

An Evaluation of Fundamental English Course:
Everyday English Reading and Writing Course
การประเมินการจัดการเรียนการสอนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน:
รายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการอ่านและการเขียนในชีวิตประจำวัน

Tuna Girgin*

Asama Tasanameelarp

International College, Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus

Wanwisa Watcharakorn

Division of Academic Affairs, Thaksin University, Songkhla Campus

*e-mail: tuna.g@psu.ac.th

ทูน่า เกอร์กิน

อัสมา ทรรคนะมีลาภ

วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตสุราษฎร์ธานี

วันวิสา วัชรากร

ฝ่ายวิชาการ มหาวิทยาลัยทักษิณ วิทยาเขตสงขลา

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Abstract

In English Language Teaching (ELT), it is necessary procedure to offer students demanding, suitable, and updated courses that help develop their English potential. Therefore, English teachers should evaluate the course quality continually. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of the foundation English course at Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus. The participants were 134 first- and second-year students who enrolled in the Everyday English Reading and Writing course during the second semester in the academic year 2020. The researchers used a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to collect data on students' perceptions of six aspects of course evaluation: Course Objectives, Textbook and Supplementary Materials, Teacher and Teaching Methods, Assessment and Evaluation, Learning Environment, and Course Benefits. The study also examined the problems that the students encountered in the course. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the qualitative data were analyzed with content analysis. The findings show that the students were satisfied with all aspects at a high level except the Learning Environment, with which they were satisfied at a moderate level. The results from the interviews indicate that the classroom learning materials were insufficient, and the class size was large, making it easy to be distracted from the lessons. Furthermore, the students had different levels of English proficiency. Therefore, it would be advisable for the university to provide appropriate courses for each level of competence.

Keywords: Course Evaluation, English Foundation Course, Everyday English Reading and Writing Course

บทคัดย่อ

ในการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษนั้น กระบวนการที่สำคัญและจำเป็น คือ การเตรียมรายวิชาที่เป็นที่ต้องการให้เหมาะสมและทันสมัยเพื่อช่วยในการพัฒนาความสามารถทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน ดังนั้นจึงเป็นสิ่งสำคัญอย่างยิ่งที่ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษจะต้องพัฒนาคุณภาพของรายวิชาที่สอนอย่างต่อเนื่อง งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาข้อคิดเห็นของนักศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตสุราษฎร์ธานี ที่มีต่อรายวิชาพื้นฐานภาษาอังกฤษ กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาชั้นปี 1 และ 2 จำนวน 134 คน ที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการอ่านเขียนในชีวิตประจำวัน ในภาคการศึกษาที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2563 เครื่องมือในการวิจัย คือ แบบสอบถามและแบบสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างซึ่งใช้รวบรวมข้อมูลความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาต่อรายวิชาทั้ง 6 ด้าน คือ วัตถุประสงค์รายวิชา หนังสือและสื่อการเรียน ผู้สอนและวิธีการสอน การวัดและประเมินผล สภาพแวดล้อมการเรียนและประโยชน์ของรายวิชา นอกจากนี้ยังมีการสอบถามข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับปัญหาที่นักศึกษาพบในการเรียนรายวิชาการอ่านเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในชีวิตประจำวัน ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณที่ได้วิเคราะห์โดยใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนา ส่วนข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพวิเคราะห์โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า นักศึกษามีความพอใจในการจัดการเรียนการสอนทุกด้านที่ระดับสูงยกเว้นด้านสภาพแวดล้อมการเรียนที่นักศึกษาประเมินในระดับปานกลาง ผลจากการสัมภาษณ์นักศึกษาได้ระบุปัญหาเรื่องสื่อ อุปกรณ์การเรียนการสอนในชั้นเรียนนั้นไม่เพียงพอ และจำนวนนักศึกษาในชั้นเรียนมีมากเกินไปทำให้ยากต่อการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมในชั้นเรียน นอกจากนี้ ยังพบว่า นักศึกษามีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษที่แตกต่างกันมาก ซึ่งมีข้อเสนอแนะให้มหาวิทยาลัยเปิดรายวิชาที่เหมาะสมตามระดับความสามารถของนักศึกษาเพื่อการพัฒนาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษตามศักยภาพของนักศึกษา

คำสำคัญ: การประเมินรายวิชา ภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน การอ่านเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในชีวิตประจำวัน

Introduction

English serves as a lingua franca (ELF) in a wide range of communication settings in today's globalized world, from science and education to business and technology (Jinghui, 2019). Individuals from all over the world use English for many purposes, including communicating with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As a result, English Language Teaching (ELT) is considered a vital component of education in the twenty-first century, particularly in countries where English is a foreign language.

