



*Full Length Research Paper*

# Focus on Thai learners of English: Their self-reports about foreign language learning

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**Current research on English instruction in Thailand has pointed towards the need to create learner-sensitive classroom environments. This study was carried out in order to understand the extent to which learner-centred embedded syllabus influenced Thai adult learners' English language development, speaking ability in particular. Qualitative analysis of the data obtained from an open-ended questionnaire, interviews, observation, and students' scores indicated that the students notably develop their speaking skills. Specifically, their feelings towards English changed to positive, they developed self-independence in learning, confidence to speak and courage to use the language in real life situations. The findings imply that the change in teaching approach from teacher-centred to learner-centred approach can impressively improve Thai students' language performance.**

**Keywords:** Teacher-centred approach, Learner-centred approach, Thai learners

## INTRODUCTION

Current educational practices in Thailand are still viewed like what was done two decades ago where classrooms were teacher-centred. Even though the Thai National Educational Act in 1999 has enforced a need to reform the traditional Thai education system from a teacher-centred to learner-centred approach, the old system still continues to persist (Thamraksa, 2003; Phungphol, 2005; Grubbs, Chaengploy & Worawong, 2009). This phenomenon also reflects in teaching and learning English language activities in the country especially in rural areas where the schools hardly find skilled and qualified English teachers. Phongphul (2005) quoted Wasi (1998) who regarded Thai education system as "pushing the country into disasters" because it does not prepare graduates to cope with the fast changing world of globalization. Some English teachers are still blind about the concept of Learner-Centredness (LC) partially because they are not properly trained on how to implement the concept into language classrooms (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf Jr. & Moni, 2006). Though most of them may have general ideas of what LC is all about but they still have trouble in applying such ideas in their teaching contexts. Some thought that teaching language content, vocabulary and grammar is more

important than teaching the way language is used or its functions as often seen in a communicative approach (Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006). They used to think that they have the most knowledge in class and thus ignore the importance of knowing their students as well as their needs and expectations about learning a new language. Teachers of this approach usually expect their students to trust and depend on them to gain the best of knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Thai students do not know how to be independent and autonomous learners. Consequently, they become unqualified graduates who lack critical thinking and necessary skills to meet market demands as asserted by a former secretary general of Thai Higher Education Commission Office (Daily News, 2011).

There is an urgent need to take the concept of learner-centeredness to a more practical approach where teaching activities do not just consider *what* to teach but to decide *how, when, where, and why* to teach the language in relation to learners. Learners should be considered in planning and designing a language curriculum in order to motivate them and allow them to fully engage in their learning process (Nunan, 1995). In addition, the activities should be interesting, meaningful

and relevant to their lives to promote high intrinsic motivation to learn. Nunan (1995) suggests five levels of learning process. First, learning goals and objectives should be made explicit to learners. Second, they choose learning goals from different alternatives. Third, they engage themselves in working towards the goals. Later, they create their own goals and objectives. Last, they link what they have learned with other language resources in real life and use the language in the real world.

Positive attitudes towards the language, good past learning experience, and productive learning community (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) can also raise students' interest and motivational level. Past learning experience seems to be the major factor which influences students' motivation in learning English in a foreign language context such as Thailand. To illustrate, three points should be mentioned here. First, the traditional way of waiting for knowledge from the only givers (teachers) which is still the practice of today is not compatible with the idea of independent learning (Dueraman, 2012). As a result, students lack planning and problem-solving skills and may have low motivation which can impede language skill development. Second, the contents of English language teaching in their primary and secondary schools mainly revolved around grammar and translation of reading texts. Some students were taught to memorise as many as vocabulary words as they can and thus learning the language. Some others thought that buying grammar books and memorise verb tenses by heart is the best way to improve English language skills. More often than not, their teachers would ask them to practice grammar exercise or translate reading texts into Thai language and neglected all other types of English language skills. Students were not given opportunities to use the language in context or practice it outside classrooms especially in the area of productive skills (writing and speaking). Third, the characteristics of English teachers who taught them in the past and their training experiences also influence the way students perceive learning the language. Skilled teachers are commonly found in higher levels of education especially in urban areas. In most primary and secondary schools in Thailand, English teachers do not have good command of English. It is therefore not surprising to hear that they choose to teach grammar because it does not require advanced language skills on the teachers' part. This can affect their feeling about the language and future attempts.

