Teaching Knowledge for English Language Teaching

ความรู้ทางการสอนสำหรับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ

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Abstract

The language learners have been encountering the difficulty learning and using English due to the lack of knowledge of vocabulary, expression, grammatical rules, writing processes and organization. Additionally, most learners demonstrate low levels of reading proficiency in areas of sentence structure, and reading comprehension. They also lack self-confidence and meaningful sentence formation in their speaking abilities, and have limited listening comprehension abilities when listening to speakers' different pronunciation or accents, or fast rate of speech that might make it more challenging for the students to understand English. Therefore, It is important that teacher be aware of the problems and make their best attempt to improve their teaching knowledge - subject matter preparation, pedagogical preparation, knowledge of learners' characteristics, knowledge of educational context, knowledge of education aims, purposes, and value. Understanding the teaching knowledge and being able to apply it in classroom settings will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction, and that will lead to learners' successful language development.

Keywords: teaching knowledge, English Language learner, English language development

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บทคัดย่อ

ผู้เรียนภาษาเผชิญหน้ากับอุปสรรคในการเรียนรู้และการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเพราะพวกเขาขาดความรู้ด้านคำศัพท์ สำนวน กฎไวยากรณ์ กระบวนการและโครงสร้างการเขียน นอกจากนี้ ผู้เรียนยังมีความสามารถในการอ่านอยู่ในระดับต่ำ ในด้านโครงสร้างประโยค และการอ่านจับใจความ ส่วนในด้านการพูด ผู้เรียนขาดความมั่นใจในตนเองในการพูด และสร้างรูปประโยคที่มีความหมายตามที่ต้องการสื่อสาร สำหรับด้านการฟัง ผู้เรียนมีความสามารถที่จำกัดในด้านการฟังเพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจ เมื่อฟังการออกเสียง สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษที่แตกต่างกัน หรืออัตราการพูดที่เร็วของผู้พูด ซึ่งอาจทำให้เกิดความท้าทายมากขึ้นสำหรับผู้เรียนในการเข้าใจภาษาอังกฤษ ดังนั้น สิ่งที่สำคัญก็คือครูต้องตระหนักถึงปัญหาต่างๆที่เกิดขึ้นและพยายามให้ดีที่สุดในการพัฒนาความรู้ทางการสอน เช่น การจัดเตรียมเนื้อหาสาระ การจัดเตรียมวิธีการสอน ความรู้เกี่ยวกับลักษณะของผู้เรียน ความรู้เกี่ยวกับบริบททางการศึกษา จุดมุ่งหมาย วัตถุประสงค์ และคุณค่าทางการศึกษา ความเข้าใจในความรู้ทางการสอนและสามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในชั้นเรียนจะช่วยเพิ่ม ประสิทธิภาพและประสิทธิผลในการเรียนการสอนและนำไปสู่การพัฒนาภาษาของนักเรียนที่ประสบความสำเร็จได้

คำสำคัญ: ความรู้ทางการสอน ผู้เรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ การพัฒนาภาษาอังกฤษ

Introduction

For the past several decades, English has become a "Global Language" as it has grown into the primary language for international communication and has played such an important role in the worldwide communication (Crystal, 2003). In other words, English is recognized as a common working language and a language of contact in many regions throughout the world. Thus, to help people understand one another, there needs to be fewer barriers to effective communication. Knowledge of the English language and of interaction with other cultures is critical and useful in the manner that people can make the right and appropriate choices in communication and also prevent the problems that may arise from miscommunication due to language differences in a global world. In the world such as ours where technology and communications are so rapidly changing and producing new dilemmas - ethical, economical, and otherwise, people can hardly afford not to be literate in English.

Over 70 countries around the world, such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, have English as an official language used by a large portion of the population or as a medium of communication in government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. Moreover, in over 100 countries such as Japan, Russia, Brazil, where English is not an official language, English is made a priority in the countries' foreign language teaching. Thus, English is the most common language taught in school (Nunan, 2003). The earlier learners learn the new language, the more they can function in the language. Learners who have

begun learning another language at an early age are likely to develop English literacy skills and achieve functional levels of English proficiency (Penfield & Roberts, 1959; Oyama's study (1976); Scarcella & Oxford 1992).

