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Development of open educational resources for supporting academic English in higher education

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study examining and developing Open Educational Resources (OER) based on the needs for academic English of graduate lecturers and students. Five-point Likert-type scale questionnaire surveys were used to collect data from graduate instructors, and graduate students on the necessary academic English skills prior to designing the OER vault from 48 lecturers and graduate students from five leading universities participating in the one-year study. Prior to developing the OER, evaluating of contents, categories and materials were conducted using interviews, focus group discussion, and expert review logs. Discussion regarding OER development, constraints, and implications are addressed. Textbooks are limited in physical accessibility, however, online resources will be helpful for those who are less privileged. The academic English OERs facilitate graduate students, yet the instructors must provide sources, guidelines, and assistance. It is argued that quotations, or use of citations, or paraphrasing are a must for all college and university students in the west and other continents. However, higher education institutions in Thailand have been confronting plagiarism especially in academic writings and research theses.

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Introduction

In Thailand's strategy of 2014, the new growth model aimed to improve governance and public management by getting out of the middle-income trap, increasing environmental friendliness, and reducing social disparity. It has become clear that to improve basic infrastructure, research and development, and productivity would be the way to do such. The forefront issues are to elevate the country's foreign affairs and competitiveness by uplifting all necessities regarding the educational frameworks, and emerging global contents. University plays a vital role in preparing the naive graduates who are commercialized (Florida, 2004) and the stock of knowledge to flow from the advancement of professional

practice. The interconnected forces of technology, globalization and cultural hybridity are unraveling (Araya, 2010). Yet the teaching and learning, research, academic, and community services are the core values of Thailand's educational development. In recent criticism of the Thai education system, majority of the budget was poured into improving school infrastructure, facilities and educational equipment that largely benefited others but not Thai students. The government has intended to lift the educational standards from basic education into more modernized and internationalized, therefore foreign languages are compulsory.

Language competency has been proven to be one of the major drawbacks of Thai educators and students alike. Foreign teachers whose mother's tongue is English were hired and employed in many public and private schools around the country in an attempt to alleviate the crisis. However, this has been wrongly invested since the problems still persisted.

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The stem of the issues does not stem from the non-native language but the whole educational system at large. Higher education holds the virtue of moving forward the progress of the students. Developing individuals who are free-spirited, responsible, professional and compassionate, competent and inventive, capable of critical thinking and teamwork, ethical and sincere should be the main components of educational systems. The international programs are to provide opportunities for those students who reside in Thailand and Thai students who want to have the international experiences. The international programs ensure the supporting roles that could result in the success of the graduate students.

Research Question

The purpose of this project is to develop Open Educational Resources (OER) focusing on the English academic competency to assist Thai graduate students who struggle with academic writing and other issues regarding academic English competency skills. Research questions of this study are, if higher education learning is a means of improving the quality of the learners, what roles does of the OER that higher educators can use for helping the graduate students, and highlight OER that could be the forefront for international engagement in the country where the English serves as a second language?

Literature Review

Curriculum Standards

Teaching and Learning in the 21st century align with the Thai National Education Act B.E. 2542 and 2545, section 22, requiring that every student will be able to learn and promote learners' holistic development. Students should be encouraged to develop logically, socially, emotionally, and technologically to their full potential. The educational institutions must organize activities, learning environment, and facilities appropriately and in accordance with pupils' interests and aptitudes. Stevenson (2002) emphasizes that in order for students to learn well, learning that engages with a 'difference' from other learning has to be taken into careful consideration. Challenging approaches will provide students with online resources, real world experiences. Classes and workshops are intricate approach to challenge settlement and participation. Students' attention and participation must be designed appropriately, which will draw students' motivation. Technologies and other facilities can assist students with real-world experiences that happen around the world. Besides, the assignments that are individually designed for students based on skills and interests will also be considered as motivational approach (Fallows, 2000). Provoking class discussion via challenging questions is expected from the students of the new generations (Barnett, 1997). Higher education has established a framework that sets out modes of working and provides flexibility to set new priorities. Advancing ideas in English language pedagogy, provides opportunities for foreign teachers to study abroad, and is driving educational reform to change the ways of work and to excel in English education in Thailand.

