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The Development of an “English for Tourist Guides” course Using a Task-based Approach to Enhance the Oral English Communication Ability of Chiang Mai Rajabhat University Undergraduates

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Introduction

Business travel and international tourism have become important sources of income due to the employment opportunities and opportunities for national development that they provide for many developing countries such as Thailand. The growth of business travel and international tourism in the area, together with the increased use of English as an international language (EIL), inevitably requires that Thailand to equip its population with sufficient English skills, especially through teaching of English as an international language. In spite of some of the national efforts to meet this need, success still seems to be far off due to a lack of relevant curriculum and teaching methodology.

There have been a number of studies pointing to Thai graduates' insufficient English language proficiency for the current era of globalization. Thai students need to be urgently equipped with the acceptable level of English proficiency (Prapphal, 2003) to remain employable. Research shows that Thais' low level of English fails to meet the demand for English in the workplace, especially in the hospitality sector (Wiriyaichitra, 2004), and this insufficient English language proficiency may also prove to be a disadvantage in global trade as well.

The discussion of this issue thus far has focused on the irrelevant and ineffective English curriculum offered in Thai educational institutes. English curriculum, especially for English for specific or occupational purposes, should be precise, cater to the requirements of the course and have situational relevancy. However, the curriculum for tourism related subjects in universities are too academic for real-world situations, which require multifunctional language (Robinson and Yee, 1997; Lo and Sheu, 2008). In general practice, communication skills are barely addressed in EFL language pedagogy. Moreover, It is clear that despite the fact that listening and speaking skills are the most used in the workplace, the four skills are often equally emphasized in the English curriculum, focusing on native targets of grammar, pronunciation, syntax, etc, in English language teaching in Thailand. EFL has not met with great success due to its lack of real spoken interaction in class; the focus instead has long been on grammatical accuracy, native speaker-like pronunciation, and literature. Learners are treated as target language observers rather than users (Graddol, 2006). This method of learning in class, emphasizing form, does not enhance acquisition (Willis, 1996). Graddol (2006) states that English language learning in the current situation may need to cater more to the dimensions of English as an international language. Also, English testing may need to follow the “washback” effect, which can influence how courses are taught (Hughes, 1989). Graddol adds that the increasing response to ELF (English as a lingua franca) worldwide results in the decline of traditional English as a foreign language.

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The incongruity between the current practices of the English for Tourism courses offered at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University and the fast growing need for English in global business interactions was discovered through needs analysis done by the researcher. It was revealed that the teaching and learning practices have been conducted in a way that fails to meet the demand for English in the workplace. The instruction ignores the learners' needs and fails to prepare local tourism students to cope with the major tourism destination in the area, Chiang Mai - one of the most famous tourist destinations in Thailand.

In order to equip Thai learners with English proficiency that meets the demand for English use in the workplace, Thai educational institutes may need to turn to a more meaningful English curriculum that meet the needs of learners and has more situational relevancy. In addition, the teaching methodology employed should be underpinned by subconscious language acquisition theory with comprehensible input, interaction and output hypotheses, which are believed to enhance language acquisition (Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1996; Swain, 1985, cited in Nunan, 1999).

Therefore, a new course with a new teaching approach for tourism should be constructed and tried out to see if it could be better than the older ones.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To find typical components that should be incorporated into a task-based "English for Tourist Guides" course (What components should be incorporated into the "English for Tourist Guides" course?)
2. To find the effectiveness of the course in 3 aspects, namely:
 - 2.1. The gained scores of the students after learning the course. (Will the scores of the students' post-test be significantly higher than those of the pre-test?)
 - 2.2. The magnitude of the effect size (What is the magnitude of the effect size?)
 - 2.3. The degree of student engagement. (What is the degree of student engagement?)

Research methodology

The research was conducted in two main phases: 1) course development, and 2) course implementation and evaluation.

Phase 1. Course development. To develop the course, the related literature was studied to explore the theoretical framework and a needs analysis was conducted to investigate the needs for the course. Then the course components yielded from all the synthesized information obtained from these sources were incorporated into a course development plan.

1. Theoretical frameworks for designing the course

1.1. Input, interaction and output hypotheses and Language acquisition

Language acquisition, on the one hand, substantially depends on the target language use by learners to convey messages meaningfully for a particular real purpose (Willis 1996; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996). On the other hand, target language exposure to comprehensible real input is also believed to promote learning acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Having the opportunities to use the target language meaningfully to convey messages and be exposed to comprehensible real input, students can recognize, reconstruct new knowledge and test their prior knowledge in the supportive and low

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stress environments which enhance learning motivation and learner autonomy (Long, 1996; Willis, 1996). Interestingly, Swain (1985, cited in Nunan, 1999) found from her study that a different hypothesis of comprehensible output in which she claims that opportunities to produce target language is important for language acquisition.

1.2. Task-based language learning (TBL)

Task-based Language Teaching, is believed to promote language acquisition. It is a need-based approach to content selection that yields the relevant and meaningful content for learners. The aim of the “tasks” is to create a real purpose for language use and provide a natural context for language study. By tasks, students engage in certain types of information processing that are believed to be important for effective language use for language acquisition. A communicative task is aimed at stimulating real communication in the target language. Authentic texts and comprehensible input are introduced into the learning situation. The methodology of task-based language teaching focuses on message conveyance that emphasizes meaning. Learners act as language users, learning to communicate through interaction, utilizing the target language, and making use of their own linguistic resources, knowledge and experience. Negotiation of meaning in the interaction is believed to contribute to acquisition. In addition, learning takes places in a social context through interaction with other people in small or collaborative groups. The approach also evokes a diversity of cognitive operation that is needed to perform real life functions.