More importantly, in 2015, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was established as a mean to offer 10 ASEAN Member States, including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, opportunities to economically and sustainably integrate in the global economy, thereby contributing to the goal of shared prosperity. According to the ASEAN Charter Article 34 (The ASEAN Charter, 2008), "The working language of ASEAN shall be English." As ASEAN member states consist of people speaking different languages, having English as a common language will make it easier for everyone to communicate with one another as part of the ASEAN Community.

Given that ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is the goal of regional economic integration (ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint, 2008) and English is designated as the official language used for communication, conducting meeting or writing reports, statements or any other endeavours in a government setting should be done in English without translation or interpretation service (The ASEAN Charter, 2008). In addition, English becomes essential for people in order to communicate with foreign workers, and conduct several business activities with investors from ASEAN member countries and other countries. By that, it is beneficial to people who can communicate in English to meet the challenges and opportunities of the AEC. Therefore, there is a critical need for Thailand to step forward into the teaching of the English language to its people, to enhance English language teaching strategies and approaches, and people should make the best effort to learn the language (Fredrickson, 2016).

Non-Native Students' English Language Learning

During these past years, there has been a noticeable increase in Thai learners' amount of time and effort into learning English. However, research evidence strongly suggests many literacy skills can transfer across languages. Literacy skills transfer from a child's first language to another, so language learners with strong first language skills tend to have strong second language skills. It helps facilitates the development of literacy skills in English (Cummins, 1996; Lanauze & Snow, 1989). In foreign language learning situation including Thailand where English is not the language of the community, second language learners tend to rely on their native language to help them learn. Due to their lack of opportunity to use English, their exposure to English is limited; therefore, the learners' limited English proficiency results in difficulty using the language (Paul & Norbury, 2012; Noom-Ura, 2013).

In English class of learners who do not usually use English in their daily lives, most learners go through a silent period, an interval of time they are unwilling or unable to communicate orally in English (Krashen, 1982). As English is not their mother tongue, they do not feel comfortable speaking English. They find it difficult to speak English in order to express their thought and opinion, even to give short answer. The length of the silent period can vary depending upon their personality, their experience with English, and their emotions in English learning (Brown, 1994). The personality plays an important role in a way that the language learning process may take longer for shy and quiet learners to feel comfortable producing the language. Exposing language imperfections in front of others leads to anxiety due to many factors such as lack of confidence, unfamiliar situation, fear of looking foolish or being judged by others (Arnold, 2003). Besides, experience and emotion in learning the target language also plays a role as it influences the motivation and attitudes towards the language learning (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). It should not be assumed that learners do not go through a stage of feeling embarrassed when they try to speak in English in groups or class.

English is the target language learners need to learn so as to effectively communicate at a different level of formality depending on the settings and audiences. However, it gives learners greater cause for concern about such things as grammar, lexis, and pronunciation etc. To acquire the language, learners need to go through a long learning process. In other words, they need time to build up the language competence or master the aspect of the target language, learn the rule and the exceptional rule, and try to understand the language. It takes a long time to learn the language in order to know about and be able to use it.

Thai Students' Language Learning Problems

With regard to the language skills, some students might have higher oral proficiency (speaking and listening) than proficiency with literacy (reading and writing) or vice versa. Many studies indicated that among four basic skills, learners of English find writing most difficult for students to become proficient in (Noh, Kim & Noh, 2012; Ismail, 2011) Moreover, the fact can be seen from learners' scores in English language tests such as IELTS, TOEFL etc. According to National Commission on Writing (2004), writing is necessary for the instruction of second language learners due to the fact that it is a vital part of communication which means the message will be delivered to the readers with clarity. It is also critical to academic success. However, the primary concern for English teachers is to find the way to improve learners' writing competence. Sirikhun (2000) stated that Thai students had low level of writing

proficiency because they lack knowledge of vocabulary, expression, grammatical rules, writing processes and organization. Besides, they were not able to convey their ideas or opinion in English; therefore, they used dictionary to translate word by word to form a sentence. As a result of that, most students felt discouraged and unmotivated to learn the language.