OER in Thailand

Emphasizing the fact that decent educational resources for self-studying are not widely available, especially in Thailand, most of the educational resources are limited to institutions. The majority of available English books or textbooks must be imported from other countries, where they are expensive and mostly unaffordable for the students (Fitzgerald, 2006). The Open Educational Resources or OER can offer drastic savings in the cost of education, especially the rising costs of subscriptions to academic journals (Gourley, 2009; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2005). The National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) has established the search engine with a categorized list of OERs, MERLOT, etc., however; it does not categorize by specific subject matters. According to Saiyasit, Kaosaiyaporn, and Atisabda (2016), in order to establish an OER on Thai culture, the OER model should identify three characters; (1) content resources, (2) development and delivery tools resources, and (3) implementation resources. Additionally, the OER under the patronage of Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthon also provides extensive collection of OERs exclusively related to Thai knowledge and local wisdom (i.e., the Rama 9 crematorium, Thai crafts, etc.) in an attempt to preserve the history of the country. The links provided in the English language category do not provide the support for academic English for those who study higher education, whatsoever.

The OER movement which provides the open access for education, explores new ways of creating, maintaining, distributing, and sharing educational materials, which would be sure to capture the attention of worldwide scholars. Therefore, OER is a good option for the students and professors to access in their own time. The OERs are used 'as is' without alteration by the educational institute; use consists (in a sense) of the 'putting together' (Wiley, 2000).

Assertions of the OER is superior in providing the reasonable open source, however; the challenges of materials provided are also in questions. Thus, the open sources must be carefully sorted from the large amount available into usable and unusable materials. Emphasizing the fact for graduate students, there is a need to specify the suitable resources to be listed on the OER as "digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research". The OER recently emerged at educational institutions in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Ireland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Thailand, Hong Kong, and many countries (Downes, 2001; Johnstone, 2005; Kumar, 2006; Stacey, 2007), but are not widely known and used in Thailand.

OER Contents for Higher Educational Learners

The OECD has prompted the government to seize the opportunity to use OER as a way to promote lifelong learning and widen the participation in higher education (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2007). The OER is an excellent source where Thai scholars can cover an "educational" Creative Commons license along with their

content knowledge online (Creative Commons 4.0, 2017) which permits the general public to access, reuse, modify or redistribute its content without written permission (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007) and be released under an intellectual property license which allows for free use (Lane & McAndrew, 2010). The fair use of the OER poses a new facet to learning community since this can lessen the preparation time and is cost efficient for instructors (Hylén, 2007). The nature of an online media can offer wide range of educational materials, such as video, PowerPoint slides, and web content (Hylén, 2007; Wiley, 2000). This is beneficial to students with different learning styles and preferences (Friesen, 2009). The learners with audio preference can choose the video content for self-study in their own time (Kearns, 2016), and allow the instructors to share numerous materials across the globe. The relationship between English and the utilization of technical resources for educational and economic purposes was highlighted by Dr. Wichit Srisa-an at the Thailand TESOL conference in 1998 (Srisa-an, 1998).

Methodology

This study has been carried out in multi-stage with an analytical and an empirical strand. In the first strand, OER cost/benefits, together with the use of OERs in the end user's perspectives and development of the academic English OER for the purpose of graduate student's usage are examined. Five-week, one-on-one interviews were conducted to share the common request for academic English and subcategories. This study employed both descriptive and explorative research designs. The questionnaire survey was cross-sectional in that the information was only collected at one point of time. A packet of materials for data collection was delivered to each research participant. The survey was administered during the 2015–2016 academic year.

Participants

From a population, a random sample of 150 graduate students was drawn from graduate students attending international programs and university lecturers across five leading universities in Thailand. Forty-eight samples were randomly selected. The survey consisted of five parts: demographic information, writing skills (i.e., grammar), submitting manuscripts (i.e., preparing manuscript, selecting publications, plagiarism), presentation skills, and listening skills. There were three categories of educational level, which were M.Ed./M.S., Ph.D./Ed.D., and other degree. A pilot study was tested to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Data Collection

The English Proficiency Self-Assessment (EPSA) was developed to assess graduate students proficiency level as confident by graduate students in international programs. It used five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Later, the Academic English Open Educational Resources (OER) for Graduate Students in

International Program was developed based on the result from the previous stage survey. The experts reviewed and evaluated the developed OER and provided two-round feedback and suggestions prior to implementation.

Result of the interviews showed that the OERs offer drastic savings in the cost of education. Some students who otherwise cannot afford to buy expensive textbooks or other course materials will enjoy this affordable option when taking a course. A faculty member from a community college remarked during an interview: As books are a valuable wealth of knowledge, limited access of the resources prevents students from progressing. OERs, therefore are a good option for the students and professors to access and study in their own time. The English resources not only benefit the students as a whole, but also international students enrolling in higher degree seeking programs. OER is increasingly popular in other countries but not as commonly known in Thailand. The limited access and not knowing of the existence of such OER prevents success of its use. Besides, there was no OER development in the field of study focusing on the international programs or area of study. The submitting of manuscript and avoiding copying and pasting are listed as two of the top issues among graduate students therefore, the OER should include these particular topics for the students, to create awareness and avoid doing such accordingly.

