

## Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): An Anecdotal Observation

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### Abstract

An increasing number of environmentalists are becoming more concerned about global warming, air/water/etc. pollution, imbalanced earth systems, to mention a few issues, and encouraging more public awareness and participation. Climate change impacts have become issues for all, not only for ecologists, as previously. At this critical time, many foreign language teachers not only impart vocational wisdom and knowledge on a daily basis, but have been adding more values to their classroom experience. This observatory study is thus aimed at examining oral presentation activities undertaken in an intensive English course at a leading postgraduate school in Thailand. It represents the endeavor of two instructors to inculcate corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their Master of Business Administration (MBA) students; the students' attitudes towards CSR and their oral presentations were observed, analyzed, and compared. The data was elicited from two sources: oral presentations and a questionnaire. (The frequency CSR was mentioned by 154 students in their oral presentations was tallied and converted into percentage.) Despite explicit pedagogy on CSR, only 64.7% stated the importance of CSR after learning about it. This number is deemed high when being revealed alone, but a striking contrast is uncovered when it is compared to the high percentage of respondents who overwhelmingly expressed appreciation for the nature of CSR in the questionnaire—99.35%. An obvious contradiction between theory and practice was revealed. Attitude and knowledge may not be good indicators of standard practices.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), MBA students, presentation skills, Thailand

### บทคัดย่อ

นักอนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อมจำนวนมากรู้สึกวิตกกังวลเกี่ยวกับปัญหาสถานะแวดล้อม เช่นโลกร้อน มลพิษทางน้ำ อากาศ และอื่น ๆ เพิ่มขึ้นมากเรื่อย ๆ เขาเหล่านี้กระตุ้นเตือนให้ผู้คนตระหนักถึงปัญหาต่าง ๆ และเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมในการแก้ไขมากขึ้น ปัญหาสถานะอากาศที่เปลี่ยนแปลงเป็นประเด็นที่ทุกแวดวงกล่าวถึงไม่เฉพาะ

แต่นักนิเวศวิทยาอย่างแต่ก่อน ผู้สอนภาษาต่างประเทศมากมายในปัจจุบันมิได้มุ่งแต่จะถ่ายทอดความรู้และทักษะด้านภาษาเท่านั้น แต่ยังได้แฝงประเด็นปัญหาค่านิยมต่างๆ ไว้ในบทเรียนเพิ่มมากขึ้นด้วย งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงมุ่งหมายที่สังเกตพฤติกรรมและทัศนคติของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาโทของสถาบันชั้นนำแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย โดยเน้นเรื่องความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม (CSR) ของนักศึกษาจำนวน 154 คน ได้มีการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากการนำเสนองานในห้องเรียนและแบบสอบถาม ข้อมูลได้รับการทอนเป็นร้อยละ แม้จะมีการเน้นย้ำเรื่อง ความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม (CSR) ในชั้นเรียนอย่างต่อเนื่อง เมื่อมีการนำเสนอด้วยวาจา ปรากฏว่ามีนักศึกษาเพียงร้อยละ 64.7 เท่านั้นที่กล่าวถึงประเด็นนี้ในการนำเสนอ จำนวนดังกล่าวดูเหมือนสูง แต่เมื่อเทียบกับข้อมูลที่ได้จากแบบสอบถามแล้วต้องถือว่าต่ำ ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามสรุปได้ว่ามีผู้เรียนถึงร้อยละ 99.35 ตอบว่าให้ความสนใจเรื่องสภาวะแวดล้อมอันเป็นความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม อันแสดงให้เห็นความขัดแย้งกันอย่างชัดเจนระหว่างทฤษฎีและการปฏิบัติ ทัศนคติและความรู้ว่าจะไม่ใช่เครื่องบ่งชี้ที่ดีของการปฏิบัติตามมาตรฐานที่กำหนด

**คำสำคัญ:** ความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม (CSR), นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาโท, ทักษะการนำเสนอ, ประเทศไทย

