

NIDA: Aligning Staff English Proficiency with the New Vision*

Natchaya Chalaysap

นัชชยา เกลยทรัพย์

Returning to his office from a lengthy afternoon meeting with language specialists in the Human Resource Management Division, Professor Dr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, the recently installed twelfth president of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), was intensely aware that slow progress in increasing English language skills among support staff could well become the “Achilles heel” of his vision of making NIDA a leading international university in the Southeast Asia region. He knew well that the recruitment of increased numbers of international students was central to this vision and, indeed, had already initiated a new policy that all NIDA schools were to set a target number of foreign students—even a few—to be recruited annually, beginning in 2008.

*This case study was written by Associate Professor Dr. Natchaya Chalaysap of the School of Language and Communication at the National Institute of Development Administration (Thailand) and is based on a combination of field and archival research. NIDA cases are developed solely for class discussion, and are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective administrative or managerial practice. Copyright © 2008 The National Institute of Development Administration and Dr. Chalaysap.

To order copies or request permission to reproduce materials, call 66 2 727 3154 or go to <http://www.nida.ac.th>

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise – without the permission of the National Institute of Development Administration.

Foremost on his mind, however, as he pulled up the chair to his desk, was the progress report that he had just heard in the Human Resource Management Division concerning the continuing challenges of enhancing the English proficiency of NIDA's support line – the group most responsible for communicating with prospective new student recruits to NIDA's Master's and doctoral degree programs. Given that English was the primary language used to communicate with prospective foreign students around the region, the support line's slow progress in developing English language proficiency had the potential to become a serious impediment to the recruitment of the desired numbers of foreign students.

Mentally reviewing the actions taken to date to resolve the dilemma, Dr. Sombat mused over the fact that up until the articulation of his “going international” vision for NIDA, most support line personnel had neither reason nor opportunity to use English as a medium of communication in their work. To address this problem, Dr. Sombat had earlier begun emphasizing the criticality of support line taking active steps to improve their English language proficiency. He had also recently assigned the Human Resource Management Division the responsibility for designing and conducting English language training courses. Additionally, to further motivate staff compliance, he had initiated a policy whereby progress in developing proficiency in English would henceforth be taken into account at the time of promotion decisions.

Yet, to date, these actions seemed to have had little discernible impact on the English language capabilities of support line personnel. Admittedly, he thought to himself, the training courses — supported as they were by university funds — were limited, with the number of courses per year dependent on the vagaries of NIDA's budgetary resources. However, he was not at all certain that the limited number of annual course offerings was the main factor impeding progress. What *was* clear was that progress in enhancing support line English language proficiency had to quicken if NIDA was to make any meaningful progress toward his vision of becoming one of the top international universities in the Southeast Asia region.

The questions with which he continued to grapple were “What else should I do to upgrade the support line staff’s English proficiency level? Have I overlooked anything? Have I done anything that I need to reconsider?”

Background

The National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) is a graduate institute under the Office of Commission of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, Thailand. Although it was formally established in April 1966 with initial assistance from several entities (i.e., the School of Public Administration at Thammasat University, the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Ford Foundation, and the Midwest University Consortium for International Affairs), its antecedents could be traced back to the current King’s initiative, precursor institutions and public policy decisions stretching back to the early-1960s.

In a very real sense, NIDA’s foundation could be attributed to the vision and the great benevolence of the current Thai monarch, King Bhumibol Aduyadej (King Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty). Prior to NIDA’s establishment, Thailand lacked the numbers of highly specialized skills in a number of areas critical to national development. Realizing this, the King discussed his concern with Mr. David Rockefeller during a June 1960 visit to the United States. Rockefeller sent an expert, Dr. Stacy May, to conduct a “needs analysis” survey, which upon presentation to the King led to the establishment of the National Institute of Development Administration.

Meanwhile, several years before the foundation of NIDA, a program in public administration had been established by the Thammasat University’s Institute of Public Administration (IPA) created in 1956, in collaboration with the US government through USOM in Thailand and with Indiana University as the institutional collaborator in the education of Master’s degree graduates and in the training of government officials. Contemporaneously, the Office of the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) [the currently designated Office

of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)] and the Central Statistical Office [the National Statistical Office at present], at that time part of the NEDB, had been offering multi-level training courses on statistics for economic development for officials from various government ministries and departments.

In 1962, discussions among high-ranking officials from several ministries and departments concerning the desirability of an institute of development administration to teach public administration and train government officials in economic development and other subjects, contributed directly to the eventual launching of the precursor institute to the present NIDA. That is, the 1962 discussions soon led to the emergence of a proposal to create a Graduate School of Business Administration, after which the Cabinet resolved that a Graduate Institute of Development Administration be established. The newly formed Institute absorbed the School of Public Administration from Thammasat University, as well as part of the training and teaching work from NESDB and the National Statistics Office. The two were later combined under the name of the Institute of Development Administration, which thereafter became an autonomous institute.¹ Like other universities under the Ministry of Education, it would soon become autonomous, annually receiving only a lump sum of money to run the university in a business-like manner. (See Exhibit 1 for the current organization chart).

Philosophy, Missions, and Visions

NIDA responded to the King's initiative in development by offering graduate-level education and specialized training in critical skill areas (e.g., public policy, public administration, business administration, development economics, etc.); conducting ongoing research on issues and areas pertinent to national development; and initiating various programs aimed at preserving and disseminating Thai art and culture. In a more general sense, the Institute, in all its endeavors, was focused on rendering service to Thai society, including widely disseminating information about the King's development activities. More specifically, NIDA's philosophy, missions, and visions could be paraphrased as follows:

Philosophy: An emphasis on educational quality and insistence on strict adherence to morals to retain leadership in the science of administration.

Missions: To produce graduates who possessed leadership; to build a body of knowledge in development administration; and to provide academic services to enable the national manpower to have enough competence to develop the country in a sustainable way.

Vision: To produce leaders for Thai society and conduct research to serve the society in development administration effectively.²

Like other universities, NIDA aspired to academic excellence. In particular, it wanted to be a leading international university in development administration in the Southeast Asian region. Unlike other universities, however, it had no plan to offer undergraduate programs, as it wanted to retain its unique identity as a graduate institute. Of utmost importance was the goal that all its schools reached international standards of academic quality.

