

## **ENGLISH COMMUNICATION ABILITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE CLIL COURSE**

**Khwanchit Suwannoppharat and Sumalee Chinokul**

### **Abstract**

The demand for English proficiency in communication in both social and academic contexts in Thailand has been increasing. As a weakness in English skills may cause the loss of job and educational opportunities, many Thai universities provide international programs to provide their students with opportunities for advancement in higher education and future careers. Nevertheless, English is a friend and foe of Thai students because they are learning English in an unsupportive environment – English is only used in the classroom. More opportunities to use the English language in a wider learning process in and outside the language classroom are therefore crucial. The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach was thus selected to design a course which aims to develop the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in the international program under focus in this study, since CLIL is an instructional approach that encourages the use of an additional language (usually a target language) in the learning process. The Thai undergraduate students in the Chinese International Program of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus were selected as research samples for this study. A pre and post-test were used to investigate the effectiveness of the CLIL course to develop the English communication ability of the students. An opinion evaluation questionnaire and an in-depth interview were used to identify the students' opinions of the CLIL course. The research findings show that the post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores which represents an ability development in the English communication skill the undergraduate students. Moreover, the results of the opinion evaluation questionnaire detail the positive opinions of the students towards the CLIL course in developing their

English communication ability. These interview results also helped confirm the effectiveness of the CLIL course in developing Thai undergraduate students' English communication ability.

**Keywords:** English communication ability, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), undergraduate students, international program

### บทคัดย่อ

ความต้องการความสามารถทางด้านการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษทั้งในบริบททางสังคมและวิชาการในสังคมไทยมีเพิ่มขึ้นเนื่องจากจุดด้อยด้านทักษะภาษาอังกฤษอาจเป็นเหตุให้พลาดงานหรือเป็นอุปสรรคต่อการศึกษาหรือทำงาน มหาวิทยาลัยไทยหลายที่จึงจัดให้มีหลักสูตรนานาชาติขึ้นเพื่อสร้างโอกาสให้นักศึกษา ในการเรียนในระดับที่สูงขึ้น และอาชีพในอนาคต แม้กระนั้นก็ตามภาษาอังกฤษเป็นทั้งมิตรและศัตรูกับนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาบัณฑิตของไทย เนื่องจากพวกรู้ภาษาอังกฤษท่ามกลางสิ่งแวดล้อมที่ไม่สนับสนุน – ภาษาอังกฤษถูกใช้เพียงในห้องเรียนเท่านั้น วิธีการสอนแบบบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาจึงถูกเลือกใช้ในการออกแบบรายวิชาเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะด้านการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต หลักสูตรนานาชาติ เนื่องจากเป็นวิธีการสอนที่กระตุนให้เกิดการใช้ภาษาเพิ่มเติม (มักเป็นภาษาเป้าหมาย) ในกระบวนการเรียนรู้ ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ นักศึกษาไทยในหลักสูตรจีนนานาชาติ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตหาดใหญ่ เป็นกลุ่มตัวอย่างการวิจัยครั้งนี้ แบบทดสอบก่อนและหลังเป็นเครื่องมือในการวัดประสิทธิผลของรายวิชาตามแนวบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต แบบสอบถามความคิดเห็น เป็นเครื่องมือในการตรวจสอบความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาที่มีต่อรายวิชาบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษา และการสัมภาษณ์ถูกนำมาใช้ในการศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาในช่วงหลังเรียนมีค่าคะแนนสูงกว่าคะแนนก่อนเรียนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ แสดงให้เห็นว่านักศึกษามีความพัฒนาการทางด้านทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ มากกว่าเดิม ผลจากแบบสอบถามความคิดเห็น แสดงให้เห็นว่านักศึกษามีความคิดเห็นเชิงบวกต่อรายวิชาตามแนวบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสาร และผลจากการสัมภาษณ์ช่วยยืนยันประสิทธิผลของรายวิชาบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทยอีกทางหนึ่งด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** ความสามารถในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ, วิธีการสอนตามแนวบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษา, นักศึกษาในระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต, หลักสูตรนานาชาติ

## Introduction

Thailand is an example of a country which uses English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and where English is used in only some specific contexts (Kirkpatrick, 2010). However, although English has been increasingly used for communication in many organizations within Thailand, it is not widely used in the actual society where Thai is the national and official language. Most Thai people regularly carry out their everyday affairs in a non-English communication context; as a result, there are few opportunities for them to use English in daily life. While the world increasingly stresses the significance of globalization, English is consequently the vehicular language for communication among people from various countries (Graddol, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Furthermore, it is also accepted as an official and semi-official language. Therefore, it is part of an education priority in almost every country around the world (Nga, 2008). Accordingly, English proficiency is perceived as an advantage and demanded in both an education and career path (Krachu & Nelson, 2001; Wachter & Maiworn, 2008).

As a result, the cooperation between international organizations in Thailand and other countries in the business and educational spheres is extremely influential on educational management. Furthermore, as the growth of international cooperation encourages more varied English roles as communication means, many Thai universities provide international programs to prepare their students for an international culture, molding them to become members of an international education circle. English proficiency is thus increasingly demanded for survival in this context. It is possible to say that the more students know about English, the more opportunities they will have in their education and career paths.

However, the English proficiency of Thai EFL students has not increased over the past decade. Alarmingly, according to National Institute of Educational Testing Service (2015), the scores of the English test in the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET), administered on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015, are lower than the test scores administered in previous years. The Director of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service said that the

test scores have been decreasing every year. In fact, since O-NET is a standard placement test used as one of the criteria for entering any program in Thai public universities, it is possible to conclude that the average English proficiency of Thai EFL freshmen at tertiary level is rather low.

It is not an exaggeration to say that English development ineffectiveness in Thailand is caused by an unsupportive environment. Consequently, preparing Thai EFL undergraduate students who have a low level of English proficiency and are not in an English speaking environment to enroll in the international programs where English is used as the medium of instruction is complex. Richards and Rogers (2001) and Seelye (1993) maintain that people learn better when they acquire information through subject matter. Therefore, an instructional approach applied in the course of this research study emphasizes learning content and language, encourages students' learning through communicative activities to build up their confidence in using English in real life and allows students to become aware of differences in English use in the international society in which they will communicate and work. Therefore, a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach was selected to develop the English communication ability of Thai undergraduate students in the international program of this research study.

### *Objectives of the Study*

This research study aims to:

- 1) determine the effectiveness of the CLIL course in developing the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program; and
- 2) investigate the opinions of the Thai undergraduate students in the international program towards the CLIL course in the development of their English communication ability.

### *Research Questions:*

This study aims to answer two research questions regarding the effectiveness of the CLIL course to enhance the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program:

- 1) To what extent can the CLIL course enhance the English communication ability of Thai undergraduate students in an international program?
- 2) What opinions did the Thai undergraduate students in an international program form towards the CLIL course in enhancing their cultural awareness and developing their English communication ability?

## **Literature Review**

### *Course Development*

Course development is sometimes called course design; it is a work in progress to modify a course to serve students' needs. Language course development involves several components and steps. It is an interrelated set of processes and products as a system (Graves, 2000). A teacher who designs the course can consider what should be modified, added or changed to suit the interests and needs of a particular group of students (Sysoyev, 2000).

