

The Development of a Communicative English Training Curriculum for Thai Counter Clerks in Convenience Stores

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Abstract

The objectives of the study are to develop a curriculum for an English training for counter clerks in convenience stores in Chiang Mai, Thailand and to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed curriculum. A mixed-method research design was employed. In the curriculum development phase, participants were 20 counter clerks and 10 administrators while 40 counter clerks and 271 English-speaking customers participated in the curriculum evaluation phase. Findings revealed nine tasks of a counter clerk which require English. Trainees' English communicative competence improved significantly from the pretest to the posttest and from the pretest to the delayed posttest. However, there was a decrease of the mean scores at the delayed posttest when compared with the posttest for all areas of communicative competence. English-speaking customers were highly satisfied with trainees' use of English, and trainees perceived that the curriculum was very efficient. The study suggested that an English curriculum for adult learners must reflect a wide range of real-life tasks and incorporate real-world language functions.

1. Introduction

Recently, the number of foreign tourists in Thailand has decreased due to the current pandemic of COVID-19. However, the country has demonstrated success in handling the outbreak effectively (World Health Organization, 2020). Accordingly, once the COVID-19 vaccines are made available, the country will have a strong potential to rapidly resume the normal situation. Considering the continually increasing number of foreigners in Thailand including international traders, foreign tourists, and expatriates in the past years (InterNations, n.d.; USDA, 2020), the Thai government and business sectors must prepare for the post-COVID tourism.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks, the rising number of foreigners in Thailand did not take place only in Bangkok, the capital city, but also in big provinces such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Songkhla as has been exemplified by the number of foreign arrivals in Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Had Yai international airports since 2017 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, n.d.). Accordingly, these more remote provinces should also prepare for the recovery of tourism. Specifically, Chiang Mai, which has been known for its unique cultural heritage and natural attractions, is one of the top-five destinations in Thailand for international visitors, and such the fame attracts more foreign tourists to the province (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2018). The number of foreigners has produced attractive opportunities for businesses in Chiang Mai serving foreigners, such as long-stay and tourism businesses (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Retail business shares this demand because foreigners are considered as its important markets as shown by a strong demand for imported products in key convenience stores in Thailand such as 7-Eleven, Tesco Lotus Express, Mini Big C, and Family Mart (USDA, 2020). Inevitably, counter clerks of these convenience stores must be capable of speaking English to communicate with foreign customers to compete with other convenience stores. Many studies in Thailand have reported the growing needs of English for communication among Thai employees (Chetsadanuwat, 2018; Hiranburana, 2017) including those in the tourism industry (Kuosuwan, 2016). These studies recommended that a needs analysis of target learners must be actioned before the curriculum development to identify needs of learners.

Therefore, a scientific study of the development of a communicative English training curriculum for counter clerks in convenience stores is necessary, in order to provide an effective English training model for these counter clerks. Accordingly, the present study was conducted to address two main research objectives. First, it aims to develop a communicative English curriculum for counter clerks of convenience stores in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The second research objective was to evaluate the developed curriculum by investigating the effects of the developed curriculum on trainees' communicative competence (i.e. overall speaking performance, linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic communicative competence), English-speaking customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English, and trainees' perceptions towards the curriculum. Research questions are provided as follows.

- (1) How should components of a curriculum (i.e. learning objectives, content, and learning experience) be designed to create an effective English training program for counter clerks in convenience stores?
- (2) What are the effects of the developed curriculum on trainees' oral communicative competence and on the retention of such competence?
- (3) How satisfied are English-speaking customers towards trainees' use of English after their English training?
- (4) What are trainees' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the developed curriculum?

2. Review of Literature

The following theoretical strands contributed to the research conceptual framework. First, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) was discussed in line with Richards and Rodgers' (2001) framework in order to construct a framework for developing a curriculum. Second, communicative language competence (Council of Europe, 2001) was utilized to identify expected learning outcomes and to guide the development of data collection instruments. Lastly, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach which was used to guide the development of teaching and learning activities in this study was reviewed.

2.1 English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and curriculum development

Though ESP, along with its teaching and learning is defined distinctively depending on learning contexts, all definitions seem to be central to learners' purposes and their different needs. For example, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) differentiated ESP from English language teaching in general because of its extensive emphasis on learners' purposes. Rahman (2015) further clarified that for ESP adults, English is required for their occupations, so these adult learners come to an English class with different needs. Accordingly, frameworks for developing ESP courses usually include the analysis of learners' needs as an important step to attain the information which will be later used for constructing key components of a curriculum such as goals or learning outcomes, content, teaching materials, teaching methods, and appropriate assessment methods (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In this present study, Richards and Rodgers' (2001) framework of curriculum development was employed because it shares a similar perception as ESP towards the importance of learners' needs. Richards and Rodgers (2001) referred to needs as learners' expectations, learners' linguistic deficiency, lacks, and motivation, etc. They also proposed that a needs analysis must be conducted as an initial step, followed by these five steps: planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting a teaching methodology, selecting and preparing teaching materials, and evaluation.