English has been taught in Thailand and considered the first foreign language in Thai schools and universities since King Rama III's reign. The English language curriculum in Thailand has been established and changed several times by academics to fit the setting while remaining current with worldwide educational norms (Foley, 2005). Since Thailand joined the ASEAN region, many scholars and educators have concentrated on approaches and techniques to enhance Thai people's English language abilities for effective communication in academic and daily life.

English is a compulsory subject from primary until higher education in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007). In Thai schools, students have to take English language classes every semester. At the tertiary level, it is a requirement for the undergraduates in every program to take 6-12 credits of English to complete the study. However, many studies show that the English proficiency of Thai students did not reach the required standards of competency desired by workplaces. Furthermore, results of English exams reveal that Thai students' English language abilities were significantly behind those of their classmates in other Southeast Asian nations (Tipmontree, & Tasanameelarp, 2019; Noom-Ura, 2013). Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that Thai English language instructors should use more appropriate methods and approaches to enhance teaching quality and prepare necessary materials for the course. To fulfil the course objectives, instructors should assess all course elements upon completion of the study semester.

To improve the quality of teaching, instructors need to understand their roles, instructional strategies, materials, and learning environment affecting the quality of the course. In addition, all students should be involved in the course assessment to gather information from different perspectives of course evaluation (Weir, & Roberts, 1994).

As far as the teaching and learning of English at Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus, is concerned, all students are required to take twelve credits of compulsory English courses as part of the General Education Curriculum; the first six credits are two introductory English courses based on General English (GE), and the rest are English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Unlike students from many other universities in Thailand, the students with low English proficiency from Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus are not offered any English preparation courses before taking the first compulsory English course. Also, students with high English proficiency have to take the first or second required courses.

In 2017, the university implemented a program to enhance students' 21st-century abilities by offering new courses of the General Education Curriculum, resulting in a reduction of study hours for English foundation courses from three hours to two hours per week. To enhance real-life communication, the university modified and renamed the compulsory courses to 935-008 Everyday English Conversations, 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing, and 935-010 Effective English Communication.

At the end of the semester, many students taking the Everyday English Reading and Writing (935-009) received lower grades than students in the other English Foundation Courses. Furthermore, the Everyday English Reading and Writing course has been offered on campus for several years but has never been assessed by students. Therefore, the present research intends to evaluate the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course during the Second

Semester of the Academic Year 2020, and ensure that the instruction has met university standards while also fulfilling students' needs. The researchers used questionnaires and interviews in gathering data on students' perceptions towards the course objectives, materials, teaching methods, assessment, and learning environment, of the 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing course, as well as the problems encountered by the students.

Research Objectives

1. To explore PSU students' perceptions of the 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing course.
2. To investigate the problems PSU students encountered in the 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing course.

Literature Review

Course evaluation is another essential process to achieve the goal of teaching and learning and improve course quality. Scholars describe the term evaluation in a variety of ways. According to Brown (1986), it may refer to the systematic investigation or collection and analysis of information on something. Similarly, Doll (1996) defines evaluation as a comprehensive and continuous effort to investigate the effects of using educational content and materials to achieve clearly defined goals. Weir and Roberts (1994) describe the term evaluation as the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information required to promote curriculum improvement and assess its effectiveness and efficiency and participants' attitudes within the context of particular institutions involved. Thus, course evaluation involves collecting data, analyzing needs, finding improvement and implementation strategies, and identifying program outcomes. The aim is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the course.

Evaluation purposes, as mentioned above, are different depending on disciplines and areas of concern. According to Weir and Roberts (1994), the

scope of evaluations can vary substantially since an educational evaluation may have various possible focal points based on the decisions intended to inform participants' assumptions. Therefore, evaluation objects may include instructional materials, staff, student needs, or student achievement. Richards (1984) states that the objective of an evaluation is to determine whether the objectives of a program have been met and, if not, to suggest procedures for improvement. According to Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992), an evaluation can provide various benefits for future course development to improve course effectiveness.