There are several frameworks of the course development process proposed by various scholars, but many of them restrict the course developer to following a steady order that seems to limit the autonomy of the course design. Additionally, there are some factors causing an inability to follow the specific steps such as learning context, students' conditions, educational policy, etc.; therefore, an unlimited-order course development framework is more likely appropriate to allow the course developer to design a course spontaneously.

### *Course Development Process Framework of Graves (2000)*

The model of course development drafted by Graves (2000) is compelling because it is not a linear list. Therefore, it is not necessary to design a course in a specific order.

The course developer can begin designing the course anywhere depending on beliefs and understandings, context or setting.

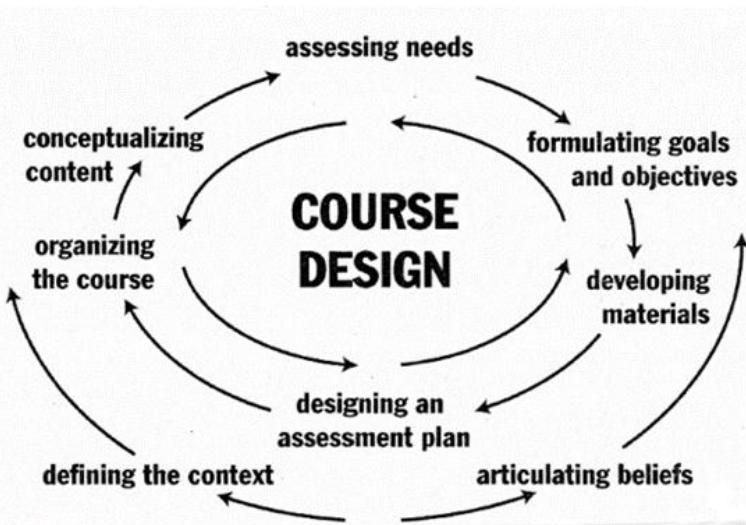


Figure 1: Framework of Course Development Process (Graves, 2000, p. 3)

Figure 1 presents two aspects of course development following Graves' (2000) course development process framework. According to Graves (2000), "the first aspect is there is no hierarchy in the processes and sequence in their accomplishment" (p. 3). The course designer can begin designing the course anywhere in the framework depending on the course designer's beliefs and understanding, and how to problematize a particular situation; and secondly, the components are interrelated, with each of them influencing and being influenced by others in some way. Although it is not necessary to follow a specific order, each step in Graves' (2000) course development process framework connects with each other; that is, planning a component will contribute to others, so changing one component will influence all the others. If the course developer gets clear content, it will be easy to write the objectives. If the content is changed or adjusted, the objectives will be changed or adjusted following the changes in the content.

The course development stages in Graves' (2000) course development process framework are: (1) *defining the context* – problematizing the course: to look at the context and define the challenges needing to be met in order to make the course successful; (2)

*articulate beliefs* – designing the course based on beliefs; (3) *conceptualizing content* – thinking about what the students should learn in the course, who they are, what their needs are and what are the purposes of the course, deciding about what should be included, what should be emphasized and what should be dropped and organizing the content to reach the decisions about: what objectives are focused, which materials are used, what are the course sequences and how are they to be evaluated; (4) *formulating goals and objectives* – building a clear vision of what will be taught in the course, (5) *assessing needs* – what students need to learn, how they learn it, and the means to learn, (6) *organizing the course* – deciding what the underlying systems will be to pull the content and material together consistent with the goals and objectives in order to shape the course, (7) *developing materials* – creating units and lessons to achieve the goals and objectives of the course, and (8) *designing an assessment plan* – assessing the students' learning and course evaluation and focusing on how the assessment fits into the overall framework of the course design.

### *Course Development Cycles*

The course development process framework of Graves (2000) follows the course development cycle as shown in the following figure.

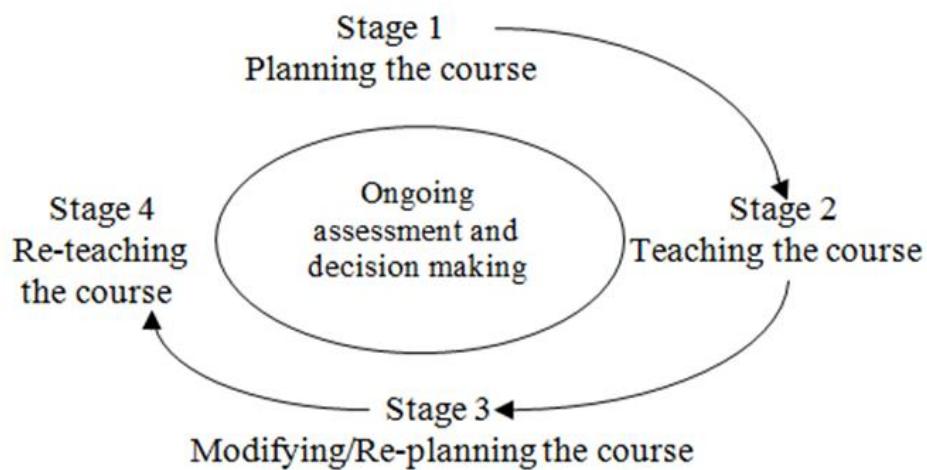


Figure 2: Course Development Cycles (Graves, 2000, p. 11)

Figure 2 presents Graves' (2000) model of course development cycles that include planning the course (conceptualization), teaching the course (practicing and evaluating the course), re-planning the course (based on its evaluation and re-conceptualization) and re-teaching the course (teaching it again in the re-planned version).

### *What is a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach?*

Content and Language Integrated (CLIL) approach was firstly developed in Europe and has spread across the European area since 1994 by David Marsh to serve communicative purposes (Garcia, 2012; Munoz, 2007). In 1990, the CLIL approach increasingly became well-known. It is a teaching innovation in Europe, in which foreign languages are used to teach not only language courses but also content courses (Eurydice, 2006); therefore, language and subject have a cooperative role (Coyle, 2007; Marsh, 2002). According to Coyle, Hood and March (2010), the CLIL approach is, “a dual-focused educational approach, in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (p.1)

The authors of *Common of the European Communities* (2005) write that “the CLIL approach opens doors on languages for a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education.” CLIL seems to be an ultimate communicative methodology that encompasses the active participation of the learners to develop their potential for acquiring knowledge and skills through cognitive processes and means to solve problems. The CLIL approach also highlights intercultural knowledge, understanding and communication; consequently, the students are expected to understand and use the content to learn the language and support content learning achievement. It is a student-led learning approach; the students are active in their learning (Colye et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Martinez, 2011).

The implementation of the CLIL approach took place because of its advantages: CLIL can attract international students, promote a high level of communication between teachers and learners and eventually be adapted by the higher education institutions to

new demands in the job market. Additionally, it connects to culture, environment and learning (Cendoya & Bin, 2010; Graddol, 2006) and aims to encourage students to understand their learning process (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

CLIL is different from other forms of bilingual education as it is about using a foreign language, not a second language, and the teachers are not native speakers of the target language (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010). Although CLIL has the same core principles as Content-based Instruction (CBI), they are different in three dimensions: medium of instruction, instructional framework and learning goals. That is to say, the target language is purely used in the CLIL classroom, whereas bilingualism is usually implemented in the CBI classroom. Moreover, the framework of CLIL focuses on the 4Cs (Content, Culture, Communication and Cognition) while CBI emphasizes only content and language aspects. CLIL emphasizes intercultural knowledge, content and language understanding and communication. It aims to develop multilingual interest and attitudes; however, CBI emphasizes the acquisition of academic content and related language (Dehnad et al., 2010; European Commission, 2008; Lasagabaster, 2008; Nikula, 2010).