2.2 CEFR communicative language competence

Recently, perceptions towards communicative language competence have changed due to the current role of English as the lingual franca. To deal with these changing perspectives, the Council of Europe (2001) proposed a Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) as a model measuring tool for communicative competence. The CEFR framework was developed based upon the concept that a proper goal of language learning is the life-long development of learners' motivation, skills, and confidence in encountering new language experience outside a classroom context (Goullier, 2007). Therefore, communicative language competence must

cover linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic uses of a language (Council of Europe, 2001). Based on definitions provided by the Council of Europe (2001), linguistic competence refers to grammatical accuracy and the control over vocabulary, phonology, and the writing system while sociolinguistic competence refers to abilities in using a language with different groups of people and within different contexts with concerns such as politeness as well as norms and culture. For pragmatic competence, learners' abilities in using a second language in different circumstances such as flexibility, turn-taking, cohesions and coherence, as well as fluency are focused (Council of Europe, 2001). CEFR serves as a source of language learning and teaching in teaching and learning activities and methods, and in analyzing language learning situations (Council of Europe, 2001). However, its scale of language proficiency level appears to be most familiar among second or foreign language practitioners. The CEFR scale consists of three major levels of language users: basic (level A), independent (level B), and proficient (level C). Each level is divided into two levels, that is level A1 and level A2, etc. As such, CEFR is a 6-level scale. A description of each level of proficiency reflects specific knowledge and skills in a language with a focus on a particular language skill and language activities such as overall spoken interaction and conversation. In the present study, CEFR scales for spoken interaction and conversation were adapted for use as rubrics for assessing trainees' communicative competence because the scale match with the authentic use of English by counter clerks in a convenience store.

2.3 The Communicative Language Teaching Approach

ESP might benefit from the sociocultural view of learning (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), which reflects language acquired through social context, where the purpose of learning a language is to communicate one's needs, ideas, and opinions effectively in the real world (Hedge, 2000; Saville-Troike, 2012). Therefore, the CLT approach which focuses on learners' communicative abilities rather than grammar mastery (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) seems to fit with the characteristics and goals of ESP.

Based on CLT, a language pedagogical approach emphasizes the communicative functions of a language and reflect the following

principles (Nunan, 2004). Firstly, language teaching must aim to develop learners' communicative competence. Secondly, language teaching must reinforce the interdependence of language skills and communicative uses. Third, a communicative curriculum must focus on real language use. Based on these principles, a CLT curriculum should focus on learning activities and materials such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, as suggested by Skehan (1998), pedagogical tasks should reflect communicative functions used in learners' real-world tasks. In addition, one should also consider the recent spread of English, which emphasizes the role of "English as an international lingua franca (EILF)" (McKay, 2011, p. 127), which refers to the use of English between non-native speakers or between native and non-native speakers of English. EILF has changed the goal of teaching English, from being a native-like user of English to be a user of English to communicate in an international context (McKay, 2011). Through the lens of EILF, the authentic use of the English language in CLT is altered from the language used by native speakers to be the language used in learners' real-life contexts, as a tool for international communication (Butler, 2011). Therefore, the implementation of CLT should be flexible upon the real use of English in the learners' context.

In conclusion, these theoretical strands played an important role in the research methodology of the present study. They were employed in constructing a framework for curriculum development as well as in designing data collection instruments for curriculum evaluation.

3. Methodology

The present study was divided into two phases: curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. For the curriculum development phase, a mixed-method research design was used. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used to obtain the data. For the curriculum evaluation phase, a quasi-experimental research design (one-group pretest and posttest design) was employed to make judgements about the effectiveness of the curriculum developed.

3.1 Phase I: Curriculum development

In the first phase, the needs analysis was conducted to identify learners' needs which were later used in developing a curriculum for English training. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments were used.

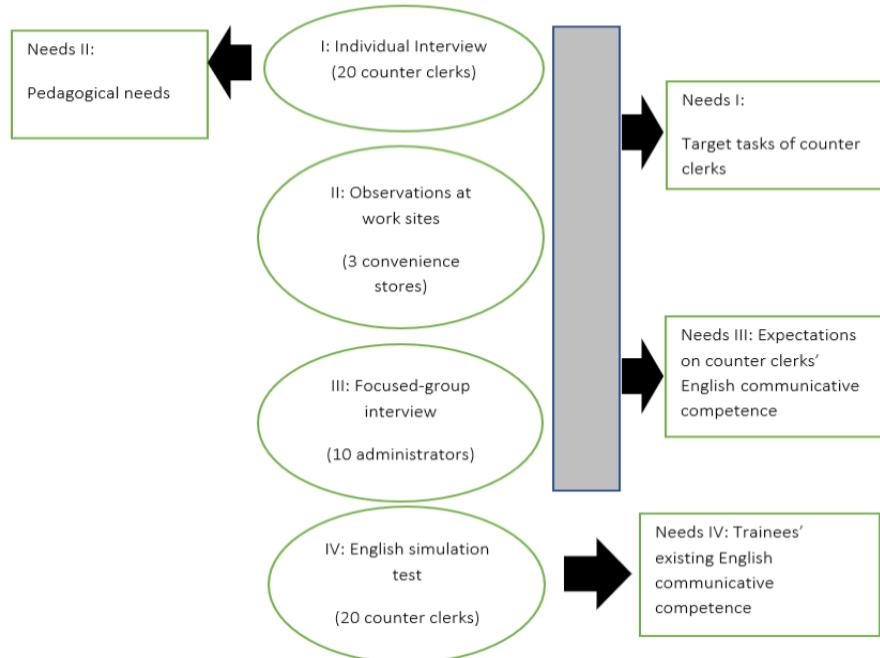
3.1.1 Participants and sampling method

To develop a curriculum, 20 counter clerks and 10 convenience store administrators participated in a needs analysis. A purposive sampling method was employed. Criteria used to select these participants included number of years of work experience at a convenience store and their volunteering to participate in the research.

