The use of Cooperative Task-based Learning in Improving Students' English Pronunciation

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาว่าการเรียนรู้โดยการปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐานร่วมกันสามารถช่วยในการพัฒนาทักษะการออกเสียง
ภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาได้หรือไม่ วิธีการใดที่ผู้เรียนใช้ระหว่างกันในการพัฒนาการออกเสียง และทัศนคติที่ผู้เรียนมีต่อ
กิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ที่มาจากการปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐานร่วมกันเป็นอย่างไร กลุ่มตัวอย่างถูกคัดเลือกจากการสุ่มแบบเจาะจงประกอบ
ไปด้วย นักศึกษาชั้นปี 2 วิชาเอกพลศึกษา สถาบันการพลศึกษา วิทยาเขตมหาสารคาม จำนวน 4 คน เครื่องมือในการวิจัย
ประกอบด้วย แบบทดสอบการออกเสียง รูปแบบการสอน แผนการสอนที่ใช้การปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐานร่วมกัน แบบสังเกต และ
แบบสอบถามทัศนคติ เสียงท้ายคำที่ทำการศึกษาในงานวิจัยครั้งนี้คือ /s/, /z/, /f/, /v/, /S/, /T/, /D/, /tS/,และ /dZ/ผลการวิจัย
พบว่า

การออกเสียงของนักศึกษาได้มีการพัฒนาระหว่างการเรียนรู้ ที่ใช้การปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐานร่วมกัน สองวิธีการที่นักศึกษา
ใช้ร่วมกันในการพัฒนาการออกเสียง คือ การแก้ไขการออกเสียงโดยผู้เรียนด้วยกันเอง และการอธิบายในสิ่งที่เรียนมา โดยใช้
ภาษาถิ่นระหว่างกัน นักศึกษามีทัศนคติในด้านบวกต่อการเรียนรู้โดยการปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐานร่วมกัน เพราะการเรียนรู้วิธีนี้ก่อให้
เกิดโอกาสในการฝึกการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษจากกิจกรรมที่หลากหลายที่มีความเหมาะสมกับระดับชั้นในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ
ของนักศึกษา การเรียนรู้วิธีนี้มีส่วนช่วยนักศึกษาอย่างมากในการพัฒนาทักษะการออกเสียง ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดประโยชน์กับทักษะ
ทางการสื่อสาร นอกจากนี้นักศึกษายังมีบทบาทสำคัญในการคิดและเตรียมการรายงานหน้าชั้นเรียนและเรียนรู้ในการทำงาน
ร่วมกับผู้อื่น

คำสำคัญ : การเรียนรู้โดยการปฏิบัติงานเป็นฐาน การสอนการออกเสียง

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to investigate whether or not cooperative task-based learning could help students to improve their English pronunciation skills. The strategies students used among their peers to improve their pronunciation and students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning were examined. The subjects, selected through the purposive sampling method, comprised four second-year students majoring in Physical Education in the Institute of Physical Education Mahasarakham. The instruments consisted of a pronunciation test, a teaching model, the lesson

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plans based on cooperative task-based learning, an observation form and an attitude questionnaire form. The final sounds focused in this study were /s/, /z/, /f/, /v/, /S/, /T/, /D/, /tS/, and /dZ/.

The findings showed that students' pronunciation was improved during cooperative task-based learning. Two strategies students used among peers to improve their pronunciation were peer correction and lesson clarification by passing on what they had learnt by using their native languages. Students had positive attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning because it provided them a chance to practice English pronunciation through various activities appropriate for their English level. The learning activities greatly helped them to develop their pronunciation skills which benefited their communication skills. In addition, students had an important role in their learning; they thought for themselves, prepared their class presentations and learnt how to work with others.

