
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 13:11 November 2013
ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

C. Subburaman, Ph.D. (Economics)

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

M Htang Dim @ Angela

=====

Abstract

Task-based language teaching and learning (TBLT) is evolution of the communicative language approach. It is regarded as emphasizing meaningful communication not only with the primary goal of, but also the means to, language learning. Meanwhile, learning strategies are tools and thoughts that individuals use to accomplish a communicative task in language learning. Those skills and knowledge enable learners to assist in completing communicative tasks confidently, flexibly, and independently, leading to autonomous learning. This article explores the impact of task-based language learning incorporated with learning strategies to acquire English language in an academic setting in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This study investigated the effectiveness of the task-based strategies syllabus to enhance the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

communicative English ability of students. It also examined autonomous learning behaviors. The findings showed that the students' communicative English ability significantly increased in the following areas, achievement test, presentation, debate, classroom tasks, and teacher reflection.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, Language Learning strategies, Communicative English ability, Autonomous learning behaviors.

Introduction

The Burmese migrant worker community is linguistically diverse in Chiang Mai. As the result of linguistic diversity, the medium language of instruction in school cannot be Thai, Burmese or Shan exclusively. Therefore, the language of instruction must be English. Furthermore, a goal of migrant students is to attend International programs in Southeast Asia Universities, where the language of the instruction is English. Since all the students learned English as a foreign language and only to pass school tests, they cannot apply it to real-world communication. Additionally, they are familiar with the teacher-centered approach and accustomed to a passive learning style. Thus, they need English language skills not only to pass high school equivalency and university entrance exams; but also to communicate in academic settings and the real-world. As they are migrant workers, they have limited time to study, and due to their teacher-centered educational background, they lack learning strategies to maximize their study time. In this particular setting, students are responsible for their own learning, and for looking at the strategies they adopt in language learning.

Students from Myanmar, including migrant students, are not used to learning language in an academic context or with a communicative language teaching approach. Thus, teaching various study skills develops students to handle their study well and leads to self-directed learning. A variety of course books have been compiled and published for Burmese migrant students in Thailand; yet, there is no appropriate coursebooks for those students to continue to higher education. According to Cunningsworth (2002), "Coursebooks or syllabuses are best seen as a resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set in terms of learner needs."(p.7). Indeed, there is no doubt that appropriate coursebooks are

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

of vital importance for the implementation of teaching methodology, especially for Burmese migrant students in the Chiang Mai educational field.

As far as teaching is concerned, task-based instruction is an important concern in EAP. It illustrates how students will be using the language in the real world and studies how they will solve an immediate problem. Furthermore, task-based teaching evaluates learners' abilities to perform a task based on the successful completion of a discrete-point test (Ellis 2003, p.58). Therefore, the design of a syllabus might be quite helpful for the application of task-based language teaching for English education for Burmese migrant students. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a central approach in to language learning and teaching worldwide. However, despite being used around the world for more than two decades, task-base approaches have been unable to approach more traditional pedagogies in EFL contexts. This statement is true in the Myanmar EFL context, where conventional form-focused approaches, such as grammar translation method and presentation-practice-production (PPP) are done. Regarding this, there were many claims that PPP failed to develop learner's communicative abilities (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1993; Willis& Willis, 2009).

This research will be an attempt to design a syllabus which emphasizes a learner-centered approach to task-based language teaching while incorporating language learning strategies to meet the learners' needs and enhance communicative English ability. In other words, tasks will integrate with learning strategies in order to enhance communicative English ability and lead to learner-centeredness. Willis framework of task-based language teaching and learning strategies of Oxford (1990) will be the major reference in terms of the syllabus design. Moreover, the process of syllabus design was done with a learner-centered approach which is presented by Hutchinson & Waters (1987,p, 74) and was used in this study as this approach not only looks beyond the competence the enables someone to perform but also focuses on how someone acquires that competence. The aims of this study were 1) to design and develop a task-based strategies English syllabus for Burmese migrant students in order to enhance communicative English ability, 2) to investigate students' communicative English language ability after the implementation of the syllabus, and 3) to examine students' autonomous learning.