Thai teachers and students must be aware of the changing world which affects all spheres of human life including education. Learning is no longer confined to classroom territories as the world has become like a global village. There is a lot of information to learn from various sources such as printed media and online platforms. Students of this era should be able to maximize the use of available resources for learning

anytime and anywhere they are. They should be guided on how to be independent and autonomous learners in order to be able to live in this fast changing world. Nevertheless, Thai students are not trained up to this level as they will only read what is assigned by the teachers (Sitthitikul, 2010). It is hard to find them enjoy extra English reading activities out of their personal interests. Appropriate learning strategies are important in training them to become independent learners. Other factors like their experience of English language learning, perceptions towards learning a new language, needs and goals of learning it affect their choices of learning strategies and behaviours (Wenden, 1987) and thus create contextual variations (Horwitz, 2008). Each learning context is unique in itself. Therefore, learners' unique context should be considered in designing language contents and what to be done throughout the course. This allows a new contextual integration of teachers' skills, learners' contribution to the course, the materials used, and the real world to more learner-centred not merely stick to the teacher's fixed plan and direction. Subsequently, they will develop a sense of learning independence and autonomy which lead to life-long learning.

It is a real pity that in spite the new reform in English language teaching in Thailand and by all means the government has endeavoured to produce graduates of high English skills up to the international standard, yet such attempts yielded unsatisfactory results. How will they contribute to the development and growth of ASEAN community which is coming in the next two years when the main medium of communication is English if the failure continues to persist? There is an urgent need to empower Thai students and upgrade their skills especially English speaking skills. This study tries to explain the extent to which a new change in teaching approach to be more learner-centred enhance Thai adults learning English as a foreign language.

### **Objective of the study**

The present study is aimed at exploring Thai adult learners' perceptions towards a new approach of learning English in a course entitled "English Conversation" at Southern College of Technology, Thung Song, Nakhorn Si Thammarat, Thailand. The course incorporated 5 stages of learning process in the learner-centred approach as suggested by Nunan (1995). These stages are goal and content awareness, student involvement, intervention, creation of their own goals and objectives and learning using the language beyond classrooms. Specifically, this seeks to understand their general perception about learning English, feelings about the course, their self-assessment in terms of English

language development, approach to language tasks, and English language needs.

### Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Thai adult learners perceive learning English language?
2. How do these students evaluate their learning performance on the current course?
3. How do they use technology to assist their language learning?
4. What are their needs in relation to English language learning?

### Significance of the Study

There are several strategic and pedagogical implications emerge out of this study which will benefit Thai EFL students, teachers, English educators, and curriculum developers. First, the result of this study will inform Thai adult learners of English as well as their teachers on what is going on in English language classrooms in Thailand so that proper solutions can be given to students who need help. The results of this study should give language educators some explanations of how students make use of available technology to assist their language learning and whether they know how to make use of them at all. Also, findings gained from this study should be able to feature general English language background of adult learners at higher educational level which in turn will give some insights to English curriculum planners and teachers at primary and secondary levels.

### Research on Incorporating Learner-Centredness Approach in language Classrooms

Many years ago, teachers completely controlled everything in the teaching process which result in a disparity between what is taught and what should be learned (Ostler, 1980). Students from different programmes usually do not share the same interests. There are circumstances where students do not like the decisions about language teaching made by their teachers. This may result in reducing students' motivation to learn the language which leads to poor performance on examination. Ostler (1980) argued that university curriculum needs to be changed according to students' real needs. In response to this, Ostler conducted a study on students' assessments of both what academic skills they need in order to complete their studies and their self assessment of their success in using English for social and business purposes. Ostler found that graduate and

undergraduate students differed greatly in their academic needs. Due to the traditional way of teaching they received, they were unable to read complex academic materials and lack of confidence in using language in certain situations.