Keywords : task-based learning, pronunciation teaching

Introduction

One of the differences between English and Thai language involves releasing final sounds. In Thai, final sounds are not released but most English final sounds must be clearly articulated. Omitting and not releasing them can impede the efficiency in communication. Accustomed to not releasing final sounds in speaking Thai, most Physical Education students in the Institute of Physical Education, Mahasarakham, tend to omit and do not release final sounds when speaking English. They feel more confident when pronouncing English in a Thai way. They also convert every English sound into a Thai sound as well. Realizing the importance of pronunciation, a basic skill in learning languages, the researcher has tried to create interesting learning activities which can stimulate students' pronunciation for successful communication, the utmost goal of studying a foreign language. The activities must link pronunciation and communication together and must challenge learners while doing the activities. Learners should realize that they pronounce correctly for some purposes such as seeking information from others. Since knowing a real purpose of using a language is essential, task-based learning is one of the two approaches used in planning the learning activities.

Task-based learning encourages real communication in the target language. The goal of the task is to generate an actual purpose for using the language and provide a natural context for studying the language. The three steps of the task cycle include preparing for the task, reporting back after the task and then studying the language that occurs naturally out of the task and its accompanying materials (Willis, 2000). Therefore, the tasks in this study concentrate on a communicative purpose which boosts interaction among learners. The tasks should make learners realize that they are not alone in learning because they can come to help each other to reach the task goal fruitfully. Learners should feel relaxed while learning in a desirable learning atmosphere which

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makes them stress-free since they know that they have peers to help them learn and achieve the goal in each task. Hence, the other approach selected in forming the learning activities is cooperative learning. Working together whether in groups or in pairs helps students to be relaxed. While sharing information, they can come to each other's aid. They are aware that they work in a team to achieve a goal without feeling competitive (Brown, 2007). Group work makes students feel more secure, less stressful and anxious because they are allowed to help one another. In cooperative activities, individuals try to find outcomes which benefit themselves and also benefit all other group members (Johnson. T and Johnson, 2007). Collaboration may occur among students through pair and group work. (Brown, 1994) Cooperative learning has proved its' effectiveness in teaching English by many researchers. Chitmana (2005) studied the development of English writing through cooperative leaning. The results suggested that the students' achievement of English writing was improved. Praphruetkij (2001) studied the effects of cooperative learning on reading skills. The results revealed that the post test scores of the students were higher after using cooperative learning in teaching activities. Aunloy (2003) and Kongkaprasert (2001) studied the effects of cooperative learning on English learning achievement of secondary students. The results revealed that students' post test scores were higher. Task-based learning has also been used in teaching many subjects including English. Ratanawong (2006) studied the effect of using task-based learning in teaching English for communication. The results suggested that

task-based learning helped students to understand the lessons and gave them chances of practicing the four language skills. Students also gained language experience and had working skills while doing the task themselves. They used English confidently as well.

Based on the proposed merits of the two approaches, it is worthwhile to examine the effectiveness of their uses through conducting the research to find out the results of the following three questions.

1. Does cooperative task-based learning help students to improve their pronunciation?

2. What strategies do students use among their peers to help them to improve their English pronunciation?

3. What are students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning?

The results of the study will be beneficial to teachers and researchers in finding appropriate ways for teaching pronunciation.

Objectives

The purposes of the study were to investigate whether or not cooperative task-based learning could help students to improve their pronunciation. The strategies students used among their peers to improve their pronunciation and students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning were examined.

Scope of the study

This study is aimed at investigating the effect of using cooperative task-based learning in teaching English pronunciation to second-year

students majoring in physical education. The sounds focused in this study are the final sounds: /s/, /z/, /f/, /v/, /S/, /T/, /D/, /tS/, and /dZ/.

Research Methodology

Population

The population was 18 second-year students, majoring in Physical Education in The Institute of Physical Education Mahasarakham, Muang District, Maha Sarakham Province. The subjects of this study were four students, selected through the purposive sampling method. They have normal speech organs, which should not impede their pronunciation learning and they were willing to participate in this experiment.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of two components: instruments for experiment and instrument for assessment.