CLIL also involves learning to use language appropriately and using language to learn effectively (Colye et al., 2010). To understand the CLIL approach, it is necessary to study the 4Cs Framework, referred to above, consisting of the interrelated components of Content, Culture, Communication, and Cognition (Colye et al., 2010; Coyle, 2005, 2007, 2011; Marsh, 2012; Mephisto, Frigols, & Marsh, 2008). The description of the 4Cs Framework of CLIL is as follows:

Content refers to subject matter, themes as the basis for learning in achieving acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding through content and language integration.

Culture focuses on developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship and awareness of self and others to increase cooperation in learning content and language.

Communication means language learning and using language for communication and learning.

Cognition refers to the learning and thinking process to think, review and engage in high order thinking skills to construct understanding.

Among the 4Cs Framework of the CLIL approach, Culture permeates the other elements. It helps facilitate the knowledge acquisition about neighboring countries, regions and minority groups in the students' communities. Moreover, the 4Cs Framework of the CLIL approach also merges learning theories, language learning theories and intercultural understanding (Colye et al., 2010; Coyle, 2011; Morton, 2010). It is based on different learning principles; therefore, the students construct rather than acquire the content and skills (Coyle, 2007; Marsh, 2000, 2002).

The CLIL approach was firstly implemented in Thailand in 2006 under the cooperation between the Ministry of Education in Thailand and the British Council to ameliorate Thai educational failures (MacKenzie, 2008). The first CLIL 18-month project was administered at six schools (three primary and three secondary schools) in September 2006. The project's findings showed that the CLIL approach was useful for language learning in a Thai context. The English skills of the students in those schools improved, and a positive attitude towards learning the language was noted. A series of CLIL projects has been built up to plan a vision for the future of language learning and teaching in Thailand (British Council, 2006; MacKenzie, 2008; Phoodokmai, 2011; Samawathdana, 2010). As a result, CLIL is likely to be the most appropriate approach to develop the English communication ability of Thai undergraduate students in the international program since it increases more opportunities to use English as an additional language in their learning processes, especially among students in group work learning activities.

#### *Main Characteristics of CLIL Approach*

In CLIL classes, foreign language development is facilitated in subject classes, and content-based language learning strategies in language classes that support content knowledge development (Denmen, Tanner & Graaff, 2013). Coyle (2011), Coyle et al. (2010) and Eurydice (2006) express that there are five key characteristics that are useful for CLIL lesson planning: choosing appropriate content in keeping with the students' age, ability and interests, developing intercultural understanding by investigating and

reflecting on different cultures, traditions, values and behavior, using language to learn or learning to use language, making meaning that allows the students to engage maximum interaction in the target language within and beyond the classroom to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings that influence them to create contexts for communication, provide scaffolding to involve language use and interact with content to be successful in knowledge, skills and the understanding of content, cognitive processing engagement, communicative interaction, appropriate language knowledge and skills development and the acquisition of intercultural awareness.

### *Using Language to Learn and Learning to Use Language in CLIL Approach*

According to Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2007), CLIL demands a reconceptualization of language roles in CLIL settings from language learning based on a grammatical progression towards an approach which combines learning to use language and using language to learn. To conceptualize language learning in CLIL, the Language Triptych has to be considered (Coyle et al., 2010): Language of learning, language for learning and language through learning.

Language *of* learning is an analysis of the specific language needed for students to access basic concepts and skills that relate to the new content, theme or topic and understanding when dealing with the content. It includes functional grammar, vocabulary and structures.

Language *for* learning focuses on the type of language needed to function in a foreign language learning environment where the medium of instruction or an additional language used in the class is not their first language.

Language *through* learning relates to active involvement of language and thinking that leads to effective learning. It involves both language and thinking processes and encourages the teacher to find ways of dealing with an emerging situation related to language.

### *Theoretical CLIL Concepts Applying to Classroom*

One aspect of CLIL is connected to the way language students are confronted in the classroom. This is its social nature where students have opportunities to communicate. The students' socialization is expressed through the practice of interaction between teacher and student; therefore, learning is retrieved through scaffolding, interaction and the role of a reflective practitioner as the basic concepts in CLIL education (Coyle, 2011). The core aspect of CLIL is integration (Mephisto et al., 2008, p. 11); therefore, CLIL focuses on a tripartite objective: using language to teach content, using content to teach language and developing learning skills. Therefore, in the CLIL classroom the students are actively involved both at the preparation and presentation stages to have opportunities to take on authentic roles and follow real world situations. Through a variety of instructional activities, they learn survival skills, interpersonal communication, presentation skills, discussion skills, time management and technological skills for an information search in the process of content and language learning (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2007). As a result, they know how to assess their own learning and that of others and are helped to improve their own and others' skills. Therefore, the CLIL teachers have to scaffold both the content and linguistic areas (Mephisto et al., 2008).

To design a CLIL lesson, it is necessary to follow the 4Cs Framework of CLIL – Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture. Colye et al. (2010) constructed a template to build up an overview of a sample unit in the following figure.

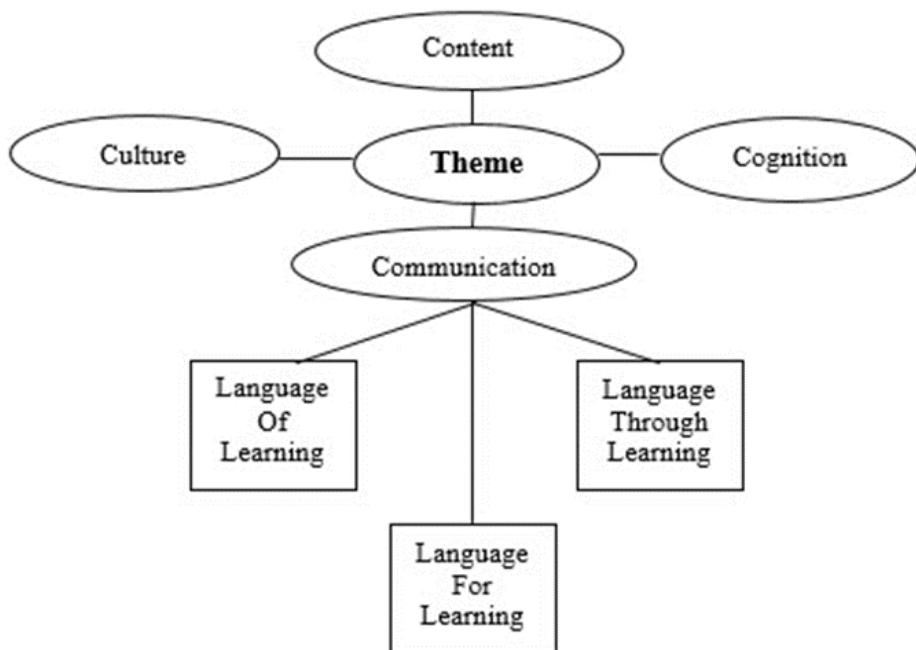


Figure 3: Overview of CLIL Unit Structure (Colye et al., 2010, p. 56)

Figure 3 indicates that a CLIL lesson structure is based on the main theme and under the 4Cs Framework of CLIL – Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture. Particularly, Communication demands an awareness of the different types of language used for different purposes by the use of a Language Triptych – the language of learning, language for learning and language through learning. Finally, the 4Cs Framework presents the complex interrelationship amongst the guiding principles of CLIL. As these contribute to successful learning outcomes, planning a CLIL unit has to follow the aforementioned unit structure.

