for doing remote qualitative interviews ethically. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211073212>

Equitable Education Fund (2021). *Teachers and Equitable Education Thailand*. Equitable Education Conference 2021. EEF.

Halkias, D., Neubert, M., Thurman, P.W., & Harkiolakis, N. (2022). *The Multiple case study design: Methodology and application for management education*. Routledge.

Hiliya, A.A., Tambari, U., Sarkingobir, Y., Hamza, A., & Ashafa, N.A. (2022). Instructional supervision and teacher effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Tambuwal Local Government Area, Sokoto State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in STEM Education (IJRSE)*, 4(2), 58-74.

Hiranburana, K., Subphadoongchone, P., Tangkiengsirisin, S., Phoochaeoensil, S., Gainey, J., Thogsongsri, J., Sumonsriworakun, P., Somphong, M., Sappapan, P., & Taylor, P. (2017). A framework of reference for English language education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) — based on the CEFR, The Thai experience. *LEARN Journal*, 10(2), 90-119.

Hoque, K. E., Bt Kenayathulla, H. B., D/O Subramaniam, M. V., & Islam, R. (2020). Relationships between supervision and teachers' performance and attitude in secondary schools in Malaysia. *SAGE Open*, 10(2). [doi.org/10.1177/2158244020925501](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020925501)

Inphoo, P., & Nomnian, S. (2019). Dramatizing a Northeastern Thai folklore to lessen high school students' communication anxiety. *PASA4*, 57(1), 33-66.

Janpor, F. (2024). National security and political space for youth in Thailand's Deep South. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 51(3), 177-205.

Muthanna, A., & Sang, G. (2023). A conceptual model of the factors affecting education policy implementation. *Education Sciences*, 13(3), 260. [doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030260](https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030260)

Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. *Strides Development in Medical Education*, 14(3), e67670. <https://doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670>

Nomnian, S., & Arphattananon, T. (2018). School administrators' competencies for effective English language teaching and learning in Thai government primary schools. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 6(2), 51-69.

Peace Survey Network (2019). *Seven policy recommendations for the Deep South/Patani*. Sasawaka Peace Foundation.

Quintela Do Carmo, G., Vinuesa, V., Dembélé, M., & Ayotte-Beaudet, J.-P. (2024). Going beyond adaptation: An integrative review and ethical considerations of semi-structured interviews with elementary-aged children. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23, 16094069241247474.

Ra-ngubtook, W., & Bhongsatiern, J. (2022). Basic education in Thailand. In L.P. Symaco & M. Hayden, M. (Eds.), *International handbook on education in South East Asia* (pp.1-25). Springer [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3\\_21-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3_21-1)

Ridder, H.-G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research*, 10, 281–305.

Rueangdej, C., & Nomnian, S. (2021). Stakeholders' insights into migrant students' experiences in a Thai public school: A linguistic ecological perspective. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 14(2), 243-266.

Rukspollmuang, C., & Fry, G.W. (2022). Overview of Education in Thailand. In L.P. Symaco & M. Hayden, M. (Eds.), *International Handbook on Education in South East Asia* (pp.1-31). Springer [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3\\_24-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3_24-1)

Saemee, K., & Nomnian, S. (2021). Cultural representations in ELT textbooks used in a multicultural school. *rEFLections*, 28(1), 107-120.

Savski, K. (2023). CEFR and the ELT practitioner: Empowerment or enforcement? *ELT Journal*, 77(1), 62-71.

Shepherd, E., & Ainsworth, V. (2017). *English impact: An evaluation of English language capability*. British Council.

Songnuan, N., & Nomnian, S. (2023). Science students' motivational orientations of EFL reading through the lens of self-determination theory. *rEFLections*, 30(1), 104-131.

Soparat, S., Arnold, S.R., & Klaysom, S. (2015). The development of Thai learners' key competencies by project-based learning using ICT. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*, 1(1), 11-22.

Thipatdee, G. (2021). The development of English competency-based curriculum integrated with local community for high school students. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 10(1), 39-46.

Thummaphan, P., Sripa, K., & Prakobthong, W. (2022). Competency-based school curriculum: A development and implementation framework. *Rajabhat Chiang Mai Research Journal*, 23(3), 185-205.

Uddin, M.N., & Sarntisart, S. (2023). The schooling gap between the Deep South and the rest of the South in Thailand. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 34(2), 199-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2022.2027183>

Uddin, M.N., Sarntisart, S., Mahbub, A., & Rahmatullah, A. B. M. (2023). Power of education in economic conflicts: How the Deep South differs from other southern provinces in Thailand? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science*, 7(3), 987-1005.

---

UNICEF (2019). *Bridge to a brighter tomorrow: The Patani Malay-Thai multilingual education programme*. UNICEF.

Vibulphol, J., Prabjandee, D., Chantharattana, M., & Bupphachuen, P. (2021). English teachers' understanding of Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum. *English Language Teaching*, 14(11), 128-143.

Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017). *Education policy implementation: A literature review and proposed framework*. OECD Education Working Paper No. 162.

Widiawati, D., & Savski, K. (2020). Primary-level English-medium instruction in a minority language community: any space for the local language? *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1817044>

## Appendix A

### Interview questions for school administrators, teachers, and teacher educator

1. Could you please introduce yourself?
2. Could you please provide some information about your educational background?
3. How long have you been school administrators/ teachers/ teacher educator?
4. Could you please tell me about your working and teaching experiences?
5. What are your thoughts on the Ministry of Education's policy regarding teaching and learning English based on competency?
6. How does the Ministry of Education disseminate or publicize the policy to the education area office and schools within that area?
7. What observations can you make regarding the application of competency-based learning in schools within your area?
8. What do you consider to be the factors involved in implementing and executing this policy, and how does it impact the educational institutes under your responsibility?
9. What are the differences between implementing competency-based policy and the previous policy in teaching English?
10. What do you perceive as the problems, challenges, and obstacles in implementing a competency-based policy for teaching and learning English in the area?
11. How often do you monitor or follow up on the implementation of this policy in the schools of your area?

12. What do you consider the best practice for successfully implementing this policy?

### **Interview questions for parents**

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. What level does your child/children study at this school?
3. Why did you send your child/children to this school?
4. What do you think about the teaching and learning of English at this school?
5. What areas of teaching and learning of English do you think this school can improve?
6. What is your expectation upon your child/children's graduation from this school?
7. Have you supported the school? If so, how?
8. Do you have any suggestions for the school?