1. Tools for experiment

   1.1 A pronunciation test was designed to test the subjects' pronunciation of the nine final sounds: /s/, /z/, /f/, /v/, /S/, /T/, /D/, /tS/, and /dZ/. The test had two parts. The first part was pronouncing separate words and the second part was pronouncing words in contexts. The students would get one point when they pronounced correctly and zero when they pronounced incorrectly.

   1.2 A teaching model was designed in accordance with task-based and cooperative learning to improve students' pronunciation of the nine final sounds.

   1.3 Lesson plans designed in accordance with the teaching model based on cooperative task-based learning were used with the subjects for eight weeks. The framework of task-based learning consists of three phases: pre-task, task cycle and language focus. The pre-task phase introduces the class to the topic and the task, activating topic-related words and phrases. The task cycle offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task, and then to improve that language under teacher guidance, while planning their reports of the task. The last phase in the framework, language focus, allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle. After working with the language and processing it for meaning during the task cycle, learners are ready to concentrate on the specific forms of the language, which contain that meaning during the language focus phase (Willis, 2000). The goal of task-based learning for language teaching is to achieve in communication. Therefore, realistic and achievable goals should be set. Learners should not be pushed to strive for only perfect pronunciation. In stead, it is more reasonable to have them concentrate on pedagogic attention on those items, which are learnable and teachable as well as essential in terms of intelligible pronunciation (Luchini, 2005).Another technique used in designing class activities to stimulate interaction among students is cooperative learning. In this technique, students get involved in the process of learning. The more they feel involved, the more achievement and enjoyment they will gain (Lewis, 1999). The goal of all learning activities is not to make students sound exactly like native speakers, but to make their pronunciation acceptable and

comprehensible in order to accomplish their goals in communication. The tasks given to students to work cooperatively include fixing appointments, explaining students' drawing pictures, making up a story, and answering questions.

    2. Tools for assessment

      2.1 An observation form was used to record the students, progress and the strategies of their learning both in tackling the task and in pronunciation.

      2.2 An attitude questionnaire form was used to gather data on students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning.

Data Collection

    The data were gathered through the following steps:

    1. The four subjects were tested by the pronunciation test which included the nine final sounds: s/, /z/, /f/, /v/, /S/, /T/, /D/, /tS/, and /dZ/. The test had two parts. The first part was pronouncing separate words and the second part was pronouncing words in contexts. The students would get one point when they pronounced correctly and zero when they pronounced wrongly.

The results of the raw scores were converted into percentage.

    2. The experiment took eight weeks. The students performed the tasks focusing on the nine final sounds with their friends cooperatively. There were eight tasks within eight weeks for students to tackle. The data were collected every week through the observation form.

    3. Every student's presentation was recorded for the convenience in observing students' sounds. Each student would present eight presentations in eight weeks.

Data Analysis

    The data of the pronunciation part in the observation form were analyzed by a native speaker of English. Then percentage was used to compare all the words that should be pronounced and the words the students pronounced correctly in each presentation. The strategies the students used among their peers in tackling the task and in helping them to pronounce accurately were noted in the second and the third part of the observation form. The students' attitudes towards cooperative task-based learning were also gathered and described.

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The research procedure is shown in figure 1.