3.1.2 Data collection instruments

Figure 1

Data collection instruments for the needs analysis



The data collection instruments used in the needs analysis for the curriculum development included interview, non-participatory observations, and an English simulation test and rubrics. Figure 1 shows the framework for the needs analysis.

As depicted by Figure 1, a needs analysis was employed to gather the following information for curriculum development: tasks of counter clerks which require the use of English, pedagogical needs, expectations of counter clerks' English communicative competence, and prospective trainees' existing communicative competence. The individual interview was conducted in Thai with 20 counter clerks. Each interview lasted 30 to 40 minutes. Five questions were included focusing on a) reasons for applying for the training, b) difficulties when using English to communicate with customers, c) expected knowledge or skills from the English training, d) situations or tasks of counter clerks which often require the use of English and e) preferred teaching and learning activities. Second, non-participatory observations were conducted with a focus on conversations between counter clerks with foreign customers at three convenience stores located in Ta Pae Gate, Chiang Mai which is a tourist spot. Each observation lasted between 3 to 5 hours depending on whether the data collected were rich enough to determine counter clerks' needs regarding language forms and functions. The observations aimed to identify which tasks require English use by the counter clerks. Third, a simulation test was used to evaluate the existing English language communicative competence of prospective trainees. The simulation test was identical to the one used as the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest, which will be described in the following section. However, to reduce the effects of the test familiarity, details of tasks across the tests are varied though situations remain the same. For example, in a situation that requires trainees to assist customers with product issues, trainees were asked to make recommendations to customers certain dairy products, food and beverage products, and local products in the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest respectively. Lastly, a focused-group interview with employers or administrators of a convenience store aimed to reveal the expected oral communicative abilities of trainees which were later used to set the learning outcomes for the training curriculum. Ten administrators or employers of a convenience retailing store including three branch managers, three executive administrators, one senior officer of Customer Relations, and

three directors of Human Resource Development were interviewed in Thai language. Five guided questions were employed, focusing on their expectations towards the English communicative competence of their counter clerks. Follow-up questions were also used when clarification or further information was needed.

3.2 Phase II: Curriculum evaluation

In the second phase, the curriculum developed was evaluated based on its effects on trainees' English communicative competence and foreign customers' satisfaction with their use of English. A quasi-experimental research design was employed to investigate the effectiveness of the training program.

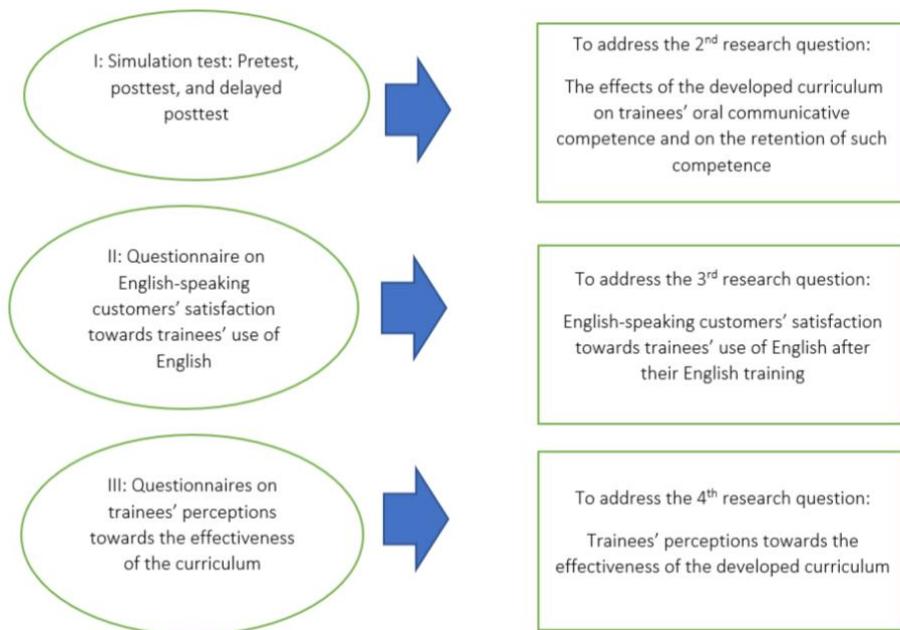
3.2.1 Participants and sampling method

To evaluate the curriculum effectiveness, 40 counter clerks working at two global-brand convenience stores in Chiang Mai and 271 English-speaking foreign customers were recruited by using the probability sampling method. These 40 counter clerks were randomly selected from 122 counter clerks who volunteered to receive the English training. For the justification of the sample size, it is suggested by the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning of Washington State University (n.d.) recommends that a representative sample should be made up of at least 40 students from the population of interest. In addition, it has been suggested that the English language teaching that occur within small classes appears to have a positive effect on English learners' motivation and learning experiences (Harfitt & Tsui, 2015). Therefore, the present study recruited 40 trainees to ensure manageability. In addition, foreign customers were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire on customers' satisfaction with respect to trainees' use of English. The sample size of foreign customers (n=271) was determined by Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1963, cited in Israel, 2003), since the population of foreign customers of convenience stores in Chiang Mai could not be specified.