Going International—Early Initiatives and Current Concerns

Prof. Dr. Purachai Piumsombun, NIDA president [the former term is “rector”] during 1991-1995, recalled earlier points in the Institute’s history when discussions of the objective of NIDA’s becoming an international university had been uppermost in his thinking. Reflecting on some of NIDA’s earliest international endeavors, he commented:

With regard to the international program, one goal of NIDA is that it will not be static or will be just another campus in Thailand, but that it will be international. So we started the project in Vientiane, Laos, by holding a training course on library science there. After that, the School of Public Administration carried out the policy of the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation by offering training programs abroad. I strongly supported this. NIDA sent its faculty team to Hanoi, where they provided training on Fridays and returned on Sundays. At first, NIDA planned to

develop the training program in Hanoi to turn it into a Master's degree program there later, but because of the economic problems and other constraints, the project had to be cancelled. However, one benefit from this activity was that NIDA played a part in holding academic programs for other countries. At the time Thailand's economy was booming, and NIDA gave academic assistance to Asian countries. Trainees came from Mongolia, Korea, Nepal, Sikkim, Bangladesh and other countries in this region, including Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Other international training programs concerned management, economic development, social development, research and evaluation, as well as other modern concepts of administration.³

From these early experiences in conducting international programs, a number of views of the requirements for NIDA's further development as a truly international university emerged both within the faculty and among some alumni. Among these views were those concerning the impediments and weaknesses that NIDA would have to surmount in the process.

Associate Professor Dr. Preecha Jarungidanan, NIDA president from 2001 to early 2007, stated that NIDA should be developed in such a way that it would be a locally and internationally accepted graduate institute in terms of academic excellence within the next three to five years. One of the administrative and managerial strategies to achieve the mission goals was, as he pointed out, to offer international programs. In his words:

All the schools/centers will be encouraged to offer an international program to provide an opportunity for Thais and foreigners in Thailand and from other countries to attend. This will enable NIDA to develop exchange programs with other foreign universities and international organizations, which in turn will serve as a channel to attract qualified

instructors and experts from abroad. These qualified instructors and experts will bring with them updated knowledge and technology in their teaching and research. In addition to the benefits for the students, their research may bring prestige to NIDA and benefit the country. If the international programs can be developed to achieve international standards, NIDA will be internationally accepted for its academic excellence.⁴

Dr. Preecha also mentioned that the managerial approach to achieving this objective included the following:

- First, all the schools/centers would have to offer more international programs;
- Second, the central administration would need to financially support any school/center that does not have enough funds to offer an international program; and,
- Third, NIDA would have to encourage all the schools/centers to have exchange programs with renowned overseas universities.⁵

He pointed out that one of NIDA's weaknesses was the lack of support staff development. The Institute should, he suggested, allocate a budget to develop personnel in the support line to accommodate future work—international programs, doctoral programs, and others. He wanted to see the initiation of continuous development for the support staff. As he put it:

A personnel development project should be created to upgrade the skills and knowledge of the personnel in the support line (i.e., Lines B and C staff, the non-faculty personnel) in the use of the English language and the use of information technology in order to develop NIDA into an international university.⁶

Dr. Pichai Rattanadolok na Phuket, an alumnus who, in 2008, was an associate dean of the School of Social and Environmental Development, was of the opinion that NIDA should recruit instructors of various nationalities. He thought that NIDA should “go beyond race and culture and eliminate any regulation that hindered the promotion of learning.”⁷ This, he averred, increased the necessity of developing the support staff’s English proficiency to communicate with foreign instructors, in addition to foreign students.

English Proficiency Enhancement – A Brief History

Encouraging the personnel to upgrade their knowledge and skills had long been a central thrust of all NIDA administrations. This practice could be traced back to 1989, when the NIDA Council passed the regulation setting up the Personnel Development Committee, consisting of the president and the vice presidents. In addition, the Subcommittee for Personnel Development Fund Management was formed to approve the personnel training projects, to grant funds for implementation, and to oversee the management. English skill development within the support staff was one of the programmatic initiatives that the Committee had supported from its inception.

Before 2007

Prior to 2007, NIDA’s Language Center had sole responsibility for arranging English training courses for staff personnel. These courses were organized on a once- or twice-a-year basis and were primarily geared toward English for general purposes. This responsibility, however, was always ancillary to the Language Center’s main mission of teaching academic English to students in NIDA’s various schools in order to ensure their preparedness for the English reading assignments in their particular degree programs.

For English skill development, the support staff had two alternatives: either attend one of the weekend training courses offered to the general public or take a training course normally offered by the Language Center within the official working hours once or, sometimes, twice a year.

Weekend training courses. The Language Center normally offered several training courses to the general public under the Continuing Education Program. Each course was attended by several subgroups of trainees and one NIDA official was allowed to attend each subgroup.⁸ These courses were free of charge for NIDA officials. The officials who were interested in improving their English could directly apply for a course at the Language Center. Even if they were not required by their work units to attend the course, the units had to give them recognition for doing so. Even after the Language Center had been upgraded to be the School of Language and Communication, this practice remained in effect.

Weekday training courses. As for the weekday courses specially held for NIDA personnel, the erstwhile induction process for staff participants in English language courses formerly organized for them by the Language Center was fairly straightforward. First, the Language Center prepared and disseminated an announcement to all of NIDA's schools, centers, and divisions, calling for an indication of support staff interest in attending the next round of courses. The Language Center usually set some qualifications for those who were allowed to attend each training course. For example, the participants had to be in a certain range of Personnel Classification Level, or hold a certain position. It was understood that the Language Center preferred that nominated staff personnel were to have similar job descriptions, as this greatly facilitated the instructional process.

After receiving the circulation letter from the Language Center, the heads of individual work units would then select the permissible number of their staff to attend the training courses. The number of staff personnel accepted for a particular round of training courses very much depended on a quota imposed by the Language Center because of NIDA's limited annual budgetary allocations.

In the earliest years of the weekday English language training courses offered to the staff during official hours, no placement tests were administered to determine the specific course to which enrollees should be directed based on their level of English proficiency.

Support staff of different English proficiency attended the same class. At the end of the training program, a certificate of class attendance was conferred on the trainees.

NIDA administrators and Language Center instructional staff members alike were aware that course enrollees' motivations for attending the courses were varied. Some felt that they *had to* attend, given that their division head had selected them to participate. However, with most of NIDA's foreign students contingent at the time coming from Laos and fluent in *Thai*, many staff personnel in the "reluctant" group of participants failed to see much relevance in developing any real fluency in English. It was believed that only a very small percentage of the total participants in any given round of training courses could be described as "eager" or "enthusiastic" enrollees. Many of these more enthusiastic participants were staff personnel with plans to pursue further studies and who thus believed that greater facility in English would be of value in the realization of their plans.