## Introduction

Erratic climate has become a dire predicament for all. Countless examples of climate change impact can be subsumed under three broad categories: (1) severe climate and weather extremes, (2) altered ecosystems and habitats, and (3) risks to human health and society (Environmental Defense Fund, 2015). To date, many countries—China, Nepal, India, the United States, Thailand, and Japan—have suffered natural disasters. Heavier snow and unpredicted tornadoes in the United States as well as tsunami in Japan and along the west coast of Thailand can also best exemplify such climatic extremes. Likewise, the most recent earthquake on Kyushu Island in the south of Japan, on April 2016, as well as the Aso volcanic eruption and land slide prediction led to many instances of injury and death. In Thailand, improper agricultural zones also led to mega flooding, soil erosion, and land slide all over the country.

This year, Thailand has been combating drought and all kinds of pollution. Environment-related causes include climate change, economic growth, an increase in population, and national unbalanced development. These bases altogether made natural resources and the environment in Thailand prone to further depletion and deterioration. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2013) thus put guidelines into the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan B.E. 2555–2559 (A.D. 2012–2016) to promote “coexistence of

industries with communities” (p. 120). The insight into advantages of eco-industrial development and the idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) must be strongly developed and fully shared among the local, government and private sectors (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2013). In other words, everyone should cooperate on environmental issues! Every sector—be it public, private, governmental, agricultural, political, educational, etc.—should assume complete responsibility for their own part. As educational agents, the co-authors accordingly present a recommendation for the whole population, even if not all 100%, to collaborate in such task.

Hence, the present study investigates how CSR might be instilled in young adult learners. While their course content reflects the two instructors’ pedagogical methods, it also reveals how students responded to the knowledge they gained. Their attitudes towards green issues were deliberately explored and, surprisingly, were found contradictory to the value given to CSR in their presentations.

### **Learning Language and Beyond**

Conventional wisdom often misrepresents that the language classroom is a place where only language is taught. Consequently, some language teachers will emphasize only their students’ language skill proficiency. Indeed, textbooks containing only topics pertaining to daily activities such as getting to know people, shopping, and ordering food, etc. are widely found. With such special prominence, some adult learners could not help feeling that they were being treated like children. In contrast, as contemporary world citizens become more keenly aware of environmental and social issues, language textbooks which cover topics such as the environment, gender equality, culture, etc. can be found on bookstore shelves. By embracing these topics, acceptance has grown that language can be taught around them. Being a place where language skills are taught, classrooms can simultaneously be the place where values are instilled into students. Over the years, scholars and practitioners of second language pedagogy have advocated that the content of language textbooks do not have to deal only with daily activities but can also embrace topics which are of current social concern. Many salient research studies on additional values discernable within the English classroom will be presented.

Believing that the English classroom should not concentrate only on language, Hurlbert and Totten (1992) account that the English classroom should be more than a place where students learn the literacies of work or the critical, and rhetorical skills of research. To these two scholars and many other teachers, “the English classroom is a good place for students and teachers to explore, through whole language philosophies and pedagogies, in cooperative and socially responsible ways, the issues and conditions affecting this time and the public lives we lead in it” (Hurlbert & Totten, 1992, p. 2). William-Toussaint (2013) asserted that teachers are obviously role models for their students. What they do their students will pattern and will accordingly guide

their students' thoughts, actions, and future. When teachers realize such implications, their classroom practice will be further enriched, student achievement will be extraordinary, and productive communities will be established. If teachers create "a harmonious classroom environment," students can correspondingly build up "a harmonious working environment" where mutual growth and productivity can emerge, exist, and sustain (William-Toussaint, 2013, p. 38).