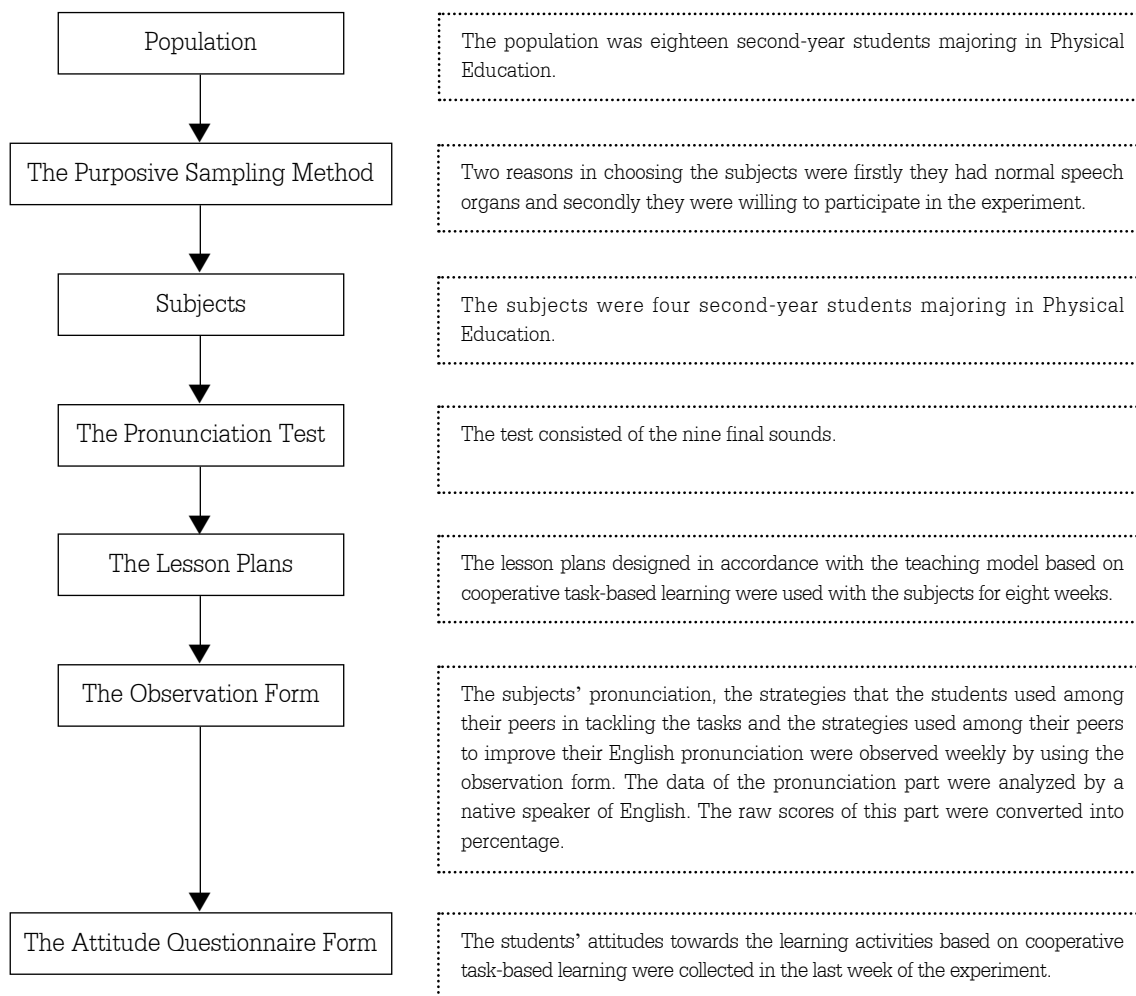|	
Population	The population was eighteen second-year students majoring in Physical Education.
The Purposive Sampling Method	Two reasons in choosing the subjects were firstly they had normal speech organs and secondly they were willing to participate in the experiment.
Subjects	The subjects were four second-year students majoring in Physical Education.
The Pronunciation Test	The test consisted of the nine final sounds.
The Lesson Plans	The lesson plans designed in accordance with the teaching model based on cooperative task-based learning were used with the subjects for eight weeks.
The Observation Form	The subjects' pronunciation, the strategies that the students used among their peers in tackling the tasks and the strategies used among their peers to improve their English pronunciation were observed weekly by using the observation form. The data of the pronunciation part were analyzed by a native speaker of English. The raw scores of this part were converted into percentage.
The Attitude Questionnaire Form	The students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning were collected in the last week of the experiment.

Figure 1 Research Procedure

Results of the Study

The data of students' pronunciation of each sound during cooperative task-based learning were obtained through an observation form. Students did their presentation while doing activities based on cooperative task-based learning. While they presented their findings during the task cycle, their pronunciation was observed and recorded. Then it was checked by a native speaker of English.