3.2.2 Data collection instruments

Figure 2

Data collection instruments for curriculum evaluation



Data collection instruments for evaluating the curriculum are threefold: simulation test (pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest), a questionnaire on foreign customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English, and a questionnaire on trainees' perceptions towards the training program. Figure 2 illustrates data collection instruments for curriculum evaluation.

First, the English simulation test was designed based on nine tasks counter clerks perform for foreign customers, as derived from the interviews with employers and counter clerks as well as from the observations. The test covers nine real-world situations as follows: 1) greetings and farewell to customers, 2) offering helps, 3) assisting customers with product issues, 4) bill payment and banking services, 5) giving information on Thai laws on the retail sales of alcohol beverage

and tobacco, 6) issuing a receipt and collecting payment, 7) informing sale promotions, 8) dealing with customers' complaints, and 9) having a short conversation with customers on traffic and local transportation, well-known festivals, and various tourist spots. The interviewer took the role of a foreign customer in these nine tasks. Video recording was used with the consent from test takers for the purpose of assessment. In addition, rubrics used to evaluate the English simulation test were adapted from scales for assessing the spoken interaction derived from CEFR standards (Council of Europe, 2001). The adaptation of the CEFR's scales counted on the expected learning outcomes elicited from the needs analysis. Rubrics used in the present study evaluated a test taker's oral English abilities in four areas: a) overall speaking performance, b) linguistic, c) pragmatic, and d) sociolinguistic appropriateness. Two researchers who are instructors of English at a tertiary level rated the interactions in a fashion which reduced the risk of biased assessment. The English simulation test was examined for its content validity by three specialists in English curriculum development using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) to evaluate the congruence between learning outcomes and test items. The first draft of the English simulation test was revised after the first IOC according to the suggestions of three experts, focusing on the items which received IOC scores under 0.71. After adjustment, the overall IOC scores reached the high level of value 1. These values revealed that the English simulation test was valid and appropriate. In addition, the alpha coefficient (.934) suggested relatively high internal consistency among the test items. For the inter-rater reliability, the Pearson Correlation values (.961 and .978) reveal that both raters have high grading consistency.

Secondly, the questionnaire on English-speaking customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English consisted of four items including overall speaking performance, linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic communicative competence. A 5-scale rating was used ranging from very unsatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). The IOC index was employed to measure the content validity of items in the questionnaire. For the reliability stability of the questionnaire, 22 foreigners watched a video clip of a trainee communicating with an English-speaking customer and were asked to complete the questionnaire. Three days later, these same foreigners were asked to watch the same video clip and to recomplete the questionnaire. Based on the test-retest of the

questionnaire, the correlation coefficient values of the four items including the satisfaction towards linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, sociocultural competence, and overall speaking performance were .882, .911, .753, and .824 respectively. Since a correlation coefficient higher than .68 is considered as a strong or high correlation (Taylor, 1990), the questionnaire is assumed to be of a high reliability.

Third, the questionnaire on trainees' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the curriculum was based on the components of the English training curriculum. The questionnaire consists of five items as follows: 1) learning outcomes and lesson objectives, 2) classroom management, 3) teaching methodology, 4) teaching materials, and 5) assessment. A 5-scale rating was used ranging from inefficiency (1) to very high efficiency (5). The IOC index was employed to measure the content validity of items in the questionnaire. In addition, the test-retest reliability was employed to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. Twenty-two trainees in a pilot study of the English training were asked to fill in the questionnaire twice, immediately and a week after the English training was finished. The test-retest of the questionnaire revealed that the correlation coefficients for objectives, classroom management, teaching methodology, teaching materials, and assessment were .765, .761, .830, .863, and .879 respectively which showed the high reliability of the questionnaire.

4. Data Collection Procedure

There are two main phases in the data collection procedure: curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. The data collection procedure is presented in Figure 3.

As presented in Figure 3, the first phase of the study focused on the analysis of needs of stakeholders including employers or administrators of convenience retailing businesses, English-speaking customers, and prospective trainees. In addition, the development of the training curriculum, validity and reliability measurement, and ethical review were also included. The second phase, curriculum evaluation was aimed at investigating the effectiveness of the developed curriculum. The pretest was conducted in the first week, followed by a 22-hour English training unit. After the training, the posttest was conducted along

with questionnaires about trainees' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the training. After that, questionnaires on foreign customers' satisfaction towards their use of English were administrated. Lastly, the delayed posttest was conducted two weeks after the posttest.