In her study on how values can be incorporated into the English lesson, Contreras (2007) highlights that language forms can be deployed to contribute to the fostering of values in a given society when they are taught within a learner-centered curriculum approach and a cross-curriculum view. Bringing values into her English class in Colombia, Contreras (2007) indicates that the content of the lesson becomes relevant to everyday life (p. 12). Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum (1995), working on the importance of class content, affirm that "learners and adults face problems and decisions in everyday life; students ponder over what and how to think, believe, behave. So often what goes on in the classroom is irrelevant and remote from the real things that are going on in students' lives. This states a reason why teachers need to find the way to connect their classes to their students' interests" (p. 25). As a result, according to Contreras (2007), the role of the teacher should be that of a facilitator who leads the students to the construction of that atmosphere by means of teaching and learning strategies that make them feel that the class is about them.

Fessler and Ungaretti (1994) contend that teachers—as curriculum developers—have to encompass their experiences and expertise at different settings such as school, home, and society at large. They may need to create and include new materials for their classroom as well as the lesson contents. They have to engage themselves in social inquiry which can direct and develop their curriculum to cope with social changes and new requirements (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994). For instance, the current issue of the environment requires teachers to include environmental topics to raise their students' awareness thereof. With such leadership activities, teachers should incorporate certain needs of the society into their teaching (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994).

Furthermore, exploring the contributions of alternative views of literacy as social practice to health literacy research, Santos, Handley, Omark, and Schillinger (2014) examine teacher survey data and learner outcomes data collected as part of a multiyear collaboration involving the California Diabetes Program, university researchers, and adult ESL teachers. In this study, Santos et al. (2014) report success in incorporating health care content in an ESL classroom. In this study, the majority of learners reported they had learned, together with language skills, about diabetes risk factors and prevention strategies, which affirmed existent healthy behaviors or prompted revision of unhealthy ones. Santos et al. see that an ESL context can facilitate health care literacy. They conclude, "This study represents a first step in research efforts to account more fully for the mechanisms by which social interaction and social support facilitate health literacy outcomes in ESL contexts, which should

complement what is already known about the development of health literacy as functional skill” (p. 89).

Focusing on teachers’ preferences, Özbaşa and Güray (2014) aim at investigating the perception of English language teachers regarding integrated social studies and English lessons via global education. They find that most teachers in their survey are willing to integrate social studies and English. The social topics mentioned in their survey are, for example, earthquakes, floods, poverty, and AIDS (p. 1132). Similarly, Poupore (2014) investigates the influence of content-related conditions on adult second language learners’ task motivation. In this survey, Poupore finds that content associated with immediate personal life themes such as personal growth, human relationships, and life challenges is perceived to be more intrinsically interesting than that associated with more remote and abstract topics such as those related to global issues and current affairs. Consequently, incorporating life themes into adult-based courses, especially through story-based texts, may act as an important springboard for active motivational engagement during task-based interaction (p. 69).

Cates (cited in Nkwetisama, 2011, p. 110) insists that English teaching is successful only not only when students become fluent, but also when they become aware of world problems. Sharing Cates’ idea, Nkwetisama (2011) states that language classrooms can be used to implant social ideas, specifically environmental issues, in students. Nkwetisama indicates that “environmental education is necessary for the EFL/ESL instructor because successful language learning equally involves a successful combination of the micro and macro skills acquired into appropriate expressions of communication; and, environmental issues are rich subject matters of communication” (p. 110).

Focusing also on environmental issues, Tang (2009) proposes that the incorporation of environmental education into the EFL/ESL classroom is to raise students’ awareness of global environmental crises. According to Tang (2009), knowledge of environmental protection is at the core of environmental education and should be done with any age group, with any linguistic rules and language specifics like vocabulary, grammatical rules, syntax, semantics and discourse of the target language. Thus, teaching English as a second or foreign language can emphasize the language skills and environmental issues in the school context in order to raise awareness about global issues like environmental degradation.