## Methodology

This study is a research and development study with a single group pre-and post-test research design, which aims to determine the effectiveness of a CLIL course to develop the English communication ability of Thai undergraduate students in an international program. The main study consisted of two phases: a course development

phase and a research phase, which followed the course development cycle framework of Graves (2000).

This course development phase was processed following three cycles of the course development cycle model of Graves (2000): 1) planning the course, 2) teaching the course, and 3) modifying the course. The first cycle is linked to the eight-stage course development process framework of Graves (2000) in the following order: 1) defining the context, 2) articulating beliefs, 3) assessing needs, 4) formulating goals and objectives, 5) conceptualizing content, 6) developing materials, 7) organizing the course, and 8) designing an assessment plan.

The research phase was processed following the fourth cycle of the course development cycle framework of Graves (2000), which is re-teaching the course cycle.

The data in this paper presents the processes and results of the second phase of this research study, research phase.

#### *Research Samples*

The research samples of this study were composed of 24 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a Chinese International Program in the academic year 2014: Thai EFL undergraduate students at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus. This group of research samples was drawn from a total of 78 undergraduate students in the Chinese International Program from the first to the fourth year of study by a convenience sampling method since they were the only group of students in the program who were still in Thailand at the end of semester 1/2014.

#### *Research Design*

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, an experimental research model, a one-group pre-post-test design, was employed.

#### *Research Instruments*

The research instruments of this study were divided into two categories: an instructional instrument and research instruments.

##### *Instructional Instrument*

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CLIL course instructional materials were designed and based on the steps of the CLIL tool kit and the principles of the 4Cs Framework were adapted from Coyle et al. (2010). Based on the results of the Needs Analysis processed with the 14 third-year students in the Chinese International Program, in semester 1/2013, the structure of the CLIL course was linked to the research variables of the study: Cultural Studies (Content), English communication ability (Communication), cognitive process (Cognition) and group work learning (Culture).

The instructional materials consisted of 10-lesson instructional sheets, teacher manual, supplementary sheets and formative assessment activities. All of the instructional materials were written in English since English was used as the medium of instruction in the CLIL course. It was designed for a 30 hour course, assigned by the faculty and its instructional materials consisted of five chapters. Six hours were spent on the instruction of each chapter. The first lesson focused on listening and speaking skills, and the second on reading and writing skills. The activities processed in the teaching and learning processes employed group work learning leading individual learning. The undergraduate students also took the roles of More Knowledgeable Others (MKO); therefore, they learned from others and vice versa.

The instructional materials were proofread by three experts in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Teaching English and were adjusted based on the experts' feedback. They were then piloted with 10 third-year undergraduate students in the International Program. They were then adjusted again based on the results from the pilot study, and the researcher asked for the experts' approval before implementing them in the main study.

### *Research Instruments*

Three research instruments were engaged in this study: 1) pre-test and post-test, 2) opinion evaluation questionnaire, and 3) interview.

The pre-test and post-test were designed in an equivalent form using the goals and objectives of the CLIL course. The test was subjective (a criterion-referenced test). It consists of two main sections: 1) listening and speaking and 2) reading and writing

paralleled with lessons taught in the class. The test was validated by three experts in English teaching and from the assessment and evaluation fields using an Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) form. It was then administered to 10 third-year students to test its reliability.

A Likert-four-scale questionnaire was used to ascertain the opinions of Thai undergraduate students in the international program towards the CLIL course. It aims at determining the respondents' opinions towards effectiveness of the CLIL course in several aspects: objectives and content, language focus, teaching steps and variety of activities and exercises, group work activities, teacher and teacher's instruction and English skill improvement. The last part of the questionnaire provided for more suggestions and comments. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in the English teaching and Applied Linguistics fields using an IOC form, and it was administered to 10 third-year undergraduate students in an international program test its reliability.

In sum, the questionnaire adapted sixteen questions from Changpueng (2009) and were applied to interview the Thai undergraduate students. It was validated by three experts using an IOC form, and it was administered to 5 third-year undergraduate students to assess its reliability.

### *Data Collection*

The data collection process was conducted at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus, at the end of Semester 1/2014.

The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the course to determine the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program before they commenced studying the CLIL course. The test lasted for 2 hours.

CLIL course instructional materials were used in the 30 hour CLIL course during a learning period of 10 days to develop the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program.

After finishing the CLIL course, a post-test was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the CLIL course in developing these students' English communication abilities. The average scores of pre and post-tests were compared to see if there were differences among them, indicating an improvement in the Thai undergraduate students' English communication ability. This test also lasted for 2 hours.

Finally, an opinion evaluation questionnaire was administered to the students at the end of the CLIL course. This was followed by an interview to discover the in-depth opinions of the students towards developing their English communication ability through the use of the CLIL course.

### *Data Analysis*

The pre and post-tests were graded by two English language teachers who have at least 10 years of experience in their field. They were trained and the rubric details for grading were explained by the researcher before grading process. The analytic descriptors of spoken language of the Council of Europe (2001) were adapted to assess the first part of the test, Listening and Speaking, and Weir (1990)'s holistic scoring scale was adapted to grade the second part of the test, Reading and Writing. The mean scores of both tests were compared by using a Paired-Sample T-test. Descriptive statistical data was used to interpret the Thai undergraduate students' opinions towards developing their English communication ability through a CLIL course.

## **Research Findings**

### *English Communication Ability Development*

A pre and post-test were used to investigate the effectiveness of a CLIL course in developing the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program. The results of both the pre post-tests showing the development of the students' English communication ability are illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	S.D.
Pre-test	7.42	2.57
Post-test	12.63	1.58

Total score is 20.

According to Table 1, the Thai undergraduate students in the international program achieved positive progress in English communication ability development since the mean score of the post-test ( $\bar{X} = 12.63$ , S.D. = 1.58) was higher than the mean score of the pre-test ( $\bar{X} = 7.42$ , S.D. = 2.57). As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that the students' English communication ability developed after they were taught the CLIL course.

In addition, the results of the formative assessment help to confirm the effectiveness of the CLIL course in enhancing Thai undergraduate students' English communication ability as their English skills gradually improved, as shown in the following table:

Table 2: Oral Presentation Scores

	Oral Presentation 1	Oral Presentation 2	Oral Presentation 3	Oral Presentation 4	Oral Presentation 5
Group 1	4.33	5.00	4.70	5.00	<b>5.30*</b>
Group 2	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.70	<b>6.30*</b>
Group 3	4.00	4.33	5.70	6.00	<b>6.30*</b>
Group 4	4.00	5.70	5.70	<b>6.00*</b>	<b>6.00*</b>
Group 5	4.00	5.70	5.70	6.00	<b>6.70*</b>
Group 6	6.00	6.30	6.70	7.30	<b>7.70*</b>

**\*the highest score**

Total score is 10.