Hence, the task-based strategies English syllabus was appropriate and specific for Burmese migrant students. In this syllabus, different tasks will be used to carry the learning strategies to develop the communicative English ability and learner-centered focus. The tasks will be identified as follow: group discussion will carry the Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies as students have to incorporate with one other and plan for the task. Reading tasks will hold memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies, and social strategies. Writing will train memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies. Listening and speaking tasks will support memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies, and social strategies

Literature Review

Task-based Language Teaching

As Prabhu is the first person to apply task-based language teaching and practicing (Wang, 2006), he believed that students may learn more effectively when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language, they are using (Prabhu, 1987). A task as an activity that requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process (Van den Branden, 2006). Moreover, Willis (1998) states that “tasks are activities in which the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome.” This means the use of tasks is a way forward in communicative language teaching, and enhancing their language abilities by the performance of the task.

For the definition of TBLT, it can be said that TBLT is not a monolithic teaching method, but an adaptable approach to language teaching; Ellis also notes that “there is no single way to doing TBLT” (2009, p.224). Samuda and Bygate (2008) also refer to task based language teaching in “contexts where tasks are the central unit of instruction: they “drive” classroom activity, they define curriculum and syllabus and they determine modes of assessment” (p.58). This study mainly adopted Willis’ framework of task-based language as the fundamental form of task-based syllabus.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

Language Learning Strategies

Many researchers have defined language learning strategies from different points of view. According to Rigney (1978) and Rubin (1987), language learning strategies are behaviors, steps, or techniques that language learners apply to facilitate language learning. Use of learning strategies is a special way of processing information that enhances comprehension, learning, or retention of the information (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Moreover, Nunan (1999) defines learning strategies as the mental and communicative procedures that students use in order to learn and use the language. Also, the definition by Oxford (1990) included cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of language learning strategies that enhance learners' language learning proficiency and self-confidence.

Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbin (1999) cited the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996) to refer to learning strategies as a "means to help students become better language students." The broad definition of foreign language learning consists of steps or actions selected by learners to improve on their learning of a foreign language, the use of a foreign language, or both (Cohen, 1995).

Moreover, learning strategies also enhance self-efficacy, individuals' perception that they can successfully complete a task or series of tasks (Oxford, 2001). Regarding this, when language learners encounter language tasks such as reading and writing, they can apply several different strategies to complete the tasks. Language learners will be successful in the tasks due to use of an appropriate language learning strategy (Richard, 1994). In other words, learning strategies help learners become more autonomous.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching provides learners with sufficient opportunities to use the language themselves for communicative purposes. Regarding this, Huttum (2006) points out that communicative language teaching as a method for teaching a second language

emphasizes the on the importance of students' interactive ability to express their own ideas in the target language.

In language classrooms, according to Snow (2006), "language is a major tool for communication and that communicative activity should play a major role in the language classrooms"(p.9). Larsen-Freeman (1986) states the most obvious characteristic of communicative language teaching is that "almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent."(p.132), In terms of communicative language teaching, language is achieved through interaction between reader and writer, and through negotiation between speaker and listener. There are numerous communicative activities (games, role plays, simulation, and problem-solving tasks), which offer learners an opportunity to practice their communication skills meaningfully in different contexts and by taking on different roles.

Small group work is also regarded as an important principle of CLT. Larsen-Freeman (1986) puts forward that activities in a communicative class are commonly carried out by students in small groups. Through small group activities, the students are engaged in meaningful and authentic language use rather than in the simply mechanical practice of language patterns.

Methodology

This research focused on the designing a task-based strategies syllabus for bridging course English program. Emphasis is placed on two aspects: firstly, designing the syllabus, which focuses on Burmese migrant students' needs and problem in learning English. Secondly, investigate the students' communicative English ability before and after implementation the syllabus and examine autonomous learning behaviors. In particular, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does the task-based strategies syllabus enhance their communicative English ability of Burmese migrant students?
2. Does the task-based strategies syllabus promote Burmese migrant in becoming autonomous learners?