Connections between English pedagogy and the environment are not new. Tracing back into the 1990s, books on English learning with a focal point on the nature, e.g., *Focus on the Environment* by Susan Stempleski (1993), are easily found. Each pack contains a book and accompanying DVD. The book contents comprise topics such as plants, animal habitats, air, land, water, energy, resources, and recycling. At the end of the book, some ideas and applications are offered for further investigation and practice. Moreover, the ecological issue may be considered as a concept or even a dimension of life and work. Various activities can be used to encourage learners to think more deeply about business practices in conjunction with

ecological involvement. Introducing specific content like the environment into an English classroom for MBA students, Frendo (2005) thus suggests pertinent presentation activities. Each presentation includes the presenters' attitudes, awareness, and experience. The audience will enjoy the issue raised, the solutions, and advantages of particular solutions.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

As 190 was considered too large a number of students for effective classroom management, two sections were created, comprising 100 students for section 1 and 90 students for section 2. Within each section, team groups of 10–11 students were formed, making nine groups in section 1 and eight groups in section 2. Since the participants in the current study belong to the younger generations of the country who will become the key business people in the future, it was felt that an emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) should be instilled from the very beginning of the program.

At the initial stage (before the class really started), the co-authors planned to conduct a competitive experiment between the two sections. To be exact, the second section will learn CSR right from the start of the very first class while the first one will not. Then the results from the control and experiment sections will then be compared. However, in the first week, there was some confusion and 30 students from the first section joined the second group. Thus, the initial plan design had to be cancelled. To adjust the design, the co-researchers determined to look into the pre- and post- performance tests for attendance at the CSR lessons. In detail, that meant for the first presentation, CSR was not mentioned at all. The presentation titles were also chosen by each particular group. After that, CSR was taught to both groups. The number of times CSR was mentioned in the first and second presentations would then be compared and contrasted, uncovering the subsequent similarities or differences, as the case may be.

### ***The Nature of an Intensive English Course at a Postgraduate School***

The Intensive English Course is a non-credit course lasting 30 hours. The class meets once a week on Sundays for 6 hours per day (from 9:00 to 16:00 hours), over a total of 5 weeks. The course is regularly provided at an outstanding postgraduate institute in Bangkok and is primarily aimed to prepare MBA students for reading textbooks, writing reports, and presenting projects, most of which are in English. Because the global environment has become a more and more critical issue, calling for more attention from the business sector, the course puts more emphasis on this key topic. The particular course under investigation ran from November 23 to December 20, 2014.

Throughout the program, students read *English for Business Studies: A course for business studies and economics student, Student's Book* (3rd Ed., 2010). The book contains concepts and practices relating to business careers, production, products and product quality, marketing, logistics, advertising and CSR, among many others. Moreover, as the course period is relatively short, the two instructors usually cover no more than 10 units. The presentation topics evolve around these business-related issues, but vary from one batch to another. For this batch, students were asked to give presentations twice: in the second and fifth weeks. For the first presentation (November 29, 2014), each group was directed to select their own company - before the program gets underway in August, students are to familiarize themselves with leading local companies in Thailand, such as Mc Donald's, the Nation Group, S&P, or MK Restaurant. For the second presentation (December 20, 2014), topics were assigned to each group by way of a draw. To be specific, each group's representative chose a topic by taking a sealed envelope without being able to see what was written inside.

### ***Questionnaire***

In the current study, both authors acted as the participatory co-researchers as they were the two instructors of the course. The co-authors' main purpose of placing paramount importance onto environmental issues was to encourage the MBA students who will work in the business to think greener. All 190 students were given the choice of completing the questionnaire in either Thai or English. In it they were asked to answer whether or not they realized the importance of the environment. The response to each option (yes/no) was then converted into a percentage of the total. An open-ended question for free expression of opinion was also provided for each student's open articulation. Questionnaires were distributed in the fifth week, which was the last day of class.

### ***Participants***

The group of MBA students was selected to be the subjects in this study because they are considered to be alert to new challenges, such as online learning and the environment (Leong & Koh, 2012) Examining the attitudes towards education or learning among the lecturers of higher education in 5 schools, including Schools of Business, Engineering, Computing & Information Technology, a Language Centre, and a Centre of Excellence for Pre-University Studies, Leong and Koh (2012) found that School of Business people were more active in learning than those from other schools. Looking into the attitude of MBA students towards the environment was thus deemed to be relevant and appropriate to this study.