Figure 3

Data collection procedure

Phase I: Curriculum development	4 months	I: Needs analysis: Interviews &Observations:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) English-speaking customers b) Employers/administrators of convenience stores c) Prospective trainees
Phase II: Curriculum evaluation	Week 1	II: Developing English training curriculum, validity & reliability measurement, and research ethical review
		Pretest
	Week 2-8	Training
		Posttest & administration of a questionnaire on trainees' perceptions towards the curriculum
	Week 9	Administration of a questionnaire on foreign customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English
		Delayed Posttest
	Week 10-11	
	Week 12-13	

5. Data Analysis

For qualitative data, the process of open coding was used. Themes were both elicited from the data and suggested by the literature review. For quantitative data, repeated measured ANOVA and descriptive statistics were employed.

6. Findings

Findings are presented according to the two main research objectives: to develop and to evaluate an English training curriculum for a communicative English training curriculum for counter clerks in convenience stores in Chiang Mai. Firstly, findings from the needs

analysis were reported, followed by the application of such findings in the development of the following components of the English training curriculum: learning objectives, content, and learning experience (e.g. teaching methods as well as teaching materials). With regards findings on curriculum development, the following aspects were reported: 1) the effects of the developed curriculum on trainees' communicative competence; 2) foreign customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English; and 3) trainees' perceptions towards the developed curriculum.

6.1 Findings from the Needs Analysis

The results of the needs analysis reveal the following aspects of needs: 1) target tasks of counter clerks, 2) pedagogical needs, 3) trainees' needs on communicative language competence, and 4) lacks and needs of trainees on English oral proficiency.

6.1.1 *Target tasks of counter clerks*

Nine target tasks were derived from the individual interviews with counter clerks, the observations at convenience stores, and the interviews with administrators. These nine target situations are: a) greetings, welcoming and saying goodbye to customers, b) offering help, c) assisting customers with product issues, d) bill payment and banking services, e) giving information on Thai laws on the retail sales of alcohol beverage and tobacco, f) explaining SIM cards and call plans, g) issuing receipts, collecting payment, and talking about sales promotions, h) dealing with customers' complaints, and i) having a short conversation with customers.

6.1.2 *Pedagogical needs*

For learners' pedagogical needs, the individual interview with trainees revealed eight preferable classroom activities: lecture, group activities, role-play, discussion, paper-based exercises, paired dialogues, and on-site simulations. Later, trainees were asked to rank these eight classroom activities based on their preferences, and it was found that their top-three preferred classroom activities were paired dialogue (93.33%), role-play (80%), and on-site simulations (53.33%). For trainees'

learning styles, paired dialogue (93.33%), role-play (80%), and on-site simulations (53.33%) were the most preferable activities respectively.

6.1.3 Expectations on counter clerks' English communicative competence

Firstly, the expectations of counter clerks' English communicative competence were derived. As guided by the communicative language competence proposed in the CEFR framework (Council of Europe, 2001), codes such as pronunciation needs, vocabulary needs, and fluency, were assigned to the transcripts and were later categorized according to similarities in the characteristics of needs. Then categories contributed later into the following themes: linguistic needs, pragmatic needs, and sociolinguistic needs. Table 1 below shows some examples of how categories and themes were developed.

Table 1

Coding and theme development

Themes	Categories	Examples of Excerpts from the transcribed interviews (Translated from Thai)
Linguistic needs	Pronunciation needs	Counter clerk 1: <i>Pronunciation is hard. When a foreign customer doesn't understand my English, I will repeat the same word using different stresses and pronunciation.</i> (code assigned = pronunciation).
	Vocabulary needs	Counter clerk 1: <i>Sometimes, I want to use some other words instead of the word that I can't pronounce but I can't.</i> (code assigned = vocabulary) Counter clerk 2: <i>My big challenge is I don't know many words in English, so I don't speak to a foreign customer. I will have someone help me.</i> (code assigned = vocabulary)
Pragmatic needs	Speaking strategies	Counter clerk 21: <i>It's hard to start a conversation with our foreign customers. I'm afraid that I'll interrupt them.</i> (code assigned = opening, turn-taking)
	1) Fluency 2) Speaking strategies	Counter clerk 7: <i>Sometimes, I need time to think about a sentence in English but customer just left because he might think that I can't speak English.</i> (code assigned = time-delaying strategy) <i>Actually, I think I can speak some English but I just need time to think.</i> (code assigned = fluency)

Sociolinguistic needs	Politeness	Counter clerk 1: <i>I think my sentences are too short, and I am afraid that I am not polite to my customer.</i> (code assigned = politeness)
	1. Politeness 2. Sociolinguistic	Counter clerk 11: <i>It's hard to deal with customers' complaints. I don't know how to cool them down.... . Many times, when I have tried to explain reasons, a customer has gotten even angrier. Maybe, my English doesn't show the right politeness and sincerity.</i> (code assigned = politeness and sociolinguistic)

According to Table 1, findings revealed that a counter clerk cannot depend only on linguistic competence such as pronunciation and vocabulary needs. Pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence are also necessary for a counter clerk when communicating with a foreign customer. The observations at convenience stores confirmed findings from the interviews on these three needs. For example, all counter clerks who were observed presented difficulties in using accurate sentences to some extent. First, chunks and body language were usually used by the observed counter clerks. Second, pragmatic and/or sociolinguistic competence were rarely noticed. Finally, the interviews with counter clerks and administrators revealed sociolinguistic needs among counter clerks when communicating with foreign customers.