In 2007

One important change in the new personnel system initiated in the early months of the Sombat administration concerned career pathing. More specifically, career paths were established for all levels of support staff personnel, clearly setting forth the path, competencies, and other requirements needed for personnel in each work group to move up. A major new specification was that they had to attend a certain number of required training courses per year, during official work hours, if they wanted to advance their careers or garner a rise or promotion when the time came. One of the required training courses was English. Despite the fact that budgetary limitations in 2007 slowed full-scale implementation of the new training requirement, it was believed that as soon as NIDA's financial situation permitted, the new career pathing system – including the English language training – would move into full force.

The NIDA administration desired that all staff members receive training, especially to upgrade their language skills. The ratio of support staff to a lecturer was 3:1. The support personnel on the NIDA payroll totaled 463, divided into four types: government officials (216 persons), university employees or employees under the new system (99 persons), regularly hired employees (97 persons), and temporarily hired employees (51 persons). Among the employees, some were hired with university income (47 persons) and the others were hired under fiscal budget allocations (4 persons). See Exhibit 2. This personnel roster did not include those hired by way of the budgets of individual schools/centers/divisions. The latter category of employees received no HRMD-sponsored training because they were not officially on the NIDA payroll. Further, even for those whose names were on the NIDA payroll, the number of staff eligible for annual training courses was too large to be accommodated by the annual budgetary allocations.

Upon assuming the presidency of NIDA on the 12th of March 2007, Professor Dr. Sombat began a systematic review of the status of all essential enabling factors deemed critical to the visions of “going international” and developing NIDA into a leading world-class university. It did not take him long to conclude that further reliance on the School of Language and Communication for English language training for support personnel would not be advisable. First and foremost, the School of Language and Communication had its own main missions – i.e., its current Master’s level program in Language and Communication (its English program), and its soon-to-be-launched (in 2009) Master’s level program in Communication, as well as its plan to launch a doctoral program in Language and Communication in 2010. In addition to these current and planned degree programs, the School of Language and Communication remained responsible for the same mission that it had performed when it was still the Language Center – i.e., the teaching of academic English to students in other NIDA schools to prepare them for the English language demands of their various degree programs.

In Dr. Sombat's view, these several missions were more than enough for the School to pursue, particularly given their limited faculty resources (i.e., eleven instructors in fields related to English language teaching, two instructors of Japanese, and three Communication Arts instructors). Therefore, the responsibility for developing the English proficiency for the personnel was transferred to the Human Resource Management (HRM) Division. And after a September 2007 meeting with those concerned, Dr. Sombat decided that English training courses had to be outsourced.

Thus, beginning with the Sombat administration, all personnel training was placed under the aegis of the HRM Division, with Mrs. Usaroj Dirdjosubroto, formerly Secretary of the Language Center, as the new director. She was appointed to the position a few months before Dr. Sombat became NIDA president. Because of her previous experience in the Language Center, Mrs. Usaroj had a wealth of experience in arranging English training courses. One of her first acts as director was to set up a working team, "the personnel development team," to handle training courses for various disciplines.

Accordingly, the HRM Division hired Mr. Peter Briggs (Master of Science in Biochemistry from Liverpool University and Trinity ESL Teaching Certificate from St. Giles College) — an instructor with the Corporate Training Department of *Inlingua* International School of Languages — as a trainer for the English training courses for the support personnel.

Again, the budget limitations made it necessary to set training priorities. In 2007, office personnel, excluding section/division heads, were given priority over other types of employees to attend such a course. A later course for section/division heads, it was noted, would be arranged specifically for them, as soon as budgetary resources permitted.

The process employed for inducting course participants was essentially unchanged from earlier years. It began with the HRM Division's sending a circulation letter announcing a training course, with a list of support staff members in all schools/centers/divisions that were required to sit for a placement test and then assume their places on a waiting list for assignment

to the specific training course. This list was long, and it was very likely that some of them could not receive training within one year because of the budget limitations.

In addition to the budgetary issues that sometimes complicated the planning and execution of staff training courses, the lack of parallelism among some job categories (or levels) could also create problems. For example, the support staff, according to Mrs. Usaroj, could not be grouped for training on the basis of their work positions because support staff in the same positions sometimes had different functions, especially in the case of the general administrative officers.

The HRM Division designed three training courses, each of which covered 30 hours. It also wrote the course description of each course. The course content was English for general purposes with the focus on listening and speaking skills. (See Exhibit 3.) The training project, including the course descriptions, was approved by the Subcommittee for Personnel Development Fund Management. The HRM Division managed the project under the supervision of the Subcommittee.

In spite of the fact that the HRM Division had a plan to offer all the three course levels in one year, it was soon determined that in view of the support staff's performance on the English proficiency placement test, only the lowest-level course of the three, *Listening and Speaking Skills Level 1*, could be offered. This 30-hour English training course was offered three times in 2007.

The primary teaching material selected by the trainer — a commercial book entitled, Get Real! Level 1 — was distributed at the beginning of the training program. One-hour class sessions were conducted twice a week, with participants being given a listening cassette/diskette to practice listening skills at home. No certificate was awarded to participants at the end of the program.

In 2008

When Dr. Sombat assumed the presidency, the Subcommittee for Personnel Development Fund Management appointed by the former president, Dr. Preecha Jarungidanan, was still functioning at the outset of Dr. Sombat's administration, as the 2-year term of office for its members had not yet expired. Dr. Sombat installed the newly appointed Vice President for Academic affairs, Associate Professor Dr. Pradit Wannarat, as the new chairperson of the Subcommittee. A faculty member from each of the schools of Business Administration, Development Economics, Applied Statistics, Language and Communication, along with the Director of the Finance and Procurement Division, comprised the remaining members. The Subcommittee was responsible for scrutinizing and approving the training projects initiated by the HRM Division in addition to funds for personnel training purposes.

On November 2, 2007 the Subcommittee passed a resolution to the effect that henceforth support staff at all levels — even janitors, gardeners, and security guards — would be required to upgrade their English skills, especially listening and speaking.

However, when the Subcommittee's resolution reached the attention of the president, Dr. Sombat put forward his view that only those who had regular or sustained contact with foreigners — such as academic assistant officials, international affairs staff, public relations officials, and telephone receptionists — should be required to undergo training, with the focus on English for work. Nevertheless, he did not endeavor to overrule the Subcommittee, and thus the resolution was implemented.

The 2008 process for selecting participants or trainees to attend each training course level was as follows:

The personnel from whatever schools/centers/divisions or whatever types — government officials, university employees, or regular or temporary employees on the NIDA payroll whose work positions were below supervisor — were asked to sit for an English placement test. They were placed in the same courses if they were in the same proficiency

range. That is, the personnel were assigned to each course level on the basis of their proficiency, not on the basis of their work positions or work functions.