In addition, Sinlarat (1981) suggested that courses should be designed to reflect the current condition of a social environment and the demands of both lecturers and students. Moreover, Rea-dickins, & Germaine (1992) point out three main reasons for conducting an evaluation. The first reason is for assessment and accountability, where the information obtained is used mainly for administrative purposes. In the second and third, evaluation can serve as a developmental function for curriculum development and teacher self-development. Thus, the primary purpose of course evaluation is to improve and justify the course as per social changes, learners' needs, and academic growth. According to the course design model developed by Nunan (1985), the essential elements include needs analysis, goal identification, objective setting, materials development, learning activities, learning mode, environment and evaluation. An evaluation should gather information regarding teachers, teaching techniques, teaching materials, and the learning environment. Furthermore, Fleischman and Williams (1996) developed a course evaluation methodology including both outcome and process evaluations. In this methodology, the purpose of course outcomes is to determine whether course objectives have been accomplished or not.

There are numerous course evaluation techniques, and evaluators should employ the most appropriate

one depending on the evaluation's objectives, duration, and timing. According to Weir and Roberts (1994), questionnaires are an instrument to gather information on course contents, methodology, and class settings. In this evaluation research, the questionnaires and the interviews were used to determine students' perceptions of the 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing course in terms of Course Objectives, Textbook and Supplementary Materials, Teacher and Teaching Methods, Assessment and Evaluation, Learning Environment, and Course Benefits.

Research Methodology

Participants

This study focuses on an exploratory investigation of students' perceptions on six aspects of the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course; Course Objectives, Textbook and Supplementary Materials, Teacher and Teaching Methods, Assessment and Evaluation, Learning Environment, and Course Benefits. This study, therefore, employed mixed-methods research since this combination of research methodologies is believed to increase the study's validity and dependability (Golafshani, 2003). In this research, the quantitative method assisted in obtaining preliminary and general information on perceptions, while the qualitative method sought deeper information based on the concerns raised in the study questions (Xerri, 2017).

To investigate students' perceptions of the English Reading and Writing Course as well as problems the students encountered in the course, 134 students enrolled in the course during the second semester of the academic year 2020 were asked to participate in the study by using the purposive sampling method. They were all asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the semester. About 30 of the 134 participants were chosen to receive further information in their responses to the questionnaire, the problems they encountered in their studies. The purposive sampling technique was employed to identify thirty participants depending on their Everyday English Reading and

Writing grades. Of these, 15 students got A, B+, and B grades, while the remaining 15 students obtained grades lower than B.

Research Instruments

In this research, two instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire with the 5-point Likert scale was used to collect information about the participants' perceptions on the different aspects of the Everyday English Reading and Writing course. The questionnaire in this study consisted of four parts: The first part deals with the general information of the participants; the second part contains the evaluation of six aspects of the course; Course Objectives, Textbook and Supplementary Materials, Teacher and Teaching Methods, Assessment and Evaluation, Learning Environment, and Course Benefits. The third part contains the issues they encountered in this course. The questionnaire contained both open and closed sections. The semi-structured interview was conducted individually after the researchers read the received questionnaires. The questionnaire and interviews were conducted in Thai to avoid misunderstanding the questions and check reliability and validity the questionnaire and the questions in the semi-structured interview were validated and found to be justified by the same group of three experienced teachers. Before conducting the research, a pilot study was carried out with 35 students in the second year who studied the Everyday English Reading and Writing course in the previous semester. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to investigate the reliability of the questionnaire. The overall score of .98 indicated a high level of internal consistency of items in the questionnaire.

Data Collection

The data were collected at the end of the second semester of the 2020 academic year. The study was conducted in two main stages as described below:

Stage 1 Gathering data from the questionnaire

Before data collection in this study, all subjects were explained the research objectives, procedures, and significance of the study and were informed by the researchers that there would be no effect on their grades. The information obtained as part of the study was confidential, and participants could opt out of the study at any moment. All the participants voluntarily participated in the study. The questionnaires were distributed online to 134 participants via Google Form.

Stage 2 conducting the semi-structured interview

The research included 30 individuals who voluntarily participated in the interview. Based on their responses to the questionnaires, they were personally asked for more information on the issues they encountered while taking the course. They were interviewed in Thai for about 10-15 minutes each to obtain information without facing any language barriers. The interviews were later translated into English by the researchers and were then analyzed to obtain answers to the study's research questions.