The 190 questionnaires were distributed, and 154 (male: 62; female: 92) were filled out and returned. The response rate was 81%, which was deemed to be at a high level.

**Table 3.1 Number and gender of MBA respondents of sections one and two**

Section	No. of Students		Total
	Male	Female	
1	27	53	80
2	35	39	74
<b>Total</b>	62	92	154

The subjects ranged in age from 23 to 38 years. The average age was 26.7. The mode of this list was both 25 and 26 years. Their undergraduate study background included the fields of accounting, anthropology, aviation management, brand communication, business administration, business English, economics, engineering, English, finance, law, logistics management, marketing, mass communication, nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy, political science, production management, sociology & humanity, science and statistics. Before enrolling in this intensive course, all the students had passed a written examination and an interview at the famous postgraduate institute where this research was conducted. It was thus anticipated that the participants would be equipped with a medium to high degree of English proficiency.

## Findings & Discussion

The findings came from two sources: in-class presentation activities and questionnaires. Each source offered the following results.

### *Presentation Activity*

This portion illustrates the number of times CSR was mentioned during the presentations of each group. As previously indicated, the presentation activity was assigned to students for the second and the fifth weeks. To familiarize students with leading local businesses, they were assigned to select a company they preferred or were most interested in and present this company to the class. Before the first presentation, students were not educated about CSR at all.

**Table 4.1 Number of CSR mentions in the first and second presentations of section 1**

Group	1st Presentation Title	CSR Mention	2 <sup>nd</sup> Presentation Title	CSR Mention
1	MK Restaurant	✓	Siam Macro Plc	-
2	Love Matching	-	Thai Preserved Food Factory Co., Ltd.	-
3	McDonald's	-	Thai Royal Frozen Food Co., Ltd.	✓
4	MBK	-	Thai President Food Plc	✓

5	Ajinomoto	✓	S&P	-
6	Exxon Mobil	-	Charoen Pokphand Foods Plc	-
7	Guess what? (Government Savings Bank)	-	Thai Beverage Plc	✓
8	Nation Group	-	Taokaenoi	✓
9	BAFS <sup>1</sup>	-	Friendship Co. Ltd.	✓

Table 4.1 clearly outlines that before CSR was taught and highlighted, only 2/9 or 22.22% mentioned it in their presentation. Most groups stated the importance of and analyzed each company in terms of SWOT<sup>2</sup>, expenses & revenues, business model, product lines, recruitment/ employment opportunities & fringe benefits, company profile/structure/history/vision/mission, logo, product, locations, 4Ps, slogan, key success factors, etc. After learning about CSR, the percentage of mentions significantly rose from 22.22 to 55.56. Table 4.1 reveals that the knowledge gained raised the students' awareness of CSR. Next, the results of the second section's presentations are presented.

**Table 4.2 Number of CSR mentions in the first and second presentations of section 2**

Group	1st Presentation Title	CSR Mention	2 <sup>nd</sup> Presentation Title	CSR Mention
1	Google	-	Thai Beverage Plc	✓
2	IKEA on campus	-	Thai President Food Plc	✓
3	Thai Airways	-	Charoen Pokphand Foods Plc	✓
4	Toyota Motor Thailand	✓	Thai Royal Frozen Food Co., Ltd.	-
5	Nok Air	✓	Taokaenoi	-
6	Sri Panwa	✓	Friendship Co. Ltd.	✓
7	McDonald's	-	S&P	✓
8	Google	-	Siam Macro Plc	✓

Similar to the findings displayed in Table 4.1, before CSR was taught, only 3/8 or 37.5% mentioned it in their presentation. Again, similar to the first section's presentations, topics and areas such as product mixes, SWOT, business model, job opportunity & perks, company profile/structure/history/vision/mission, logo, product, locations, 4Ps, slogan, etc. were raised. After perceiving the importance of CSR, the percentage of mentions notably increased from 37.5 to 75. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 reveal that the knowledge gained raised the students' awareness of CSR. Combining the two sections' performance, the awareness of CSR rose from 29.4% to 64.7%.