Initially, the HRM Division had planned to arrange English training courses twice during the fiscal year 2008 and to have two groups of trainees for each level: one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. However, explained Yuthana Sucharit, an official on the HRMD personnel development team, it was later concluded that the plan needed to be revised. Which of the three courses to offer and how many times, would depend on the English proficiency of the trainees and the budget. In instances where there were more trainees at the same proficiency level than could be accommodated in one round, the same course would be provided twice. These courses were conducted in two-hour sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays. The expense per head was set at 2,800 baht for a 30-hour course. No certificate was to be awarded to those who attended any of these courses.

Staff Reactions to the Policies

The new policy of having all levels of support staff upgrade their English ability received mixed reactions. Most voiced varying degrees of resentment to the perception that they were being coerced, even though they acknowledged that English was necessary if NIDA wanted to be an international university. Focus group discussions with several of them surfaced a number of revealing outlooks on the issue.⁹ (See Exhibit 4 for the overall staff opinions.)

Voices of the Fretful and Pessimistic

Some reactions, in particular that of a staff member in the Educational Service Division, centered on many staff members' continuing lack of confidence in actually using English when contacted by a foreign applicant enquiring about NIDA and its various programs. Noted one staff member,

Some officials in my division were selected to attend English training courses three or four times. But, they still didn't have enough confidence

in their English ability to talk to foreign students when they called us, or when they contacted us in person. They simply weren't brave enough to try to answer the enquiries.

Added a financial and accounting officer from the support staff for the School of Social and Environmental Development who had participated in a focus group discussion of the issue:

I remember how stressful it was. It seemed to me that many participants were much better than I did [sic]. At that time my classmates were researchers, librarians, for example. Many other participants felt the same. We didn't want to lose face, so we spent a lot of time preparing the lessons before attending the class. I learn something, of course. But I dare not ask questions. I think if I attend the course with people from the same work unit, I'll feel more relaxed and dare to speak. I won't feel nervous or lose face when I've made mistakes.

When asked about the idea of including only people from the same work function in the same course, her response was that while this might be an improvement on the situation that she described (above), it had to be borne in mind that although some tasks in different work units were similar, many others were more specific to the particular work units.

Another focus group member, a general administrative officer, who attended the English training course in 2008, after it was outsourced, compared learning English with eating food, saying:

To me, studying English is like eating food. If you like this kind of food, you will eat a lot. But if you don't like it, you will eat a little just to satisfy those who've offered you the food. I think it's better to offer such food to those who enjoy it.

Voices of the Hopeful and Optimistic

However, some support staff members were entirely supportive of the renewed attempts to enhance their English proficiency. Typical of this group was an administrative operator in the School of Social and Environmental Development who talked about the positive “change” that happened to her after attending the English training course. In her words:

I used to have a negative attitude toward English in my childhood. But after I attended an English training course for NIDA personnel, my attitude changed. Now I see its importance. I like English better and do not avoid a foreigner who comes to contact our office, even though I cannot say much. I accept that learning English is a hard task, especially for adults or people of my age. You know, many staff of my age [50 years old] and beyond think it’s quite late for many of us to start studying English again. We seem too old for foreign language study. If we need to learn English, the course must be really basic, and the training must be continuous. Not just once or twice a year.

Another administrative operator intimated that some attention needed to be devoted to *retention* because “if English is not used often, we’ll forget.”

Asked whether rewards such as money could be an incentive to motivate support staff to upgrade their English, a third administrative operator responded positively to the idea. She replied:

I think it’s a good idea to reward people for their good performance. We all work to earn a living. If we can get extra money, I think no one will reject it. To me and many other support staff like me, money can be used as an incentive, of course. But who will achieve adequate English proficiency and get the reward depends on their perseverance.

To conclude, there were *both* support staff that seemed to be reluctant to attend English training courses, *and* those who had a positive attitude toward it. Some in the former group experienced stress; some did not think they would have much opportunity to use English at work; and still others were discouraged because of old age. The latter group, despite not minding taking English training courses, was not quite sure of how much they could improve their English and how long they could retain their proficiency. Thus, Dr. Sombat had to find some way to motivate them not only to master English skills but to retain them as well.

The Course Approach of the School of Language and Communication

In response to the president's request that all NIDA schools endeavor to increase English language proficiency among their particular support staff, the School of Language and Communication (SLC) had taken the lead and was most active. In fact, even prior to the establishment of the School (i.e., while it was still the Language Center), support staff throughout the unit had been encouraged to strive for continuous enhancement of their facility with the English language by attending a specially designed course taught by its yearly-contract English native-speaking instructor. After a nearly two-year hiatus, the course was now back in operation.

In January and February 2008 the SLC's English training course – a ten-week course of 1 ½-hour sessions – was taught by a SLC yearly contract English instructor, Mr. Ismael Mercado, whose primary responsibility was that of teaching NIDA students. Twelve out of 18 LSC staff members, including those hired by the school budget, attended the course – all on a strictly voluntary basis. Although the course description was not available, the course focused on developing English proficiency for *general* purposes – i.e., for simple, routine office work conversation – and concentrated on enhancing participants' listening and speaking skills. The basic aim was to increase staff members' ability to use English in communicating with non-Thais with respect to oft-encountered circumstances.

Support staff at the SLC had typically been favorably disposed toward the SLC English course. Comparing the SLC course with the one that the HRM-offered course, they preferred the SLC course because without textbook distributed in advance, they could not prepare the lessons beforehand, so the tasks provided by the trainer were challenging. See Exhibit 5 for the focus group members' additional opinions.

In March 2008, five support staff members in the SLC, inspired by the SLC course, agreed to speak English to each other when they got together or when what they had to talk about was not beyond their English ability. They said that this was one way to practice speaking. But they were not very serious. If they did not know English words or expressions they would use Thai mixed with English.

Finally, with respect to the issue of whether rewards should be made available to those whose English proficiency improved after the training, SLC support staff member views were almost uniformly unfavorable – as indicated by the following several comments from different staff members.

- “That won’t work except it must be a big sum. People who don’t like English won’t put much effort on it, anyway”
- “Those who do like it [English] don’t think of the money.”
- “English training is a requirement. Many don’t want to attend the course. I think even money can’t be used as an incentive.”

Attempts of the SLC support staff to acquire English proficiency and their views on rewards made Dr. Sombat feel that there was still some hope to enhance NIDA personnel’s English skills, using the SLC staff as example.

