

Foreign Language Competency Development of Tour Guides in Geology and Fossils in the Northeast of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to design a foreign language curriculum for language competency development of tour guides in geology and fossils in the Northeast of Thailand based on the 80/80 standardized criteria efficiency, to compare the foreign language competency of the tour guides, to survey the opinions of the tour guides towards the foreign language curriculum and the opinions of tourists and tourism personnel towards the professional performance of the tour guides. The research methodology consisted of three steps: 1) curriculum design and development, 2) curriculum implementation and 3) evaluation. The population was seventy five students from the English Curriculum Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University who did a practical experience in 2/2009. The sample subjects were forty students from the English Curriculum Program selected by the simple random sampling technique. The research instruments were an English curriculum for the tour guides in geology and fossils in the Northeast of Thailand consisting of thirteen lessons, a listening test, a speaking test, thirteen lesson plans, an evaluation form for IOC and a form evaluating the appropriateness of the curriculum, as well as two sets of questionnaires. The research statistics used were percentage, mean, standard deviation and Repeated Measures MANOVA.

Results of the research were as follows:

In regard to the efficiency assessment of the qualified curriculum, it indicated that the average level of the curriculum efficiency consisting of 3 steps of the assessment: a1:1 experimental design, a small group design and a large group design was high ($\bar{x} = 4.7$). The finding indicated that the value of the standardized criteria efficiency was 81.75/81.12%. The findings indicated that the average score of the post-test of the tour guides was significantly higher than that of the pre-test at the .05 level. The average scores of both listening and speaking skills of the post-test were significantly higher than those of the pre-test at the .05 level. Additionally, the findings indicated that the average opinion of the tour guides towards the English training curriculum was high ($\bar{x} = 4.38$). The average opinion of the tourists and tourism personnel towards the professional performance of the tour guides was high.

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In conclusion, the findings indicate that the model of foreign language competency development and the curriculum for the tour guides in geology and fossils are effective and practical. They should be introduced and applied to improve the foreign language skills for other professional groups.

Keywords : Development, Foreign Language Competencies, English for Tour Guides, Efficiency of Training Curriculum, Tour Guides, Geological and Fossil Tourism Attractions

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to develop specific skills and knowledge of human resource, which supports the policies of the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan focusing on human resource development leading to the sustainable development of Thailand (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board. 2006). Today, globalization is creating a "flatter", smaller, and more competitive world. Communication technology allows cheap and almost instant communication between anyone in any part of the world. The new satellite and internet based communication platform creates challenges and opportunities for economic development. Tourism is rapidly growing industry worldwide. However, tourism has varied impacts. For instance, tourism plays an important and positive role in the socio-economic and political development in the destination countries, by, for example, creating new employment opportunities. In addition, it may contribute to a broader cultural understanding of the destination country by creating awareness, developing respect for cultural diversity and for people's ways of life. The government of Thailand realizes this situation and hopes to harness these new opportunities to improve the quality of life for the Thai people. A key strategy is to support economic development leading to better job opportunities for the Thai people. Tourism is a key industry in Thailand and a resource to develop because of Thailand's reputation for its wonderful culture, traditions,

hospitality, friendliness, and kindness of the Thai people. (Thailand Executive Diary, 2551 cited in Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board. 2008)

According to E-TAT Tourism Journal (2007), most tourists to Thailand come from Europe. 15.89% of Europeans coming to Thailand visit the northeastern region, yet far less money is spent there, the least of any Thailand region. According to official government tourism policy, 17 strategies are in place to develop and promote tourism in the northeastern region with the goal of making this region of Thailand to be the gateway to the Indochina sub-region countries. A new standard tourism center is to be developed as well. The tourism promotion projects in the northeastern region during the 2007-2011 period are to focus on ecotourism, historical, cultural, and educational tourism. For instance: Agent Farm Trip in the Northeast, Tourism in Thailand 2009, I-san Dinosaur Route, I-san Merit Route, etc.

This strategy to develop the northeastern region to be a gateway to Indochina complies with the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan. The northeastern region of Thailand has outstanding characteristics for tourism, as well as several competitive advantages, such as the cost of traveling in the Northeast being lower than other regions in Thailand with high standard of service. Moreover, the northeast is also well known for cultural, archeological and historical tourism as well as ecotourism.

