วารสารอิเล็กทรอนิกส์
ทางการศึกษา

การพัฒนาบทเรียนออนไลน์ตามแนวคิดการเรียนรู้ตามสถานการณ์และวิธีสอนอีเอสเอเพื่อเสริมสร้างความสามารถในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัย

Development of an Online Course Using Situated Learning and ESA Method to Enhance English Oral Communication Ability of University Administrative Staff

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บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นที่ใช้เป็นสื่อกลางเพื่อการสื่อสารในระดับอุดมศึกษาโดยเฉพาะหลักในสูตรนานาชาติ ซึ่งพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัยจะต้องใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสื่อสารกับคณาจารย์ นักศึกษาต่างชาติ และมหาวิทยาลัยคู่สัญญาได้ การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) ตรวจสอบประสิทธิภาพของบทเรียนออนไลน์ตามแนวคิดการเรียนรู้ตามสถานการณ์ (situated learning) และวิธีสอนอีเอสเอ (ESA method) เพื่อเสริมสร้างความสามารถในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัย และ (2) ศึกษาทัศนคติตของผู้เรียนต่อบทเรียนดังกล่าว ขอบเขตการศึกษาในครั้งนี้ใช้ประชากรตัวอย่างเป็นพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัย โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัย จำนวน 20 คน อายุตั้งแต่ 22–40 ปี ประกอบด้วยเพศชาย จำนวน 6 คน และเพศหญิง จำนวน 14 คน โดยเลือกวิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างตามความสะดวก ผลการศึกษาพบว่า 1) ความสามารถในการสื่อสารของพนักงานในมหาวิทยาลัยเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 หลังจากการเรียนบทเรียนออนไลน์ และ 2) บทเรียนนี้ยังส่งผลต่อทัศนคติทางบวกของผู้เรียนต่อวิธีการสอนร่วมกันทั้งสองวิธี ดังนั้นบทเรียนออนไลน์ที่ใช้การสอนร่วมกันทั้งสองวิธีนี้เป็นประโยชน์ต่อพนักงานมหาวิทยาลัยตามผลการวิจัย

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Abstract

Since English is the primary mode of communication at institutions of higher education that offer international programs, university administrative staff must be able to communicate in English with academic staff, international students, and partner universities. The purpose of this research is (1) to investigate the effectiveness of an online course that combines situated learning and ESA to improve oral communication skills and (2) to capture the perceptions of university administrative staff towards such a course. The participants were 20 university administrative staff, aged from 22 to 40 years old, 14 females and 6 males, at a public university in Thailand, selected by the convenience sampling method. The study employed one group pre-test and post-test design, using a pre-test, post-test and online journals from the participants to collect the data. The results indicated two major findings: 1) oral communication skills significantly improved after implementing the online course (p = .05), and 2) participants expressed mainly positive perceptions about the course. The study implies that an online course benefits university administrative staff.

Keywords: ESA method, online course, oral communication, situated learning

Introduction

English oral communication is a necessary skill in a variety of occupations, since it is the primary mode of communication and the worldwide *lingua franca* in today's corporate world (Nickerson, 2013). Businesses are increasingly requiring workers to communicate well in English (Anthony, 2018). Workers in the media, international relations, mass media, foreign travel, and educational institutions all need to communicate effectively in English (Crystal, 2012).

Higher educational institutions with international programs rely on effective English oral communication to accommodate international students and staff. English is required to communicate with those constituencies, since "English connects to internationalization" (Rose & McKinley, 2018). In other words, English becomes an additional language, even between students, academic staff, and administrative staff. In Thailand, many higher educational institutions offer international programs, which makes it necessary for all staff to be able to coordinate using English, both within the university and overseas. This is particularly true for university administrative staff, who need to accomplish important tasks, such as signing MOUs (memoranda of understanding) and assisting international students to apply. As a result, it is

undeniably vital for university staff to improve their English for better service (Pradaphon, 2018). Oral communication is, hence, the priority in education (Crosling & Ward, 2002).