Few years after the birth of learner-centred approach, Barkhuizen (1998) conducted a qualitative study to explore learners' perceptions of EFL classroom teaching and learning activities in a South African context. Barkhuizen's participants were 200 students from grade 8-11 and their 5 English teachers. They were given writing, reading, language and oral activities as outlined in their syllabus. Later, they were asked to relate their thoughts about language learning experiences throughout the course in three interrelated aspects in order to determine their motivation towards learning a language: express their feelings, make judgment about the activities and predict about what they learn in class. They were first required to report whether they enjoy or have favourable feelings or attitudes towards the activities. Then, they were asked to evaluate the activities in relation to their own progress in learning and make judgment about its effectiveness. Besides, they were also asked to make prediction about the usefulness of the activities in relation to their future needs. An individual in-depth interview was also conducted with each of the five teachers while a group interview of six students was also conducted for each grade level. Barkhuizen (1998) found that students experienced high level of anxiety in doing oral activities. They were concerned about accuracy of what they said in class, aware of critical evaluation by their classmates when they perform, and thus did not enjoy the activities. With regards to summary writing activities, students reported that they were not taught and given much opportunities to practice but were asked to do in their examination. They also said that summary writing has no relevance to their future employment or education.

It worthy of note that Barkhuizen's study only attempted to explore students' perceptions towards learning and teaching activities whereby students did not take part in shaping the class such as setting goals or choosing topics that are interesting to them. It was the teacher who solely designed the course syllabus. Teacher-centredness still dominated the classroom. Thus, the findings indicated low level of motivation especially in speaking activities.

The idea of LC began to be an area of interest by English language education researchers in Thai context during early years of 21<sup>st</sup> century e.g. Phungphol (2005), Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006), Pawapatcharandom (2007), Grubbs et al. (2009), Chusanachoti (2009), Degang (2010), and Patanasorn (2011). Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006), among the early pioneers of LC research conducted a qualitative study to explore five Thai teachers' perceptions and their implementation of LC in

high schools. The study found that they were aware of their inadequate qualifications to teach English, lack of LC skills, and were confident to teach vocabulary and language structure only not interactive activities. Surprisingly, these teachers reported that LC is not suitable for Thai students as they perceived that LC is good for a more advanced learners. Later, Patanasorn (2011)'s study supports the findings of Nonkukhetkhong and her colleagues. Patanasorn (2011) confirms that English teachers in Thailand have misconception about LC though the new educational reform was introduced since 1999. As a result, the classroom practices were not designed according to learner-centred approach. This means that English education in Thailand remained unchanged regardless in the passage of time or global changes. Thai teachers need to be educated and trained on how to apply LC in English language classrooms so that they can use appropriate teaching strategies which will eventually benefit learners. Moreover, further research should be done in the area of teaching methods appropriate for Thai learners (Patanasorn, 2011).

Pawapatcharaudom (2007) also indicates that Thai students' learning experience is against LC approach. Pawapatcharaudom investigated 30 Thai undergraduates' English language problems and their learning strategies at the International Programme, Mahidon University in Thailand. Pawapatcharaudom's subjects were students who already passed their English proficiency exam as the entrance requirement for this programme. The data obtained from a questionnaire and Oxford (1990)'s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) indicated that Thai students have problems with writing skills the most and that students use learning strategies on the SILL at a medium frequency. To be more specific, the students reported that they encountered problems in learning the four skills of English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. With regards to listening skills, they said that they could not understand native speakers' tone of voice, customs, and attitudes. When they were asked to speak, they cannot express their ideas in English and felt uncomfortable with a native speaker instructor. They also said that they could not understand academic textbooks, could not get the main idea and summarise English texts. It is therefore, not surprising that they could not produce English essays or academic paper within a given time. When these students do not have confidence in the language, subsequently they feel ashamed about any possible outputs they would make, would avoid contact with English speaking environment, and finally start to develop negative attitudes toward learning the language as confirmed by the study.