Data analysis

The questionnaire data were examined and interpreted using descriptive statistics. The mean average scores and standard deviations were displayed. Based on Best (1981), the mean scores of the responses were interpreted as follows: 4.50-5.00 = very satisfied; 3.50-4.49 = satisfied; 2.50-3.49 = moderately satisfied; unsatisfied, 1.50-2.49 = unsatisfied; 1.00-1.49 = very unsatisfied.

Content analysis was employed to analyze the data from open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The analysis followed the qualitative data analytic procedures proposed by Gbrich (2007). Additionally, the deductive approach was used to create a coding system and interpret the data, whereas the inductive approach was used to formulate the emerging codes from the emerging themes.

Findings

In the following, the results of the data analysis of the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews are presented.

1. The students' perceptions towards the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course

The data shown in Table 1 demonstrated the students' perceptions of the course. It can be noticed that the students studying the Everyday English Reading

and Writing Course in the second semester of the 2020 academic year were satisfied with all aspects of the course as the mean score was found at a high level ($\bar{x}=4.18$). The top three aspects satisfactorily perceived were Teacher and Teaching Methods ($\bar{x}=4.48$), Assessment and Evaluation ($\bar{x}=4.45$), and Course Objectives ($\bar{x}=4.37$). Learning Environment; however, was found at the lowest score ($\bar{x}=3.35$) compared with the others.

Table 1 Students' perceptions towards the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course

Course Evaluation Aspects	Mean	S.D.	Level of Interpretation
Course Objectives	4.37	0.65	High
Textbook and Supplementary	4.28	0.59	High
Teacher and Teaching Methods	4.48	0.53	High
Assessment and Evaluation	4.45	0.64	High
Learning Environment	3.35	0.65	Moderate
Course Benefits	4.13	0.70	High
Total	4.18	0.63	High

2. The students' problems in studying the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course

The semi-structured interviews' results were transcribed to investigate better the students' difficulties in learning the course. (See Table 2 for further information.) The semi-structured interviews' results were transcribed to investigate better the students' difficulties in learning the course. (See Table 2 for further information.) Based on the interviews' results, most of the students' problems were connected to the classroom equipment. Approximately 93 per cent of the students stated that there was insufficient

equipment and devices in the classroom. It is also worth noting that 87% of them indicated that their learning assistance devices were outdated.

Moreover, a large number of students (84%) indicated that one of the difficulties they had while taking this course was the big class size. Surprisingly, around 66.67% stated that they had difficulty studying due to their limited English competency. Approximately 57% of them also reported that some topics in the lessons were exceedingly difficult for them to understand.

Table 2 Problems encountered during studying the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course

Problems	Number of Respondents (N=30)	Percentage (%)
1. Insufficient learning equipment in the classroom	28	93.33
2. Out of date learning equipment in the classroom	26	86.67
3. Large-sized class	25	83.33
4. Limited English background knowledge	20	66.67
5. Difficulties of some topics in the course	17	56.67

Discussion

The overall findings reveal that the students had a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the Everyday English Reading and Writing Course except Learning Environment, with which they were only moderately satisfied. The findings were incongruent with the study by Madtathawee (2011). In her study, the students' opinions on the Foundation English Course II provided by the Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hatyai Campus were high in all aspects; course objectives, syllabus, coursebook, and supplementary materials, other general management, teaching techniques, and course assessment.

Regarding the aspects of the course, the top three aspects satisfactorily perceived in the current study were Teacher and Teaching Methods, Assessment and Evaluation, and Course Objectives. These findings were consistent with the data gained from the semi-structured interviews and the open-ended comments in the questionnaire, which indicated that the teacher utilized suitable teaching methods and a range of assessments in the classroom, as described by two students below:

“Some topics were difficult for the students but the teacher tried to find technics that helped us to understand the lesson. He explained everything clearly and gave us examples.” **Student 56**

“The teacher told us about course objectives before teaching and gave us both group work and individual work to check whether we understood the lesson or not. We were informed about the topics before taking the quiz which helped us to get prepared.” **Student 88**

However, Learning Environment was the aspect that was less satisfied by the students. According to Brown (2000), the learning devices in the classroom and environment are an essential factor in learning which can affect students' motivation. The data from

the semi-structured interviews revealed that many of the students stated that the learning devices and equipment were inadequate and outdated, as reported by two students below.