Table 2 presents the mean scores for the oral presentations the Thai undergraduate students in the international program received in each unit in the CLIL classrooms as a part of their formative assessment. The scores shown in the table highlight their learning progress in terms of speaking. The research samples were divided into six groups. The findings show that the scores for the last oral presentation by each group were their highest which confirms an improvement in the students at the end of the CLIL course.

Moreover, the scores for the writing tasks also help confirm the students' learning progress. In fact, these figures presents two aspects: the group work and individual work scores show the influence of group work learning on individual learning as follows:

Table 3: Writing Task Scores

Writing Tasks	Group Work Writing	Individual Writing ( $\bar{X}$ )
Web-post paragraph writing	4.62	5.90
E-mail writing	5.61	5.92
Informal letter writing	6.52	6.27
Instructive text writing	5.76	6.53
Invitation letter writing	5.69	6.27

Total score is 10.

Table 3 presents the Mean scores for the writing tasks received by the Thai undergraduate students in an international program from the formative assessment processes. It indicates that the students achieved a higher degree of progress in the individual writing tasks after learning from the comments for the group work writing tasks and from discussion with a friends or the teacher.

Moreover, the results of Paired Sampled T-Test shows the difference between the pre and post-test scores. The findings of the comparison are presented in the following figure:

	Paired Differences				
	<b>̄X</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Pre-test and Post-Test	-5.208	1.870	-13.642	23	.000

**p value < .05**

Figure 4: Differences between Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Figure 4 presents the differences between pre-test and post-test scores from a Paired Sampled T-Test. The figure shows that there was a significant difference ( $p = .000$ ) between the pre-test score ( $\bar{X} = 7.42$ ,  $S.D. = 2.565$ ) and the post-test score ( $\bar{X} = 12.63$ ,  $S.D. = 1.583$ ). As a result, it can be concluded that after the undergraduate students in an international program were taught using the CLIL course, their English communication ability developed significantly.

The development of the Thai undergraduate students' English communication ability probably results from an influence by their learning environment, the taught content and the language skills. In the interview process, the students expressed the opinion that learning in the CLIL course was fun. They wanted to come to the class every day. It is likely that the learning environment of the CLIL course attracted the students to come to the class faithfully and supported their learning.

#### *Opinions about the Effectiveness of the CLIL Course*

An opinion evaluation questionnaire was used to investigate opinions of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program towards the CLIL course in developing their English communication ability. Their opinions are illustrated as follows:

Table 4: Opinions of Thai Undergraduate Students in an International Program towards the CLIL Course in Developing English Communication Ability

Course Components	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Meaning
Objectives and content	3.33	0.58	Positive
Language focus	3.50	0.50	Positive
Teaching steps and variety of activities and exercises	3.36	0.53	Positive
Group work activities	3.18	0.61	Positive
Teacher and Teacher's instruction	3.44	0.51	Positive
English skill improvement	2.83	0.82	Positive
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>Positive</b>

1.00-2.49 = Negative Opinion      2.50-4.00 = Positive Opinion

Table 4 presents that the Thai undergraduate students in an international program had positive opinions towards all components of the CLIL course ( $\bar{X} = 3.27$ , S.D. = 0.59): objectives and content, language focus, teaching steps and variety of activities and exercises, group work activities, teacher and teacher's instruction, and English skill achievement. Each component is described in the following details of the findings:

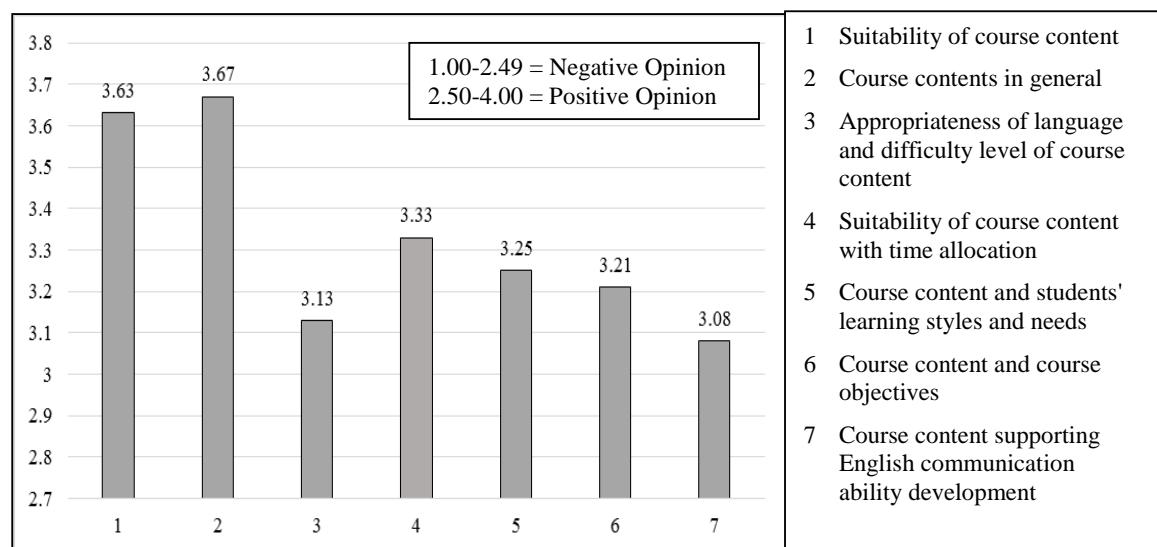


Figure 5: Opinions towards Objectives and Content of the CLIL Course

Figure 5 presents the positive opinions towards the objectives and content of the CLIL course to develop the English communication ability of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program. It shows that the students had positive opinions towards the CLIL course objectives and content.

The Thai undergraduate students in an international program agreed with the suitability of the course objectives to develop their English communication ability ( $\bar{X} = 3.63$ ) and course content with teaching allocation time ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ). Moreover, a majority of the students agreed that the course contents in general were interesting ( $\bar{X} = 3.67$ ) and the language taught in the CLIL course was suitable for their levels of English proficiency and the difficulty levels of the content were appropriate for their background knowledge ( $\bar{X} = 3.13$ ).

In addition, most of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program agreed that the CLIL course content met their learning styles and needs ( $\bar{X} = 3.25$ ). They loved learning through fun activities, and said that the activities of this CLIL course were indeed fun and also used social situations that are authentic for their learning. The learning process brought the real world into the classroom and developed their English communication ability. They also agreed with the conformity of the CLIL course content and its objectives ( $\bar{X} = 3.21$ ) which enabled the undergraduates to improve their English communication ability ( $\bar{X} = 3.08$ ).

In conclusion, the Thai undergraduate students were satisfied with the CLIL course used in the research study because it was designed around the results of the Needs Assessment process conducted during the course development. Therefore, the designed CLIL course met the students' needs and interests.

In the interview process, the undergraduates expressed that the course objectives influencing the learning activities conducted in the CLIL classes were appropriate for their interests, needs, and background knowledge to support their English communication ability development. Moreover, they also agreed that the time allocation well-matched the taught content as well as the teaching and learning activities. In contrast, the different English proficiency levels of the undergraduates were noted as the chief handicap of their

learning; for example, some might have wanted to have more time to practice more basic skills, etc.

