

A Study on the Difficulties of Instructional Process on English for Proficiency Test Course perceived by Business Students

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to investigate current problems obtained by the business students through English for Proficiency Test Course in three aspects: Teaching Techniques, Teaching Materials and Assessment; and 2) to study additional suggestions. The samples of this research were the 75 business students who enrolled English for Proficiency Test Course in 2016 academic year. The instruments used were questionnaires consisted of three aspects: Teaching Techniques, Teaching Materials and Assessment. The statistical values were the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results from the study will be analyzed to find solutions for improving teaching-learning process in the future.

Keywords: *EFL Classroom, EFL Teaching-Learning Process, Teaching for TOEIC Test*

Introduction

Among those necessary working skills, English language proficiency is one of the most important skills as a fundamental language used in this era of globalization (Kanitpong 2012). Take India, individuals who are a good command of English earn significantly higher relative wages and better occupation outcomes even for the same level of overall education. As stated by The SUNDAY TIMES (2011), the importance of English in the workplace is a top concern among employers in Sri Lanka. 95% of employers believe that better English helps improve the productivity of organization, and 66% of employers turn down applicants due to a bad command of English. In this case, it might be implied that the improvement in English language proficiency is an essential key characteristic to ensure that Thai workforce will be beneficial from the economic liberalization. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand the roots of English problems in Thai student as well as investigate the learning activities to enhance Thai students' human capital in order to achieve in this competitive era.

A proficiency test is used to measure a learner's level of language. It can be compared with an achievement test, which evaluates a learner's understanding of specific material, a diagnostic test, which identify areas to work on, and a prognostic test, which tries to predict a learner's ability to complete a course or take an exam. Proficiency tests are uncommon within the classroom but very frequent as the end aim (and motivation) of language learning. The examples of a proficiency test accepted in Thailand are IELTS and TOEFL (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2017).

However, many companies in Thailand have highly regarded on the TOEIC scores as well. TOEIC or Test of English for International Communication is remarkable concern in case of employment for a new employee, and promotion for an existing employee. The test is produced by ETS (Educational Testing Service) which evaluates personal ability in English communication. Currently, TOEIC is executed in about 60 countries which approximately 4,500,000 people are taking TOEIC in a year. The TOEIC test questions are based on real-life working setting in an international environment such as meetings, travelling, telephone conversation, etc. The test composes of two separate parts as:

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1. The Listening and Reading test is a paper and pencil test that takes 2.5 hours and is taken at a test centre.

2. The Speaking and Writing test is an online test that is taken in a test center and takes 90 minutes. However, the Speaking and Writing test is a new test which is only available in some countries (CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT (THAILAND), 2014).

College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI) has also emphasized on the significance of the TOEIC test. All third year students have to take the TOEIC test before their Cooperative Education as the students' TOEIC scores are used to classify the rank of organizations for their Cooperative Education. Moreover, the TOEIC test is recognized as the global standard for assessing English proficiency for business to help organizations build a more effective workforce. Thus, it is vital for all TNI students to prepare themselves for an internationally competitive edge.

However, according to research done by Anuyahong (2012), it was found out that the TOEIC scores of TNI students are not in a satisfaction level, especially in business students. Therefore, it is significant for College of General Education and Languages to find out the current problems on instructional process of English for Proficiency Test course in order to improve teaching-learning process in this course for the next semester.

Research Purpose

The purposes of this study were:

- 1) To investigate current problems obtained by the business students through English for Proficiency Test Course in three aspects: Teaching Techniques, Teaching Materials and Assessment; and
- 2) To study additional suggestions.

Research Methodology

Population and Samples

Population of this study was 120 second-year business students in the second semester of 2016 academic year at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

Samples in this study were 75 second-year students who enrolled English for Proficiency course in the second semester of 2016 academic year.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire based on the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course for the second year business students.

The first part (Part 1) of this questionnaire asked for the demographic information on the students' gender. The second part (Part 2) concerned on the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course. This part comprised of 30 items of in three aspects: 10 items of Teaching Techniques, 10 items of Teaching Materials and 10 items of Assessment. The five levels of problems used in the questionnaire were ranked as "The highest problem," "High problem", "Moderate problem", "Low problem" and "The lowest problem". Responses from the student questionnaires were subsequently coded. The data of the students' coded responses were statistically calculated and analysed. The computation of Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of reliability was employed to indicate how reliable the research questionnaire results were. Reliability was defined as the proportion of the students'

responses to each item in the questionnaire and the reliability coefficient or calculated alpha was a lower bound of the true reliability of the research instrument, or the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics was also used to determine the individual summary statistics for each of the 30 items in the questionnaire.