Also, the interviews with the administrators revealed that their expectation towards counter clerks' communicative abilities matched with the description of the B2 level of proficiency on the CEFR scale, where one can use English in general conversational topics in an appropriate fashion with the interlocutors and different situations with some degree of language fluency and accuracy (Council of Europe, 2001). These administrators agreed that their counter clerks must have sufficient vocabulary to converse in an unfamiliar topic, though they might show some hesitation. In addition, though high speaking fluency is not expected, the use of pauses or signs of hesitation must not interrupt the conversation.

6.1.4 Trainees' existing English communicative competence

Trainees' existing English communicative competencies were examined by a simulation test. The findings of the simulation test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Findings on prospective trainees' existing English communicative competence

Band score	Linguistic competence	Pragmatic competence	Sociolinguistic competence
2 (B1)	70%	65%	65%
4 (B2)	30%	35%	35%
Total	100%	100%	100.0

For trainees' existing English communicative competence, the simulation test revealed that most trainees did not reach the expected level (B2). For the linguistic competence, 70% of prospective trainees did not meet employers' competency expectation (B2 or higher). In addition, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences seemed to be difficult for trainees because only 35% of trainees could reach B2 level.

6.2 Curriculum development from needs findings

The findings were used to design the following components of the training curriculum: learning objectives, content, and learning experience. First, the learning objectives of the English training curriculum are classified into two types: expected learning outcomes and enabling objectives. Expected learning outcomes were created to match with trainees' needs for communicative language competence in linguistics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics: thus, they focus on accuracy, speaking strategies, and appropriateness respectively. These three foci of the expected learning outcomes were used as framework for enabling objectives which were designed in accordance with the nine target tasks of the counter clerks (See appendix A for an excerpt of curriculum mapping).

In addition, nine target situations which were drawn from the needs analysis were also used as the main content areas of the English training curriculum. Accordingly, the curriculum consists of nine units, and each unit focuses on a particular task. Vocabulary, expressions, and sentence structure were selected to match such tasks and to enhance linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic uses of language.

Moreover, findings from the needs analysis about learners' preferred learning styles were used as steppingstone to design teaching and learning methods and materials. Since paired dialogue, role-play, and on-site simulations were most preferred among trainees, they were used to guide the development of teaching and learning activities and materials.

Lastly, based on trainees' existing English proficiency levels, topics, and availability of trainees, this curriculum is designed for 22 training hours. There were 6 trainers together, 3 non-native speakers and 3 native speakers of English, with 2 to 15 years of English teaching experience.

These trainers were also the research team of this study, so they took part in developing the curriculum, and all had a clear understanding of the content and the implementation of the curriculum.

6.3 Findings on the curriculum evaluation

The effectiveness of the curriculum was investigated through the effects of the curriculum on trainees' communicative competence, English-speaking customers satisfaction towards trainees' use of English, and the trainees' perceptions towards the English training curriculum.

6.3.1 The effects of the curriculum on trainees' oral communicative competence and on the retention of the competence

To examine the effects of the English training curriculum on trainees' communicative language competence and on the retention of the competence, the repeated measures ANOVA was used to reveal the comparisons among the mean scores of the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest. Table 3 summarizes the differences of the mean scores of the three tests.

For overall speaking performance, it is found that the mean scores of the posttest ($\bar{x} = 6.00$) has increased from the pretest ($\bar{x} = 2.92$) at a significant level ($p = .000$). The similar trend has been found when the mean score of the delayed posttest ($\bar{x} = 4.72$) was compared with the pretest. However, the mean scores of the delayed posttest significantly dropped from the posttest ($p=.000$).

Table 3*Mean differences of the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest*

Test types	Test types	Mean Difference (Total scores = 10)	Std. Error	Sig.
Overall speaking performance				
Pretest	Posttest	-3.075	.236	.000
	Delayed posttest	-1.800	.249	.000
Posttest	Delayed posttest	1.275	.196	.000
Linguistics				
Pretest	Posttest	-3.275	.232	.000
	Delayed posttest	-2.425	.255	.000
Posttest	Delayed posttest	.850	.158	.000
Sociolinguistics				
Pretest	Posttest	-3.000	.224	.000
	Delayed posttest	-1.600	.242	.000
Posttest	Delayed posttest	1.400	.205	.000
Pragmatics				
Pretest	Posttest	-.950	.304	.010
	Delayed posttest	-.925	.294	.009
Posttest	Delayed posttest	.025	.333	1.000

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

In a similar way, when examining each area of communicative language competence, it has been found that the mean scores of linguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence share a similar trend with the overall communicative competence. The mean scores of both competences have been increased significantly from the pretest (\bar{x} of linguistics = 2.77 and \bar{x} of sociolinguistics = 2.90) to the posttest (\bar{x} of linguistics = 6.05 and \bar{x} of sociolinguistic = 5.90) and from the pretest (\bar{x} of linguistics = 2.77 and \bar{x} of sociolinguistics = 2.90) to the delayed posttest (\bar{x} of linguistics = 5.20 and \bar{x} of sociolinguistic = 4.50). However, the mean scores of the delayed posttest for both competences have decreased from the pretest at a significant level ($p=.000$). As such, it can be concluded that the English training developed both linguistic and sociolinguistic competences among trainees. In addition, time seems to be a significant factor that affects the retention of these competences among trainees.