The majority of Thai undergraduate students in an international program agreed that the course content was interesting ( $\bar{X} = 3.67$ , S.D. = 0.57) and that the language taught in the CLIL course was suitable for their levels of English proficiency. Additionally, the difficulty level of the content was appropriate for their background knowledge ( $\bar{X} = 3.13$ , S.D. = 0.45).

Furthermore, most of the students agreed that the CLIL course content met their learning styles and needs ( $\bar{X} = 3.25$ , S.D. = 0.68). They loved learning through the fun activities, and commented that the activities of this CLIL course were fun and also used social situations that were authentic for them to learn. It helped them link the real world to the classroom and supported their English communication ability development. They were also satisfied with the conformity of the CLIL course content and its objectives ( $\bar{X} = 3.21$ , S.D. = 0.78) - it enabled the undergraduates to improve their English communication ability ( $\bar{X} = 3.08$ , S.D. = 0.58).

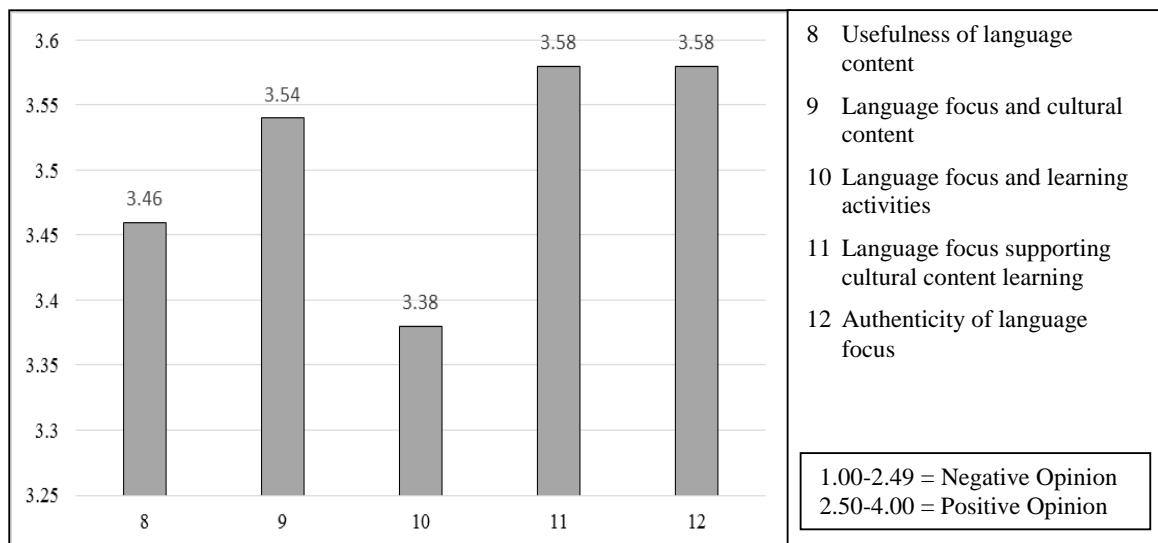


Figure 6: Opinions towards Language Focus in the CLIL Course

Figure 6 highlights the finding that most of the Thai undergraduate students had a positive opinion towards the language focus in the CLIL course. They agreed that those language focuses are useful ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ ) and match with the cultural content ( $\bar{X} = 3.54$ ). They thought that the language focus supports learning activities ( $\bar{X} = 3.38$ ) and helps them learn the cultural content ( $\bar{X} = 3.58$ ). Those language focuses are authentic, so the knowledge gained from learning them can be applied in real life ( $\bar{X} = 3.58$ ).

The findings of this section represent that the Thai undergraduate students thought that the course content was appropriate with instruction of the CLIL course and that it supported effective student learning.

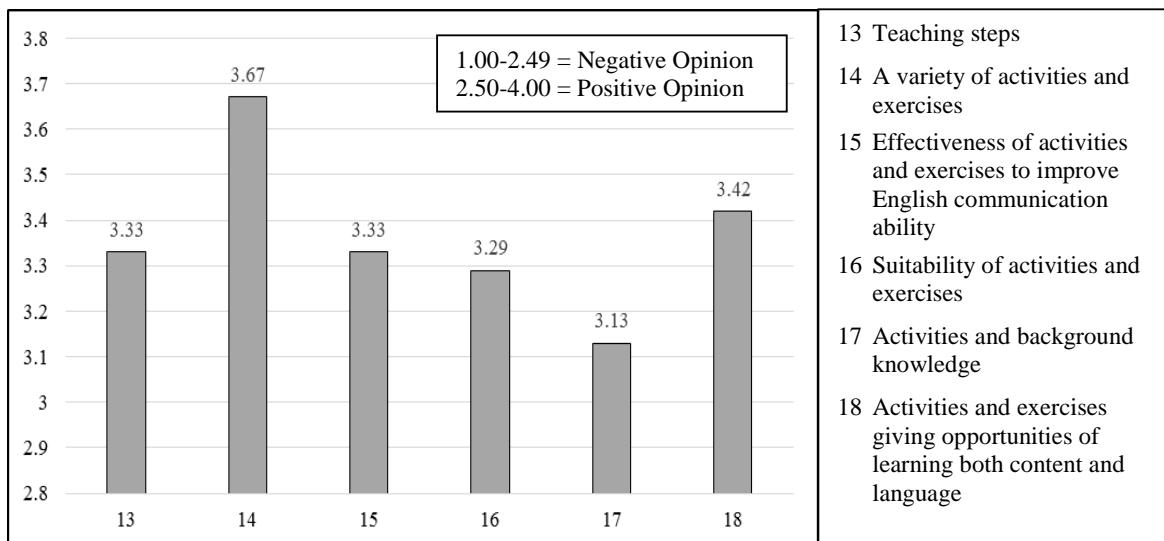


Figure 7: Opinions towards Teaching Steps and Variety of Activities and Exercise

Figure 7 shows that Thai undergraduate students agreed with the teaching steps of the CLIL course. They thought that it was easy to follow ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ), and appreciated the variety of activities and exercises ( $\bar{X} = 3.67$ ). They also felt positively towards CLIL course activities and exercises ( $\bar{X} = 3.29$ ). They thought that each unit of the CLIL course activities and exercises could improve their English communication ability ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ). The activities and exercises are suitable in general ( $\bar{X} = 3.29$ ), especially with their English background knowledge ( $\bar{X} = 3.13$ ) which enabled them to learn both content and language ( $\bar{X} = 3.42$ ).

Some of the undergraduate students who agreed with the teaching steps and the variety of activities and exercises also commented that the instructional steps of this course are clear and easy to follow.