Though Pawapatcharaudom's subjects were those who already passed university entrance examinations, such examinations usually test students' reading and grammar skills not writing or speaking. This can affect the

way they learn the language i.e. to focus only on receptive skills not on the use of language in its real contexts. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that Thai students are not able to write or speak in English. More research should be done to improve the situation and more attention should be given to productive skills. Pawapatcharaudom's study acts as a signal for other researchers in the field that students' lack of English language skills and appropriate strategies in learning were indicators of failure in acquiring a new language. Appropriate interventions should be given to them in order to achieve better learning outcomes.

Another similar study which focuses on a superficial level of LC was the one conducted by Grubbs et al. (2009). Grubbs et al. (2009) examined perceptions of Thai university students in Thailand in terms of their thought about a foundation English course currently enrolled, their current language ability, and their English teachers. These students had positive perceptions towards English and their teachers but not their own ability. Though having positive attitudes towards the language being learned is important, it does not guarantee learners to develop a sense of learner autonomy or independence necessary for language development. Thus, more emphasis should be on how to develop learners and foster life-long learning in them.

In the same vein, Degang (2010) has shown his interest to know more about Thai learners' motivation in learning English. Degang then conducted a quantitative study to identify 50 Thai Business majors' motivation at Assumption University in Thailand. Through a motivational survey adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, Degang found that students are equally instrumentally and integratively motivated to learn English. Degang's study however, just highlights the types of motivation in learning English of his subjects but did not explain why certain type of motivation occurs among his subjects and how this is relevant to the required approach, the LC approach to teaching the language.

The literature reviewed above points towards a need to practically adopt the LC approach in English instruction in Thailand. This study tries to explain the extent to which Thai students develop their English language skills given that they are taught using a newly created LC-embedded syllabus in a short period of time (one semester). Though not all, most past studies related to LC used a quantitative method whereby questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection. When learners are the main focus of LC approach, their voices regarding learning experience in the context should come from their own words. General presumptions about their learning behaviours and experience may provide part but not complete information related to their learning. In addition, students' feelings and thoughts cannot be quantified thus

interpretation based on numeric scale may distort the participants' real experience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative method of inquiry to explore whether incorporation of LC in a conversation class improves students' language skills in general and speaking skills in particular. The qualitative method is appropriate for a study that seeks to explain individual experience from their own perspectives not using pre-determined questions (Creswell, 2008).

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were all students who enrolled in the "English Conversation" course which carries three credits in semester 1/2011. There were 45 students in the class and all participated in the study. The course is one of the three English language requirement courses for all undergraduate students at Southern College of Technology, Thung Song, Thailand. The two other courses are "Integrated English Language Skills" and "English Reading and Writing." It was the only course offered at the college to develop students' English conversation and communication skills. It was taught by the researcher which allowed her to closely observe her students' learning behaviours from the very beginning of the class. The researcher created a new course syllabus which incorporated 5 stages of learning process as proposed by Nunan (1995, see Appendix A). This process included creating students' awareness of learning goals, having them to select goals from different alternatives, engaging them in the process of learning, creating their own goals, applying what they know to a larger context. The course was held one day a week (7 hours/day) and it lasted for a semester of two months.

The participants were mostly adults whose ages ranged from early 20s to early 50s. They were in their second year as part-time students majoring in Political Sciences at Southern College of Technology (SCT) in semester 1, academic year 2011. The selection of this group was based on the researcher's general perceptions that part-time students have poorer English skills when compared to the regular groups. The researcher was interested to find out whether poor Thai learners can be developed in an eight-week semester. The number of years which they have completely abandoned English before enrolling as SCT students ranged from 2 to 25 years. Regardless of the differences in their years of studying English, they all could not converse even using few basic English sentences. Thus, all are regarded as beginners of English.