The design of the task-based strategies is based on Willis' framework of task-based language teaching. For each learning unit, the structure was arranged according to the framework and integrating with language skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening which are based on the students' needs. Additionally, since this task-based strategy syllabus is for Burmese migrant students, special attention was paid to make sure that tasks forms fit the students' particular context.

For the selection of topics and materials, questionnaires were used to collect students' opinions and interests. Swan (1992) states that "people generally learn languages best when their experience, knowledge of the world, interests and feeling are involved, and a course must allow students to be themselves as fully as possible." Thus, it is important to identify the needs of the learners in order to choose the most suitable topics and materials.

This study subjects were divided into 2 groups as there were two phrases in this study. The first group for need survey was composed of 35 students (15 from first year class, 20 from second year) and five native English speaking and five non-nonnative English speaking teachers. The second group for implementing of TBS syllabus consisted (15) first-year Burmese migrant students in Chiang Mai. They were 8 males and 7 females, and they attended the course incorporating a 33-hour task based strategies English syllabus to enhance communicative English ability

Due to the limited times and resources, there are two limitation of this study. Firstly, the lesson plans used for this research did not include separated listening tasks, but listening was integrated into speaking tasks and aiming at communicative skills. It would be more effective if the lesson provide in training listening skills and speaking skills separately along with communicative tasks. Second, the students had a limited time only to be trained and improved. The students should be provided with plenty of time for study, practice, and that they use the strategies they learn until they can perform it. Thus, if the training time was much longer, the results of the study and the development of the students might be different from the results in a short time.

Instrument

The instruments used in this study were divided into two main types, experimental and data collection instruments. There were three types of experimental instruments in this research: (1) Needs survey which consisted of needs survey questionnaires, needs survey interview, and observation, (2) Proto-syllabus and (3) Lesson plans. Moreover, there were six types of data collection instruments: (1) Lesson plans evaluation form, (2) Achievement test used in order to investigate students' communicative English ability, (3) Communicative Tasks (formative assessment), 4) Teacher reflection (formative assessment), 5) Autonomous learning behaviors questionnaires, and 6) Interviews about students' opinion on course. Data obtained were analyzed through the use of the SPSS computer program. The statistics employed were arithmetic mean, percentage, standard deviation, and paired sample t- test. Qualitative data was analyzed by using content analysis.

Design of Task-based Strategies English Syllabus

The result of needs survey, including the result from needs survey questionnaires, classroom observation, and student and teacher interviews, was used for setting the course objective, content, and materials. Thus, the contents of the proto-syllabus focused on the students' needed skills, and their topics of interest. Richard (1994) states that if language learners use appropriate language learning strategies, they will be successful in learning English by applying tasks. Thus, in this syllabus communicative tasks were incorporated with these learning strategies: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies, all of which are very effective in encouraging the students to develop academic skills (note-taking, comprehension, summarizing, organization, writing quickly under time pressure, evaluation, explaining, and oral presentation), to enhance communicative language ability in a learner-centered environment.

According to Cunningsworth (2002), good topics may arouse learners' interest and thus provide them with motivation. They also serve as illustrations of the aim and purpose of the task. Then, choosing the familiar content to the students is most authentic for learners and best matches their knowledge, experience and expectation (Ellis, 2003). Topics in the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

syllabus were selected based on the topics which students were interested in, namely Education, Social life, Health, Environment, Culture and traditions, Laws, Science issues, Politics, Technology, Rights and responsibilities of being a students. The teaching methods and activities for the task- based strategies syllabus were based on an integration of various approaches to enhance communicative English ability such as discussion, brainstorming, group work, individual and group presentation, and debate. Communicative English ability in the task based strategies syllabus was focused on listening and speaking, reading, and writing.

Findings

Research Question 1: Does the task based strategies syllabus enhance the communicative English ability of first-year bridging students?