2. Needs analysis

Needs analysis was conducted to determine the requirements for the course in terms of language knowledge, language skills, tasks needed for certain domains of a tourist guide. The course content and objectives were determined by needs analysis of the two sources: a) documentary study including the documents including an inquiry into the current role of the English language, review of the English Language Development Center (ELDC, Thailand, 2005), the related research, and Chiang Mai Rajabhat University’s educational policy, and b) semi-structured interview with the three parties that are tourist guides working in Chiang Mai, the English teachers who usually teach the existing course and the university alumni who took the existing course and are tourist guides.

3. The key findings from analysis of the needs assessment and the related literature review

The literature and the needs analysis, revealed that a tourist guide needs both language and communication skills to accomplish his work. In fact, there are many complex prescriptions for professional tour guides. However, as this course is for EFL students who, according to the literature have low level of English skills and are not familiar with social exchanges and communication skills, the basic language and communication skills were selected.

3.1. A tourist guide’s tasks associated with English language use at work

It was found from the analysis that a tourist guide’s tasks associated with English language use at work are mainly 1) leading a tour with receiving tourists at a particular place using social exchanges, giving information, describing points of interest or other local knowledge, answering tourists’ questions, seeing the tourists off at a particular place, and 2) creating and describing a tour plan and itinerary.

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3.2. Language skills and communication skills

Listening and speaking skills were found from the needs analysis and related studies as the core and most needed skills for a tourist guide at work and for oral communication. In addition to language skills, communication skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication and negotiation of meaning were found to be crucial for a tourist guide to enhance his or her oral communication especially among non-native speakers.

3.3. English as a lingua franca

It has been found from the documentary study that the outstanding role of English as a lingua franca has been evidently supported by the report of tourism trends. It has been found that 85 percent of all business including tourism been done between non-English speaking countries (Graddol, 2006). Moreover, it has been found that over 50 percent of the tourists that Thai tourist guides interacted with were non-native English speakers (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2005).

3.4. Task-based language learning

Regarding teaching methodology and learning activities by the literature review, task-based language learning with the key features of meaning primacy, target language use, real-world related tasks as the main means in learning, authenticity of exposure and group work operation, was found to be relevant for this study. The key features of the task-based language approach are relevant to communicative competence. In addition, the key features of the task-based language approach serve the significance of subconscious acquisition, input, interaction, and output hypotheses, which are believed to enhance language acquisition.

The key features of the task-based language approach also fulfill the needs and lack of the Chiang Mai Rajabhat University alumni regarding a great need for increased English speaking in class conveying the message in stress-free situations with no immediate error correction (meaning primacy), the need for more listening practice including a variety of accents of English, more real life language use (authenticity of exposure), and group work practice in real situations (Group work doing tasks). The aforementioned features were identical to those identified in the needs analysis from the interviews with tourist guides working in Chiang Mai regarding the issue of the effective ways to be adopted in the English class to help students to communicate with tourists effectively. Moreover, the effectiveness of task-based language learning towards oral English communication ability may help fulfill one of Chiang Mai Rajabhat University's policies of promoting its students' English language proficiency.

In response to research question 1: What components should be incorporated into the “English for Tourist Guides” course?, the final product of the study is the “English for Tourist Guides” course for Chiang Mai Rajabhat University students and its components drawn from mapping results of the findings of the related literature and the needs analysis are as follows:

1. The course content

The typical content for this course are the task content of the real-world task of leading a tour and launching a tour package together with the facilitating pedagogical tasks of closed-tasks and simulation tasks. Moreover, the language content of social

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exchanges and communication skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication and negotiation of meaning is included. Moreover, the selected pedagogical tasks and real world-tasks are repetitive and contain the characteristics that can enable learners' oral language proficiency in a spiral manner.

2. Teaching and learning activities

2.1. The materials for this particular course

The significant role of English as a lingua franca, together with the needs for listening, speaking, and communication skills to be the focus, lends itself to an integration of 1) authentic models of English audio-visual inputs with a variety of accents presenting a holistic view of dialogue communication in its specific context, 2) authentic reading inputs with tour plans and itineraries, 3) authentic learners' interactions as they are considered to be the comprehensible inputs for the learners (Krashen, 1982), and 4) related internet websites which can help foster the lifelong-learning strategies that learners need in their work. The materials for this course contain the characteristics that provide support and introduce learners to noticing and acquiring the language of their interest.

2.2. Teaching methodology

The underlying methodology used for this course is task-based language learning with its relevant key features of meaning primacy, target language use, real-world related tasks, and real-world tasks as the main means of learning, authenticity of exposure, and group work operations. The framework for the lessons covers pre-task, task cycle, and language focus.

a) The pre-task stage. On the pre-task stage, at the very first phase, learners are explicitly introduced to the knowledge of necessary social exchanges and communication skills. Then, they are exposed to the audio-visual inputs. By this stage, learners work on their own, mediating with those inputs. Also, they do the activities that raise their consciousness about the required language and communication skill features. By the latter phase of this pre-task-stage, learners carry out the information-gap tasks using their own existing knowledge. Small group work is applied.

b) The task cycle stage. By the task cycle stage, learners observe the prime role as a language user working in groups using English to carry out the task. This stage provides learners opportunities to work at their own pace, making use of their existing linguistic knowledge and their knowledge of the world so that they can put their contributions, effort and application of ideas and their personal talents into planning the task sharing and discussing ideas, and solving related problems to get the best product. In addition, learners have the opportunity to practice presenting their work/products in front of the class.

c) The language focus stage. By this stage, learners' problematic language or linguistic features from inputs or clips of their work are examined, discussed and clarified. Extra practice of those problematic features are provided as optional.

