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The Development of Business English Speaking for Communication Course for Business English Students at Three Rajabhat Universities in Southern Thailand

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were to: 1) investigate the English speaking for communication abilities needed for business English students; 2) develop and examine the effectiveness of the business English speaking for communication course; and 3) examine and compare the business English students' speaking abilities before and after implementation. This research used quasi-experimental method consisting of two phases: course development and course implementation. To develop the course, needs analysis was conducted based on the modified Oliva Model using the key informants: interviews with 24 experts and questionnaire survey with 132 business English students from Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University (NSTRU), Songkhla Rajabhat University, and Suratthani Rajabhat University. The instruments consisting of self-checklists, teacher and students' logs, the end of the course evaluation forms, semi-structured interviews, Business English speaking for communication instructional package, and the English oral test and scoring rubrics. The content validity was proven by IOC results. Then 32 third-year business English students at NSTRU obtained by cluster random sampling for course implementation. The results indicated that: 1) Students needed to be able to speak about the important topics in business, speak the appropriate language functions in the business topics, and speak with the pronounce sounds correctly and clearly, use varied and correct vocabulary, consistently use correct grammatical structure ,and use gestures appropriately; 2) The course development was design based on the theory of Backward design, the instructional process was based on scaffolding approach, and the assessment based on the concept of multiple assessments. The course was verified by experts and pilot study. The effectiveness of the instructional packages were 78/80 in cognitive domain and 80/80 in affective domain; and 3) The business English students' speaking abilities according to the results of posttest scores were statistically and significantly higher than the pretest scores at the level .05.

Keywords: Course development and implementation; Survey of Needs for Business English; Business English Speaking for Communication Course; Business English Students; Three Rajabhat Universities in Southern Thailand

Introduction

In the world of business, oral communication is one of the skills that business practitioners need to possess (Kruckeberg, 2018) Monagehan (2019) explained that oral communication was an important task to enable business personnel to build and maintain the organization's image. In addition, English oral skills were reported as the most wanted and needed for communication of business English students (Phonsakorn, 2020).

Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University (NSTRU) and most of Rajabhat universities realize the significance of English to their students' future. One of the university policies is to equip the students with the ability to use English to communicate in the real world. Language Center of NSTRU reported that speaking ability of students, including students' knowledge and skills of business English speaking for communication was the weakest ability compared with other

language abilities (Phanit, 2019). Moreover, the committees of Quality Assurance in academic year, 2019 submitted official request to Rajabhat English business teachers for urgent enhancement of the students' business English speaking skills, for the business English programs of three Rajabhat universities in Southern Thailand especially third year students who have to be well prepared before their graduation in their fourth year of study, the time they enter the workforce or becoming trainees in the job market.

Therefore, this study aimed to study the needs for Business English in the business sector of Southern Thailand, and to develop English speaking for communication course for business English students. The developed course was thus expected to equip business English students with English speaking abilities so that they would be able to have more opportunities in business job employment.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the English speaking for communication abilities needed for business English students; 2) to develop and examine the effectiveness of the business English speaking for communication course; and 3) to examine and compare the business English students' speaking abilities before and after implementation the developed course.

Methods

Research Methodology: This research was a quasi-experimental study. The study consists of two phases. The first one was course development and the second one was course implementation and evaluation.

Phase1Course Development: The three steps performed during this phase were:

Step1 Needs Survey and Analysis: The first step was survey of the needs and problems in business English. The purposive sampling technique was used to obtain participants for the needs analysis in this study consisting of 2 groups i.e. (1) the two main expert groups of experienced business English teachers and entrepreneurs 12 in each, the first 12 expert group was for preliminary interview, and the second 12 expert group was for content valid test; and (2) business English students consisting of 132 third year students and fourth year students from three Rajabhat Universities in Southern Thailand, namely, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University (NSTRU), Songkhla Rajabhat University (SKRU), and Suratthani Rajabhat University (SRU), obtained by purposive sampling.