The task based strategies syllabus was constructed based on the incorporation of task-based learning, communicative language teaching, learning strategies, learner-centered approach, and the result of the needs survey: it consisted of 19 lesson plans covering 33 hours. The series of the lesson plans are valid and reliable because they were evaluated by experts and the overall result of evaluation showed the lessons plans were effective, since they were able to enhance students' communicative English ability. Moreover, the effectiveness of the lesson plans was measured by mean score and the lesson plan was good as the total mean score was 3.95 and appropriate for the students to enhance communicative English ability. The results of the lesson plans evaluation by two experts are presented in the following table:

Overall evaluations of lesson plans by experts

Lessons	Mean							Total Mean	S.D.	Overall
	Learning objectives	Contents	Materials	Warm-up	Instruction	Closure	Activities			
1	4.00	3.67	3.67	4.00	4.00	3.67	4.00	3.86	0.17817	good
2	3.67	3.33	4.00	3.33	3.33	3.67	3.67	3.57	0.25198	good
3	4.33	4.00	4.00	3.33	4.00	3.33	4.00	3.86	0.37796	good
4	4.33	4.00	4.00	3.33	4.00	3.33	4.33	3.90	0.41786	good
5	4.33	4.00	4.00	3.33	4.00	3.33	4.33	3.90	0.41786	good
6	4.00	3.67	4.00	3.67	3.67	3.33	3.33	3.67	0.27217	good
7	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	
8	4.33	4.33	3.67	4.00	4.67		4.33	4.22	0.34427	excellent
9	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	3.67	3.33	4.00	4.00	0.50918	good
10	4.00	4.33	3.67	4.67	3.67	3.67	4.00	4.00	0.38490	good
11	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.67	4.33	3.67	4.00	3.95	0.23002	good
12	3.33	4.00	4.00	3.67	3.67	3.67	4.67	3.86	0.42414	good
13	3.67	4.00	4.33	4.00	4.33	4.00	4.33	4.10	0.25198	good
14	4.00	4.67	3.33	3.67	4.00	3.33	4.33	3.90	0.50006	good
15	4.65	4.00	3.50	3.66	4.50	3.33	4.11	3.96	0.49836	good
16	4.05	4.00	3.87	3.81	3.99	3.51	4.10	3.90	0.14037	good
17	4.66	4.33	3.50	4.00	4.66	4.00	5.00	4.31	0.14373	excellent
18	4.11	4.20	4.66	3.33	4.33	3.90	4.33	4.12	0.15073	good
19	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	
Total Mean Score								3.95		good

Mean: 1.00- 1.80= very poor, 1.81-2.60= poor, 2.61-3.40= average, 3.41-4.20 =good, 4.21- 5.00= Excellent

The lesson plans were also adjusted and improved according to the experts' suggestion in order to provide effective lessons for the students. After implementing the improved lesson plans, these lesson plans were changed and improved again to solve the problems that really occurred during the teaching period, and to make them appropriate to the students' ability and time limitation of the lessons. Moreover, it can be inferred that the lesson plans were reliable because the instruction matched with the needs of the students and lesson objectives. And, each lesson plan included tasks that enhance students' communicative skills and practice learning strategies to develop autonomous learning behaviors. In summary, the task based strategies syllabus was a valid and reliable tool to enhance students' communicative English ability and promote autonomous learning.

In addition, the improvement of students' communicative English ability was shown by comparing the pretest scores and post test scores. The mean score of pretest and post test were significantly different ($t = -10.800$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, it can be interpreted that students' English ability after training was significantly increased.

The result of the achievement test

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

Types	No. of students	Total score	Mean	S.D	t	df	sig. (2 tailed)
Pre test	15	50	16.44	0.98	-10.800	23	.000
Post test	15	50	42.23	2.40			

During the training, students were evaluated in order to check improvement of their communicative skills by formative assessments such as oral presentation and debate for speaking, reading for reading tasks, and writing for writing tasks.