2.3. Skills and English to be focused on

Listening and speaking skills are the focus of this course; as determined by the needs analysis and related studies, these are the core skills for a tourist guide. In terms of English, English as a lingua franca is focused in this study.

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3. Student evaluation

The direct performance-reference tests with role-play simulation tasks as a tourist guide are applied for the evaluation for both formative and summative tests. The evaluation also caters to the dimensions of English as an international language. Therefore, the oral English communication analytic rating scales evaluating learners' language skills and communication skills that they perform during the test, are used to ensure the test accuracy and validity.

The developed course syllabus has been illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: The developed course syllabus

<p>Module one: Pedagogical tasks: Essential language skills and communication skills for a tourist guide</p>	
<p>Pedagogical task 1: A tourist guide and social exchanges, information presentation, language and communication skills: Thai Cooking</p>	
Pre-task:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social exchanges : greetings, small talk, introductions, questions and leave-taking - Negotiation of meaning and verbal-non verbal cues - Information-gap task
Task cycle:	- Role-play simulation (Thai Cooking)
Language focus: Examining problematic language or linguistic features	
<p>Pedagogical task 2: A tourist guide and social exchanges, information presentation, language and communication skills (Revision): Tourist attractions</p>	
Pre-task:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social exchanges : greetings, small talk, introductions, questions and leave-taking - Negotiation of meaning and verbal-non verbal cues (Revision) - Information-gap task
Task cycle:	- Role-play simulation (Tourist attractions and a tour guide)
Language focus: Examining problematic language or linguistic features	
<p>Module two: Practicum : Real-world tasks</p>	
<p>Real-world task I: Launching a tour package</p>	
<p>Real-world task II: Conducting a tour</p>	
Language focus: Examining problematic language or linguistic features	

Phase 2. Course implementation and evaluation

1. Course implementation

The course was implemented with 24 fourth-year tourism students of Chiang Mai University for 4 months with 12 sessions of three hours each. The participants were randomly assigned to 5 groups of one high, two medium and two low score achievers per group. One of these 5 groups was randomly selected to be the focus group for the investigation to obtain the in-depth qualitative and quantitative information of the participants' learning task engagement via recordings.

2. Course evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed course with the focus group and the whole class, a number of instruments were used to investigate participants' oral proficiency improvement and learning task engagement in terms of their use of

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English to clarify problems or solutions, their collaborative work in groups with contributions and positive emotional tone, and participation in the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas. In terms of participants' use of English to clarify problems or solutions, negotiation of meaning including attempts to prevent communication breakdown, clarification requests, comprehension checks and confirmation checks, and language related episodes were the features to be investigated. The instruments used and their timing are summarized as follows:

1. The oral English communication ability test was administered before and after course implementation to evaluate the participants' learning improvement and the effect size was calculated to determine the relative magnitude of the effect size.
2. Recordings of participants' interactions among the members of the focus group were made during course implementation to evaluate the participants' learning task engagement in terms of their use of English to clarify their problems or solutions.
3. Students' engagement observation checklists with recordings of the focus group were used during the course implementation to evaluate the participants' learning task engagement in terms of their collaborative work in groups with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and their participation in the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas.
4. Student logs were used with the whole class and gathered during course implementation to evaluate the participants' learning task engagement for all selected features.
5. The engagement questionnaires were distributed to have all participants rate each aspect after the course implementation to evaluate the participants' learning task engagement for all selected features.

3. Findings

In response to research question 2.1: Will the scores of the students' post-test be significantly higher than those of the pre-test? and **research question 2.2:** What is the magnitude of the effect size?, the results of comparison of the oral English communication ability of the students before and after taking the "English for Tourist Guides" course, and the result of the calculation of the effect size on students' oral English communication achievement are reported in Table 2 and Figure 1 as follows:

Table 2: Oral English communication ability test (Paired-Samples t-test) and the effect-size result

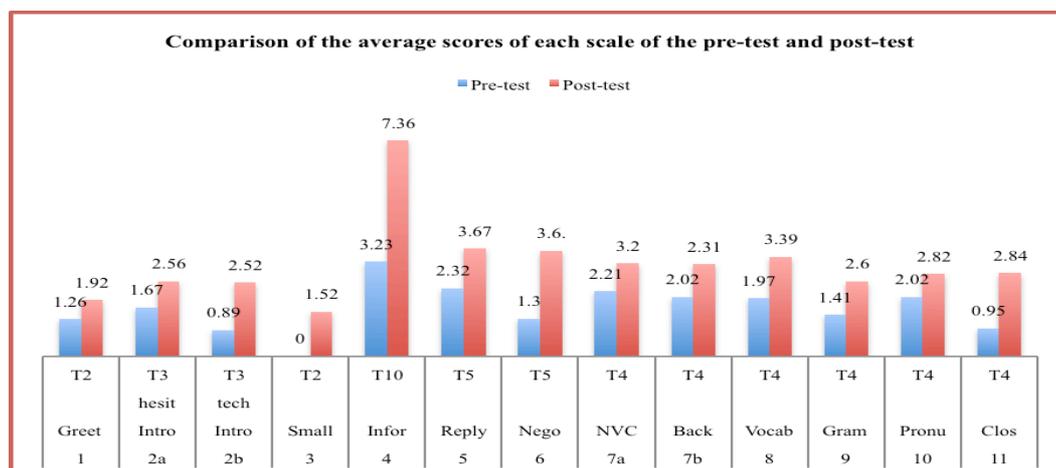
Test	n	\bar{X}	S.D.	df	t	Sig (1-tailed)
Pre-test	23	21.28	7.686	22	-13.090*	0.0005
Post-test	23	41.10	4.306			
Effect-size	T value -13.090 Cohen's d 3.58			df 46 effect-size r 0.87		

*p < 0.05

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From Table 2, the t-value of -13.090 from the t-test indicates that the participants in the study had, on average, oral English communication ability in their post-test significantly higher than that of in their pre-test ($p < .05$). The effect-size of 0.87 from the calculation of the effect-size using t values and $df = 46$ indicates a large effect-size. This means that the developed course had a large positive effect on the participants' oral English communication ability.