### **Data Collection**

This study used four data collection methods: open-ended questionnaire, interviews, participant observation and students' scores for the course.

On the first day of the course, they were asked to take a speaking test to gauge their speaking proficiency. However, the whole class suggested that there should be no test or pre-test because they could not produce any intelligible English utterances either in the form of written or oral. They started to develop apprehension when asked to speak. Though two of them could converse with the researchers in English but such conversation was just for greeting and will end after one minute then they could not contribute further to the conversation. So there was no pre-speaking test to all the participants.

In order to know more about the participants in relation to their English language learning and development, they were required to answer open-ended questions in a questionnaire (see Appendix B). The questionnaire elicits their past English learning experience, attitudes towards English, their self-evaluation on the current speaking skill development during, the usefulness of technology to assist their language learning, and their needs to improve the language proficiency on the last day of the course. To obtain accurate meaning of information responded by the participants, they were asked to write their report in their language (Thai).

Informal one to one interviews were conducted with three volunteers from the participants to supplement the data obtained through open-ended questionnaire and to obtain data related to the current teaching and learning activities. They were conducted shortly after they submitted the questionnaire. The three guided questions used were:

- What do you think about English language?
- How were you taught English in the past?
- How do you perceive the current approach to learning English with that of the past?

To allow the volunteers freely express their ideas, the interviews were conducted in Thai. Then, the information obtained was summarized and recorded in Thai which was later given to all the interviewees for accuracy of the information.

Throughout the semester, the teacher researcher also observed her class and recorded both descriptive and reflective data related to the class and students' development. The students' scores for the course were also used to support the data collected from open-ended questionnaire and interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews were translated into English and then manually coded for

qualitative analysis. They were grouped into categories or themes with the use of diagrams and notes. Among the major themes were: students' past English experience, their awareness of importance of English, the usefulness of the current course, the role of technology, their special needs about English, and relevance of English in their daily lives. The analysis continues till saturation is achieved as suggested by Creswell (2008).

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1:

How do Thai adult learners perceive learning English language?

It is interesting to see that all students value the importance of English as an international language. They reported the usefulness of knowing and ability to use the language. Some view that *"everyone needs English to develop oneself and his country"* because it is the language of the world. They need it to communicate and exchange ideas with other people from other parts of the world in daily life and jobs. One student remarked that *"English is important because it can be useful for his future education and national development."* The prominent three objectives of learning English for them have been for *"social, professional and educational"* purposes respectively. However, their positive feelings towards the language just began to develop after enrolling the Conversation Course as noted by one student:

Before joining this class, I used to think that English is a boring subject. It is a language which is hard to read and write. But what I am experiencing now is something else. I feel that English is not difficult. This may be because I get a good teacher.

Throughout his past years of experiencing English, the student did not want to learn the language because it was not interesting and relevant to him as he had to study *"grammar rules"* and *"vocabulary"* words. Therefore, he and the friends did not know the reasons of learning the language (those roles). This made him think English is boring.

The findings on students' positive feeling as reported at the end of the course may be influenced by interventions given by the teacher at the beginning of the class about the importance of English. It is common to learn that Thai learners are afraid or anxious when it comes to the time for English lesson. From my twelve years of teaching experience, I sometimes encountered a problem where students who hate English skipped the class often. Considering this issue, in the first meeting in class, students were told that English will be soon used as a medium of communication not just with the far world from them but with other ASEAN community members

too which include Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, The Philippines, Myanmar, and Cambodia. I also emphasized in the class repeatedly that whether you like English or not, one day you will have to use it. The students then started to realize how importance English would be in the future.