Enhancing English Proficiency of the Support Staff: The Challenges

All in all, notwithstanding the actions and plans concerning the revamped English language training program for support line personnel, a number of unresolved issues remained for decision and action. The first entailed the all-time important challenge of providing the proper sanctions, positive and/or negative, with which to induce the desired level of staff commitment to the goal of increased English language proficiency and retaining it. The second concerned the specific type of English – e.g., general English or English for specific purposes -- that should be the main focus of the program. Additional concerns were who would design the courses and how the participants should be grouped. The third issue encompassed the question of what, if anything, could NIDA learn about enhancing staff proficiency in English from other universities that already blazed the trail toward going international. The fourth pertained to the adequacy of the training budget.

The Staff Motivation Challenge

At present, the support staff was required to attend different training courses offered at NIDA during their working hours. Those who avoided attending such courses would not have a chance to get promotion when the time came. However, there was no measurement of their progress or development. Neither was there any officially provided incentive to motivate them to improve their English proficiency and to retain it.

By contrast, the establishment of measures to determine the effectiveness of information technology (IT) was under consideration by the NIDA's president. That is, under the proposed new measurement system, those who attended an IT course would have to be able to demonstrate the ability to use it efficiently after the training. If a trainee failed to pass the test, he/she would have to develop himself/herself further for three months and then re-take the test. If the staff member were to fail the test on the second and third attempts, he/she would become ineligible for annual rises in salary. If the measure was successfully used with IT, it might be applied to English skill development, too. As of the beginning of February 2008,

however, this remained an idea that was floating around, with no firm indication as to whether or when it might be put into effect.

Because English training was also a requirement for all support staff, it was the responsibility of the trainer to motivate them to learn. But, after the training ended, *some* means seemed needed to motivate the staff to *use* and retain their enhanced English proficiency.

Miss Chanidaporn Sucharitwarangkul, Secretary of the School of Social and Environmental Development (mid-level administrator), suggested that there be a test of progress at intervals during the year to make sure that those who had already attended an English language course continued to develop themselves in this area. She also believed that the nurturance of a campus atmosphere in which personnel would have opportunities to *use* newly acquired or enhanced English language skills could have a highly positive motivational impact.

As an outstanding figure in public policy and administration, Dr. Sombat knew very well that motivation was an important factor that impacted the organizational goal achievement. Thus, how to motivate NIDA support personnel to master English for work was very challenging to him.

The Course Focus Challenge

NIDA support staff now had one good reason for improving their English -- that is, to function adequately in a target situation at workplace. The key issue raised by this fact was whether they should be taught English for general purposes (EGP) or English for specific purposes (ESP). (See Exhibit 6 for a definition and elaboration on ESP.) If the choice was the latter, then it was necessary to follow a process for ESP course design.

The process proceeded by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation, which would form the syllabus of the training course for those in a particular work function. This process was usually known as 'needs analysis, or 'target situation analysis'. (See Exhibit 7 for a brief explanation of the process of needs analysis.)

There were clear advantages in setting up an ESP course where learners had specific needs. These were

- Being focused on the learner's need, it wastes no time;
- It is relevant to the learner;
- It is successful in imparting learning;
- It is more cost-effective than 'General English'.¹⁰

These claims implied that ESP teaching was more motivating for learners than General English. The focused nature of the teaching, its relevance and cost-effectiveness ensured that its aims were widely accepted by learners. Also, course designers should be ESP specialists, not teachers of English in general.

As of the outset of February 2008, such needs analyses had yet to be commissioned or performed with respect to the English language program for support line personnel. There were therefore a few among the instructional faculty for the program who wondered whether the absence of such needs analyses presaged a central focus on *general* English or whether it indicated merely a lack of awareness of the criticality of such needs analyses for courses focused on *English for specific purposes*.

The Benchmarking Challenge

Dr. Sombat thought of the benchmark for developing the English proficiency of the support staff. Perhaps foreign students' satisfaction with and opinions on the university service staffs were one thing that could serve as its measurement. Perhaps, mid-level administrators' views on the acceptable level of practical English used by support staff could be a better benchmark. As the mid-level administrators knew well about the staff's problems in dealing with foreigners and often had to help deal with expatriates, their views and experiences might be used as the benchmark.

Off campus, it was well known within the NIDA administrative group that nearby Assumption University had already traveled a path toward going international, including attracting a sizable proportion of foreign students and enhancing the English language skills of its support line staff. Having long referred to itself in media advertisements as “Thailand’s first *international* university,” Assumption University employed English as the medium of instruction in all of its programs, except for a required course (for Thai subjects) that dealt with Thai culture and values. Moreover, a sizable minority of its instructional faculty were foreigners, many of whom were native English speakers and a few of whom spoke English as a second (or third) language. Hence, notwithstanding some salient differences between the two universities, some NIDA administrators and language faculty members wondered whether there might be something to be learned from Assumption University in terms of how it had developed its support staff’s English language capabilities, how the support staff handled communication with foreigners, what problems they had experienced in the process, and so on. As of the beginning of February 2008, these questions remained in the sphere of “musings,” with no as-yet articulated plan to discover the answers. (See Exhibition 8 for Human Resource Management at Assumption University.)

The Budget Challenge

Many universities in Thailand, especially in Bangkok were offering or were going to offer international programs. The English ability of their staffs needed improvement. But budget constraints for both personnel and personnel development were a perennial issue for government organizations, including NIDA. In terms of *hiring*, NIDA could not afford to pay the salaries required to attract support staff with already highly developed levels of both facility in the English language and technical proficiency in their specialized fields. Yet, because of ongoing budgetary limits, NIDA had to use whatever resources were available for support staff training very fruitfully.

It was in this context that Mrs. Atchaya Singhalwanitch, Head of the Education Service Division, voiced the view that the English training that NIDA was attempting to provide for its support staff was not cost-effective. Advancing the argument that people learned a new language only when it affected their “survival,” she argued that “for the staff to see the necessity of mastering English, they must be put in situations in which they cannot survive if they cannot use English.”

She went on to assert, “. . . not all the personnel need to be trained to upgrade their English skills because the majority do not have much chance to use it, and thus will soon lose their ability.” In her estimation, it would be better for NIDA to select only a few promising staff members to be trained in English-speaking countries—the US or Australia, for instance -- for a certain period of time, ideally about one year. Those who were selected should be 30-45 years of age. She stressed that NIDA should not send abroad those who were already good at English, but those who had *potential* to be successfully trained. Once selected for such a program, she added, these personnel would be required to sign a contract, obligating themselves to return to work for NIDA for a specified number of years before they could move out to work elsewhere.

She recalled her own successful experience with improving her English via this particular route:

You know, I was once sent to take some intensive courses at Indiana University in the US for four months. At that time my English was not good. But after four months there, my English improved a lot because I was in the English speaking environment. I needed to survive, so I was naturally forced to speak and understand English.