Figure 1: Comparison of the average scores of each scale of the pre-test and post-test



Note: T =Total scores

From the Figure 1, illustrating the comparison of the average scores of each scale and sub-scale of the pre-test and post-test below, it is seen that some scales of participants' ability dramatically improved such as scale 4 with the ability to describe points of interests and/or other local knowledge (from 3.23 to 7.36), scale 6 with ability to use negotiation of meaning (from 1.3 to 3.6), and scale 11 with ability to close a talk appropriately (from 0.95 to 2.84). Some other scales were highly improved such as sub-scale 2b with ability to use introduction technique (from 0.89 to 2.52), scale 5 with ability to provide relevant reply to the questions asked by tourists (from 2.32 to 3.67) and scale 3 with ability to initiate small talk (from 0.00 to 1.5). Some scales such as scale 8 with the vocabulary (from 1.97 to 3.39), and scale 9 with grammar (from 1.4 to 2.6) were averagely improved. However, sub-scale 2a with the degree of hesitation of introduction (from 1.67 to 2.56), sub-scale 7a with ability to use of non-verbal communication (NVC) to convey or enhance meaning (from 2.2 to 3.2), sub-scale 7b with ability to use back-channel feedback (from 2.02 to 3.1), scale 1 with ability to initiate a greeting appropriately (from 1.26 to 1.92) and scale 10 with their pronunciation (from 2.02 to 2.82) were slightly improved. This means that the developed course helped improve the participants' language skills and communication skills. Moreover, their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation improved considerably since taking the course.

In response to research question 2.3: What is the degree of student engagement?, the results of the examination of the degree of engagement of the students studying the "English for Tourist Guides" course are reported as follows:

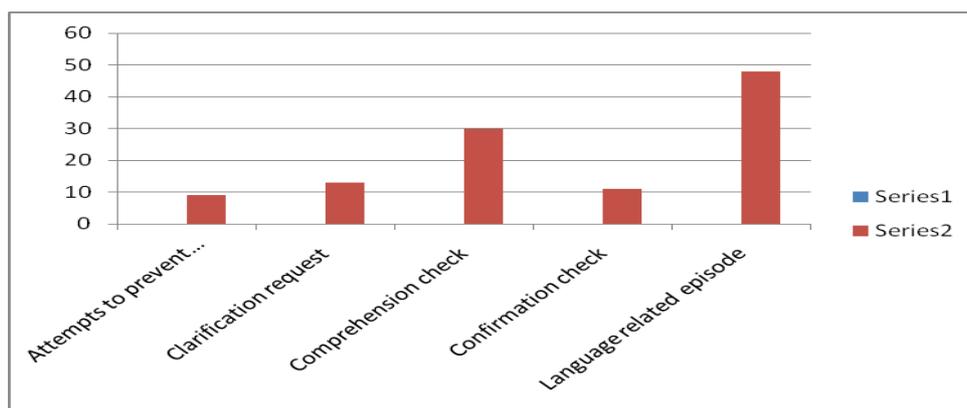
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1. Results from the analysis of the recordings of participants' interactions of the focus group

The results of the analysis of participants' use of English to clarify their problems or solutions indicated a large number of interactional features of participants' use of English to clarify problems or solutions while carrying out the information-gap task with 111 turns out of 226 turns (which is around 50% of the total turns of interactions) as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Participants' use of English to clarify problems or solutions



It can be seen in Figure 2, that amongst the five features of negotiation of meaning and language related episode, participants produced the highest number of language related episodes followed by comprehension check, clarification request, confirmation check and attempts to prevent communication breakdown respectively. This infers that the participants questioned the language they were producing or questioned their language use rather than questioned or checked their understanding of the content of the produced language.

2. Results of the analysis of the students' engagement observation checklists with recordings of the focus group

The result of the analysis indicated that the participants showed active engagement in terms of collaborative work with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and participation in the development of the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas to the specific contexts of the tasks, more than the average value (>3.50) as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Levels of participants' collaborative work in groups with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and participation in the development of the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas to the specific contexts of real-world task 1 and real-world task 2.

Indicators of level of engagement				
Code 5 = Most of the time (60/50 mins) 4 = Often (48/40 mins) 3 = Sometimes (36/30 mins) 2 = Seldom (24/ mins) 1 = Not yet (0/0 min)				
Descriptors	Real - world task 1	Frequ - ency (%)	Real - world task 2	Frequ - ency (%)
1. Worked together to carry out the tasks during class	5	100%	5	100%
2. Interacted within the group members	5	100%	5	100%
3. Shared or expressed ideas within the group members on the assigned tasks	4	80%	4	80%
4. Discussed ideas about the assigned tasks with the group members in class	4	80%	4	80%
5. Showed concentration on tasks	5	100%	4	80%
6. Showed interest and enthusiasm	5	100%	5	100%
7. Were eager to initiate ideas	4	80%	4	80%
Indicators of level of engagement code Yes = 5 No = 0				
8. Planned the real-world task	5	100%	5	100%
9. Shared responsibilities	5	100%	5	100%
10. Enjoyed the assigned task	5	100%	5	100%
11. Applied the ideas to the assigned task	5	100%	5	100%
12. Produced creative task	5	100%	5	100%

It is clear from Table 3 that participants in this study actively engaged in their learning task with a positive emotional tone. However, they showed fewer concentrations in real-world-task 2. This may be because of the nature of real-world task 1 (Launching a tour package) which required them to get the product within one session of learning (The other 2 sessions were reserved for the interview and presentation tasks). Also the task provided them less time for completion compared to real-world task 2. This may infer that time constraints may influence learners' concentration.