A tour guide is a key person who takes responsibility for tourism development and promotion, and who dispenses the knowledge, enjoyment, pleasure and positive impressions including promotion of tourism attractions in Thailand to both Thai tourists and foreign tourists. The Office of Tourism Business and Tour Guides (2008) states that there is a total of 31,548 certified tour guides in Thailand and there are about 4,224 foreign-language tour guides for specific areas. Of this number there are only 1,122 tour guides and 165 foreign-language tour guides for specific areas available in the Northeast.

It is inevitable that development of knowledge, professional skills and foreign language competency of tour guides is very necessary. Ratanabon, A. (2001) claims that training is a development process of knowledge, skill and attitude of human resources in organization for an efficient performance. Delahaye, L. B. (2005) claims that training is a primary strategy for human resource development leading to the success of local and national development. Sopa, N. (2007) states that the opinion of the tour guides and tourism personnel in Khon Kaen, Kalasin, Maha Sarakham and Roi-Et provinces is of high necessity for English development, since they realize that English is necessary for their current and future jobs. Boonyawatana, P. (2009) has asserted that the tourism personnel in Chiang Mai, Phuket and Pataya have realized that English is necessary for tourism business especially listening and speaking skills. Sukhattham, K. (2005 : 8) claims that English curriculum for personnel of 6 industries should be directly related to professional performance. English for tourism industry is necessary, and listening and speaking skills are especially necessary for tourism personnel. Therefore, foreign language competency development of tour guides in the Northeast of Thailand is currently necessary with special

attention on listening and speaking skills. The research methodology for this study consists of 3 steps: 1) curriculum design and development, 2) curriculum implementation, and 3) evaluation.

Objectives:

- To design a foreign language curriculum for tour guides in geology and fossils in the Northeast of Thailand that meets the required 80/80 efficiency criterion,
- To compare foreign language competency of the tour guides,
- To survey the opinions of the tour guides towards the foreign language curriculum, and
- To survey the opinions of tourists and tourism personnel towards the professional performance of the tour guides.

Hypotheses:

1. The foreign language competency of the tour guides in geology and fossils after training is higher than that achieved before training.
2. The satisfaction of the tour guides with the foreign language curriculum is high.
3. The satisfaction of tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with professional performance of the tour guides is high.

Scope

This experimental research is a quantitative research by nature of the comparison of foreign language competency, and a qualitative research by nature of a foreign language curriculum development for tour guides in geology and fossils in the Northeast of Thailand during 3/2008-3/2009.



Chart 1 Conceptual Framework

Steps	Procedure	Goal/Outcomes
1. Curriculum Design and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contextual Analysis and Tourism project study - Need analysis - Job analysis - Study of literatures and research related to curriculum design and development - Curriculum design - Assessment of curriculum efficiency 	A foreign language curriculum in geology and fossils
2. Curriculum Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Testing listening and speaking skills in foreign language before training - Organizing a foreign language training course for tour guides in geology and fossils based on lesson plans - Recording the scores of listening exercises and role-play (speaking) - Testing listening and speaking skills in foreign language after training - Comparing the foreign language competency of the tour guides before and after the training - Data analysis with Repeated Measures MANOVA 	Results of the curriculum implementation with the target group
3. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design and quality assessment of questionnaire - survey the satisfaction of the tour guides with the foreign language curriculum - Data analysis with basic statistics : mean, percentage and standard deviation 	Satisfaction of the tour guides with the foreign language curriculum
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design and quality assessment of questionnaire - survey the satisfaction of the tour guides and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with professional performance of the tour guides - Data analysis with basic statistics : mean, Percentage and standard deviation 	Satisfaction of the tour guides and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with professional performance of the tour guides

Research Methodology

The experimental research was employed using a one-group-pretest-posttest design based on the concept, theories and research of human resource development, methodology consisted of 3 steps: curriculum design and development, curriculum implementation and evaluation.

Population and Samples

The population were 75 students of the English program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University who had a practical training experience in 2/2009. The samples were 40 students of the English program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University who did a practical training experience in 2/2009 selected through simple random sampling.

Research Instruments:

1. The foreign language curriculum was used to train the tour guides in geology and fossils in the Northeast of Thailand. The curriculum was designed based on need analysis, job analysis and assessment of curriculum appropriateness including curriculum efficiency by the experts

2. Thirteen lesson plans for the experimental group were constructed on the basis of standards of English for Occupations (English Language Development Center : 2005), the goals and objectives of English for Tour Guides in Geology and Fossils. The appropriateness and accuracy of lesson plans were assessed by experts. The developed lesson plans consisted of: learning objectives, contents, activities, teaching materials and evaluation.