Despite this, there have been very few courses that focus on developing this skill in Thailand. Oral communication is one component in an overall English course that uses an appropriate educational method that fulfills the functional requirements of language in the workplace.

Situated learning is one such method. This method was based on the belief that effective learning occurs when learners are placed in similar settings and share similar cultural backgrounds (Brown et al., 1989). Additionally, Lave and Wenger (1991) define this method in terms of a community of practice, which they define as a group of individuals who work together or have a common interest.

Language learners also need be exposed to, and provided opportunities to use, the language, in order to be motivated (Harmer, 2007). Students who receive adequate in-put, and are engaged in learning topics and tasks, have higher oral ability (Harmer, 2007). Because of this, Harmer (2007) proposed a teaching method known as Engage, Study, and Activate (ESA) to foster English oral communication opportunities among students. The Engage stage activates the students' background knowledge, and motivates them in learning the topic. The study stage provides the language in-put. And the activate stage lets the students produce the language freely from the information they have learned.

In the digital era, technologies play an important role in language learning and teaching. There are also various digital tools that assist people in communicating with one another. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is one of the tools that helps people in various occupational contexts connect. Wang (2010) emphasized that CMC made students produce more utterances in speaking courses at a university in Taiwan. Another study on CMC also showed that it helps students speak with confidence. Abrams (2003) illustrated how CMC can create a pre-planning environment, so that students will produce more accurate and complex utterances. Additionally, technology can connect a language teacher and students through both synchronous and asynchronous communication (Romaña, 2015), which develops both speaking and listening skills (Levy, 2009).

Situated learning and the ESA method were employed in the present study, because of their benefits in helping participants engage in learning with people in the same community

to enhance their oral communication to work together effectively. Given the nature of university administrative staff, an online course was deemed suitable to the context.

Whereas English oral communication courses for university administrative staff have been limited and also constitute a notable research gap — and given the critical nature of oral communication ability for university administrative staff, and the benefits online learning, this study attempted to design and develop, therefore, an online course for university administrative staff using situated learning and the ESA method.

Research Objectives

This study pursued two objectives:

1. To develop an online course using situated learning and the ESA method to improve the oral communication ability of university administrative staff
2. To investigate the university administrative staff's perceptions towards the course.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a single-group pre-test—post-test research design.

Population and Samples

The population were from a public university in Bangkok, Thailand that use English for their daily work. There were 20 administrative staff, who ranged from 22 to 40 years of age, comprised of 14 females and 6 males, represented as research samples. They were chosen using the convenience sampling method. The samples were asked to fill in a consent form to participate voluntarily in the course.

Research Instruments

Oral Communication Test

A pre-test and a post-test were developed to measure any improvement in the students' oral communication ability. The tests were divided into three parts: responding to questions using information provided, expressing opinions, and proposing a solution, respectively. The participants were assessed using an analytical rubric adapted from those in the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM), developed by the San Jose Unified School District, San Jose, California (2000), and Brown and Lee (2015). The five criteria included:

1) comprehensibility, 2) fluency, 3) vocabulary, 4) pronunciation, and 5) grammar. The rubric used in this study was a five-Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. It was validated by three experts, using IOC (item-objective congruence), yielding 0.67, which indicates validity. As for reliability, the result of applying the Pearson correlation coefficient of interrater reliability was 0.972, implying that the markings were consistent.

Student Online Learning Journal

To investigate the participants' perceptions about the online course, they were asked to keep an online student learning journal. At the end of each unit, the researcher posted questions to a Google form on Google Classroom, and the participants responded individually with their reflections on their experience of both the teaching and the online learning. To ensure the instrument's quality, three experts were asked to evaluate the instrument's appropriateness for study, utilizing IOC (item-objective congruence), yielding 0.67, which indicates validity.