However, findings for pragmatic competence are slightly different. It was found that mean scores of the posttest ($\bar{x} = 3.75$) and

the delayed posttest ($\bar{x} = 3.72$) rose from the pretest ($\bar{x} = 2.80$) at a significant level of $p = .010$ and $p = .009$ respectively. Interestingly, the mean scores of the pragmatic competence of the delayed posttest, though, has decreased from the posttest, but not at a significant level ($p = 1.00$) like the other two competences. Such findings might suggest that time might have the least effect on the retention of pragmatic competence.

In conclusion, it is concluded that the English training curriculum improves trainees' communicative language competence in all aspects of communicative language competence including overall communicative performance. However, time seems to have a negative impact on trainees' retention of overall communicative performance, linguistic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Contrastively, time seems to have the least effect upon the pragmatic competence of trainees.

6.3.2 English-speaking customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English

It was found that in general, English-speaking customers were satisfied with trainees' use of English. Table 4 shows the mean scores of English-speaking customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English.

Table 4

The descriptive statistics of foreign customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English

Competence	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall communicative performance	271	1.00	5.00	3.91	.867
Linguistics	271	1.00	5.00	3.66	.943
Pragmatics	271	1.00	5.00	3.48	.942
Sociolinguistics	271	1.00	5.00	3.80	.942

Based on Table 4, English-speaking customers were satisfied with trainees' use of English where the highest mean score (3.91) was on the overall speaking performance, and the lowest mean score (3.48) was on the pragmatic competence. It is interesting that though the pragmatic competence has the highest retention rate based on trainees'

performance in the delayed posttest, when compared with the other two competences, it received the least customers' satisfaction. The finding reveals the needs of an English training with an intensive focus on the development of pragmatic skills.

6.3.3 Trainees' perceptions towards the developed curriculum

For the trainees' perceptions towards the effectiveness of the curriculum, the mean scores of trainees' perception of all components of the English training curriculum are at the highest level (very efficient) with the lowest mean score (4.22) on teaching methodology and the highest mean score (4.42) on assessment. Accordingly, it can be concluded that trainees perceived that the English training curriculum is very efficient in helping them improve their uses of English as a counter clerk at a convenience store.

7. Discussion

The following sections discuss two important themes that have emerged from the findings of the study: the development of ESP classroom communicative tasks and the retention of oral communicative competence among ESP learners.

First, communicative tasks which address the real-world needs of counter clerks at a convenience store seem to play an important role in improving English oral communicative competence among trainees in this present study. Huang et al. (2011) recommended ESL language teachers closely attend to the needs of their adult ESL learners because these learners usually come to English classrooms with specific learning goals that reflect their life goals. Two salient characteristics of communicative tasks used in the English training curriculum as main teaching and learning activities are delineated as follows. First, the scenarios set for each communicative task are related to real situations where English is required by a counter clerk at a convenience store. For example, the following scenarios were used in the conversational practice of Unit 3, 4, and 7 respectively.

Scenario in Unit 3:

A customer wants to buy some granola bars but he or she is allergic to peanuts. The counter clerk is helping with recommending another brand

to her that does not have peanuts as an ingredient. Then, the counter clerk tells the price. A customer also wants to buy herbal balm for his or her mom. The counter clerk helps her out.

Scenario in Unit 4:

A customer wants to pay for a water bill, but the bill is overdue. So, the counter clerk will suggest the customer to pay it at the Waterworks Office.

Scenario in Unit 7:

At the checkout, a counter clerk is checking out a customer and asking whether the customer wants to buy some potato chips which are on sale. A customer agrees to buy some and wants to pay with a credit card. These three scenarios are type of tasks undertaken during counter clerks' daily routines in a convenience store. Huang et al. (2011) argued that using such authentic and meaningful activities can engage adult learners' learning and help "foster connections to real-world contexts and situations" (p. 8). Such activities enable adult learners to learn skills more rapidly because they can integrate knowledge and skills obtained from their classrooms with real-life situations (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997). Therefore, with these scenarios, trainees who participated in the present study were well-prepared for using English in real situations in their workplace.

Secondly, communicative tasks in this English training curriculum reflect real-world language functions of counter clerks. For example, according to scenario of Unit 3 where a counter clerk was asked to assist a foreign customer in buying some granola bars and a herbal balm, the following language functions were central to the teaching and learning of this scenario: explaining about ingredients, recommending a granola brand which does not have peanuts, explaining choices of a herbal balm, and telling the price. In another example, based on the scenario given in Unit 4 above, a trainee was asked to help a customer with a bill payment. Thus, trainees were required to perform the following language functions: refusal, giving reasons, as well as giving a solution or recommendation. Since communicative tasks were used extensively in the curriculum, it might be assumed that trainees' knowledge and skills were enhanced through these authentic conversational practices. Such findings support the argument of Huang et al. (2011) that adult learners acquire vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, pragmatic and semantic

elements rapidly through classroom activities that engaged them in authentic communication and that involved the negotiation of meaning.