The third part (Part 3) asked for more opinions and suggestions on the difficulties of instructional Process on English for Proficiency Test course of the business students based on open-ended questions.

Data collection

A study on the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course of the business students was accessed through the questionnaire in the second semester of 2016 academic year.

The administration of the research questionnaire was conducted in English for Proficiency course (ENL-412). Part 1 concerns the demographic variables about the students' gender. The 30 items of Part 2 covered the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course in three aspects: Teaching Techniques, Teaching Materials and Assessment. The participants were requested to consider each item carefully and indicate how important each item was for their study. A total of 75 business students completed the questionnaire. The students' responses from the questionnaire were subsequently coded using computer program as follows: "1 = male and 2=female" for genders; and "1=the lowest problem, 2 =low problem, 3 = moderate problem, 4 = high problem, 5 = the highest problem" for each of the five levels of importance on 30 items in Part 2.

The analyses of the research data were conducted by means of descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistical analyses of the frequencies and percentages of the students' responses were employed to report their demographic variables and to indicate the rank order of the items in each area of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course listed in the questionnaire. The frequency distributions were analysed to determine the proportions of the students' responses to the five levels of importance on the 30 items in three areas: 10 items of Teaching Techniques, 10 items of Teaching Materials and 10 items of Assessment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis from questionnaire both single item and whole questionnaire which presented a form of rating scale. These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation and then translated based on criteria developed by Best (1981) as follows:

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|---------|--------|---|
| 1.00 <= | < 1.50 | refers to students had the lowest problem. |
| 1.51 <= | < 2.50 | refers to students had low problem. |
| 2.51 <= | < 3.50 | refers to students had moderate problem. |
| 3.51 <= | < 4.50 | refers to students had high problem. |
| 4.51 <= | < 5.00 | refers to students had the highest problem. |

The collected data was analysed using computer program. The statistics used for analysing the data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

Results

Phase 1: The results of demographic data

The analysis of the data from the students' questionnaire was presented in the first section deals with the demographic variables from the students' responses to Part 1 of the questionnaire in the following table.

Table 1: Table of the results of demographic data of respondents

Demographic data of respondents	n=75	Percentage
Gender		
1.1 Male	38	50.67
1.2 Female	37	49.33
Total	75	100

The table showed that percentages of business students in gender ranged from 50.67% for male students and 49.33% for female students.

Phase 2: the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course

Table 2: Table of Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course in overall

No.	Cluster	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1.	Teaching Techniques	1.84	0.71	Low
2.	Teaching Materials	1.69	0.77	Low
3.	Assessment	1.95	0.79	Low
Total		1.82	0.75	Low

The above table presented that the overall mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course was at a low level (\bar{x} =1.82). The lowest rank of the problem was at Teaching Materials (\bar{x} =1.69), followed by Teaching Techniques (\bar{x} =1.84) and Assessment (\bar{x} =1.95).

Table 3: Table of Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course in Teaching Techniques

No.	Teaching Techniques	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1.	The teacher does not meet the goals set in the lesson plan.	2.41	0.79	Low
2.	The teacher focuses on teacher- centre approach.	2.47	0.81	Low
3.	The teacher lacks of teaching techniques that motivate students to learn on their own.	1.77	0.61	Low
4.	The teacher did not focus on varieties of teaching approaches, such as task-based learning, problem-based learning or research-based learning.	1.77	0.71	Low
5.	There is no assignment for students to work outside classroom.	1.72	0.81	Low
6.	The teacher lacks of use of activities that motivate	1.88	0.79	Low

	students to think critically.			
7.	The teacher does not allow students to ask questions or give any comments.	2.11	0.88	Low
8.	The teacher uses language that is too difficult to understand and lacks of explanation.	1.78	0.71	Low
9.	The teacher does not allow students to learn by practicing.	1.11	0.88	The lowest
10.	The teacher lacks of collaborative learning technique.	1.38	0.89	The lowest
Total		1.84	0.71	Low

The above table presented that the mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Teaching Techniques was at a low level (\bar{x} =1.84). The lowest problem was “The teacher does not allow students to learn by practicing” (\bar{x} =1.11), followed by “The teacher lacks of collaborative learning technique” (\bar{x} =1.38) and ‘There is no assignment for students to work outside classroom’ (\bar{x} =1.72).