As for the budgetary requirements of such a program, she suggested that NIDA seek cooperation from universities, such as Indiana University or others with which NIDA had signed an MOU, to establish an exchange program or to obtain partial funding to support personnel training. In addition, fellowship funds might be sought from multinational

corporations (e.g., Australian, American, Canadian, and others with major business interests in Thailand and/or elsewhere in Southeast Asia), foundations (e.g., the Ford Foundation), and even governmental agencies (e.g., the U.S. Agency for International Development) in the countries that might host such “language internships.”

Even though this approach to the challenge of support staff English proficiency would entail in-depth training for the *few*, the end result might prove superior to the current focus on limited training for the *many*. More specifically, returning language trainees could be assigned to deal with foreign students in their normal functions. If each work unit had at least two of such persons, that might well prove adequate to help advance NIDA’s internationalization thrust, while simultaneously relieving the pressure on NIDA’s always limited budgetary resources for English proficiency training. Every year NIDA had to put aside a huge budget for this purpose, and the allocated budget in each year was not fixed. In 2008, for example, it allocated a budget of 480,000 baht for such English training (six classes and 20 trainees in each class).

Since more than a decade ago, different schools at NIDA, however, have offered non-official hour Master’s degree programs (and some doctoral programs). By this means, every year all schools earned an extra income that enabled them to take their faculty staff and support staff for a tour to European countries as well as other Asian countries-- as a bonus. They did not put aside some money for their support staff’s work skill development, as this was considered the responsibility of the central administration.

In line with the current situation, Dr. Sombat thought, it might be a good time to review the NIDA policy on allocation of the budget for personnel development. But due to decentralization of power, he needed to seek consent from the deans of all schools first, and he knew that this was not an easy job because NIDA had already charged each non-official hour degree program offered by each school 25 percent of its income. Outside, other universities wanted to offer international programs. They too might want their support personnel to improve the English ability. Perhaps, cooperation among universities for this purpose might serve as another alternative.

Staff English Proficiency as “Fate Control”?

Picking up a few papers and reports as he reached for his briefcase and prepared to leave the office for home, Dr. Sombat found himself thinking of the concept of “fate control” – a concept common to a number of courses, including game theory and psychology. It occurred to him that the term was an apt description of the potential power wielded by the situational variable, “staff English language proficiency,” vis-à-vis the feasibility of his vision of building NIDA into one of the leading international universities in Southeast Asia.

It was inescapable fact that a key requirement for becoming an *international* university was an increased contingent of foreign students throughout NIDA’s schools and centers. It was also an inescapable fact that for NIDA to attract and hold such students, the NIDA support line staff had to be capable of communicating with prospective students and addressing their on-campus needs and issues in English. Last but not least, a big budget needed to be put aside for personnel development each year. Thus, he sighed; unless he could devise plans, policies, and support budgets for upgrading the support line staff’s English language capabilities, the language issue would indeed exercise nearly complete “fate control” over the realization of the “going international” vision. Yet, he remained uncertain as to what, exactly, needed to be done to diminish this fate control.

Endnotes

1. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 14-15.
2. *NIDA Profile 2008 Booklet*, p. 4.
3. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 145.
4. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 161.
5. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 161.
6. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 161.
7. *NIDA 36th Anniversary, 2002*, pp. 170.
8. Normally, the applicants for any training courses offered to the general public by the Language Center had to take an English placement test to be divided into subgroups of about 30 trainees based on their English proficiency. The number of trainees in each year was inconsistent, ranging from four subgroups in some years to eight subgroups in others. The number of NIDA support line staff to be accepted each round depended on the number of subgroups. Since the group of about 30 was quite large, only one NIDA staff member was allowed to join each group.
9. Some support staff in the two focus groups were Boonlert Cha-amporn, Busakorn Ananthasuk, Srisomboon Meekririya, Yongyuth Rattanasilapin, Naiyana Krudnak from the School of Social and Environmental Development; and Jareeporn Kaewsuksi, Phanuwat Phumisart, Watcharee Seeh-ra, Monchai Darasart, and Rumpung Maneekhao from the School of Language and Communication.
10. Peter Strevens. 1988. "ESP after Twenty Years: A Re-Appraisal." In M. Tickoo (Ed.) *ESP: State of the Art*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center.

Exhibit 1: NIDA Organization Chart (2008)