3. The listening test consisted of 4 parts: 25 multiple-choice items, 30 completion items, 5

true/false items and 5 matching items. All these items were for assessing listening comprehension ability. The test was then assessed for its content validity, as well as language ambiguity and accuracy by experts in English and English testing.

4. The speaking test included 3 role play situations for assessing English speaking ability with a 5-rating-scale-assessment form. The test, adapted from a 5-rating-scale-assessment form of Beresova, J. and Rok, S. (2006), was assessed by experts for language correctness and appropriateness.

5. Two questionnaires:

5.1 A 16-item questionnaire was used to survey the satisfaction of the tour guides with the foreign language training curriculum. The questionnaire was assessed for content validity, accuracy and appropriateness of the language by experts.

5.2 A 9-item questionnaire was used to survey the satisfaction of the tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with professional performance of the tour guides. The questionnaire was assessed for content validity, accuracy and appropriateness of the language by experts.

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation consisted of the following: orientation, testing listening and speaking skills before training, organizing the training for the tour guides, assessing listening ability by using listening exercises and assessing speaking ability by using role play situations, testing listening and speaking skills after the training, surveying the satisfaction of tour guides with the foreign language training curriculum and the satisfaction of tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with the professional performance of the tour guides.



Data Collection

1. The data of foreign language competency were collected from 40 4th year students of the English Program at Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University. The data were results of an English listening comprehension test and an English speaking assessment. The data of English listening competency was collected from the scores of the listening test. The data of English speaking competency were collected from the scores of speaking assessment. Then the data were calculated, tabulated and analyzed by means of statistical procedures.

2. The data were results of questionnaires on the satisfaction of the tour guides with the foreign language curriculum and the satisfaction of tourists and tourism personnel with the professional performance of the tour guides. The data were collected by using questionnaires and analyzed by means of statistical procedures.

Data Analysis

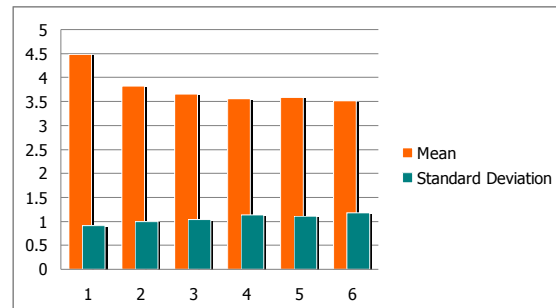
Data analysis consisted of results of an English listening test, an English speaking assessment and questionnaires on the satisfaction of the tour guides with the curriculum and the satisfaction of tourists and tourism personnel with the professional performance of the tour guides. The arithmetic mean was used to provide the average scores of pre-test and post-test including the average level of the satisfaction of the experimental group. The standard deviation was used to show the variation of the scores and the satisfaction. Repeated measures MANOVA were used to determine whether there was any significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of English listening competency and English speaking competency. Cronbach's Alpha was determined by using the SPSS program to ascertain reliabilities of the listening test and two sets of questionnaire.

Results

The results of this research were summarized as follows:

1. Curriculum Design and Development

1.1 The curriculum design was based on the need analysis of tourists and tourism personnel.



Graph 1 Comparison of the average opinions of tourism personnel in 4 provinces in the Northeast of Thailand towards the necessity for English development

The research results revealed that the average opinion of the tour guides and tourism personnel was a high level of the necessity for English development, and they realized that English was very necessary for their current and future job. The 6 highest-rated areas were 1) content, 2) language skills, 3) meaningful situations, 4) practice-based learning, 5) an instructor and 6) location.

1.2 The curriculum development was based on:

1.2.1 The curriculum was composed of: rationale, goal, learning objectives, contents, training methodology, teaching material, evaluation, number of trainees, quality of trainees, time, place and expected outcomes.

1.2.2 In regard to the efficiency assessment of the curriculum, the finding indicated that the average level of the curriculum efficiency was high ($\bar{x} = 4.7$), the IOC index of the curriculum was 1.00-0.80, and the value of the standardized criteria efficiency was 81.75% /81.12%.