Although many research studies revealed students' writing difficulties, reading problems are also mentioned in other studies. In fact, most students can understand directions in classroom or exercise but with hesitancy and misunderstanding. They get accustomed to understanding commonly-used words. Without those words, they usually read with great difficulty understanding the contents. In other words, their reading ability is below the assigned grade level. Chawwang's study (2008) revealed that Thai students have low level of reading ability in areas of sentence structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The researcher also mentioned about the importance of activities or tasks which play a vital role in students' learning and motivation. The lack of motivation could cause students not being able to finish work and might create other problems (Netasit & Chanowan, 2017). To design effective tasks, the teacher should consider their grade level, abilities, learning style, prior knowledge and experiences, and community. In addition, they should include real-world situations as much as possible. This would support findings of Condelli (2002) who mentioned that the use of real-life material, such as gas bills, receipts, or bus schedules, made a significant impact on basic reading skill development.

In addition to the reading and writing skills, most Thai students have a low level of speaking proficiency as a result of English teachers, learning environment and the students themselves. To clarify, English teachers' teaching styles are not interesting as they do not engage students in the learning process which can increase their attention and focus, motivate them to practice the language and promote meaningful learning experiences (Arunsuksawang & Sungrugsa, 2015).. Moreover, Suekham (2000) pointed out that teachers spend less time on designing instruction which can affect students' learning and motivation in language learning. They do not perceive the lessons as interesting and worthy of their consideration and attention. Other than that, Thai students have been studying English for many years but they are unable to speak or write the language because of some teachers' poor speaking ability and the absence of meaningful tasks (Waenthong, 1999). Khamprated (2012) also found that Thai students had difficulty in speaking English fluently and with correct intonation. They were not eager to practice English due to the fear of making mistakes, and their limited knowledge and understanding of grammar caused speaking English even more difficult. Moreover, they do not get the opportunity to participate in class activities, resulting in lack of self-confidence in their

speaking ability and negative attitudes towards language learning which influence students' desire to move forward and achieve their goals (Saetan, 1991).

Sadighi and Zare's study (2006) considered the effect of background knowledge on listening comprehension. Twenty-four upper-intermediate EFL students in two different TOEFL preparation classes were tested. The study's findings showed that the experimental group had a better and more consistent overall performance than the control group in listening comprehension. After the study, many students commented that they had a difficult time making a transition from understanding classroom talk to understanding natural language. In other words, in addition to activating their background knowledge, it would be helpful if teachers exposed them to real world, native-like speech through authentic listening materials. Furthermore, subtle differences in pronunciation, rate of speech, limited knowledge of grammar, etc. might have made it more challenging for the students to understand English (Khamprated, 2012). The students found it easier to understand English as they have had months of becoming accustomed to the teacher's voice. While they were comfortable with the voice, they were unfamiliar with the voice on other sources such as CD, Video etc (Moolngoen, 2016).

It is possible that the issues mentioned previously result in low scores on various standardized tests reflecting Thai learners' English proficiency level. Several national exams and international indicators indicated that Thai learners' English proficiency is relatively low. Results of Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in academic year 2013 showed that average English scores of Thai elementary school learners (Grade 6) were 33.82 out of 100; lower secondary school learners (Grade 9) were 30.35; and upper secondary school learners (Grade 12) were 25.35 (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2014). The results implied that Thai learners' English proficiency was low. Furthermore, the most recent Education First's English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2014, a standardized measurement of adult English proficiency, showed that out of 63 countries, Thailand was ranked 48th with an average score of 47.79 which was categorized under "very low proficiency" (EF Educational First, 2014). In addition to O-NET and EF EPI scores, Thai examinees' scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language™: Internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT®) in 2014 showed that the average score was 74, which was lower than most of other ASEAN countries: Singapore (98), Malaysia (89), Philippines (89), Myanmar (78), Indonesia (84), and Vietnam (79). Considering each of four skills, Thai examinees' scores on reading and listening were 18 and 19 respectively, equal to Myanmar's but lower than the other ASEAN countries. Also, speaking (19) and writing (19) scores were lower than all other ASEAN countries (Educational Testing Service, 2014).