The findings on students' perceptions towards the language indicate that there is a real mismatch between what was taught earlier in school life and what they expect about their ability in using the language. When grammar and translation of new English words to Thai were the only things they experienced, achieving such expectations is undoubtedly beyond their reach. This course did not just change their feelings about the language but it is also a means to close this gap. The creation of a new syllabus which required them to learn how to learn and use the language matches their preferences and needs resulting changes in their perceptions.

### Research Question 2:

How do these students evaluate their learning performance on the current course?

The second research question was aimed to understand students' feelings about the course, the teaching approach and evaluation of their own English language development. Data obtained from both questionnaire and interview showed that the students truly enjoyed the course and the communicative activities introduced in each lesson. They compared the current learning experience of English with that of their past. For example one student noted:

*I see the differences in me between before and now. Before I didn't know English, now I know and can use it. I could not speak before, now I can.*

Another student wrote:

*Before, I was afraid that I will make mistakes when I speak. Now, I feel confident because the focus is more on communication.*

They said it was their *"first time"* to be taught to use the language being learned to *"interact with others"* though they have learned it for many years since in their primary school. Some admitted that they never wanted to speak the language with anyone because they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes prior to joining the class.

The data also show that after attending the course, they felt being driven to be active and *"independent learners."* Many reported of their new strategies of learning as evident in the following statements:

*I use technology to help my learning to understand and create English conversations at the same time I know how to develop myself for future learning.*

*This course allows me to learn how to be effective learners and use language in real contexts.*

They could always search for more opportunities and practices about the use of English. They felt that they get improved much in their English language skills which include some “*ability to converse, read, listen, and write*” after enrolling in the course. They can now “*express their ideas, order food using correct English words.*”

This course truly introduced them to a new world of experiencing the language. They are now empowered to be language users and willing to communicate with foreigners and tourists in Thailand and felt certain that they will be “*able to help those tourists*” when needed. Some told that they learn more vocabulary words out of class practices via technology. Simultaneously, they also learn how to “*use technological tools*” because they thought that in the past they could not use all these tools as a result of the language barrier. One student remarked that “*learning English is not boring*” anymore.

Students’ reports on the improvement in their performance were consistent with the scores they obtained from the course. At the very start, none could communicate in English though they remember quite a number of vocabulary words but could not use them interactively. All students passed the requirement of the course which means they scored at least 50% of the total marks with some few obtained above 85%. It is almost unbelievable to know that these students learned so fast probably because they were excited to use the language first time throughout their life. They were also empowered by the researcher to try, produce and express as much as they can.

The findings on students’ negative evaluation about their English language skills before joining the course were consistent with those done by Barkhuizen (1998), Osler (1980), Pawapatcharandom (2007), and Grubbs et al. (2009). These researchers found that students showed high anxiety in doing oral activities because they were concern about accuracy. However, after the LC intervention, conflicting results emerged when students firmly reported that they were confident to use the language and able to communicate with foreigners in different situations. This proves that Thai students have potentials to develop themselves to be successful learners. Thus, Nunan (1995)’s contribution of the five stages in LC learning process as embedded in the course syllabus is very constructive (see Table 1).

The findings revealed there is a tremendous improvement in the students’ ability to use English in real life within eight weeks of the course. This implies that Thai students can achieve goals set in relation to language when appropriate interventions are given. When students who participated in the study just began to use and speak the language when enrolling the course, it also implies that their past experience and time given to English during their school life was nothing but futile as claimed by Phungphol (2005).

### Research Question 3:

How do Thai adult learners make use of technology to assist their language learning?

The students reported that the course allowed them to use technology to assist their English language learning in different ways. For example, they “*use computer and the Internet to look up the meanings of unfamiliar words, translate, listen to the pronunciation and check spelling.*” They also use the Internet to search for English conversation samples as to accomplish their learning goals and objectives set in class. Interestingly enough, one student clearly indicated the importance of “*using technology to assist learning outside class*” hours. They felt that they did not have to depend on teachers anymore regarding word meaning, pronunciation and word spelling as they used to in the past. They now develop better learning strategies to improve language skills via technology. However, one student admitted that his ability to use technology is still limited to few aspects of language area but not in a more advanced skills such as reading or sending some texts, news, or academic journals. He expressed that “*I can’t understand English*” so he did not make use of technology much as it is the language used for all types of technology.