1.2.3 The efficiency of the listening test was determined by the assessment of the accuracy and appropriateness, and the average level of the efficiency was high ($\bar{x} = 4.70$). The value of reliability was very high ($\alpha = 0.788$)

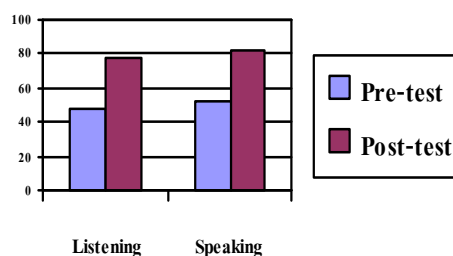
1.2.4 The efficiency of the speaking test was determined by the assessment of the accuracy and appropriateness, and the average level of the efficiency was high ($\bar{x} = 4.82$).

1.2.5 The values of the questionnaires regarding the reliability were very high $\alpha = 0.987$ and $\alpha = 0.856$.

1.2.6 The finding indicated that the average level of lesson plans regarding the assessment of the accuracy and appropriateness was very high ($\bar{x} = 4.88$).

2. Curriculum Implementation

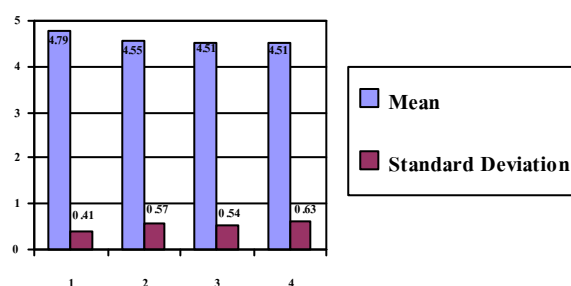
Graph 2 Comparison between the scores of pre-test and post-test of English listening comprehension and English speaking competency of the experimental group, 4th year students of the English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University.



The research results revealed that the average score of English listening comprehension of the students after the training was significantly higher than that of the pre-test. Moreover, the average score of post-training English speaking competency was also significantly higher than that of the pre-training.

3. Evaluation

Graph 3 Comparison of the average opinion of all tour guides towards the foreign language training curriculum



The result indicated that the average opinion of all tour guides towards the foreign language training curriculum was high. The four highest-rated areas of the curriculum were: 1) a practical curriculum, 2) interesting topics, 3) appropriate content, and 4) evaluation. ($\bar{x} = 4.79$, 4.55, 4.51 and 4.51, respectively).

Graph 4 Comparison of the average opinion of tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils towards the professional performance of the tour guides





The result revealed that the average opinion of the tourists and tourism personnel towards professional performance of the tour guides was high ($\bar{x} = 4.32$). The two highest-rated areas were professional skills and tourism ethics.

Discussion

This paper discusses only the curriculum design and development, and the results of the curriculum implementation and evaluation.

1. Curriculum Design and Development

1.1 The result indicated that there were fewer tour guides in the Northeast of Thailand than in other regions. The average opinion of the tour guides and tourism personnel was of high-level necessity for English development, and they realized that English was very necessary for their current and future jobs. It is obvious that the contextual study and need analysis of the target group are necessary for curriculum design and development. Nunan, D. (1988) has asserted that need analysis is an important starting point of curriculum design because the curriculum designer or developer can get useful personal information of learners or trainees for a specific curriculum such as educational background, age, gender, marital status, goals, learning styles and strategies.

1.2 The curriculum design was adapted from the principles of curriculum design and development of Taba (1981), and a model for sustainable capacity building in developing countries of tour guides consisting of: 1) need analysis, 2) foreign language curriculum design, 3) planning curriculum, 4) curriculum administration, and 5) evaluation (Weiler, B. and Harn, H. 2002).

The learner-centered activities have been designed to improve listening and speaking skills focusing on language accuracy and appropriateness. Some of the contents and activities were adapted from English for Tour Guides (English Language Development Center : 2005). Nunan, D. (1991) claims that the trends of English instruction emphasizes the learner-centered approach and the activities should be provided for learners with opportunity to practice language or interact with language as much as possible.