Table 4: Table of Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course in Teaching Materials

No.	Teaching Materials	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1.	The teaching materials do not focus on practicing.	1.10	0.91	The lowest
2.	The teaching materials are not up-to-date.	1.01	0.71	The lowest
3.	The teaching materials do not match with the content.	2.11	0.73	Low
4.	The teaching materials are not varieties.	1.72	0.81	Low
5.	There is a lack of teaching materials that allow students to practice outside classroom.	1.45	0.71	The lowest
6.	There is a lack of teaching materials that enable learners to learn independently.	1.78	0.69	Low
7.	There is a lack of teaching materials that encourage students to become active learners.	2.11	0.73	Low
8.	There is a lack of online learning.	2.27	0.85	Low
9.	There is a lack of authentic materials.	1.74	0.81	Low
Total		1.69	0.77	Low

The above table presented that the mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Teaching Materials was at a low level (\bar{x} =1.69). The lowest problem was “The teaching materials are not up-to-date” (\bar{x} =1.01), followed by “The teaching materials do not focus on practicing” (\bar{x} =1.10) and “There is a lack of teaching materials that allow students to practice outside classroom” (\bar{x} =1.45).

Table 5: Table of Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course in Assessment

No.	Personal Skills	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1.	There is a lack of testing that integrates four communicative skills.	1.83	0.77	Low
2.	There is a lack of subtests during class to motivate students with enthusiasm.	1.73	0.81	Low

3.	There is a lack of practical measurement.	2.45	0.88	Low
4.	There is a lack of measurement of the authentic materials, such as work instructions or manuals.	1.79	0.73	Low
Total		1.95	0.79	Low

The above table presented that the mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Assessment was at a low level ($\bar{x}=1.95$). The lowest problem was “There is a lack of subtests during class to motivate students with enthusiasm” ($\bar{x}=1.73$), followed by “There is a lack of measurement of the authentic materials, such as work instructions or manuals” ($\bar{x}=1.79$) and “There is a lack of testing that integrates four communicative skills” ($\bar{x}=1.83$).

Phase 3: Suggestion from the respondents

The suggestions from the respondents were listed as follows:

1. The teacher who teaches this course should have an experience of proficiency test.
2. TNI should invite a guest speaker from the outside organizations to inform the importance of TOEIC test.
3. Teaching materials of TOEIC test should be updated every year.

Conclusion

1. The overall mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course was at a low level ($\bar{x}=1.82$). The lowest rank of the problem was at Teaching Materials ($\bar{x}=1.69$), followed by Teaching Techniques ($\bar{x}=1.84$) and Assessment ($\bar{x}=1.95$).

2. The mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Teaching Techniques was at a low level ($\bar{x}=1.84$). The lowest problem was “The teacher does not allow students to learn by practicing” ($\bar{x}=1.11$), followed by “The teacher lacks of collaborative learning technique” ($\bar{x}=1.38$) and ‘There is no assignment for students to work outside classroom’ ($\bar{x}=1.72$).

3. The mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Teaching Materials was at a low level ($\bar{x}=1.69$). The lowest problem was “The teaching materials are not up-to-date” ($\bar{x}=1.01$), followed by “The teaching materials do not focus on practicing” ($\bar{x}=1.10$) and “There is a lack of teaching materials that allow students to practice outside classroom” ($\bar{x}=1.45$).

4. The mean score of the difficulties of instructional process on English for Proficiency Test course on Assessment was at a low level ($\bar{x}=1.95$). The lowest problem was “There is a lack of subtests during class to motivate students with enthusiasm” ($\bar{x}=1.73$), followed by “There is a lack of measurement of the authentic materials, such as work instructions or manuals” ($\bar{x}=1.79$) and “There is a lack of testing that integrates four communicative skills” ($\bar{x}=1.83$).

5. The suggestions from the respondents were listed as follows: 1) The teacher who teaches this course should have an experience of proficiency test; 2) TNI should invite a guest speaker from the outside organizations to inform the importance of TOEIC test; and 3) Teaching materials of TOEIC test should be updated every year.

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