Data Collection

Data were gathered over a 12-week period. The course was divided into 10 lessons, each lasting one hour. The pre-test was given during the first week. The post-test was administered in the last week. Each unit then ended by asking the participants to express their perceptions in the online student journal.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative data. To investigate the university administrative staff's oral communication ability, the scores from pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively using non-parametric statistics: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The quantitative data were calculated by using SPSS to find means and standard deviation.

To analyze the qualitative data, the online learning journal that the participants were asked to complete in every unit was coded and categorized by the researcher using content analysis to obtain the information regarding their perception towards the online course using situated learning and ESA method to enhance English oral communication ability of university administrative staff.

Results

Quantitative

The quantitative data were calculated using IBM's *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* statistical software (SPSS) to find the mean and standard deviation. The scores from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using non-parametric statistics, i.e., the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. Mean scores and standard deviations are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Oral Communication Test Results General (n = 20)

	Min (25)	Max (25)	*M*	*SD*	*Z*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	4	15	8.85	2.70	-3.932	.000*
Post-test	12	20	15.40	2.33		

*p < .05

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test produced a mean score that appeared to be higher after implementation than before. The mean score on the pre-test was 8.85 (*SD* = 2.70), with the lowest score being 4 and the highest being 15. On the other hand, the mean score for the post-test was 15.40 (*SD* = 2.33), with a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 12. Thus, the improvement in the score was statistically significantly (*p* = .000), after participation in the course.

Table 2 summarizes the quantitative data for each component of oral communication ability, and details the participants' improvement from the pre-test to the post-test.

Table 2

Oral Communication Test Results by Component

	Pre-test		Post-test		*Z*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Comprehensibility	2.15	0.88	3.10	0.97	-4.146	.000*
Fluency	1.45	1.10	2.70	1.30	-4.061	.000*

*p < .05

Table 2 (cont.)

Oral Communication Test Results by Component

	Pre-test		Post-test		Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Vocabulary	1.75	0.97	3.35	0.93	-4.029	.000*
Pronunciation	1.85	1.04	2.95	0.69	-3.999	.000*
Grammar	1.65	1.04	3.30	1.03	-3.681	.000*

*$p < .05$

Table 2 indicates a significant improvement in all areas, including comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Notably, there were statistically significant mean score changes from the pre-test to the post-test in every area of oral communication ability at the level of .05.

Qualitative

To analyze the qualitative data, the online learning journal was coded and categorized by the researcher, using content analysis, to capture information regarding perceptions, by grouping themes concerning the advantages of, and limitations of, 1) the instruction, 2) online learning, and 3) participants' oral communication ability.

The first theme that appeared was the perceptions towards situated learning. The students reported that learning with people who are from the same background, and with situational activities, was fun, and they could feasibly discuss both their work, the situations they encountered, and English learning in general. They could also identify precautions with regard to upcoming situations that they would soon face at work, and foresee what kinds of problems the situations would pose for their English ability, and thus, work together toward resolving them in advance. More interestingly, they found that they could communicate more appropriately in the real-world situations, thanks to the situational activities in class.

"I joined the class almost every time. Moreover, studying with my colleagues working in international affairs, we could discuss about work and language used to communication with foreigners. Situational activities make me understand and communicate in the real situations."

The next theme that appeared was the perceptions towards the ESA method. They demonstrated that the method created an exposure to the language before speaking, and helped them produce the language more freely.

"When the teacher brings pictures or videos to show us before starting the class, I could answer easily because I could answer the questions based on my experience so that it makes learning more interesting."

One challenge that the participants perceived was the lack of practicing with foreigners. Interestingly, they mentioned that practicing with real foreigners would be beneficial, and they wanted to practice with foreigners sometimes.

In addition, the students also reported that the online environment helped them with listening comprehension, because they explored other accents and varieties of English, and they could also start and stop the videos on their own, and thus, isolate and repeat problem points. The asynchronous platform helped their speaking skill, because they had to prepare themselves before speaking. Due to these improvements, they felt more comfortable and confident with communicating in English.