Students' pronunciation scores during cooperative task-based learning are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1 Students' Pronunciation Scores in Terms of Percentage before and during the Cooperative Task-based Learning

Participants	/s/	/s/	/z/	/z/	/T/	/T/	/D/	/D/	/f/	/f/	/v/	/v/	/tS/	/tS/	/S/	/S/	/dZ/	/dZ/	total	total
Student 1	57.14	69.23	45.45	66.67	00.00	100.00	00.00	66.67	00.00	33.33	20.00	50.00	11.11	18.18	25.00	22.22	00.00	00.00	20.00	49.00
Student 2	85.71	84.62	63.64	86.67	00.00	100.00	00.00	100.00	50.00	100.00	40.00	100.00	55.56	63.64	25.00	66.67	25.00	60.00	40.00	82.00
Student 3	28.57	92.31	18.18	87.50	00.00	83.33	00.00	100.00	00.00	80.00	20.00	33.33	00.00	54.55	00.00	22.22	00.00	00.00	8.00	62.00
Student 4	85.71	92.31	45.45	50.00	00.00	100.00	00.00	100.00	00.00	50.00	00.00	20.00	88.89	100.00	00.00	100.00	00.00	80.00	32.00	82.00
total	64.00	85.00	43.00	74.00	00.00	95.00	0.00	92.00	13.00	69.00	20.00	55.00	39.00	59.00	13.00	53.00	6.00	35.00	25.00	69.00

☐ Pronunciation test scores before cooperative task-based learning

▨ Students' pronunciation scores during cooperative task-based learning

Improvement of students' pronunciation

Students' pronunciation was improved during cooperative task-based learning. Among the nine final sounds, the sounds /T/ and /D/ were tremendously improved. All students could pronounce them during cooperative task-based learning. According to the average scores, the sound, which appeared to be the hardest to pronounce, was /dZ/. Only Student Two and Student Four could pronounce it while Student One and Student Three could not pronounce /dZ/ at all. All students did a good job for /s/. The other five final sounds: /f/, /tS/, /S/, /v/ and /z/ were easy for some students and difficult for the others. Student Two and Student Three pronounced /f/ very well while Student One got low score. Student Four got moderate score. The sound /tS/ was easy for Student Four. Student Two did quite well while Student Three got moderate score and Student One got very low score. Student Four did the best pronunciation for /S/ while Student Two did quite well. However, Student One and Student Three got low scores. The only student who could pronounce /v/ very well was Student Two. Student One got moderate score while Student Three and Student Four got low scores. The sound /z/ was easy for Student Two and Student Three. They got high score over eighty-five percent. The score of Student One for /z/ was fairly good while Student Four got moderate score.

2. Strategies students used among their peers to improve their pronunciation

Students used two strategies among their peers to improve their pronunciation. One of them was lesson clarification by passing on what students had learnt from the teacher to their peers by using both Thai and Northeastern dialect. When the students understood how to pronounce each sound, they would pronounce it themselves first. Then they gave an explanation to their peers who did not know how to pronounce the sound. They often used a sense of humor to pass on their knowledge from their personal understanding. The other strategy students used was peer correction. Since they worked in pair, they took turn to pronounce with their partner. While one student was pronouncing, the other checked his peer's pronunciation.

3. Students' attitude towards cooperative task-based learning

Students' attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning were collected through an attitude questionnaire form in the last week of the experiment. Expressing their attitude anonymously, students stated that the pronunciation activities based on cooperative task-based learning were not only appropriate for their English level but also beneficial to their pronunciation because they had a chance to practice English pronunciation themselves clearly and correctly. They also had a chance to practice English pronunciation with their peers. Moreover, they also had a better understanding in pronunciation and realized the usefulness of pronunciation in their daily life. Apart from these, some students also pointed to the connection between pronunciation and spelling that they just realized from doing the activities. Learners also stated that they had an important role in cooperative task-based learning activities because they could help their peers to learn. They could give an explanation to their peers in an easy way after they understood how to pronounce each sound correctly. They had a good time to do pronunciation activities with their peers, too. Besides they had an opportunity to think and to do what they wanted to present in front of the class themselves. They also learnt how to work with others.