-Data collection: First, literature concerning needs for business English speaking was reviewed. Next, a preliminary interview was conducted with the first group of 12 experts who were experienced business English teachers and business entrepreneurs from the South of Thailand. Then the data from the preliminary interview was used to construct a proposed list of needs in business English speaking for communication for business students and to construct the interview the interview form for content valid test. The results from previous step provided information for the researcher to develop the course on business English speaking for communication for business English students.

Step2 Course development: This step was to interpret, analize, and synthesize the information obtained from step one as mentioned above to design and develop the course which includes creating course assessment, instructional plan, instructional development as well as materials assessment.

Step3 Pilot study: Evaluation of the developed course: The developed business English course was did pilot test and the experts' validation and evaluation of the course materials were collected for minor course materials adjustment. With the experts' approval, the business English speaking course was implemented for Phase II, which is the main study.

Phase 2: Main Study

Step1 Implementing the course: The actual course was implemented for 15 sessions: the instruction covered 12 sessions and 3 sessions for in-class pretest, in-class midterm and final examinations. That was altogether 40 hours of instruction (200 minutes per one session).The learner participants for course implementation consisted of 32 third year business English students at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University by purposive sampling technique. They were required to take this course as part of their program. The Instruments of this step were the developed course lesson plans. Twelve session course lesson plans were constructed based on the results of the questionnaire survey with the students.

Step2 Evaluating the course: This stage is to evaluate the effectiveness of the course both quantitatively and qualitatively. A single group pretest-posttest design was employed for its experimental methods aiming to investigate the effects of the course on the participants' abilities of business English speaking for communication for business English students and their views towards the course. After the main study, the effectiveness of the course was evaluated. Instruments for course evaluation included a pre and post oral performance test, self-evaluation checklists, the end of course evaluation, the end of the course interviews, also teacher's logs and students' logs were used to evaluate the course effectiveness.

-Data collection: Quantitative data were obtained from the oral performance tests, self-checklists and the end of course evaluation. For qualitative data were collected via students' logs, the teacher's logs and interviews for additional insights. Participants were asked to complete the student's log after finishing each unit of lessons and so were the teacher of the course when they completed the teacher's logs at the end of each class session. All of the learner participants were asked to participate in the end of the course interview.

- Data Analysis For quantitative data, single group t-test analyses were used to compare the mean scores of the pretest and posttest, in class self-checklists and the self-checklist at the end of the course. Then, the t-test results of pre, posttest gain scores were calculated to prove whether the participants in the study had higher scores in their oral posttest at a significant level ($p<.05$). The gained scores of the pretest and the posttest were calculated to find the effect size. Concerning the results from the end of the course evaluation, Mean and single sample t-test were used to analyze the data. For qualitative data, the information from the students' logs, the

teacher's logs and interviews was studied and analyzed using content analysis for additional insights into the study.

Results

Needs Analysis: The findings from the modified Oliva Model (Oliva 2009) revealed that the expected outcomes of the research on the needs and problems in business English speaking for communication of business English students to enhance their English speaking ability were 1) students would be able to talk about the topics that related with the business topics: job application, the company, import-export, shipping, marketing, advertisement, sale, and the international trade that are needed for entering a business job, 2) students would be able to speak the appropriate language function in the business topics, and 3) students would be able to use some proper communicative to help them when facing some difficult or problematic questions related to business topics. The results of the questionnaire survey indicated that business English students at NSTRU, SKRU, and SSRU rated their current speaking abilities quite low. They also wanted and needed all of these three expected outcomes to be included in their Business English Speaking course.