3. Results from the analysis of the students' engagement questionnaires with the whole class

The result of the analysis indicated that the participants showed active engagement in terms of collaborative work with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and participation in the development of the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas to the specific contexts of the tasks, more than the average value as illustrated in Table 4.

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Table 4: Levels of participants' use of English to clarify problems or solutions, collaborative work with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and participation in the development of the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas to the specific contexts of the tasks.

	n	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Questionnaire	24	3.25	4.82	4.18	.341

Table 4 indicates that participants rated themselves on their engagement at the average level of 4.18, which is higher than the average value ($>3.50/5.0$). From the analysis, the minimum level (3.25) fell on the items asking for their use of English to clarify problems or solutions.

4. Results from the analysis of the participants' logs with the whole class

Ten descriptive content domains based on the engagement key selected features of learning task engagement were derived from student logs analysis. This means that participants actively used English to clarify problems or solutions, collaboratively worked in groups with contributions and a positive emotional tone and participated in the development of the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas.

Table 5: Selected student engagement features and descriptive content domains

Selected student engagement features and descriptive content domains		
Use of English to clarify problems or solutions	Collaborative work with contributions and a positive emotional tone	Participation with effort and application of ideas
English use	Group responsibility shared	Participation with application of ideas
	Participation with a positive emotional tone	Participation with concentration
	Talk and discussion	Participation with effort
		Participation with substantial time
		Problem solving
		Task quality care

Table 5 illustrates that the derived descriptive content domains cover all the student engagement features selected for the analysis in this study.

In conclusion, the developed "English for Tourist Guides" course has been found to be an effective course to enhance participants' oral English communication ability and participants' learning task engagement as all the set criteria were achieved.

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Discussions

1. Course effectiveness

Since it was found that, generally speaking, the new course was very effective in terms of students' high achievement, its very large effect size and students' strong engagement, why it was so?

1.1. Why does the new course yield a large effect size?

It is obvious that this course was very fruitful and challenging for the participants. The analysis result revealed the large effect size of the course. This could be due to the following reasons:

a) The intensity of authentic exposure.

The participants had opportunities to be exposed to authentic comprehensible inputs with audio-visual VDO clips containing language knowledge, language features, and communication skills. In addition, peer interactions including negotiation of meaning together with recasts emerging during interactions are evidence of comprehensible inputs that helped develop their oral performance. Through these comprehensible inputs, participants may notice, internalize, some small chunks of language of their interests incidentally.

b) The effect of the substantial practice of the oral English performance.

The participants had to learn and use English all the time during class. They used English to carry out the assigned tasks to get the task outcome. Moreover, they had the opportunity to use their English outside of class interviewing tourists and conducting a tour in a real situation. Substantial practice using English both in and outside of class may foster participants' oral English communication ability.

c) Participants' motivation and relaxed mood. The course devoted less time and effort to focus on grammar. The participants used English conveying the message they wanted to convey without grammatical error correction. This method probably resulted in the student higher motivation. In addition, the tasks might have enhanced their motivation in learning since what they practiced was what they would do in their future careers. Also, working cooperatively among close friends, they felt safe, supportive, and engaged in learning. The previously mentioned relaxed environment of teaching and learning may have established participants' motivation, self-confidence, and a feeling of trust, which in turn, enhanced their oral English communication ability.

d) Gaining more skills from learning

The participants in this study were explicitly provided the relevant knowledge of language, language features of relevant expressions, and communication skills including negotiation of meaning features and backchannels needed by a tourist guide at work. The communication skills and some language features and expressions such as introduction, small talk, and leave-taking with reason for closure followed by bidding farewell, are not common for them. They were not familiar with these features and had hardly used them even in their native Thai language. Accordingly, very few participants used them in their pre-test, which in turn, decreased their pre-test scores. During the implementation, participants were usually aware of including those language features and language functions in their talk or presentations. Using these language features repetitively may have activated participants' use of them in their post-test, which in turn, dramatically increased their scores.

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e) The contingency of task-based language key features and principles of communicative competence.

The teaching methodology of task-based language teaching used in the course may help foster participants' communicative competence. The key features of the task-based language approach are relevant to communicative competence.

f) Participants' learning task engagement

The result of analyzing participants' learning task engagement revealed their active engagement in learning tasks. Quantitatively, they showed much more positive engagement than the average level. The qualitative analysis also supported the quantitative results. Student engagement is one of the crucial factors enhancing students' learning ability (Chapman, 2003).

1.2. Why does the new course yield a large degree of participants' learning task engagement ?

It is also obvious that this course fosters the participants' learning task engagement. The analysis result revealed the participants' active learning task engagement in terms of using English to clarify their problems or solutions, cooperative work in groups with contributions and a positive emotional tone, and participation in the real-world tasks with effort and application of ideas. The factors for success are described below.

a) Participants used a substantial amount of English to clarify their problems or solutions. This may be due to the nature of tasks, and the heterogeneous group composition. The nature of tasks especially for the closed task required participants to use English to carry out the task to get the task outcome. To get the task done, the participants needed to become involved in communication, planning, and discussing using both verbal and non-verbal skills. They were pushed to produce English language, including negotiation of meaning to clarify their problems for solutions.