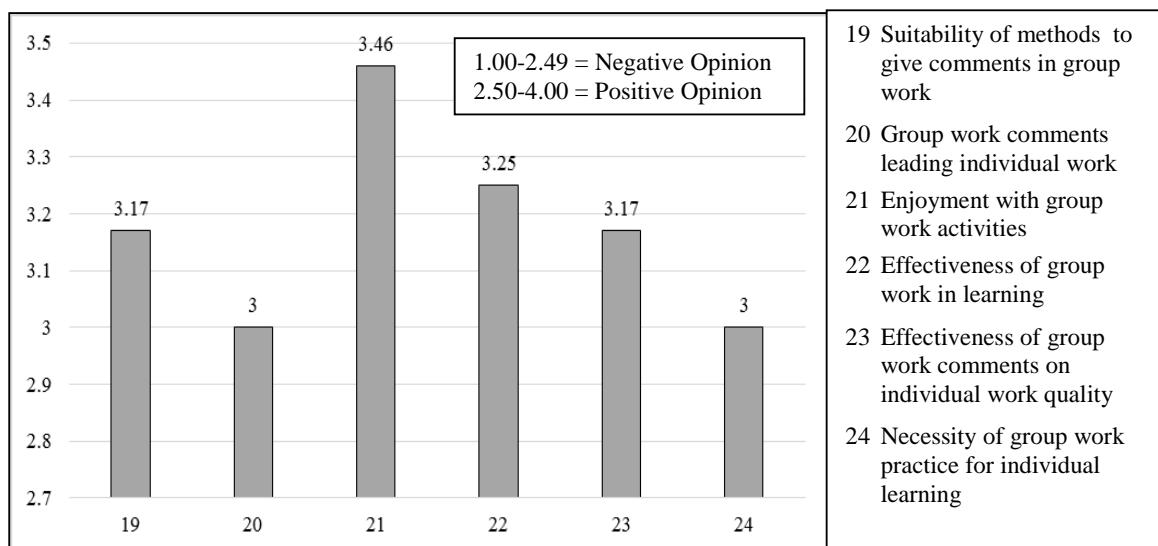


Figure 8: Opinions towards Group Work Activities

Figure 8 underscores the positive opinions of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program towards group work activities. They agreed with the suitability of the comment giving method of the CLIL classes. This is a process that starts with group work and the receiving of feedback for the group work assignment ( $\bar{X} = 3.17$ ), then followed by individual work. The students reported that comments from the group work tasks helped guide them to do a lot better in the individual work ( $\bar{X} = 3.00$ ). Moreover, they stated that they love learning in groups ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ ). They believed that their English communication ability was improved through group work ( $\bar{X} = 3.25$ ). In terms of writing skill development, it was reported that comments from the group work enabled them to write the text better ( $\bar{X} = 3.17$ ), even that it was necessary for individual writing activities ( $\bar{X} = 3.00$ ).

A minority of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program did not agree that group work was suitable for guiding individual work, and they seemed not to

enjoy learning in groups. They clarified their reasons for disagreement around the benefits of group work as when the group members have limited overseas experience, they consequently had less information to use in a group work task. Moreover, since most of the group members were poor in English, the more skilled speakers needed to assume more responsibility for the group work tasks. This situation led to the less skillful students feeling they were not making any effective contribution to the group's task.

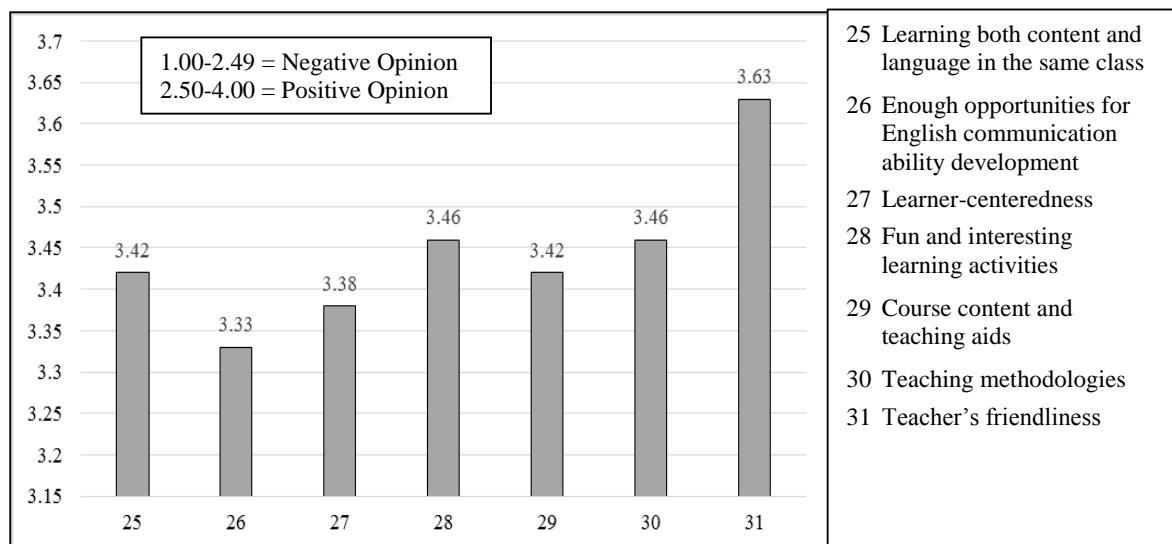


Figure 9: Opinions towards Teacher and Teacher's Instruction

Figure 9 demonstrates the positive opinions of the Thai undergraduate students in an international program towards the teacher and her instruction in the CLIL course. They stated that it was good to learn both content and language in the same class ( $\bar{X} = 3.42$ ). The CLIL course provided sufficient opportunities for them to develop their communication skills ( $\bar{X} = 3.33$ ). The instruction emphasized learner-centered concepts since the students learned through the facilitation of the teacher ( $\bar{X} = 3.38$ ), and they felt that all activities in the course were fun and interesting ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ ).

In more detail, a majority of the students were satisfied with the course content and teaching aids of the teacher ( $\bar{X} = 3.42$ ). They shared that the teacher's pedagogy helped them to understand the lessons easily ( $\bar{X} = 3.46$ ), that she was friendly and had a good relationship with them in the classroom ( $\bar{X} = 3.63$ ).

In the interview process, the students expressed the opinion that the instruction of teacher gave them opportunities to independently use their knowledge to design what they preferred to present in both oral and written forms.