Course Development: In response to the research question 2 “How can we develop a business English speaking for communication course to enhance the business English students’ speaking ability?”. The needed business English speaking abilities for business English students were listed and the top three ones were selected to be the learning objectives for the course. Then the four frameworks were developed and applied in the process of developing the course. The first one was the framework for developing the business English speaking for communication course, which was designed and adapted based on the principle of the Backward Design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2006; and Richards, 2019), and the steps in finding out English abilities needed in business workplace designed by Sujana (2015). The assessment plan was the second framework which illustrated how the learner participants were assessed. The third framework was a framework for developing the business English oral test based on LSP testing theory of Douglas’s (2000). The last framework was a framework for designing the instructional and learning plan of the business English speaking for communication course for business English students based on the theory of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding and stages of instructional process of Thornbury (2008) and Brown and Nation (2009). All of these four frameworks were used as the blueprint to develop the Business English Speaking for Communication Course for business English students.

Course Implementation: The course was offered for 32 business English students at NSTRU as the participants in the main study in the second semester of academic year 2020, for the duration of 15 sessions in 50 hours.

In response to the research question 3 “How effective is the developed course in increasing speaking ability?”, both quantitative and qualitative data from several instruments were been collected and analyzed. The quantitative data were based on the course material evaluation by

the experts, the students' total pretest and posttest gain scores, the results of the self-checklists and the end of the course questionnaire survey as well as qualitative findings of the students' opinions. All of the findings corresponded to this research question as illustrated below:

1) The course material evaluation by the experts, after the course plan was designed, three experts in the field were invited to validate and evaluate the proposed course plan. The results of the evaluation revealed that the lesson plans and the materials were valid as follows:

Table 1: The effectiveness of both the efficiency of the process and product

Criterion /Domain	Number of students	E1 (Efficiency of Process)	E2 (Efficiency of Product)
Cognitive domain	32	78	80
Affective domain		80	80

The results of the implementation were then analyzed according to the effectiveness both the efficiency of the process and product were 78/80 in cognitive domain and 80/80 in affective domain. These results were showed that they met the standard criterion which was set at the beginning and there were the effectiveness reconfirming with the pilot study before.

2) The students' posttest scores were significantly higher than the pretest scores. The significant improvement of the students' performances of the needed speaking abilities with a large effect showed that the cognitive criteria were achieved as follows:

Table 2: The business English speaking test; Paired samples test (t-test) and effect size

	Min	Max	Paired Differences				
			\bar{x}	S.D.	t-test	p-value	g
Pretest	1.00	3.00	1.62	0.59	16.55*	0.00	2.76
Posttest	2.00	4.00	3.00	3.00			
Posttest-Pretest				1.37			

* $p<0.05$

The results from the Table revealed that the t-test was 16.55 indicating that participants in the study had higher scores in their business English speaking posttest than in the pretest at the statistically significant level ($p<0.05$). According to Cohen (1988), the values of the effect-size were used for the interpretation in terms of the correlation between an effect (the business English speaking for communication course) and the dependent variable (the participants' improvements in their business English speaking abilities). Table 2 indicated that there was significant improvement in the participants' performance of the needed speaking abilities in business English speaking for communication (pretest $\bar{x} = 1.62$ and posttest $\bar{x} = 3.00$) with the considerably large effect size of 2.76. The significant improvement of the students' performances of the needed speaking abilities with a large effect shows that the cognitive criteria were achieved.

3) The results of the self-checklists were taken on the first day and the last day of the class for pre and post test were gained to analyse and qualitative findings based on the students' opinions rating of business English speaking for communication, English learning and their level of abilities in English speaking communication for business jobs before and after the course implementation. The results from calculating the effect size indicated a large effect for every item on the checklists, thus revealing the significant improvement of the students' opinions of their needed business English speaking abilities as follows:

Table 3: Paired-samples t-test of the self-checklists before and after the course implementation and the effect size

Topic	Test	\bar{x}	S.D.	SE	t	p-value	g
General opinions about English and learning English	Posttest-pretest	0.26	0.42	0.73	3.95*	0.00	0.80
Opinions about abilities in business English speaking for communication	Posttest	0.56	0.54	0.87	6.39*	0.00	1.50
Self-assessment of the needed abilities in business English speaking for communication in business jobs	Posttest	1.78	0.76	0.13	13.62*	0.00	2.70

*p<0.05

The results from t-test indicated that participants in the study had a more positive opinion about significance of English learning and business English speaking abilities for communication. The self-assessment also indicates that their self-checklist before the course implementation at a significant level (p<0.05). The results from calculating the effect size indicate a large effect for every item on the checklists. This means reveal the significant improvement of the students' opinions of their needed business English speaking abilities with a large effect. This means that these affective criteria were achieved.