Furthermore, the participants in this study were grouped heterogeneously in terms of language proficiency. In addition, they were all non-native speakers. They came with different accents, pronunciations, and vocabularies. As a result, a large amount of their English usage to clarify their problems or solutions occurred during their interaction in English. Regarding communication, the process of negotiation for meaning functions as both a means of preventing conversational trouble and a repair mechanism to conquer communication breakdown (Long, 1996; Young, 1984 cited in Oliver, 2002). Moreover, Gorp and Bogaert (2006) suggest that from the qualitative analysis, social relations between the group members had a strong effect on the interaction in the group.

In addition, the group working nature of interaction may have contributed to the large number of interactions. The participants worked in groups of five in carrying out the task. Because of the nature of the information-gap tasks together with the heterogeneous nature of the groups, as mentioned earlier, they needed to try their best to get the correct information to complete the task sheets. If an utterance was not clear, the remaining four members of the group might need it to be clarified. However, if the clarification still did not make sense and the other members of the group still did not understand because of linguistic limitations, they might try to find a way to figure it out using English. Consequently, it was possible that a single unclear utterance could cause four clarification requests. As a result, a lot of negotiation of meaning was raised during their interactions showing a high level of engagement by the participants.

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b) Participants worked actively in groups with contributions and a positive emotional tone. This may have been due to the meaningful tasks in a comfortable learning environment. The tasks were challenging and were arranged and managed in a way that allowed students to support each other. The pedagogical sub-tasks prepared them with vocabulary and expressions that they could use in their role-play simulation. Again, the role-play simulation task prepared them with the language and communication skills used in real-world tasks. Moreover, all the tasks in this study were those which the participants may need to use in their future careers. Such learning activities may meet their needs and interests, which in turn, enhances their task contributions and the feeling of fun. Heller et al. (2003 cited in Wikipedia 2010) suggest that drawing connections between information taught and real life, such as everyday life, social issues, and students' personal concerns, is highly effective in engaging students in the lesson. Furthermore, the warm and relaxed learning environment was set while conducting the course. This friendly environment may have encouraged their engagement and a positive emotional tone as it has been said that "powerful pedagogy and trusting relationships yield student engagement." (Wikipedia, Student engagement, 2010).

c) The participants devoted a good deal of effort and applied many creative ideas in participating in the development of the real-world tasks. This may have been due to the opportunities of doing long-term intricate projects with a specific outcome in group work, with the freedom of creativity. In carrying out the real-world tasks of launching a tour package based on the result of the interview and conducting a tour outside of class, the participants needed to put all their effort and application of ideas into the tasks, which were complicated and demanding. They needed to do everything by themselves, starting from planning, finding their own tourists, conducting their work, and presenting their products to the class. They were also encouraged to work at their own pace with the freedom of creatively applying technology with specific outcomes.

It could also be noted that there was some competition on the task outcome among the 5 groups of participants. As a result, their work usually came out with a variety of application of ideas. All 5 groups shared their comments on their logs that they usually put a lot of effort and ideas into their work to get the best products to show in class despite the very demanding tasks.

The evidence or assumptions above are supported by Kearsley and Shneiderman (1999), who indicate that the role of technology, including software tools available for analysis, design, planning, problem-solving, and making presentations, enable students to do sophisticated and complex tasks that, in turn, foster the kind of creativity and communication needed to nourish engagement.

2.The "English for Tourist Guides" course

The "English for Tourist Guides" course was developed based on the literature review and the needs analysis. The underpinning theories and principles of language acquisition, the input, interaction and output hypotheses and task-based approach together with the needs analysis were incorporated to construct the course framework yielding the relevant and effective course components. The developed course was for

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Chiang Mai Rajabhat University tourism students whose English level is low and who are not familiar with task-based language learning. Therefore, the course was designed in a way that enhanced the merit of the course fostering learners' language acquisition, motivation and encouragement together with learning task engagement. The course components (ingredients) were carefully selected and designed based on the underpinning theories and the needs analysis.

The researcher developed the inputs as the materials used in this course. They afforded the participants rich inputs of the target language. They were the inputs that provide greater exposure to the target language (English for a tourist guide) with linguistics and non-linguistics. The authentic materials used in this study were considered, selected, and developed based on the belief of the effectiveness of comprehensible inputs with receptive skills, authenticity of exposure and the evidence of listening and speaking skill focus for a tourist guide. As a result, many audio-visual inputs with a variety of accents containing the needed language features, functions, and expressions together with authentic brochures with substantial samples of tour itineraries were included. These input-providing materials were carefully selected and adjusted to fit the participants' level of proficiency, their needs, and serve the goals of learning in order to make them comprehensible.

The course content (task content and language content) and activities for this course have been graded according to the complexity of the tasks and designed in a way that scaffolded and motivated learners as much as possible. The individual activities and tasks reinforced each other and developed students' learning achievement in a spiral manner.

The tasks in this course were both input-based and output-based. The participants were exposed to the inputs (audio-visual clips and authentic brochures and tour itineraries) and did consciousness-raising activities, which activated their consciousness of the language (including vocabulary and pronunciation). Such tasks were effective both for practicing listening comprehension and as a means for presenting new linguistic material to students (Ellis, 2009). Then they completed the closed tasks and simulation tasks with similar topics making use of their own resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic. The real-world tasks were output-based. The participants used their existing English resources to carry out the tasks both in and outside class in real situations. The participants always knew that the main purpose of the task they performed. In addition, all the learning tasks resulted in linguistic activities and there was a large amount of English production. The course emphasized meaning over form and provided the participants with opportunities for natural language use (real spoken language) making use of their resources. The participants usually worked in small groups, which facilitated learner-centeredness. The teaching and learning also focused on form. The consciousness-raising activities including corrective feedback were done in the contexts of communication activities at the pre-task stage and the language focus stage (post-task stage). In addition, recasts (negative feedback) which were said to be attention to language form were found during the participants' interactions while carrying out the tasks.