“There were no computers in some classrooms so we had to relocate the lesson to another building. And the projector did not always operate. We had to wait for the technician to come and fix the projector and speaker before the teacher could begin teaching”

Student 100

“The air conditioner stopped working one day. I couldn't study because it was too hot. We had to look for another classroom which took around 20-30 minutes” **Student 56**

In terms of class size, most students were unsatisfied with the number of their peers in the class (around 55-60 students). They said that it was hard for the teacher to maintain control of the class and some of the students made loud noises that made it difficult for their peers to focus on the lesson, as reported below:

“There were too many students in the class and they always made loud noises during studying. Some of them used their phones. It was difficult for me to understand what the teacher taught because of the noises” **Student 27**

The findings agreed with those of Zhou (2017); Jimakorn, & Singhasiri (2006), who found that most Thai teachers in their study agreed that teaching in large classes was difficult and that there were numerous issues to consider, such as keeping students' attention, how to provide feedback, and how to evaluate students.

Moreover, some of the students reported that they were shy to ask the teacher questions in the large class because everyone would look at them. They rarely had opportunities to talk or practice with the teacher, as reported by two students.

“When the teacher asked a question in the class, I felt shy to answer him. And I was afraid of asking him questions too.” Student 95

“It was not good. I think we could have practiced more if there were not too many students. I could not talk to the teacher since there were many students in the class.” Student 121

This is consistent with the studies by Phukanchana (2018) and Xu (2001). In their research on the difficulties of studying English in large-sized classrooms, the students said that it was challenging to communicate with the teacher, and they seldom spoke to the teacher to practice their English.

Another issue was with the students' English knowledge, as many of them stated that they lacked English background knowledge and vocabulary. As a result, individuals had difficulty studying some topics. The following are some of the students' reports.

“My English is not good. Some topics were difficult for me to understand. I had to ask the teacher or my friends to explain again. And it was hard to write in English.” Student 14

“My grammar is bad. Writing in English is difficult, we need to know English grammar very well. And I don't know much vocabulary. When reading, it was difficult for me to understand the stories.” Student 56

Furthermore, the results obtained from the interviews indicated that the low-ability students had less participation in the class because they were afraid of making mistakes. As reported by Student 9

“Some of my friends are good at English. I know that my English is worse than others. I did not want to answer anything in the class because I was afraid that my answers would be wrong and my friends would laugh at me.” Student 9

This study found that a mixed-ability class might lead Thai EFL students to struggle with learning. According to Al-Subaiei (2017), it was difficult for teachers to cater their lessons to each student's requirements in a mixed-ability class. It might lead to failure in teaching, in which the advanced students become bored and less advanced students remain passive in the classroom. Thus, it is a challenging task for teachers to find effective strategies in teaching their diverse learners.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the course objectives, materials, teaching methods, assessment, and learning environment, as well as students' problems in order to improve the effectiveness of the English Foundation Course; 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing offered by the Prince of Songkla University, Surat Thani Campus.

The findings showed that the students were pleased with all elements except Learning Environment, with which they were only somewhat satisfied. The primary issues that students experienced while studying the course were the insufficient and outdated classroom learning equipment. Furthermore, most students reported that the class was large, and it was difficult for students with different English proficiency levels to participate in the activities.

There are, however, some limitations to mention in this study. Firstly, the study was conducted with students only who enrolled in the 935-009 Everyday English Reading and Writing course. Hence, these findings cannot be generalized, nor can they represent all Thai EFL learners. Secondly, in this study, the data was gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which might not have been sufficient to cover all elements of course evaluation. Therefore, in a future study, it would be recommended that class observation should be used as an additional

research instrument to obtain more information on the course. The last suggestion is relevant to the study's target group. Future research should include all stakeholders in the study, such as teachers and administrators to obtain additional information from multiple data sources.

Recommendations

The findings may be beneficial for other lecturers and teachers involved in offering foundation English courses at other educational institutions in Thailand. The following implications should be considered to improve course quality.

1. The classroom should be equipped with up-to-date learning support devices such as computers, projectors, microphones and strong Internet connections to provide a conducive learning environment. Moreover, the technicians should be available when there are any problems occurred in the classroom.

2. Regarding the class size, it would be better to have a small class size, especially for the students who are less advanced in English. Thus, the teacher can have enough time to help all students learn individually, and the students would feel more relaxed in asking questions.

3. Given students' low English background and vocabulary comprehension, it is recommended that they take English preparation courses before studying English foundation to prepare for a higher level of knowledge. For advanced students, the university should allow them to skip the introductory courses and instead provide higher proficiency level courses to help them accomplish their goals in English language learning.

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