Discussions

The factors were influenced the improvement of the students' performances of the needed business English speaking abilities based on the findings from the post-test that appears that the students' performances of the needed business English speaking abilities significantly improved. The reasons are the fact that the course was constructed to serve the specific needs of these learners and this motivates them and enables them to be able to concentrate on their learning in order to achieve the needed business English speaking abilities. As the results of the end of the course survey, the high mean indicates that the course responded to the needs of the students. The same results were revealed in the interview at the end of the course. All of the learner participants shared the same comment during the interview stating that the course was effective because it was appropriate, practical and served their needs. The results from this study confirm that the idea of needs analysis, to gather as much information about the needs and

problems of participants is a key and a vital step for a successful ESP course design. According with, Vasavakul (2006) integrated relevant theories of needs analysis, adult learners, social constructivism, competency based approach and ESP to create her own framework for developing the Business English Oral Communication (BEOC) course for customer-services staff in international banks in Thailand. Moreover, the students were given a lot of opportunities to practice their business English speaking abilities. Most of the class sessions were dedicated to activities that allowed the students to repeatedly practice the targeted business English speaking abilities. A variety of activities in each class were designed to make sure that every student was able to practice the business English speaking abilities on their own and with their peers. It can be concluded that heavy emphasis on practicing each competency through various activities has great impact on significant improvement.

The factors influenced the improvement of the student's opinions towards their needed abilities as seen from their self-assessment of the self-checklists. In this study, the results of the in-class self-assessment showed that most of the students rated their second in-class performance higher than their first in-class performance. The results found their gains in self-assessment before and after the course implementation, indicating that most students felt that they had made a progress. Doing the self-assessment regularly made the students realize their progress resulting in the improvement of the students' opinions of the needed business English speaking abilities. Lewis (2016) provides a consistent comment by stating that self-assessment was a useful tool in encouraging learners to be more involved in planning their own learning, reflecting their progress as a means to check if learners were meeting their needs.

The factors influencing positive opinions toward the teaching and learning process and the overall course were reported that students' opinions were very high. The students found that the lessons were useful and practical for fulfilling their future needs in employment. The students were satisfied with the course because the content of the course was applicable to real life. Also, the learners realized the course appropriateness as the effective instructional method for a large class. By arranging effective group-work and pair-work activities, nobody in the class was left out. The teachers were able to lead a big class by having all students practice on their own with their partners while the teacher was monitoring each group. In communicative based classrooms where emphasis should be put on heavy practice, this method allows the students to have great opportunities of practicing the needed business English speaking abilities within constraints of time and the large class size. Moreover, the result of the end-of-the course questionnaire survey indicated high means for the performance-based assessment using criterion referenced. These assessment types were contrary to the traditional student assessment which relied on paper and pencil tests. The student participants felt that this kind of assessment was fair and meaningful. As shown in the improvement of the students' performances of the needed business English speaking abilities, and their satisfaction toward the teaching and learning process, these were the reasons why the students had very positive opinions toward the entire course.

Recommendations

Although the business English speaking for communication course was designed for Business English program at three Rajabhat Universities in Southern Thailand, the future study can be conducted using other larger groups of Business English program or learners who desire to enlarge or develop their business English speaking in other institutions in Thailand. Moreover, further studies should be undertaken to construct business English speaking for communication course on other abilities such as reading, listening, or writing. Researchers could apply the business English speaking for communication course to develop students' language abilities in other English for specific purpose course such as in tourism or service industry.

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