The selected teaching methodology of task-based language learning with the selected key features used in this study matched the needs analysis and principles of communicative competence as shown in Table 6:

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Table 6: The match of teaching methodology, needs analysis and communicative competence

TBA features	Needs by the alumni	Communicative competence
Meaning primacy	No immediate error correction	The language knowledge of communicative competence, which emphasizes meaning fulfillment of the language
Authenticity of exposure	More authentic language	Pragmatic knowledge
Target language use	- More conversations in class - Speaking English on their favorite topic	Strategic competence requiring learners to make use of verbal and non-verbal communication in an attempt to get the job done
Real-world related tasks Group work operation.	Group work practice in real situations	

The performance test, the test task used in the assessment part required that learners utilize the languages skills, functions and communication skills they learned. The test task was similar to the tasks they did while learning and was the one they need to do in their future careers so they were familiar with the test task to some extent. Many of the participants shared that the test task was both familiar and challenging for them. They were much less excited but had much more fun doing it compared to their pre-test.

To sum, the developed course provided tasks tailored to the participants' proficiency level and needs and it fostered the value of the selected input-providing materials. In addition the course included form focus investigating the participants' problematic linguistics and the assessment which followed the washback effect.

The components of the course, as mentioned above might compensate for some of the criticisms of TBT regarding the inaccuracy of the interactional language, the inadequate coverage of grammar, limitation of attention to form, vocabulary and pronunciation ignorance, and the emphasis on the output rather than the input (Ellis, 2009). This developed course provided that the participants be exposed to the needed language at the pre-task stage. In addition, problematic language features were discussed and explained in the language focus stage. Moreover, the audio-visual inputs with their scripts provided substantial relevant grammar and pronunciation in contexts which enhance their comprehension and allow the students to see how those features work in a particular context allow the

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students to see how those features work in a particular context. In addition, the tasks in this course were both input-based and output-based. Regarding the impoverished interaction issue, it has been discussed under the topic of ‘The issues concerning participants use of English’ later.

Moreover, the components of the course also compensate for the deficiencies of the irrelevant and ineffective English curricula offered in Thai educational institutes as mentioned in the background of the study in the introduction part. First, the course is precise and caters to the populace’s needs. Second, the course content contains both language and communication skills needed in real situations. Third, listening and speaking skills which are used most in the workplace are the focus of this course. Fourth, the learning activities promote a considerable amount of real spoken interactions both in and outside of class. Learners take on the prime role of language users using substantial amounts of English. Fifth, the method of learning in class emphasizing meaning appears to enhance language acquisition. Sixth, the course caters to the dimensions of English as an international language. Finally, the direct performance-referenced tests employed in this course follow the washback effect.

3. The issues concerning participants’ use of English

3.1. It has been found from the study that despite the positive results that demonstrated the participants’ wide use of English, including using it to clarify their problems or solutions, they have produced poor language. Due to their linguistic limitations and their reliance on the context, they produced their own language which might be seen as impoverished. However, this does not mean that the participants’ interactions are of no value. In fact, the interactions may help to develop their capacity to make use of their existing resources and their strategic competence. Also, it could be noticed that the participants were engaged building collaborative knowledge and working with their language experimentation while carrying out the tasks and the interactions continuously. They appeared to be motivated to use their existing resources including English and communication skills more and more and they could see that at last, they could reach the final understanding and get the task outcome.

Their language used may result in concern over grammatical errors and it can be inferred that some participants may notice some incorrect language usage from peers and used it on later occasions. This situation may suggest that it is necessary to tackle structural and lexical problems through activities that raise learners’ awareness of the target language. However, there have been different perspectives about addressing formal features. Prabhu (1987) feels that the learners will incorporate those formal features into their language while carrying out the tasks and there is no need to raise their consciousness on those linguistic features. The idea coincides with that of Krashen (1982). Krashen sees that acquisition occurs as a subconscious process and conscious learning doesn’t lead to acquisition. Also the participants may gradually acquire grammar as mentioned by Ellis (2009) that grammaticalization occurs gradually in a dynamic process.

Other theoreticians with alternative view argue that the lack of form focus may foster learners’ fossilization of the language that is noneradicable (Higgs & Clifford, cited in Nunan, 2004). The grammatical consciousness raising activities should be incorporated with task based language instruction (Nunan, 2004). However, Willis

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(1996) has some interesting views regarding this issue. She points out that there has been substantial evidence of learners' error repetition even after being corrected many times. She further states that learners may be able to produce language correctly but in controlled situations and they fail to do so when using them freely. Pedagogically, Willis suggests that learners should be set free using the target language in a supportive atmosphere without feeling threatened.

As this course was developed for EFL learners who are familiar with traditional Thai teaching which often focuses on form, it should be worth to address problematic language features in the 'Language focus' part of the instruction. However, it would be better for both a teacher and learners to explicitly examine and discuss those problematic language or linguistic features in the communicative context of the inputs or those that have been produced by learners in order to foster their understanding. This assumption is supported by Ellis (2003) who states that the consciousness-raising tasks may be used and designed to draw learners' attention to a particular linguistic feature in a range of deductive and inductive procedures as a feature will not be immediately incorporated into learners' inter-language once it has been raised to their consciousness.