Data Analysis

According to the questionnaire surveys of 26 graduate students and 22 lecturers in the international programs in Thailand, the samples rated academic writing skills as being among the most significant element that they needed. Besides, the required International English Language Standardize Tests that all graduate students must take prior to entering the university, is found to be inadequate preparation for graduate schools. The other issues that were found to be most highly rated were plagiarism, which is a critical issue. Most graduate students rated paraphrasing to be among the highest needed for OER support system since the existing resources were limited and disqualified from being referenced.

The English OER was divided into four categories which are academic writing skills, submitting manuscripts, listening skills and presentation skills. Each category has four to five resources that have certain degrees of creative commons or CC, which permit being reused, redistributed or remade. There are three types of OER offered for those students with different learning styles, which are video, slides, and web resources.

Descriptive statistical analysis proposed that international program students rated the most significant elements for success in higher education are writing skills ($\bar{X} = 5.00$) and submitting manuscripts skills ($\bar{X} = 4.62$), while the lecturers rated writing skills a little lower ($\bar{X} = 4.70$), and submitting manuscripts to be a little higher ($\bar{X} = 4.73$). For presentation skills, the graduate students rated such slightly lower than the lecturers. Noticeably, for listening skills, the lecturers rated such as the lowest among all other items ($\bar{X} = 4.03$). However; the overall average score of all attributes came out to be nearly the same.

Data from in-depth interviews and questionnaire survey reviewed four main issues regarding the English communication skills of the international graduate students. The lecturers pointed out that the international students tended to overrate their English communication skills regardless of the area of study. Most lecturers mentioned that most international students were able to present and exchange their ideas during classes; however, most of them struggled with writing the academic articles, assignments, or article critique papers. Some of the Thai students were found using copy and paste as a common practice. Plagiarism is highly found in manuscript submission; the graduate students were not aware of the copyright practice as necessary. Lecturers, as well as academic English experts demand that the OER include the four issues in the OER criteria.

The OER is where scholars can post their content knowledge online with creative commons permitting the general public to access, reuse, modify or redistribute its content without written permission. It can be a threat for students. The fair use of the OER poses a new facet to learning community since this can lessen the preparation time and is cost efficient for instructors. The participants agreed that the nature of an online media can offer various range of educational materials, such as the video, slides, and web content. During the focus group discussion, the participants pointed out that the learners may have an audio preference; the development of OER should include the video content for self-study as well. The OER development for academic English has divided the contents into three formats and categorized according to the academic English skills necessary to be used in graduate coursework. The academic writing, submitting manuscript, and presentation skills are main categories. The ability to paraphrase, cite, and avoid plagiarism are listed as subcategories under the academic writing. Each category contains 4–5 subcategories and each subcategory contains 5–6 open educational resources.

Developing the academic English OER started by assessing the needs of graduate students and lecturers in international programs. By assessing the needs, the questionnaire was developed with the items listed. There are four categories for basic necessary academic English proficiency skills that are commonly seen as an important indicator for academic success. Additionally, the in-depth interviews with university lecturers revealed that most graduate students experienced delay in graduation after waiting for manuscript acceptance, writing academic English, plagiarism and related issues with manuscript preparation. Unsurprisingly, each international program has a policy to assist students with submitting manuscripts and academic writing by providing academic centers. The academic English OER development addressed the aforementioned issue and included the links to the particular subject matters to assist the graduate students in self-study of the particular issues.

It is arguable whether the academic English OER is able to help graduate students when they encounter differences in opinions. According to the aforementioned issue, results from the focus groups revealed that there could be a very easy way out. The vast use of OER would be valuable vaults for the graduate students to explore and learn from other research studies from other parts of the world with ease. The graduate

students could easily print out or send the academic English OER link via email to the professors to avoid the confrontation or discuss the results on the specific topic of quest. These would yield a fruitful result to both professors and graduate students when they discuss using the scientific method.

Results and Discussion

Basic English communication skills may seem to be an easy task in English mother-tongue countries, but it seems to be a challenge to many non-English speaking countries like Thailand. The limited resources have made it difficult to provide sufficient learning resources. Researchers received recommendations from experts during the focus group to include the Merlot II, Mason OER, XPert, Creative Commons Search, and YouTube sources to serve those who have different learning styles. However, the existing OERs in Thailand provided the contents related to the Thai culture and heritage, and categorized the materials in academic levels, in which most contents are not relevant to the needs of graduate students. Since the academic English OER for higher education has never been established before, the categorization of sort is essential. The core emphasis on the academic English OER development to maintain, distribute and share educational materials, and ensure that the materials are used 'as is' without alteration (Wiley, 2000) is always considered.