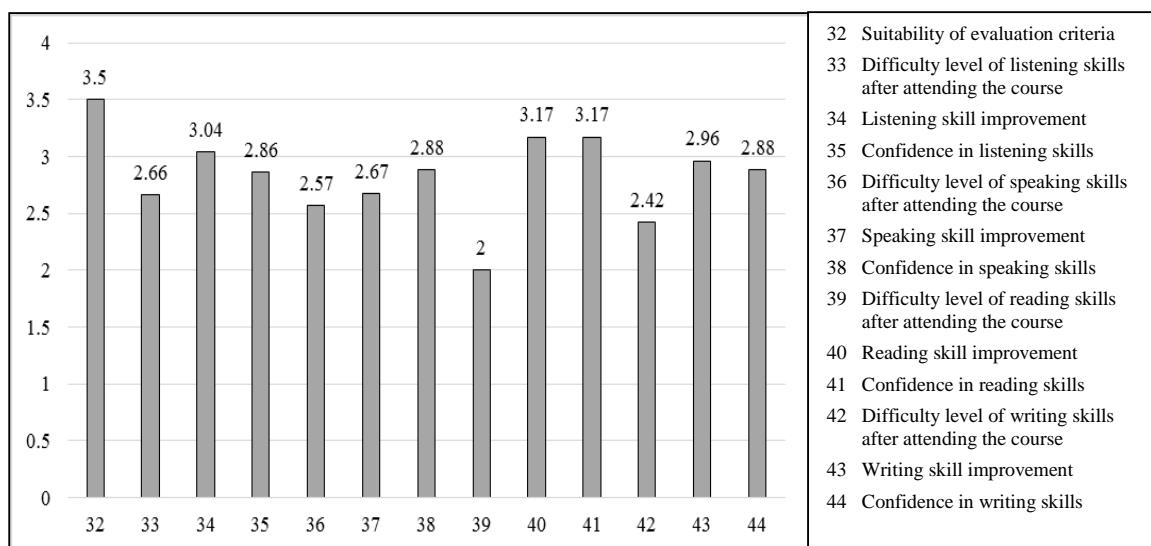


Figure 10: Opinions towards English Skill Improvement in the CLIL Course

Figure 10 presents the positive opinion the Thai undergraduate students in an international program had towards their English skill improvement in the CLIL course. They agreed with the clarity and suitability of the evaluation criteria ( $\bar{X} = 3.50$ ). Furthermore, it showed that their opinions towards achievement in the four language skills after learning through the CLIL course. Indeed, they felt all four skills had improved. Furthermore, the students expressed an increased confidence in the learning process of the CLIL course. They expressed that they now felt more confident when listening to others in English ( $\bar{X} = 2.86$ , S.D. = 0.90), in speaking in English with other people in real life ( $\bar{X} = 2.88$ , S.D. = 0.54), in reading any texts in real life ( $\bar{X} = 3.17$ , S.D. = 0.70) and in writing any texts in real life ( $\bar{X} = 2.88$ , S.D. = 0.90).

In addition, the undergraduates thought that after studying in the CLIL course, their four skills were better (Item 37:  $\bar{X} = 3.04$ , S.D. = 1.02, Item 40:  $\bar{X} = 2.67$ , S.D. = 0.70, Item 43:  $\bar{X} = 3.17$ , S.D. = 0.76 and Item 46:  $\bar{X} = 2.96$ , S.D. = 0.86); that is, they

agreed that they achieved improvement in all four skills. Overall, the undergraduate students confirmed in the interview process that their four English skills were developed in the CLIL course, which gave them a very positive feeling.

Furthermore, in the interview process, some undergraduates commented further that felt more confident from learning in the course since the course gave them opportunities to express their ideas in groups and everyone accepted others' mistakes. Everyone was equal. They learned from others and vice versa, which caused them be more confident in presenting ideas or participating in the activities.

As a result, the confidence was encouraged and nurtured in the CLIL course was beneficial for their English skill development. Learning from their mistakes seemed to be effective for their learning.

In the final section of the opinion evaluation of the questionnaire, additional comments and suggestions from the undergraduate students towards the CLIL course were presented. Here, it is shown that the students positively agreed to the benefits of using this course as an intensive course of the program and, additionally, expressed that the CLIL course is useful for their communication in daily life and study.

Additionally, a few students reinforced their opinion that the activities in the CLIL course supported their learning. It helped them to have more confidence in using English for communication. Nevertheless, they acknowledged their low English proficiency level which lessened their group work participation. For instance, they did not know how to express their opinions in English correctly; therefore, they sometimes did not share their opinions with the others. Often, their learning consumed more time than others. While other students understood what was being taught, they were still struggling to understand. However, they agreed that the comments from the group work helped them a lot in creating their individual work. Therefore, they recommend that some extra exercises could well be assigned for this group of students in order to help them deal with their learning in the group work.

In conclusion, all these outcomes indicate that the CLIL course was effective in developing the English communication ability of the Thai tertiary students in an international program.

## Conclusion

The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach is as an alternative instructional approach for English communication ability development for Thai EFL students. The integration of content and language is effective in encouraging students to develop the English proficiency demanded for real life situations. CLIL helps to build up a relaxing learning environment in order to motivate language learning so that the students rarely feel that they are focusing solely on grammar or strict language patterns. Moreover, the relationship between the teacher and students is more flexible, generating opportunities for the students to question and learn more in-depth about topics or areas of interest.

## Discussion

There have been several studies investigating the effectiveness of the CLIL approach in designing a course to enhance the English skills of EFL students; for example, Yang (2014) used the CLIL approach to investigate its effect on the learning performance of Taiwanese undergraduate students. The findings of the study presented the benefits of CLIL approach as improving the students' linguistic skills and enhancing their learning motivation, as well as facilitating the use of English in content courses. Ravelo (2013) engaged the principles of the CLIL approach to design English class activities for Jewish secondary students in Argentina to develop their conversation skills. These findings showed that the students improved in their ability to communicate opinions on the topics and content. Gregorczyk (2012) investigated the effectiveness of the CLIL approach in a qualitative study of a chemistry class in Poland. The findings of

this study show that the students in the CLIL experimental group attained higher scores than students in controlled group. The findings from these sampled studies confirm that the CLIL approach is effective in developing the English skills of students in any educational level and any type of courses. Furthermore, it may be claimed that if the structure of CLIL in the course or instructional module is clear and strong enough, the CLIL approach can be applied to almost any content course, as well as developing the students' English skills.

Moreover, the application of the CLIL approach to such a range of courses helps to deepen a positive opinion towards learning as well as increasing motivation for the students' learning. Pengnate (2013) applied the CLIL approach to teaching activities in order to investigate problems of business undergraduate students' integrated English skills. This study found that the CLIL approach encouraged a high level of student satisfaction as they attained various types of knowledge and skills. Lasagabaster (2011) also determined the effectiveness of the CLIL approach for an English course. This study also found that the students in the CLIL group demonstrated a positive trend of learning progress in the course, and they displayed a positive motivation towards learning English in the course.

## **Pedagogical Implication**

According to the findings of this current research study, the researcher would rather encourage the scholars in the English Teaching field to conduct more of this kind of research, along with the following suggestions:

- 1) The course designer should search out in-depth information regarding the problems the undergraduate students face with their needs and interests. It has been shown that when students have the opportunity to learn what they want to learn, positive motivation possibly happens in their mind. As positive motivation contributes to the best forms of learning, the students are found to participate in all activities intentionally. The current research study is a good

example of this issue since even though the CLIL course did not impact on the undergraduate students' grades or any of their other study, they were rarely absent from class. They also worked very hard to cope with the assignments in the CLIL course.

- 2) As learning in a group proved to be effective in this CLIL course, the observation is made that students learn both with others and from others. In addition, while it is impossible to set students into groups of same English proficiency level, group work activity seems to be the most productive learning process. Moreover, culture awareness was also raised through this experience. Cognitive processes were also processed. Furthermore, in the in-depth interviews, the students expressed that group work also enabled them to have more confidence to learn and use English. These were the advantages of group work for the undergraduate students. It should therefore be applied in other courses.
- 3) Although group work learning is an efficient process which encourages individual learning achievement, there were some gaps which a teacher must consider. For example, the different levels of English proficiency among the students may possibly be unacceptable since it inhibits students with weaker skill proficiency to propose their ideas to the group as well as possibly exaggerating the self-esteem of stronger skilled students. If the teacher is able to encourage the students to accept all the ideas expressed in the group, learning in the CLIL course will be more effective.

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