<sup>1</sup> Bangkok Aviation Fuel Service

<sup>2</sup> SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

It is relevant to mention here that section 2 students presented first in the morning session. The instructor thus allowed some room that some companies might not have CSR information on their websites. As a consequence, students did not include such information in their presentations. Initially, the results of CSR inclusion might not reflect the students' attitudes toward CSR or their recognition of its significance. However, this was not found to be the case later. In the afternoon session, the first section groups presented about the same companies which included CSR. Therefore, it can be inferred that the CSR inclusion truly depended on students' realization of or preference for CSR.

### *Questionnaire*

Here, the results of the questionnaire will be displayed. When asked about the importance of CSR, 153 out of 154 or 99.35% agreed to its importance. Below are some salient reasons that CSR:

- appears to be one of the best ways to compensate for society along with social development
- helps to create positive image for the company and indirect public relations
- becomes vital to social and economic progress
- is a mutual benefit between the company and society
- builds up social relationship—as a giver and taker
- is a way to promote the company and gives more to its customers
- is good for sustainable growth
- passes on good things to others—this is a good deed
- refers to social survival. With social survival, the company can survive as well.
- strengthens the country. Companies, especially the large and successful ones, should think of their prosperity only because they also need public cooperation in return.
- is essential to social and the environment
- enables existent and prospective customers to recognize the brand or the product/service
- etc.

In fact, there was only one respondent who disagreed with CSR, making 0.65%. The reason for this opinion is worth stating. The male student said, “CSR was not as important as the 4Ps. However, it varies from a company to another. For small businesses, CSR is not essential at all. CSR is important to only large businesses.” Despite the rare percentile, the student's given reasons were stimulating and direct to the point. In reality, the major target of any business is to make profits. Therefore, in accord with the student's view, for large corporations, image is really important to their prosperity and sustainability. For smaller ones, CSR may not be as essential. This point should be more delved into.

## Conclusions, Limitations, & Recommendations

To summarize, this paper successfully achieved its goal to ascertain student levels of CSR awareness before and after taking the lesson introducing this topic. Parallel with the findings of previous studies, a language classroom does not necessarily encompass only grammar and conversation, but input content topics which are meaningful to society and its issues. This paper proposes an idea and the evidence of the research results which were produced through in-class learning activities. This experiment confirms that pedagogy definitely can raise students' awareness to some degree. However, sometimes, consciousness of particular issues, in this case—corporate social responsibility (CSR)—does not essentially lead to real-life practice. In other words, an attitude may be one thing and performance or self-expression may be another. Marketers have found that many times, the results of market research may not reflect or lead to a higher sales volume; e.g., the case of Big Coke. Similarly, positive attitudes towards CSR may not lead to real-life practices. Overall, in spite of the paramount emphasis on CSR, not all groups included the concept in their class presentations. As this study seems to indicate, the students may have recognized the importance of CSR, but they may not have embraced it in their presentations because they thought it not may be of interest to their audience. It is strongly recommended that further research after these students graduate be conducted.

Another significant finding of this paper is that the inclusion of social issues into an English classroom is valuable, but only to a certain degree. Significance seems to emerge when the classroom activities do not focus only correct grammatical use, as it generally does, but encompasses environmental awareness to be instilled in the learners' minds as well. This accords with Özbaşa & Güryay's (2014) endeavor to amalgamate social studies and language lessons via global education. Their English classroom not only embraced the English lesson but also included the social tribulations of modern life. To date, there have not been many studies undertaken in this field, but as the world shrinks, it is anticipated that the extraordinary and potential value of the English language classroom will soon become more evident and lead to greater international production and collaboration.

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