When considering the speaking skills, the results of the speaking (oral presentation) prior to the training and after the training were significantly different. ($t = -10.177, p < .05$). The speaking skills were increased from a poor level to good level after training. It can be concluded that the students' speaking skills have increased. The results of the presentations were shown in the table below:

Result of presentation							
Types	No. of students	Total score	Mean	S.D	t	df	sig. (2 tailed)
1 st presentation	15	100	50.46	4.96	-10.177	27	.000
2 nd presentation	15	100	70.80	5.93			

In regard to the reading skills, the performance results of the reading tasks gradually increased. The average reading scores of the students were rated at 51.67 % for their first task, and 95.67 % for their last task. It can be interpreted that reading scores increased by 44%, or increased from a poor level to a good level.

Figure 3 The result of reading tasks

Regarding the writing skills, the performance of the writing tasks in general has increased. The students' writing scores were rated at 45% for the first task, and 71% for the last task. The writing scores increased by 26.00%. When considering the mean score of the reading and writing tasks, each showed that reading skills and writing skills of the students were improved.

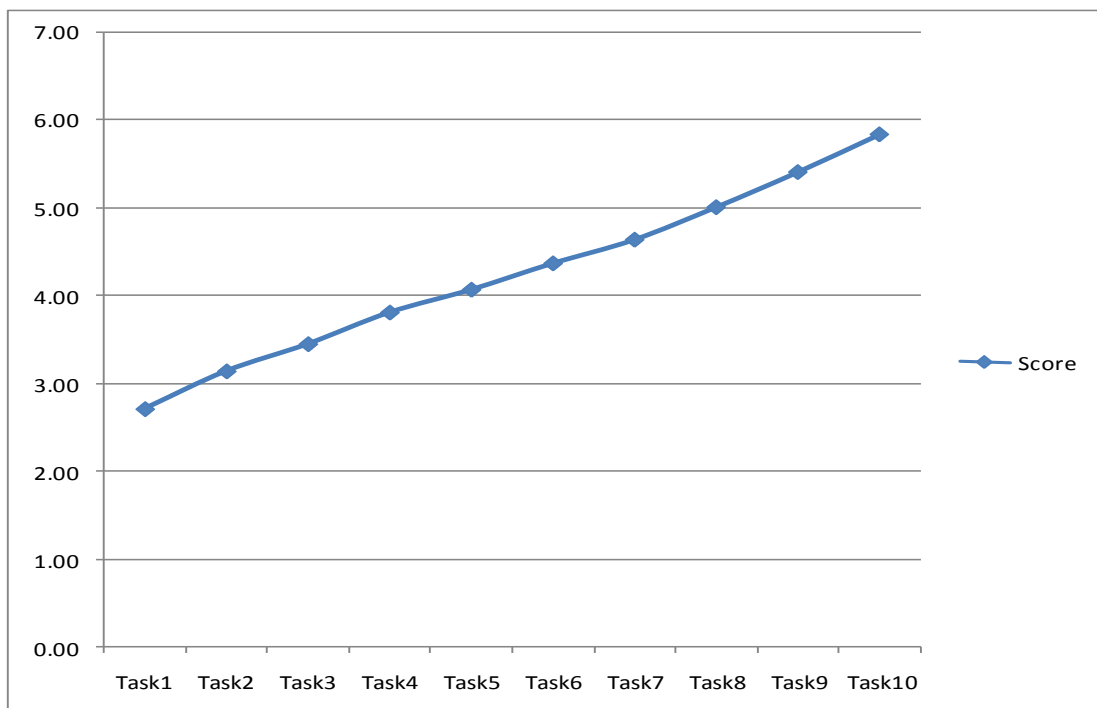


Figure 4 The result of writing tasks

Moreover, from the teacher reflection of formative assessments, based on students' task work, students interacted with their teacher and partners, planned how to work on completing the tasks, found the resources for their learning, and applied their background knowledge to real life. When doing presentations, students were able to create their own presentations and apply their background knowledge to real life presentations.

In conclusion, as students got opportunities to practice their communicative English skills in the training, the tasks based strategies syllabus developed a communicative English ability.