The aforementioned results showed that there were problems in English language teaching and learning in Thai education. Due to different strengths and weaknesses of each individual, they cause the challenge to the teacher to come up with the approaches to teaching English and motivating learners to learn the target language. One of the main challenges is the absence or lack of required teaching knowledge Thai teachers of English Language should possess. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the required teaching knowledge and skills in order to enable teachers to develop and deliver the lessons effectively and efficiently.

Teaching Knowledge

Teachers' teaching knowledge and skills has been investigated and became the topic of research for many decades. According to Wilson, Robert and Ferrini-Mundy (2001), the report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education summarizes five key issues in teacher preparation: subject matter preparation that has a positive connection with their performance in the classroom, pedagogical preparation that have ultimate impact on student achievement, clinical training that includes well-structured activities, pre-service teacher education policies, and alternative certification. Over the years, educators have given importance to each individual's knowledge. In other words, they are aware of how students learn, how they think and how teachers can pass on the knowledge. This awareness has influence on what the teachers need to learn to teach so that the teachers can design and plan effective instruction. Well-prepared teachers, effective instructions and meaningful tasks produce higher student achievement (Spratt, 2005).

Shulman (1986) mentioned that the missing paradigm in teachers is the absence of teacher knowledge. He pointed out teachers should have subject matter content knowledge, curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge which is defined as the knowledge about how to combine pedagogy and content in order to present contents effectively and make them understandable to students. A year later, Shulman (1987) reconsidered knowledge base for teaching. He pointed out 7 knowledge areas as follows:

1) Content knowledge: a kind of subject matter specific professional knowledge. The attention has been given to the body of knowledge and information teachers need to understand in order to teach the subject.

2) General pedagogical knowledge: broad principles and strategies of how to teach the lessons

3) Curriculum knowledge: the ability to apply theoretical principles associated with planning, implementing and evaluating the curriculum in differentiating instruction and being responsive to the social context and student classroom (Behar & George, 1994).

4) Pedagogical content knowledge: the integration of pedagogy and contents which is very tightly connected to teaching practice to make the lessons understandable to students with diverse abilities and interests.

5) Knowledge of learners and their characteristics: understanding of students' age, socioeconomic level, ethic group, learning styles which is how an individual perceives, interacts with, and responds emotionally to learning environments (e.g. concrete, kinesthetic, etc.), multiple intelligence, motivational factors, physiological factors and competencies, so as to design the instruction and teach effectively.

6) Knowledge of educational context: workings in schools or community, being able to support the learning of all of their students

7) Knowledge of education aims: purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds

In the United States of America, English teachers need to be aware of PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards which focus on developing students' four language skills: listening (involving students in active and purposeful listening), speaking (promoting students to use language in meaningful and purposeful interaction with others in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes), reading (enhancing students' level of literacy in processing and interpreting written language, symbols, and text with understanding and fluency, and writing (fostering students' writing skill to communicate or express meaning through text for a variety of purposes and audiences. Moreover, using students' native language and cultures is considered the foundation for developing academic language proficiency. (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association, 2006)

In addition to PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards set by TESOL International Association, the Commission for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) uses the TESOL Professional Teaching Standards, which are performance-based standards for national accreditation of teacher education programs in the United States of America. Specifically, to prepare candidates for an initial certification, endorsement, or license in English language teaching, they address the professional expertise that language teachers need in order to teach English to students in P-12 schools. In other words, The accreditation with the set of rigorous standards reflect a consensus about what is important in teacher

preparation as well as the University's commitment to providing future teachers with the best possible start to their careers. The primary aim is that the teacher candidates demonstrate their performance under the following five domains: Language, Culture, Planning, Implementing and Managing Instruction, Assessment, and Professionalism. Each of the aforementioned domains is divided into standards which reflect the best instructional practice (TESOL International Association, 2009).