"The activities were good. They are similar to a situation I have encountered. Each activity allows me to prepare before speaking. It makes me feel confident. I like learning with Google classroom because I can prepare and think before speaking. And, the teacher also gives feedback after I submit an assignment. I think my pronunciation is better. And I speak appropriately in the contexts."

As for perceptions towards the online learning, two major themes emerged: convenience & flexibility, and internet connection limitations. The participants mentioned the convenience and flexibility of submitting assignments quickly, studying at their own speed, studying at any time, and saving money on travel. Additionally, they liked having access to the materials or learning resources in which they were interested throughout their online study. More significantly, they were also able to study material that they had not grasped again, using tools provided by the instructor in Google classroom.

"When the teacher splits into breakout rooms, it is really good. It doesn't waste time because I can practice with my friends in my group or my pair. And, I can text to the teacher all the time if I ace any questions. Online learning is really convenient."

Finally, challenges with the Internet connection led some participants to experience online learning as inconvenient, rather than convenient.

"My study wasn't that okay because the internet connection at the university wasn't good. It's probably because it's raining. But I could submit assignment normally. And yet, the overall was satisfactory. If the internet connection is better, the studying will be better."

Discussion

In this study, the findings revealed a significant increase in the university administrative staff's oral communication ability after the implementation of the online course using situated learning and the ESA method. This finding is consistent with the findings of several other studies (Özüdogru & Özüdogru, 2017; Uz Bilgin & Tokel, 2019; Yang, 2011). Özüdogru and Özüdogru (2017) investigated the effect of situated learning on students' vocational English learning. In their study, students' English proficiency developed successfully after the situated learning implementation. Uz Bilgin and Tokel (2019) examined English vocabulary learning processes, and those were also developed through situated learning. Yang (2011) investigated how an online situated learning environment improved the learning process of English as a Foreign Language (ESL) students. The present study is similar to those previous studies, in that the results of the post-test were higher than the pre-test, showing improvement. Indeed, there was a significant improvement after the situated learning.

Moreover, the entire range of the university administrative staff's oral communication ability improved, including comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The students' comprehension seemed to improve best. This is similar to Mansy (2018), who found consistent results in comprehension. Mansy (2018) speculated that listening to different phrases and sentences in various situations could possibly enhance students' comprehension. On the other hand, this study's participants' grammar showed the least improvement.

The situational activities helped the participants make the connection to the real situations outside the classroom (Sung et al., 2015). The ESA method enabled the participants to connect their prior knowledge to the situations. Therefore, using the ESA method allowed them to produce the language freely, and have more opportunities for oral communication

in a variety of contexts (Fithria & Ratmanida, 2019; Ilinawati, 2018; Khoshsima & Shokri, 2016; Qin, 2013; Rahmat, 2019; Shokri, 2017).

This study's findings showed improved oral communication ability after the online course. Similarly, Sun and Yang (2015) conducted a study using online platforms. It also showed that students were able to develop their oral communication ability. They also mentioned that the asynchronous platform allowed their students to develop their own learning process. Similarly, several studies show consistently that online learning helps students develop their learning. Tangjitnusorn and Sukavatee (2016) also had positive results with the integration of an online technology to enhance oral communication ability. Yang (2011) suggested synchronous and asynchronous communication was one of the advantages of online technologies that support students, and allows them to interact with the teacher after class, and thereby have greater engagement in their learning performance. Thus, online technology could be one very practical tool for learning and teaching English.

The current study's findings showed overall positive perceptions towards the online course using situated learning and the ESA method. The situated learning allowed the students to learn as a cohesive group in a familiar environment with people with whom they share something in common, and so their perception was that they learned better. Real life situations provided genuine learning opportunities. The advanced students and the teacher also helped the other students to cope with the challenges of the implementation. This is similar to the findings of a study conducted by Özüdoğru and Özüdoğru (2017), wherein it was observed that experienced students or the instructor were able to demonstrate their language performance as a model for the other students. Their study also mentioned perceptions towards collaboration. They reported that participants could share their ideas and learn from one another, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Once the students experience the same situation, they share their ideas and solutions with each other. That is the process of learning in a community of practice. Thus, providing students opportunities to practice in different situations with their peers encourages them to apply their knowledge to real-world situations.