1.3 The result indicated that the value of the standardized criteria efficiency was higher than the standardized criteria. The efficiency may be caused by the systematic steps of the curriculum design and development consisting of: 1) need analysis, 2) job analysis, 3) assessment of the accuracy and appropriateness including IOC value. Nunan, D. (1991) states that the success of teaching English should be based on learners' personal information such as background knowledge, beliefs, learning style and strategies, motivation and attitude. Additionally, the 60-hour-training curriculum is sufficient for trainees to practice listening and speaking skills both in the class and out of the class. Manoonpol, K. (2001) cited in Baldwin and Williams (1988) has asserted that a practice-based learning model is an efficient methodology

2. Curriculum Implementation

The results revealed that the average score of the post-test of foreign language competency was significantly higher than that of the pre-test score. Regarding foreign language skills, this indicated that the average scores of the post-test of listening skill and speaking skill were significantly higher than that of the pre-test score. The results may be caused by the efficient instructional model. The Teaching-Learning Cycle

focuses on a learning process through 4 stages. Moreover, the language and content are used in their current job and trainers are also provided an opportunity to practice language in meaningful situations. Sopa, N. (2004) has asserted that the Teaching-Learning Cycle is an efficient instructional model effecting the English linguistic ability of university students. Galloway, A. (1993) has asserted that content and learning activities for communication should be related to daily and provide students with communicative purposes. Nunan, D. (1991) claims that efficient communicative activities should provide learners an opportunity to interact with language as much as possible.

3. Evaluation

3.1 The average level of satisfaction of the trainees with the foreign language training curriculum was high. The result may be caused by the meaningful learning activities and realistic and practical contents. The activities have been designed based on the principles of learner-centered approach and the Teaching-Learning Cycle model, and the learning activities were arranged sequentially and systematically. Nunan, D. (1991) claims that the content and activities based on the needs of learners affect the success of learning and teaching foreign languages. Galloway, (1993) has asserted that the practical content and language should be realistic and used in daily life of learners.

3.2 The average level of the satisfaction of tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils with the professional performance of the tour guides was high. The practical curriculum, interesting topics, appropriate contents and evaluation may affect the satisfaction of the trainees. Jetchareonrak, S. (1997) has asserted that the content of an efficient training

curriculum should be practical and realistic focusing on a practice-based training model. Manoonpol, K. (2001) adapted from Baldwin and Williams. (1988) claims that practice-based learning is an efficient instructional model. Smithikrai, C. (2005) has asserted that a practice-based training model monitored by trainers will lead to performance achievement in the workplace.

Conclusion and Suggestions

1. Curriculum Design and Development

1.1 The study has shown that the number of tour guides in the Northeast of Thailand was less than that of the tour guides in other regions. The average opinion of the tour guides and tourism personnel was of high-level necessity for English development, and they realized that English was very necessary for their current and future job. Problem and need analysis of the target group is necessary for an efficient curriculum design and development.

1.2 The curriculum design was adapted from the principles of curriculum design and development of Taba and a model for sustainable capacity building in developing countries of tour guides consisting of: 1) needs analysis, 2) foreign language curriculum design, 3) planning curriculum, 4) curriculum administration, 5) evaluation. The learner-centered activities have been designed to improve listening and speaking skills focusing on the accuracy and appropriateness of the language use. Some of the content and activities were adapted from English for Tour Guides.

1.3 The findings indicated that the average level of the curriculum efficiency regarding the efficiency assessment was high, and the IOC index of the curriculum was 1.00-0.80. The



findings indicated that the efficiency value was higher than the established criteria. The efficiency assessment of the curriculum consisted of 3 steps: a 1:1 experimental design, a small group design and a large group design.

2. Curriculum Implementation

The result has shown that the average score of the post-test of foreign language competency of the trainees was significantly higher than that of the pre-test score. Regarding to the average scores of the posttest of listening and speaking skills were significantly higher than that of the pre-test scores.

3. Evaluation

3.1 The findings indicated that the average level of the satisfaction of the trainees with the curriculum was high. The four highest-rated areas were a practical curriculum, interesting topics, appropriate content and evaluation.

3.2 Regarding the professional performance of the tour guides, it was found that the average level of the satisfaction of the tourists and tourism personnel in geology with the professional performance was high especially the professional competency and tourism ethics.

In conclusion, the foreign language training curriculum is effective at developing foreign language competency of the tour guides in geology and fossils focusing on listening and speaking skills. It is also obvious that the trainees are greatly satisfied with the curriculum, and the tourists and tourism personnel in geology and fossils are also satisfied with the professional performance of the tour guides. Therefore, the curriculum should be used for foreign language development of the tour guides in geology and fossils, tourism personnel and students majoring in English, tourism or related fields. The model of

this research can be used as a guideline for other foreign language curriculum development as well as professional development of other areas. Regarding further study, an interactive learning model, web-based instruction, distance learning strategies should be further studied. Also, reading and writing skills of tour guides and tourism personnel should be improved to further strengthen human resource development in the region.

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