Research Question 2: Does the task based strategies syllabus promote students to become autonomous learners?

There were three indicators that the students' autonomous learning increased after participating in the task- based strategies syllabus due to the theory of behaviors in autonomous learning. First, based on the teacher reflection, students were able to know how to plan and organize the tasks when they were completing the tasks. Based on the teacher reflection results, during the training, students participated in a motivated, active, creative, and independent manner. When they were carrying out tasks, they carefully followed the specific rules of the respective tasks. Moreover, they were flexible whatever the tasks were and whoever their partners were. They showed confidence and willingness in order to complete the tasks, and sometimes they helped each other and led their group.

Second, the result from the autonomous learning behaviors questionnaires showed that the students sometimes used the autonomous learning behaviors as the total score was 3.92 as the mean score. As Benson (2001) defines that "the ability to take charge of one's own learning."(P.22), selecting material / tools for extensive learning and looking for opportunities in the variety of English activities out of the class, and keeping a record of their study, such as keeping a diary and writing a review after the training, are behavior of autonomous learning. Students were able to apply those behavior for own learning. Moreover, during the training, they were able to finish their task in time, preview lessons before the class, and try to catch chances to take part in activities such as pair/ group

discussion, role play, etc. This evidence indicated that students were becoming autonomous learners and used these learning behaviors autonomously after the training.

Third, based on the students' interview after the implementation of TBS syllabus, they were able to evaluate their learning by doing tasks in the classroom and they were motivated in learning. It could be said that students applied one of the autonomous learning behaviors, evaluating their own learning, in learning English. Moreover, they were able to think creatively by participating in the tasks. The students decided that the tasks could help them to develop their thinking skills in their learning. Illustrated by the results of data collection instrument, the task-based strategies syllabus does enhance students' communicative English ability along with the autonomous learning to become autonomous learners.

Discussion of the Results

According to Littlewood (2004), in task based learning, the tasks are essential to the learning activity; it is based on the principle that learners may study more efficiently when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using. Communication tasks engage learners in a demanding mental process as they create what they want to say, expressing what they think or feel. Tasks help learners get chances to open and close conversation, to work together naturally, to interrupt and confront, to ask people to do things and to check what they have done. Moreover, Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning" (p.1), and more specifically as "action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situation" (p.8).

Based on Littlewood (2004) and Nunan (1991), the researcher of this study constructed the tasks-based strategies syllabus to develop the students' communicative English skills. This study implemented the tasks based strategies syllabus to enhance the communicative English ability. The task-based strategies focus on how students can use their own resources to learn more effectively in order to develop English skills. The overall results of the study show that the communicative English skills as mentioned above increased after training. Also, the task-based strategies are helpful tools in promoting autonomous learning.

English skills and autonomous learning were improved by using a variety of tasks and strategies in four categories such as encouraging the student to use what they know, use their imagination, use their organization skills, and use a variety of resources.

The results gained from the reading skills tasks shows that the students' reading ability has gradually increased after the 33 hours learning. During the reading skills tasks, the students used the strategies such as thinking about and using what they already know to help them to complete the task. Reading tasks, such as focusing on making inferences and predictions, allowed students to use compensative strategies to complete the tasks. Then, Venn diagram and charts were used in reading tasks; these materials helped students to use their organization skills in reading. As a result, the metacognitive strategies (e.g., organize or plan, manage own learning, monitor, and evaluate) also increased because of the tasks. Students planned how to accomplish the task (organize or plan), seeking opportunities to practice and focus their attention on the task. While working on the tasks, students checked their progress on the task as they monitored their work. After completing the task, they assessed how well they had accomplished the learning task. It means they self-evaluated their tasks.