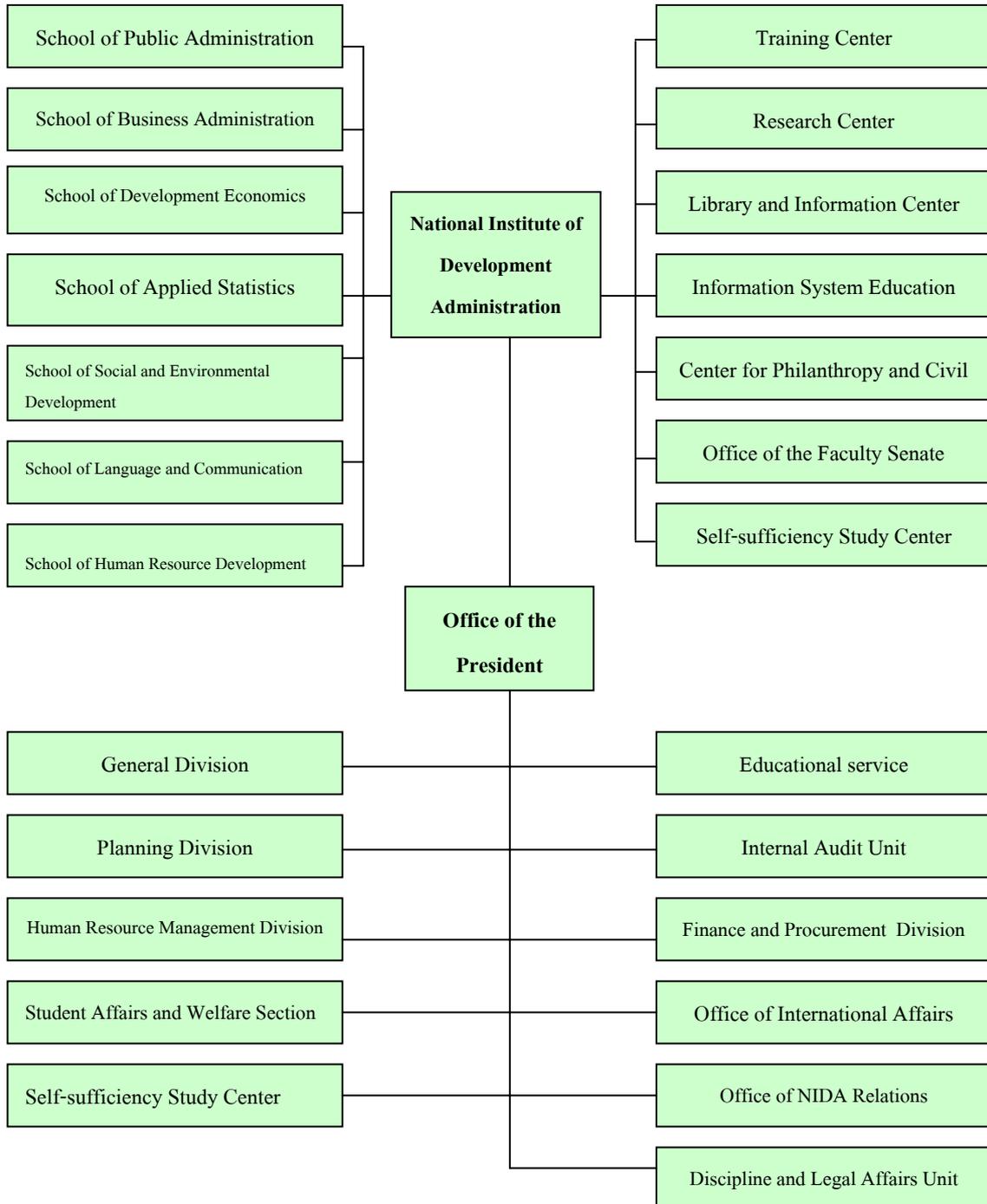


Exhibit 2: Number of Support Personnel**NIDA Support Staff as of January 7, 2008**

Position	Number (person)
Educational strategy project officer	1
Manager of Multi-Purpose Building	1
Internal auditing officer	6
Clerical staff	86
Janitor /copying service staff / security guard / gardener / worker	86
Policy and planning staff	14
General administrative officer	69
Statistics officer	1
International affairs officer	2
Educational officer	23
Nurse / physical health officer	3
Card puncher / typist	10
Public relations officer	2
Telephone receptionist	3
Audio-visual operator	3
Audio-visual officer	4
Engineer / electrician / mechanic / technician	6
Driver	19
Construction staff	1
Head of the vehicle section	1
Personnel staff	15
Legal affairs officer	3

Exhibit 2 (Continued)

Position	Number (person)
Finance and accounting officer	23
Procurement officer	7
Computer officer	17
Computer operator	1
Computer maintenance staff / electronic staff	3
Researcher	4
Librarian	13
Document officer	1
Book-repairing employee	2
Other	33
<hr/> TOTAL	<hr/> 463

Exhibit 3: Course Description

2103 Listening and Speaking 1 (30 hours) (Starter + /elementary level)

Practicing listening and speaking for communicating with foreigners. Learning simple expressions used in different functions, such as greeting, introducing oneself, answering phone calls with basic expressions, taking messages from calls, telling locations of different places on campus, giving names, work positions, and telephone numbers of administrators and faculty members.

Prerequisite: Basic English

3110 Listening and Speaking 2 (30 hours) (Elementary + level)

Learning correct pronunciation and expressions. Practicing listening and speaking for different purposes, e.g., describing briefly about work or responsibilities of different work units and practicing conversations about general topics of interest such as tourist attractions, food menus.

Prerequisite: Listening and Speaking 1

4108 Intermediate English (Pre-intermediate/ Pre-intermediate + level)

Practicing English for work of a moderately difficult level by listening to brief news, writing correspondence with focus on important and essential letters, reading to grasp the main idea of letters and news stories, and welcoming foreigners visiting certain schools/centers/divisions or the university.

Prerequisite: Listening and Speaking 2

Exhibit 4: Overall Opinion of the Support Staff on the Nature of English Training

A questionnaire survey was conducted during May 2008 to find out all NIDA support line staff's opinions on staff English proficiency development. After some incomplete returned copies of the questionnaire were discarded, the 224 out of the total of distributed 450 copies were analyzed. The findings are presented below:

Item	Frequency	Percent
1. Background of the respondents		
1.1 Gender		
Male	59	26.3
Female	165	73.7
1.2 Age		
23 - 30	40	17.9
31 – 35	53	23.7
36 – 40	33	14.7
41 - 45	24	10.7
46 – 50	26	11.6
51 – 55	22	9.8
56 – 60	10	4.5
<i>Not available</i>	16	7.1
1.3 Work status		
Government official	97	43.3
University employee (New system)	59	26.3
Regularly hired employee	24	10.7
Temporarily hired employee	44	19.7

Exhibit 4 (Continued)

Item	Frequency	Percent
2. Opinions on training courses for staff English proficiency development?		
2.1 Who should attend training courses offered by the Institute?		
All types of support staff	100	44.6
Staff in some work functions only	111	49.6
Disagreement with English training	13	5.8
2.2 Recruitment method		
On voluntary basis	163	72.8
Requirement	25	11.2
No opinion	36	16.0
2.3 Want to attend English training courses		
Yes	95	42.4
No	94	42.0
No opinion	35	15.6
2.4 Old-age staff getting exempt		
Agree	200	89.3
Disagree	24	10.7
2.5 Grouping method (in order of preference)		
By work unit	88	39.3
By English proficiency level (Placement test)	78	34.8
By work function	58	25.9
2.6 Type of English (in order of preference)		
English for general purposes	105	46.9

Exhibit 4 (Continued)

Item	Frequency	Percent
English for work	86	38.4
“Broken” English	33	14.7
2.7 Characteristics of training courses		
Intensive course	151	67.4
Courses of different levels	62	27.7
No opinion	11	4.9
2.8 Training time		
Once a year		
Agree	196	87.5
Disagree	28	12.5
Attending one course level a year		
Agree	146	65.2
Disagree	78	34.8
Continuous training every year		
Agree	186	83.0
Disagree	38	17.0
3. Retaining English skills		
Establishing the English Club to arrange activity for skill enhancement		
Agree	182	81.3
Disagree	42	18.7

Exhibit 4 (Continued)

Item	Frequency	Percent
Periodic measurement of English ability		
Agree	193	86.2
Disagree	31	13.8
Providing a fund for English training abroad		
Agree	192	85.7
Disagree	32	14.3
English proficiency as one indicator for work promotion/transfer		
Agree	185	82.6
Disagree	39	17.4
Incentive		
Giving rewards for those with impressive		
Progressing in English proficiency		
Agree	167	74.6
Disagree	57	25.4
Penalty		
Partial payment for the training cost		
Agree	108	48.2
Disagree	116	51.8
Full payment for the training cost		
Agree	168	75.0
Disagree	56	25.0

Exhibit 5: Additional opinions from focus group members in SLC

Comparing the SCL course with the HRM course, one SLC general administrative officer who had attended prior to its being outsourced, commented:

Unlike the previous course [HRM course] , the trainer of this course did not depend on any commercial text. He did not give us any handouts beforehand. The participants could not prepare anything in advance. That excited us. The trainer came to class with whatever he had planned to teach in that session. It alerted us to learn. In real life we usually encounter something unexpected. In the previous course a commercial book was used, so we the trainees could prepare the lessons in advance, and most of us appeared as if we performed well. In fact we had looked up words in the dictionary, and noted down the answers, including the pronunciation.