Students liked doing almost all activities especially the activities about drawing a picture and the activities they work with their partner.

Some said that they liked the time of recording their presentation for they were excited. However, too much pronunciation activities sometimes made them bored.

According to students' opinions, cooperative task-based learning considerably helped them to develop their pronunciation skill, which benefited their communication skill. Students could use the knowledge of pronunciation in pronouncing technical terms in other subjects. They had more confidence in speaking English. They also learnt to observe final letters of words to help them with pronunciation.

Discussion

1. Improvement of students' pronunciation

According to the results, students' pronunciation was improved during cooperative task-based learning. All of them obviously pronounced the sound /T/ and /D/ much better. Besides, each of them really showed satisfactory improvement of many sounds. Their dramatic change of better pronunciation was very interesting. Hence, the strategies students used in doing all tasks were closely observed.

The procedures in doing all tasks were as follows:

1. Getting the concept of how to pronounce each sound clearly

The explanation about the way to pronounce each sound was applied from the closest thing in students' daily lives such as Thai alphabet sounds and sneezing sound. Therefore students got clear understanding from the first place, which helped them had good attitudes towards English pronunciation. The pronunciation was not as

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difficult as what they had thought before. The English sounds they pronounce normally appear in their daily lives. Whether they are conscious or not, they have uttered most of the sounds at one time or another. In fact, they unconsciously could utter some sounds which they thought they couldn't pronounce such as /tS/ and/S/.

During the step of getting the pronunciation concept, peers' aid took an important role. Students who got the concept first would pass on what they understood to their friends by their own explanation. Observed by the researcher, students always passed on the explanation correctly. After students understood the concepts of pronouncing each sound whether directly from the teacher or indirectly from their peers, they would go to the step of practicing pronunciation with their peers.

2. Practicing pronunciation with their peers

After students understood how each sound was pronounced, they would practice pronouncing the given words in each lesson plan through a variety of activities such as reading the words aloud and playing games. The given words in each lesson plan were uttered over and over again through these activities. Students' duty was to check their peers' pronunciation and help them to correct it. Especially when they read the given words aloud, they took turn to check and correct their peers' pronunciation. They usually played with each other in a short time while they were practicing. This helped them become relaxed while learning. However, they returned to do the activities themselves because they knew that they had to finish the task in class time. Then in pairs, students used the words that they had just read

and played games to do the tasks such as making up stories and fixing appointments together. Although the tasks were difficult for them, students tended to feel relaxed and stress-free because they knew that they were not alone in achieving their goals. They had their peers to help them. The peer correction not only helped students to pronounce each sound efficiently but it also helped them to work cooperatively.

3. Tackling the tasks

After pronouncing the given words several times in pairs through various activities such as playing games and doing exercises, students then tackled the tasks. The four tasks were making up a story, fixing appointments, answering questions and explaining students' drawing pictures. All tasks exposed students to the target language and stimulated their pronunciation for successful communication. Every task had its own purpose. Realizing a real purpose of the tasks generated students to use their best effort to achieve the task goal as effectively as they could. The core parts of task-based learning are tasks (Brown 2007). Students learn more efficiently when they are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using. Performing the tasks cooperatively, students had an important role to put their imagination in most of the task such as making up a story, answering questions and explaining their drawing pictures. Hence, they enjoyed doing these tasks and looked forward to presenting what they had created especially the task of explaining their drawing pictures. Although a task was finished with several mistakes such as grammatical mistakes, this was not a serious

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problem. The braveness of using the language to communicate and achieve the task goal is more valuable than some grammatical errors, which normally occurred with a second language learner. This finding goes along the same line with Willis (2000) who maintained that students' writings with strange wordings and grammatical errors are not of vital importance but what matters is to acknowledge that students strive for the best they can at that moment with the linguistic resources and time available to them.