3.2. The study revealed that the participants in the focus group interacted with each other constantly. This doesn't mean that every member in the group actively spoke English all the time as the participants had low English proficiency and different learning styles which may have influenced their learning behavior. In addition, by the nature of group interaction, and by the participants' culture, they are likely to be assigned a turn, wait for their turns and leave some space for thinking and mediating with the previous utterance(s). However, it could be observed that the verbal interactions circulated continuously and didn't break down and leave long gaps of more than one-to-two minutes. Furthermore, learners demonstrated their interactions, concentration, enthusiasm and eagerness to initiate their ideas by both verbal and non-verbal cues, which could be noticed while observing their behavior via recordings.

Implications

1. Task-based language learning: the issue of participants' motivation, self-confidence and relaxed mood

From the findings of this study, the developed course using a task-based approach, combined with the opportunity for language use for social interaction both in and outside class in real situations, are recommended as the English course for Thai students especially for the ESP courses. However, using English to carry out the assigned tasks seems to be very demanding for them because they have linguistic limitations and were not familiar with using English all the time to carry out the task. Accordingly, it is strongly suggested that it is important to set a friendly and relaxed learning environment and establish a close rapport with learners to activate their motivation, self-confidence which in turns enhance their learning achievement.

2. The issue of the communication skills

The results of the study revealed that participants produced a large number of negotiation of meaning features while carrying out their tasks. However, it could be noted that the negotiation of meaning features they produced, such as "Hue?", "Ha?", "You....." or a gesture of raising a hand, or leaning their face towards the

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interlocutor deviate from the common features like, “Could you repeat that?”, “What is....?”, “Do what?”, “ You mean this picture?”, “ You know what I mean?”. This finding suggests that to prepare learners for the fast changing world business with the increasing number of non-native speakers, the ESP courses in Thai university especially one which associates with frontline workers should consider the inclusion of verbal, nonverbal communication features. In addition, from the result of this study it can be inferred that language and culture will never be separated. However, it may be necessary for the teacher to find the most effective way to stretch their use of non-verbal communication and backchannel feedback to effectively enhance their communication to serve the high proportion of non-native speaking tourists. This study has found that exposure to authentic audio-visual clip models is one of the effective ways.

3. English intelligibility: an issue of its practicality

It is clear that English teaching and learning in Thailand usually emphasizes the native targets of grammar, pronunciation and syntax. However, because of global trade with the high proportion of non-native speaking tourists relative to native speakers, English teaching and learning may need to prepare learners to cope with a variety of “World Englishes” which inevitably come with local linguistic and cultural influences (Jenkins, 2003). To do so, English teaching and learning in Thailand may need to place a stronger emphasis on intelligibility to serve the situational relevancy of the vital role of English as a lingua franca especially in the business sectors. In addition, English intelligibility of learners should be put more emphasis on promoting learners’ confidence, and view of making mistakes as part of their learning and a process that may foster their language internalization. The result of the study might echo the need for a focus on English intelligibility.

4. Alternative ways of evaluating learners’ language ability.

Ways of evaluating learners’ language ability especially for oral English communication ability may need to be reconsidered. The current evaluation system in Thailand is based on grading. After the evaluation, the learners are only informed if they pass or fail the course and what grades they get. They never know the level of their learning improvement or what they can and cannot do. They are unable to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn may hinder their improvement. Using the analytic scales assessing each language skill may be an alternative way to enhance learners’ learning improvement and motivation since the scale rating can illustrate the increase in scores of each skill being evaluated. Learners can clearly see which skill has not been improved, which skill has been improved. The pre-test and post-test outcome in this study as mentioned earlier may contribute to the conception of what this alternative assessment is like and how it contributes to teaching and learning benefits.

5. The issue of the analytic rating scales’ practicality and subjectivities

As mentioned earlier, the analytic rating scales used in this study contained 11 scales. In spite of providing great benefit to both teachers and learners, their practicality and subjectivity have been criticized. However, these scales can be adjusted for practical use. Teachers may select some scales they want to assess in some tasks but not others. Or they may abandon the scales that assess the language features that are found unnecessary. To take this study as an example, as it is clear that the scales of

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‘Greeting’, ‘Non-verbal communication’, ‘Intro hesitation’ or ‘ Backchannel’ concern skills, which often come with language fluency. In addition, they are skills that are universal so there may be no need to assess these skills often.

For the issue of subjectivity, the teacher may need to apply multiple tasks and assess each learner using the analytic rating scales for those tasks and investigate if the scores or improvement of those scales or skills are agreeable and triangulate each other to test the rating subjectivity. This is also beneficial for both learners and the teacher to see learners’ long-term development if the teacher can apply the rating scales continuously in the course series.

6. ESP courses in Thai university: the issue of practicality

English for specific purposes has been required as a part of curriculum offered in Thai universities including Chiang Mai Rajabhat University. However, the content used in those ESP courses seems to be broad and does not really cater to the specific needs for a particular purpose of a specific group of learners. The four language skills are still the focus and are perceived to be crucial for learners. The teaching methodology may not help foster their motivation, may not be the most effective way to achieve the course goals, and the evaluation may not be relevant. Despite the fact that ESP courses have been taught in Thai universities for decades, Thai graduates’ English language proficiency is still insufficient for the current era of globalization (Wiriyachitra, 2004). Therefore, the practicality of the ESP courses offered in Thai educational institutes may need to be reconsidered.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a discrepancy between Thais’ English proficiency and the level of proficiency needed to compete globally in business sectors such as tourism. This, combined with the adoption of English as an international language, poses a problem for Thailand if it wishes to compete in this increasingly competitive environment. This study takes an important step in addressing this problem. Hopefully, the changes we are going to introduce at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University will facilitate English language learning and make it more relevant to the current global situation. However, this paper is only an initial effort which we hope will be built upon through further study to ensure approval and validity.

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