

The Development of English Skills of English Major Students to Communicate with Tourists about Buddhism and Culture at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to study the problems of the English major students communicating in English with foreign tourists, the ways they solved the problems and the guidelines to develop their English competency; and how they developed the English competency about Buddhism and Culture of selected English major students. The experimental instruments were questionnaires; five learning activity plans (Fish bone diagram; PRA; Study-trips at Suandok temple, Phrasingh temple, and Chiang Man temple; Attendance of Monk Chat activity; and focus group discussion) and tests about Buddhism and Culture. The results showed that; 1) English major students had problems using English with foreign tourists in all four skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading at the medium level ($\bar{X} = 3.13$) as relatively follows: listening (3.19), speaking (3.16), writing (3.10), and reading (3.09); when students had problems in English communication, they seek other people with competency in English for help, and most English major students would like to develop their English competency by attending the training courses provided by the university.; 2) The result of English learning activity about Buddhism and Culture of English major students was higher than before participating in the activities with statistic significance at 0.01. The average scores of English major students before participating in the activities were at 23.70 and at 41.75 after participating in the activities, so their English competency about Buddhism and Culture increased to 18.05. All of the students were satisfied with the teaching plans provided by their researcher at the highest level ($X = 4.30$). In conclusion, the organizing of the participatory learning process could develop English competency about Buddhism and Culture of the selected English major students, especially their listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: Development of English skills; Tourists; English major students;
Tour about Buddhism and Culture.

Introduction

The tourism industry is one of Thailand's most important sources of incomes. In the national master plan of the tourism industry 2001-2010, the government planned that Thailand should become the leader of tourism in Asia and to set as the final goal in becoming the world class destination for tourism. Therefore, the government tried to promote the communities to have their own Substantial Tourism (Triwicha, 2011). The municipality administrations, village leaders and people in each community have to be ready to give services and preserve the natural resources and their own identities (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2001). One of the most interesting destinations for foreign tourists are Buddhist temples. Buddhist temples are the center of architectural arts, mural painting, and tradition and cultural learning (The Report of Tourist Statistics in Thailand 2001). Tourists can learn many things from the Buddhist temples such as the Buddhist arts and mural painting in the ordination hall (Ubosot), the assembly hall (Vihan), Buddha images, pagoda (Chedi) etc., so Buddhist temples are considered to be worthy of visiting.

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) is a Buddhist institution, founded by His Majesty King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn, the Great) with the purpose of providing higher education to Buddhist monks and laity. MCU has its four missions as follows: 1) to produce and develop its graduates; 2) to conduct research that develops the body of knowledge and Buddhist academics; 3) to promote Buddhism and academic services for society; and 4) to promote and develop learning resources for preserving arts and culture suitable for studying (MCU, Chiang Mai Campus, 2012). Both monks and lay students who study in English major at MCU need to know and understand in depth about Buddhism and Culture. Whenever foreign tourists visit the temples, English major students should be good hosts to explain the main teaching of the

Buddha and/or the important Buddha's teachings and to answer the tourists' questions correctly. Then the tourists can understand about Buddhism and culture clearly. This is another way to support and to propagate Buddhism. Moreover, English major students can improve their English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to communicate with foreign tourists. Furthermore, it helps to promote the Buddhist and cultural aspects of Thai tourism which the foreigners are so interested in. However, some of the monks and lay students who study in English major at MCU, Chiang Mai campus still have problems to communicate with foreign tourists about Buddhism and Culture, for example, the details about Buddhism, the ordination hall (Ubosot), the assembly hall (Vihan), and the colour of the monks' robes etc. It is a great shame that the students at the Buddhist universities cannot answer these questions satisfactorily. In addition, students cannot answer the questions of foreign tourists clearly and effectively. The researcher, therefore, has studied the development of English skills to communicate with tourists about Buddhism and Culture: a case study of English major students, MCU, Chiang Mai campus.

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the problems of the English major students communicating in English to foreign tourists, the ways they solved the problems and the guidelines to develop their English competency; and 2) to develop the English competency about Buddhism and Culture of selected English major students.

Research Hypothesis

Students' English skills development to communicate with tourists about Buddhism and Culture will be higher than before they will attend the Buddhist and cultural training activities.

Methods

This research employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The population of this study was 250 English major students (1st-4th year) in the academic year 2013 at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai campus. The research tools that were used in data collection were 1) questionnaires, 2) Buddhist and cultural test, and 3) five teaching plans which were checked and approved by three experts. The researcher followed the methodologies:

1) The researcher distributed 250 questionnaires to study the problems of the English major students communicating English to foreign tourists, the ways that they solved the problems, and the guidelines to develop their English competency.

2) The researcher chose 40 samples of English major students (1st-4th year) based on their lack of Buddhist and cultural knowledge. They were tested (pre-test) with the Buddhist and cultural test (50 questions and 50 scores).

3) The 40 students were trained about Buddhism and Culture with five teaching plans namely: 1) Fish bone diagram: students knew the exact problems of English usage to communicate with foreign tourists about Buddhism and Culture and the ways in which they solved the problems.; 2) PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal): students understood and reviewed the English usage to communicate with foreign tourists about Buddhism and Culture.; 3) Study-trip: students learned about the history and architectural styles of the assembly halls (Vihan), pagodas (Chedi), ordination halls (Ubosot), Buddhist scripture halls (Hortrai) and reliquary of Northern family at Suandok, Phrasingh, and Chiang Man temples from the resource persons and their own direct experiences (Experiential Learning).; 4) Monk Chat: students attended the Monk Chat

programme for three days to talk and share their knowledge about Buddhism and Culture with foreign tourists.; 5) Focus Group Discussion: students showed, shared, and summarised what they had learnt and trained from the teaching plans provided by their researcher relating to Buddhist and cultural aspects when communicating in English to foreign tourists. Finally, 40 students were retested (post-test) with the same Buddhist and cultural test (50 questions and 50 scores).