It is the help of technology which made these students learn fast as they did not have to depend on the teacher. They started to appreciate technological tools which facilitate their learning both during and after class hours. At the same time, they also develop autonomy in improving the skills whereby they have to manage their own learning to achieve the goals. The process now moves from the burden of teaching to learning and discovery which is opposed to the traditional pattern.

### Research Question 4:

What are the needs of the Thai EFL adult learners of English?

The questionnaire and interview data revealed that these adult students had strong needs to develop their speaking skills. They think that speaking skills should be emphasized because it is more important than writing skills. Some students require that teachers should stress on correct word pronunciation. One student said that “*most Thais are shy and feel unconfident to speak English because they have unclear pronunciation, if I can pronounce words correctly, I will feel confident to use English.*” Since Thailand is known as one of the top world tourists’ destinations. Most of them think that the ability to speak English is important because “*there are many foreign tourists in Thailand.*” Having English speaking skills allows them to talk to those tourists. One student also remarked that “*speaking and listening skills should be emphasized especially learning to speak correct*”

Table 1: The LC Learning Process Designed for the Conversation Course

Day	8:30 – 11:50 am	13:10 – 16:30 pm
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Course Introduction</li> <li>- Setting goals and contents of the course</li> <li>- students find their speaking partners throughout the semester</li> <li>- write down their own goals and objectives together</li> <li>- present and submit their plans to the teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing an example of working towards learning goals</li> <li>- Watch video conversations in different situations: in a meeting, in an office, in a shop, in a hotel, at a restaurant.</li> <li>- Sorting out language functions from the watched Conversations e.g. introducing someone, asking for clarification</li> <li>- Write language forms used for each function e.g. - <i>This is ..... from .....</i> - <i>Excuse me, can you repeat that again please?</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> students watch one video conversation used in a situation that matches their goals and prepare the scripts before the next class meeting. They should prepare at least one video for each meeting.</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students have scripts of the watched video for the day.</li> <li>- Write functions of language used in the video.</li> <li>- List specific language forms used.</li> <li>- Create their own conversation</li> <li>- practice speaking it with partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practice speaking in a similar situation based on what they have created.</li> <li>- present what they have learned to the class.</li> <li>- Indicate problems encountered while learning the lesson</li> <li>- Feedback from teacher and class</li> <li>- teacher stress on pronunciation of difficult words newly discovered by students</li> </ul>
3-5	Repeat the same pattern as day 2 above	
6	<b>Individual Speaking Test</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- asking and answering questions related to students</li> <li>- expressing opinions about things using comparative and superlative adjectives</li> </ul>	
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students form a <b>group</b> of three to five</li> <li>- creating a group conversation in a situation of their own interest</li> <li>- study language forms and functions suitable for the context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- present their plans to the class</li> <li>- feedback from class</li> <li>- preparing for the conversation</li> <li>- practice speaking</li> </ul> <p><b>Homework:</b> videotape the group conversation and save into a CD file for submission</p>
8	Submit a video CD on group conversation	

*words related to travelling.*” Some few among them show interests in improving their other skills such as listening, reading and writing as they think it can be used to communicate in their daily lives. One student thinks that the ability to “*speak English can benefit their future jobs and further education.*”

It seems that these Thai EFL students believe that speaking and conversation are the most important skills of all. It is however, not surprising that these students who live in the rural area in Thailand where English is hardly spoken or heard unless with or among foreigners, would think that speaking skills should be emphasized. Other skills such as reading, and writing are considered unnecessary for this particular group of learners. For writing skills, these students think they are irrelevant in their lives though one student said that “*I want to improve speaking, listening and writing skills.*” In fact, we do not even know if these students truly understand the meaning of writing skills in English. They may not have past experiences in English writing because it is common for undergraduate students in Thailand to finish high school without being taught English writing.