The results of this study show that Thai students attending international programs in various high ranking universities require advanced English writing, speaking and presenting skills, however; not all of the students have the appropriate English communication levels. This reflects the urgent need to provide appropriate English training, courses, or resources as a platform for all students attending international programs to access in order for them to have self-training. The developed academic English OER can be the alternative route (Fallows, 2000) for self-study and the self-evaluation in order to be beneficial as suggested by experts. Some university lecturers argued that the regular OER may not be so useful as it is not categorized into useful subject matter and content is not verified by experts. Therefore, this academic English OER development has English experts reviewing the materials, content and credentials of each link prior to the development process.

This study aimed to provide academic English OER vaults that are accessible, free to use, open to all; and verified by qualified university professors for the content and the sources as suggested by Atkins et al. (2007). Therefore, the attempt to provide assistance at both ends was to create a vault of reliable English academic skills as a reservoir for the students to utilize in their own time. The developed academic English OER makes it easy to link to source, open resources repository, link to license, CC licenses; which make reuse, reproduce, or recreate even easier as recommended by Fallows (2000) and Tuomi (2001). Therefore, the emphasis is on the ability to acknowledge the resources, and avoid plagiarism as one of the most crucial skills that all graduate students must possess. Additionally, based on the in-depth interviews with the lecturers, all submitted academic papers must meet all the criteria, and also be aware of those baiting journals; the links are included in the academic English OER as well.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The process of the academic English OER development is of three tiers. Firstly, the questionnaire survey was used to study the needs for content from lecturers and graduate students. Secondly, the content was analyzed and categorized into subject matters. The researcher gathered the content from the worldwide OER and provided the links to the content for experts to verify. Lastly, the academic English OER was developed accordingly and English experts reviewed the contents and relevancy and provided feedback for the revision prior to establishing the academic English OER website that contains all the materials which experts reviewed.

Based on the result of the survey, students' self-examining on their own English communication skills was investigated using questionnaire survey. Table 1 showed that the necessity of such skills are a must, for example; the ability to acknowledge the resources; to provide proper citations; and to avoid publishing manuscripts in Beall's lists. In addition, the in-depth interviews revealed that the most significant issue that all

lecturers are concerned with is plagiarism. Since most students were not aware of the questionable scholarly open-access publishers in Beall's list as shown in Table 1, students must avoid submitting the manuscript to questionable publishers ($\bar{X} = 4.23$). Besides, the issues of improper use of citations and paraphrase are also one of the major problems most students encounter according to the result of the interviews. The suggestion derived from the study is to develop other relevant OER that cover the needs of the graduate students in other criteria and update as often as possible.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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Table 1 International program students and lecturers rated English communication skills needed to be successful in international higher education programs

Academic English for Graduate Education	Graduate students (n= 26)		Lecturers (n = 22)	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Writing Skills				
Ability to write academic papers	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to use appropriate words or vocabulary	5.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Ability to acknowledge the resources and provide proper citations	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to provide appropriate references using APA or other relevant formats	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to use English grammar appropriately	5.00	0.00	3.91	0.29
Ability to use quotation	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to paraphrase and avoid Plagiarism	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Total	5.00	0.00	4.70	0.04
Submitting manuscripts				
Ability to choose appropriate journals to publish manuscripts	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to avoid publishing manuscripts in Beale's lists	4.23	0.43	5.00	0.00
Ability to follow journals' guidelines for drafting manuscripts	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Ability to use appropriate language	4.23	0.43	3.91	0.29
Total	4.62	0.21	4.73	0.07
Presentation Skills				
Ability to speak with appropriate English accent & pronunciation	4.23	0.43	4.09	0.29
Ability to use non-verbal communication	3.62	0.50	4.09	0.29
Ability to use appropriate body language	3.62	0.50	4.09	0.29
Ability to use PowerPoint or other presentation tools	5.00	0.00	5.00	.00
Ability to use appropriate verbal communication	5.00	.00	5.00	.00
Total	4.29	.25	4.45	0.09
Listening Skills				
Ability to share and express opinions with classmates	4.23	0.43	4.00	0.00
Ability to demonstrate appropriate thinking skills	3.62	0.50	4.00	0.00
Ability to analyze messages	5.00	0.00	4.09	0.29
Total	4.28	0.15	4.03	0.10
Average score of all attributes	4.58	0.10	4.54	0.04

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