4. Concluding in language focus

Since the target of all tasks was to improve students' pronunciation, therefore incorrect and unclear words were collected and analyzed for the possible reasons why students had wrong pronunciation. The reasons might be getting excited in front of the video camera or too much concerning about the language used to make the class understand. Given an explanation of the right way to pronounce the words, students then pronounced them again. Besides, grammatical errors were often found during students' presentation. The teacher wrote them on the whiteboard and then corrected them with the students. After that students practiced reading the correct sentences and wrote them in their notebooks. Finally, students made their own sentences, which had the same structures like the corrected sentences. For example Student Three's presentation in task five, "A wolf back to a calf. A handy drive under the tree." The sentences were rewritten as "A wolf is behind a calf." and "A handy drive is under the tree." After noticing the structure of the correct sentences, Student Three could write new sentences as "A cat is behind a dog and An orange is under the mango tree."

2. Strategies students used among their peers to improve their pronunciation

There were two strategies students used among their peers to improve their pronunciation. The first one was lesson clarification by using their languages, both Thai and northeastern dialect, to pass on what they had learnt from the teacher to their peers. Normally it is much easier to explain about how to pronounce sounds by using Thai language especially when explaining about points of articulation and articulators. Students always told their friends in Thai how to utter the nine final sounds. Getting the concepts of uttering the sounds was the first step in improving students' pronunciation. They could use either their familiar language or the target language because the most important thing was that every student must have a clear understanding of how to utter each sound.

The second strategy was peer correction. This strategy was very effective in cooperative learning atmosphere because students knew that they were not alone in learning. They all took participation in accomplishing the tasks goal. Students realize that they can achieve the learning goals if other students in the same group also achieve the goals (Johnson and Johnson, 1989).

3. Students' attitude towards the learning activities

Students had good attitudes towards cooperative task-based learning. While doing all activities, students looked relaxed. They learnt with laughter and free of stress because they knew that they were not alone in learning. They had peers in helping them learn. For example,

when they did not get the concepts of how each sound was uttered, they had their friends to give them explanation. The students who gave the explanation felt good about themselves since they were able to help their friend to learn. Moreover, students had tangible goals for all tasks. They felt free to design what they wanted to present in front of the class.

Based on the Attitude Questionnaire Form and the researcher's observation, the most enjoyable activity was drawing a picture especially drawing a picture of their peer in lesson plan five. In this activity, students could not look at each other's picture. One student explained his picture while the other drew without seeing it. When they were finished, the two pictures were compared. They all laughed with the differences between the two pictures. The most exciting activity was presentation especially when they had to present their drawing pictures and explaining them in front of a video camera. The students were so nervous that they forgot their scripts. Therefore, the language they used was immediately spoken out. The grammar was not correct, but they could communicate; for example, task five from Student One." I draw a picture. I write number five is home. A turtledove fly in the sky but it holds in the mouth handy drive. I draw a tree. It's a beehive is on the tree. It's under leaf under the tree. A calf enjoyed and happy because it's a wolf is be bite." The rest of the students laughed while listening to the presentation. This made the class have a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of this study revealed that students' pronunciation improvement and students' positive attitudes towards the learning activities based on cooperative task-based learning have proved the effectiveness of using the technique to develop students' pronunciation skill especially the weak students who have problems in pronunciation. In teaching them, an opportunity to work together should be offered because students tend to reduce stress and anxiety when performing tasks with others. However, to ensure that everyone takes part in achieving the task, students should work in a small group. The simplified task with one tangible goal can help them get the perspective of the whole lesson. They move to each step with tangible goals. That is they learn the meaning of the words because they will use the words to make up a story. They pronounce the same words several times because they will use them for presenting their stories in front of the class. The pronunciation must be clear because it will make their friends understand the stories and able to answer the questions from their stories. Consequently, communication among learners is effectuated from the learning goal in cooperative task-based learning.

In this study, cooperative task-based is applied in teaching English final sounds; however, the approach can be applied in teaching other sounds such as cluster sounds and initial sounds, etc. The most difficult part in using this approach is to create learning activities, which focus on both pronunciation and communication at the

same time. However,dueto the improvement of students'pronunciation, it is worthwhile to do so.

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