English is an international language and the language of technology. It is true that by being able to speak the language, students can communicate with foreigners in their country though that is what the majority of this group wants. Nevertheless, we want to instill life-long learning in our students. When students do not see the importance of reading and writing skills, how can they access to available English resources. Even though teaching and learning English language can be broken into sub-skills, neglecting other aspects of the language may slow the process of acquiring the language as a whole.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that LC approach can be incorporated easily in English classrooms in Thailand which is opposed what was reported by English teachers in Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006)’s study. It seems that factors which impede Thai students’ English language development are those that relate to teachers and their teaching approach as claimed by Patanasorn (2011). To overcome this, they need to understand the new approach to teaching, the LC, and how to design appropriate learning contexts where students can develop their own learning strategies that

promote current and life-long learning (Phungphol, 2005). When these are ensured, Thailand will soon have graduates who are competent English speakers.

### Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study indicate that to Thai students need to be recognized and empowered in English classrooms. They especially learn fast and best when they are taught learning strategies which promote self-independent and life-long learning. Therefore, English teachers must consider them in designing materials and activities related to English instructions. Also, future instruction should not focus on memorization of single words but on their use in contexts through communicative activities. In addition, individuals who are in charge of national or regional development of English language teaching in the country should organize workshops to train English teachers regarding LC application in language classrooms. This helps to ensure the same teaching approach is used across the board.

### Limitation of the Study

There are few limitations of this study. First, it was only conducted with a group of adult learners who enrolled in English Conversation course, semester 1, academic year 2011 only. Any generalization of the findings should be made with caution. It is not the aim of qualitative research to generalize but rather to provide a descriptive and comprehensive explanation about what is happening in the context being studied. Educators who share similar contexts should carefully consider which area of the findings is suitable for their learners before putting it into practice. Second, it merely stresses on the importance of knowing more about learners but did not attempt to explain the teacher's characteristics or teacher-student interactions. Last, though the study did show students' development in their English language proficiency, it did not attempt to include information on specific language items students learned in such development. In other words, it merely report their holistic performance in the use of language and their self-evaluation of such performance but not what was said.

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**Appendix A****Course Syllabus****Course Code:** ENG201**Course Title:** English Conversation**Credit Hours:** 3**Session:** Semester 2/2011**Instructor:** Bayatee Dueraman**Course Description:**

Speaking and listening skills in different situations in daily life, expressing opinions, using more advanced sentences in speaking

**Objectives of course:**

The course is designed in order to promote independent learning in students. Learning strategies of setting goals, planning for what to learn, sharing and giving feedback are encouraged. Students should try to make contributions and commit themselves to communicative activities with the aim to convey messages. Any comprehensible outputs with small grammatical errors are considered acceptable for beginners. Thus, no assessment is made for grammar or language accuracy.

**Course Assessment:****a. Pair conversation: 60%**

- type of video chosen
- ability to identify language functions used in conversations
- ability to identify language forms used for each function
- ability to use language/communicate in a similar situation

**b. Individual speaking test: 25%****c. Group conversation: 15%**

- Intelligibility of the utterances
- signals to indicate turn-taking
- each member has equal contribution to the conversation

**Total 100%**

d. To pass the course, students should get at **least 50%** of the total scores.

## Appendix B

### Open-ended Questionnaire

#### Instruction

Please answer the following questions about yourself in relation to the current course "English Conversation."

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Years of learning English: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Years of abandoning English: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How were you taught English in the past?  
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5. What do you think about the importance of learning English?  
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6. What do you think about your English language development after enrolling the course?  
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7. How is technology relevant to your English language learning development?  
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8. How would you like to develop your English language skills further? Which areas?  
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