In addition, the participants also provided their perceptions towards the ESA method as an instructional method carried out in a sequence. They reported that they were active and motivated to study. This is also consistent with Rahmat (2019). The research suggests that

the ESA method is able to improve students' activeness in learning English speaking. Similarly, a study from Arifani et al. (2020) highlighted the same positive finding in each stage. Therefore, the students participated actively in class, and had positive perceptions towards the teaching sequence.

During the implementation, a limitation appeared. The participants reported a lack of practicing with foreigners, both native and non-native speakers. Based on the findings from the student online journals, the students wanted to practice speaking with foreigners, because they need the activities to be more authentic. They also wrote that real-world situations are often more complicated, so it is beneficial to practice with foreigners sometimes. Brown (2017) found that not only do students in Taiwan not have adequate English, but also that interacting with foreigners created the very remedy for their English learning. Nguyen and Stracke (2020) suggested that practicing with foreigners—such as exchanging e-mail, or engaging in discussions with them through an online platform—could expand one's language activity outside the classroom into real-life practice.

With regard to the students' own perceptions towards their oral communication ability, the findings from the online journals showed that the university administrative staff developed their oral communication ability when they studied online. Online learning made them feel more confident. This is consistent with several studies (Tangjitnusorn & Sukavatee, 2016). They commented that a synchronous online application allows them to practice their oral communication using English as the target language with their peers, in order to make their discussion go smoothly. This result is also consistent with a study by Alharbi and Alfadda (2020), who concluded that an online learning community can increase students' confidence, and help them feel more comfortable speaking when studying online. For these reasons, online planforms would certainly be potential tools to provide opportunities to practice speaking in a variety of activities, and to increase students' confidence in speaking in various situations.

The students' perception regarding online learning was that it was suitable in terms of convenience and flexibility. They agreed that online learning through an online platform was convenient, because they could easily retrieve data, submit assignments, and repeat their learning activities over and over any time. These findings are also consistent with previous studies (Bangkom & Sukavatee, 2021; Wang et al., 2009), who have demonstrated that online

learning is convenient. Furthermore, learning online offers such flexibility, precisely because the students can study at their own pace, and revise repeatedly, anytime and anywhere. Thus, online learning offers students both access to learning resources and the flexibility to manage their time.

While the Internet eliminates the time difference between teacher and students, it does have certain limitations. The majority of students in this study expressed frustration with the lack of a stable or reliable Internet connection. They said that their learning was hampered by a bad Internet connection. This was an inconvenience, since they were unable to submit assignments or study without a steady Internet connection. Shapiro et al. (2017) confirm that a bad Internet connection has a detrimental effect on online learning. As a result, when developing an online course, instructors or educators should keep this peril in mind.

In summary, an online course using situated learning and the ESA method can potentially help university administrative staff not only enhance their oral communication, but also improve their work performance in the future.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The present research study was conducted successfully. Nonetheless, there were some practical problems and uncontrollable variables. The limitations of the study can be acknowledged as follows: 1) The time allotment of the study was ten weeks, excluding the pre-test and post-test. In order to get more insightful perspectives, the course should have been extended; 2) The number of participants was 20, which must be considered a small sample size. Therefore, a larger-scale study is recommended. Additionally, participants were selected by the convenience sampling method. As a result, the findings might not be generalizable. Therefore, a future study using a different selection method, such as the random sampling method, is recommended; 3) This study focused exclusively on university administrative staff, and the context was based on the needs analysis in this study. The findings might not be generalizable to other occupational contexts. Therefore, future studies could explore other careers or occupations or contexts.

Finally, future research should also explore whether an online course would be suitable for other communicative skills, such as listening, reading, or writing, since both written and spoken communications are essential to English users.

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