He went on:

In the previous course nearly everybody was stressful [sic]. We were afraid of making mistakes and losing face. We studied with those we were not familiar with. We did not want to lose face, so we dare not ask the trainer questions about, for example, what we should say in such and such situations. We were also afraid that others would waste their time listening to our cases.

Added an academic assistant employed by the budget office of the School of Language and Communication:

Our School has some problems of our own that those in other schools/centers/divisions haven't experienced. It is good to attend the same class as our fellow staff, although our English proficiency varies.

We are intimate and dare to speak, to ask the trainer questions. We don't feel much embarrassed or losing face when we've made mistakes.

Regarding motivation to learn, the earlier-quoted general administrative officer expressed this opinion about taking the placement test:

For me, I tried my best to get as high score as possible--if I got exempt, that'll be the best--so that I didn't have to attend any course. But unfortunately I couldn't. I had to be in the waiting list for the most advanced level of the three courses arranged by the HRM Division. I don't mind taking any English course. But to tell the truth, in attending any English training course, especially before I went to class, I had to push myself a lot. But when I was in class, I enjoyed the lesson. If I could have a choice, I preferred spending my time completing my office work. You know, after attending the class, I came back to see a pile of work on my desk.

Presently, part-time employees who were not on the NIDA payroll were not eligible to attend any training provided by the HRM Division, but SLC included these employees as participants in its own English proficiency enhancement course. In reaction to her own participation in the SLC course, one such participant, a staff member dealing with the school budget, commented as follows:

I think attending a training course for three hours per session per week and once or twice a year does not work. We will soon forget what we've learned because we don't have much chance to speak English in our daily work. Also we often have some urgent work waiting for us after we've returned from the training. If we could have a choice, we prefer to give priority to our work. In my opinion, training should be conducted every day or every other day, only one hour a day, throughout the year. That won't bore us and allow us to have some spare time to finish our own work.

Exhibit 6: Definition of ESP

According to Dudley-Evans and Jo St John (1998), apart from specified needs arising from need analysis which relate to activities that learners need to carry out (rather than language), language should be considered as a defining feature of ESP. A key assumption of ESP is that these activities generate and depend on registers, genres and associated language that learners need to be able to manipulate in order to carry out the activity.

In their definition, they use absolute and variable characteristics to define the term.

1. Absolute characteristics:
 - ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learners;
 - ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
 - ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.
2. Variable characteristics:
 - ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
 - ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
 - ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be used for learners at secondary school level
 - ESP is generally designed for immediate or advanced students. Most ESP courses assume basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.

(Source: Dudley-Evan, Tony and Jo St John, Maggie. 1998. *Development in ESP: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 4-5.)

Exhibit 7: What are target needs?

A target situation analysis framework includes the answer to the following questions: (1) Why is the language needed? (2) How will it be used? (3) What will the content areas be? (4) Who will the learner use the language with? (5) Where will the language be used? (6) When will the language be used?

Any course should be based on an analysis of learner needs. The target situation should be looked at in terms of necessities, lacks, and wants of learners. A successful course for the personnel of particular functions should be based on such information.

Necessities are the type of needs determined by the demands of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. This information is relatively easy to gather. It is a matter of observing what situations the learner will need to function in and then analyzing the constituent parts of them.

Lacks are the needs of particular learners. The ESP course designer should know what the learner knows already, so that he/she can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks. The target proficiency, in other words, needs to be matched against the existing proficiency of the learner.

Wants Learners may well have a clear idea of the 'necessities of the target situation. They will certainly have a view as to their lacks. But possibly their views will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, and teachers. Because of the importance of learner motivation in the learning process, learner perceived wants cannot be ignored.

(Source: Hutchinson, Tom and Walters, Alan. 1987. *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 55-60.)

Exhibit 8: Human Resource Management at Assumption University (ABAC)

The number of support personnel at Assumption University (ABAC) was larger than 600. The management there was quite different from NIDA. One of the staff members in the Personnel Office at ABAC revealed that not all the staff, even in the same work units, were fluent in English. ABAC recruited those with high English proficiency to do some work that required English for communication at work. Unlike NIDA, all schools or faculties had only a few support staff who served as secretaries to the deans and faculty members to facilitate teaching and learning. These people were good at English. Other work units were divided by function into, for example, the Personnel Division, the Student Service Division, the Registrar Division, etc. In other words, people in the same work functions worked under the same divisions or offices and gave services to all students/faculty members alike. For example, the Personnel Division would provide consultation to faculty members—both Thai and foreign—and other support staff. Foreign instructors (more than 100) could make enquiries there if they encountered problems. Foreign students could go to the Education Service Division to make enquiries and to seek advice. The two work units had a few support staff members that were fluent in English and were responsible for assisting foreign lecturers and students. Although not all the support staffs were good at English, they could communicate, using simple English to foreigners. Any serious matter would be referred to division heads. On the contrary, work units at almost all public universities in Thailand, including NIDA, had quite different characteristics. Although NIDA had many work units similar to ABAC, all its schools had their own support staffs working in different functions under the same roof. That is, each had a finance and accounting officer, academic assistants, administrative operators, typists, and so on. Most of these support staff were not good at English.

Regarding personnel development, Assumption University had no plan to provide training for all the personnel to enhance their English proficiency. Any work unit that needed such training for the staff had to make a request and it was the Language Institute that provided English training to personnel in response to the request. The course was usually held on weekends, about 20 hours per course. The personnel were recruited to attend the training course on voluntary basis. Because English for specific purposes, or English for specific work, was taught, the course did not cover many hours. At Assumption University the staffs were encouraged to improve their English by themselves; they did not need to wait for their work units to provide them with training.

One incentive for the staff to enhance their English ability was a monthly extra pay of 2,000-3,000 baht for those whose English proficiency was high. There was an idea of using English proficiency as a criterion to give the staff a rise and promotion. However, this idea had not been put into effect yet.

To promote an English-using atmosphere, all the announcements, brochures and other publications were written in English. ABAC had set up a work unit to edit English written announcements, journals, and others produced by faculty members and support staff.