Barber and Mourshed's report (2007), entitled How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top, has a major influence on improving the quality of teachers in every learning area, including English. Based on a report by the National Institute of Education (2012), a national teacher training institution in Singapore, a teacher education model for the 21st century was established with six primary recommendations as follows: 1) New V3 SK, 2) Graduand teacher competencies, 3) Strengthening the theory-practice nexus, 4) Programme renements and an extended pedagogical repertoire, 5) Assessment framework for 21st century teaching and learning, and 6) Enhancing pathways for professional development. To improve pre-service and in-service teachers' quality, all these attributes of the 21th century teaching professional need to be considered.

To explain further, one of the aforementioned recommendations include V3 SK Model: 1) Three Values – learner centeredness, teacher identity and service to the profession and community, 2) Skills – the abilities to teach or deliver content effectively, communicate with and facilitate students and others, recognize and manage own and others' emotions, integrate technology in teaching, etc., and 3) Knowledge – subject matter expertise, awareness of students' diverse learning needs, understanding of global and cultural perspectives, and environment.

Based on the implementation handbook of National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Thailand (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2006), students are provided with knowledge and the opportunity to practice skills during the study in the program in order to make improvement in the following areas. It is required that at least 5 domains (1-5) need to be covered in all fields of study, and the last domain, psychomotor skills, is applicable to some fields in which developed physical skills are critical.

1. Morals and Ethics: develop awareness of teachers' code of ethics and act in accordance with the values and principles, feel empathy towards others, have social conscience (a sense of responsibility in society) and public mind, be a good role model, use moral point of view to evaluate, manage and solve problems, be considerate of and honor others' values, rights and feelings

2. Knowledge: have in-depth pedagogical and content knowledge, understand principles and theories in related disciplines and integrate different disciplines or subject areas in real-world settings, strengthen content area expertise, and effectively apply analytical and synthetic thinking skills to teaching profession

3. Cognitive Skills: examine facts, evaluate various information resources to ensure the reliability of information and broaden knowledge, apply knowledge of theories and practice to solve complex problems and provide solutions in creative ways, have leadership skills and vision, and promote and develop professionalism in teaching profession

4. Interpersonal Skills and Responsibility: recognize others' feelings and emotions, have empathy towards others, have positive thinking and emotional, social maturity, have positive interdependent resulting in promotive interaction, be a good leader and follower, have a great responsibility for community in areas of economics, society, and environment

5. Skills in Quantitative Analysis, Communication, and Information Technology: continuously use technology to retrieve, compile and select appropriate and reliable information, effectively communicate in both oral and written forms, and give a presentation suitable for target audiences

6. Psychomotor Skills: have expertise in creatively designing and managing instruction in various ways including formal, non-formal and informal, design the instructions for diverse learners including gifted and talented learners, special need learners in an innovative way, and manage interactive and integrated teaching and learning in the specific subject area

To be more specific, students in the field of language teaching should possess 1) moral for foreign language teachers such as protecting confidentiality of all and modeling respect and positive regard for all students at all times; 2) ability to integrate knowledge of the target language, linguistics or applied linguistics for teaching the language, target culture, and Thai culture and international culture by designing lessons that present the target language and culture, having students practise and use it to complete meaningful tasks; 3) ability to apply language teaching theories and principles into instructional management, and have leadership and vision in language teaching profession to enhance language teaching and learning; 4) sensitivity towards the feeling of language learners by being good listeners, and strengthening interpersonal relationship; 5) critical thinking to select appropriate materials or teaching resources which contain age-appropriate, clear and concise language, accurate information, motivate and maintain students' interest; and 6) expertise in designing and managing the language instruction for diverse learners.