Therefore, when creating classroom activities for an ESP course, especially for adult learners, it is vital to consider the following questions: a) Do the classroom activities reflect a wide range of real-life situations or scenarios for the particular group of adult learners? and b) Do these classroom activities involve real-world language functions? These questions should be clearly addressed.

Moreover, the present study reveals that trainees face some difficulties in retaining oral communicative competence, especially linguistic and sociolinguistic. The retention of English knowledge and skills is found as a challenge among learners who use English as a foreign language in many studies (e.g. Srisawat & Rujikietgumjorn, 2011; Wang et al., 2020). Important factors contributing to such failure are often in line with insufficient opportunities to practice the new English knowledge and skills outside the classroom context which, consequently, leads to students' low capacity or motivation to retain or develop their English further. Though these previous studies were taken with regular students in a classroom context, they can still shed light on the explanation of the significant decrease of the oral communicative competence among trainees in this present study. Wagner (1994) discussed the lack of practice and low motivation in his literature review about the interdependence of learning, memorizing, and practice, regarding the retention of skills among adult learners. Though the correlation between practice and literacy skills is still questionable, Wagner (1994) suggested the reinforcement of self-monitoring of skill acquisition to help retain work-related literacy skills among adult learners. Garrison (1997) proposed self-monitoring as a key element of the self-directed learning, where learners are motivated to take responsibility and control the process of strategic planning to serve their personal goals (Garrison, 1997). Therefore, if self-monitoring was incorporated into the English training curriculum, trainees might be able to plan and monitor the development of their oral communicative competence, which would help them retain the obtained knowledge and skills.

In conclusion, the findings of the present research suggest two pedagogical concepts for developing an ESP curriculum. First, teaching and learning activities in an ESP classroom must be drawn from the real-world tasks of learners. Second, an ESP course should be designed with

an awareness of how English knowledge and skills among learners are retained after certain time periods. Incorporation of self-directed learning skills such as self-monitoring might benefit ESP adult learners to some extent.

8. Conclusion

The present study addressed two main research objectives. The first research objective was to develop an ESP training curriculum for counter clerks in retail convenience stores. The second research objective was to investigate the effectiveness of the developed curriculum through the investigation of trainees' improvement of communicative competence and the retention of such competence, customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English, and trainees' perceptions towards the efficiency of the curriculum developed. Findings were as follows. First, the needs analysis revealed nine target tasks which were later used to determine learning outcomes, content, and the learning experience of the English training curriculum. Second, the research found that trainees' communicative language competence improved significantly at the posttest and at the delayed posttest stages, respectively when compared with the pretest. However, all areas of communicative language competence, except pragmatic competence significantly decreased at the delayed posttest when compared with the posttest. Third, findings showed that foreign customers' satisfaction towards trainees' use of English reached a satisfactory level, and trainees' perception towards all components of the English training curriculum were at the highest level.

The limitations of this study are related to the transferability of the English training curriculum, which is minimized because the curriculum was specifically designed for counter clerks who work in convenience stores in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Therefore, an English training which targets counter clerks who work at different types of stores or even convenience stores in different regions might yield different results as target situations and learning needs may be different. For example, for tasks, such as assisting customers with product issues and having a short conversation with customers, some English expressions and vocabulary were related to local products, tourist attractions, festivals, and transportations in Chiang Mai. Therefore, these

vocabulary and expressions might not match the needs of counter clerks who work in different provinces of Thailand.

9. Recommendations for Future Research on ESP Curriculum and Evaluation

Intercultural communication might be considered as one of the dependent variables or may be integrated into a conceptual framework because it seems to be an important obstacle hindering the success of participants or trainees in communicating with their interlocutors in English. The intercultural communication models developed by Byram (2008) might be used in addition to the conventional communicative competence model.

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Appendix A

An excerpt from Curriculum Mapping

Learning outcomes	Content/unit	Lesson objectives	Learning experience	Assessment/Simulation task
Trainees will be able to: 1) use accurate English to orally communicate with foreign customers who speak English in their workplace; 2) orally communicate with foreign customers who speak English in their workplace; and 3) deal with difficulties while communicating with English-speaking customers.	3. Assisting Customers with the Product Issues (3 hours)	Trainees will be able to: 1) tell the price of a product correctly; 2) give information about ingredients of a product with concerns of food allergy effectively; 3) explain qualities of Thai products which are popular among foreign customers including cosmetics, snacks and food, etc; and 4) use communication strategies to deal with difficulties while communicating with English-speaking customers.	Learning activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Paired dialogue ➤ Role-play ➤ On-site simulations Tasks on the following concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opinion Gap ➤ Reasoning Gap ➤ Information Gap 	Simulation Task 3 Simulation: Assisting customers with product issues at a mock-up convenience store