Data Analysis: the demographic information was analyzed and descriptive statistic of frequencies, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to measure the problems of the English major students communicating in English to foreign tourists, the ways that they solved the problems, and the guidelines to develop their English competency. The paired-samples t-Test were used to compare the Buddhist and cultural test.

Results

Information about the Respondents:

The findings showed that the majority of respondents were monks and most of them aged between 20-24 years old. The majority of the respondents were Thai followed by Myanmar, Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Bangladeshi, and others. Most of them lived in Muang Chiang Mai and they were in the 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year students respectively. They reported that they used to communicate with foreign tourists, but 8.0% of respondents never had.

Responses to the problems, ways students solved the problems, and needs for English Skills Development of English Major Students, MCU Chiang Mai campus

In the first part, the respondents reported that they could not sum up what the foreign tourists spoke to them about. This was most difficult aspect for them relating to listening problems. They could not interview and discuss the given topics with the foreign tourists due to their lack of speaking ability. This was the most difficult aspect for them relating to their speaking problem. They could not read and give related examples to discuss with the foreign tourists. This was the most difficult aspect for them relating to reading. They could not write 100-150 words on the Buddhist and cultural articles. This was the most difficult aspect in relation to their writing.

In the second part, the respondents suggested the ways students often solved the problems when they communicated with the foreign tourists. In the listening problem, they requested the foreign tourists to repeat the sentences and to speak slowly. In the speaking problem, they asked their seniors and teachers to answer the questions instead of them. In the reading problem, they requested the others who already had competency in reading English to help and sometimes to check the unknown words in the dictionary. In the writing problem, they asked the others who can write the short answers to help.

In the third part, the respondents suggested their needs for English skills development that 1) the English major should provide students with the English training courses 2) the students should attend the Monk Chat activity and 3) the students should often practice their English with foreigners.

Result of Hypothesis Testing

The average post-test scores on the Buddhist and cultural test of the selected students was higher than the pre-test scores after they had attended the Buddhist and cultural training activities, so the hypothesis was found to be significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

Discussions

The discussions were based on the objectives of this study as follows.

1. The problems of English major students, MCU Chiang Mai campus to communicate with the foreign tourists: They reported that they have four English skill problems at the medium level (3.13) as follows: listening (3.19), speaking (3.16), writing (3.10), and reading (3.09) respectively. Some of the students reported that they still could not understand and communicate with the foreign tourists well. Some said that many foreign tourists spoke English so fast, so they could not understand it well. Some also said that they could not talk with the foreign tourists well because of their lack of vocabulary and they could not speak complete, long or complex sentences. Moreover, some reported that they could read only some words and they could not translate the complete sentences. They also needed to read some sentences again and again. In addition, some of the students reported that they could not write some of the vocabulary and they were not sure about spelling some words. They could not write complete sentences or correct grammatical sentences. Therefore, the researcher created the teaching plans to develop the English skills of students which focused on listening and speaking. Consequently, the researcher found that the students improved their English because they paid more attention to practice. If they had

any problems while they were talking with the foreign tourists, they noted the problems down. Then, they consulted with the researcher immediately, so the researcher knew their problems and helped to resolve them. Moreover, the researcher always assigned the students to recite and pronounce the Buddhist and cultural vocabularies. Students also must practice to pronounce examples of Buddhist and cultural sentences. These findings were supported by Phra Yutthaphong's research (2006) which revealed that student monks still had English problems when communicating with tourists. Most of the student monks could communicate with tourists because they learnt English. However, they still used the wrong sentences or incorrect grammar structure because this was a live and continued conversation, they could understand each other well.

2. The English skill development of English major students to communicate with the foreign tourists: they suggested that MCU Chiang Mai campus can help them to improve their English skill by providing English training activities and they themselves must regularly attend the Monk Chat program, so the researcher provided students with five English teaching plans about Buddhism and Culture (Fish bone diagram, PRA, Study-trip, Monk Chat, and Focus Group Discussion). Consequently, the students could learn English about Buddhism and Culture both through implicit and explicit learning. To reaffirm this, Bialystok (Bialystok, 1981) states that the second language can be learnt by both the implicit and explicit learning. She believes that through learning by doing or practicing can make learners can absorb the explicit knowledge which is automatically developed into implicit knowledge. The implicit knowledge can be also learnt by the informal learning, so learners can learn the second language through their experiences. Therefore, the researcher tried to create the teaching plans to encourage and support the English major students to improve their English about Buddhism and Culture. They can learn by practicing English from direct experience, and they have more confidence in

speaking English and telling their opinions to the foreign tourists. They also have more motivation to communicate with the foreign tourists. As the result, the English major students can improve their English about Buddhism and Culture well than before. It is in accordance with Dulay and Burt as cited in research (Rueangmanee, 2006) which mentioned that the affective filter hypothesis can promote learners to improve the second language learning quickly. Moreover, if learners have a good self-confidence and self-image, they will learn the second language with greater ease.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the organizing of the participatory learning process could develop English competency about Buddhism and Culture of the selected English major students, especially their listening and speaking skills. Consequently, students have English competency about Buddhism and Culture to communicate with tourists that was higher than before they had attended the Buddhist and cultural training activities. In addition, these training activities provided students to learn English about Buddhism and Culture through their interest, motivation, and direct experience, so students have opportunity to speak English and to explain what they have learned with tourists effectively and with confidence. Moreover, they can apply what they have learned about Buddhism and Culture in their daily life. Therefore, the findings will be as a guideline for teachers and students in developing and improving their English skills about Buddhism and Culture to communicate with tourists.

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