In teaching profession, teachers should integrate the standards into any lesson as a tool to focus on what students are expected to learn or demonstrate the intended learning outcomes. In order to plan well-organized instructions, lesson plans are designed to serve the purpose. Although lesson planning can be time-consuming and tedious, a well-written lesson plan can enhance teacher's instructions, resulting into students' learning opportunities. The lesson plan can be used as an outline of instruction and presentation sequence as the teachers have to think of what equipment and materials they will need to gather, then set a sequence and practice before implementing the lesson in class (Smaldino, Lowther & Russell, 2012). More importantly, the lesson plan enables them to reconsider whether the contents in their lessons are aligned to the standards and are appropriate to the students so that the objectives can be achieved.

Teaching Methods and Approaches

To help improve students' language learning, many methods and approaches had been developed and employed in the field of English teaching For instance, Silent Way, learning happens when the learner discovers for him/herself, the learning is mediated with physical objects and involves problem solving using the material to be learned; however, propositional meaning is emphasized rather than communicative value (Gattegno, 1978). Grammar Translation (GT), the oldest instructional method of teaching traditionally used to teach foreign language, the rules and pronunciation features are directly explained in the learner's native language (NL), and the structures and vocabulary are taught through translation from English to NL or vice versa (Sapargul & Sartor, 2010). According to Yu (2001), the GT method is effective for learning about the target language (TL), but not effective for developing the ability to function in the TL. Unlike GT, the Audio-Lingual (AL) method was designed with the main purpose to get the learner to function verbally in the TL or to speak English quickly and efficiently through the repetition of phrases and sentence. Grammar rules are not directly explained, instead the pattern of TL or examples are given repeatedly to enable to learner to understand them and produce them. NL should not be used when teaching English as it could interfere with language learning (Freeman, 2000). Total Physical Response (TPR), learners learn by listening and responding to verbal commands with physical responses. Verbal responses in any form, words, phrases, or sentences, are encouraged when they are ready, so speaking is delayed until comprehension skills are established. In TPR, the use of learners' NL is acceptable (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

Other than GT, AL and TPR, Content-Based Instruction (CBI) approach, learners are directed towards achieving the content objectives and mastering the TL in the process. In other words, the learner accomplishment is measured in content terms rather than language terms (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) looks at language as it is used to communicate about various ideas and for different purposes. Both fluency and accuracy are emphasized and communicative situations are provided so that learners can achieve communicative competence (Yu, 2001). Task-Based Language Teaching, language learning is done through using the target language to accomplish a task. The tasks require specific content, structures and functions which are learned as the learner works on the tasks (Ellis, 2009).

All of the aforementioned methods and approaches used in teaching English are beneficial to English teachers. To be effective, teachers need to select the teaching method suitable for the current trend in education, the purpose of the instruction, and the student's learning strategies and styles, interest and language learning goals. Moreover, they should be aware of the change in education, from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction which focuses on active learning and student engagement.

Implication for English Language Teaching

The research will be a significant endeavour in supporting and enhancing English teaching skills of educators, pre-service, novice and experienced teachers of English in primary, secondary or adult teaching contexts. By understanding the teaching knowledge and teaching methods, teachers or educators can build a strong foundation needed in the English language teaching field and apply the knowledge gained from the research in their work settings. In addition, this research can be beneficial to further studies in the area of teaching knowledge for English language teaching.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary that English teachers acknowledge the importance of teaching knowledge and are able to comprehend and apply them in their teaching. It will be beneficial to students as teachers possess subject-matter knowledge; know what they will teach; consider students' diverse background and proficiency levels; select appropriate materials and media based on students' age, grade levels, English proficiency levels and other factors; plan and design curriculum accordingly; deliver contents effectively and make them understandable to students; employ appropriate teaching strategies or methods; and be self-

motivated to find the way to help promote students' language learning. Then, the student performance will reveal how much and how well they have mastered the lessons, and that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. The teachers can use the results to assess their own teaching, whether they have sufficient teaching knowledge to achieve the teaching goals.

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