Moreover, students used cognitive strategies in reading tasks such as using resources for receiving and sending messages and analyzing the author's purpose from the reading. They also used their memory strategies to recognize the sensory images. Such strategies allowed students to form pictures in their minds what was happening in the text. Hayati & Jalilifar (2010, p. 62) found students who were taught reading skills via Task-Based Language Teaching had a better academic performance, and reading comprehension was more effective. Another researcher, Iranmehr (2011, p. 147), proved that Task-Based Language Teaching was successful in increasing the reading ability by teaching ESP through tasks. In addition, Mercer (2005) also reported that learning strategies increased the students' ability in reading. Thus, the task-based strategies syllabus does increase the students' reading ability.

Atkinson (2003) stated that writing is a social act and the writers' texts always reflect their ability to solve a rhetoric problem, and their awareness of their own communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context. For writing, students needed to apply their

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013
M Htang Dim @ Angela
Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability
of Burmese Migrant Students

background knowledge and reflect their ability to express the idea. When achieved, it means they were able to communicate effectively with the readers. From completing the writing tasks, students were able to use organizational skills (summarize, look for specific information, structure, key words, phrase, and idea), as well as their imagination (create an image to represent information) in practicing the writing. The result of this study shows that the development of the students writing skills has significantly increased.

For speaking tasks, students were allowed to choose the topic and design their own presentation. In completing the oral presentation task, students needed to organize their work, create, practice, and design their own work. For this task, the result of comparing two presentations scores show those students' speaking skills increased after the training. As all the tasks emphasized on cooperative learning (social strategies), it helps students to develop their communicative skills through sharing their opinions and discussing in groups. Moreover, students work in pair when they have to complete the tasks. Then students talk to each other until both partners have the necessary information to solve the task. Therefore, it can be said that cooperative tasks are very important for students to work in pairs or small groups in order to use language. According to Penitz (2000), cooperative learning encourages students to have greater responsibility for learning, exploring alternate solutions in a safe environment and stimulating critical thinking while helping students clarify ideas through discussion and debate. Thus, students were able to use language in a variety of ways and learn from each other.

Besides communicative English skills, the task-based strategies syllabus developed students' learning behaviors to become autonomous learners. Students learned independently while completing the tasks. According to the teacher reflection, students were shown to attain characteristics of autonomous learners: students took responsibility for their own learning, planned, organized and evaluated their tasks, created their own works, and searched outside knowledge for learning resources. Moreover, the data gained from the autonomous learning questionnaires shows the learning behaviors that the students most frequently use are: keeping a record their study, such as keeping a diary, writing review, looking for opportunities in the variety of English activities out of the class, monitoring their learning, trying new ways of study and practice, and selecting material / tools for learning.

Based on the responses of the students, the students know how to make a plan for their language task, and be able to evaluate their own ability of doing the task. Cotterall (1995) considered autonomous learning as the learners' use of "a set of tactics for taking control of their learning." The interview results also show that students agreed that their language skills have increased and tasks helped to learn English more easily and support their learning.

Yet, according to the list of learning behaviors associated with autonomy in the literature (Benson, 2001), some of the behaviors were promoted in this study. Regarding this, Littlewood (1999) argues that "it is true; of course, that we recognize autonomous students by their behavior; but that can take numerous different forms, depending on their age, how far they have progressed with their learning, what they perceive their immediate learning needs to be, and so on."

In the previous research of autonomous learner, many researchers agree that within the concept of learner autonomy students are involved with and responsible for their own learning process. Subsequently, the degree of autonomy also demonstrates the complexity of this concept. According to Gardner D & Miller (1999) students may attain a high degree of autonomy in the skills of reading, but could remain teacher dependent while learning writing skills. Though students needed help and guidance from the teacher, it can be seen that after they were trained they should be able to work on their own and be successful in communicative English ability. For example, there were two students from this study group who got "failed" (20% and 22%) on the first oral presentation. Both of them had difficulty in writing their own script and in reading and presenting to the class. The researcher assisted them on two or three tasks during the training. They were able to write their own script and give presentation with confidence on the second presentation. They got 70 % and 79 % each in giving the second presentation after being trained.

Furthermore, different studies of learner autonomy indicate those students who attain higher degree of autonomy are more independent, and become more successful students. In other words, the level of autonomy while lies within individual students will reflect the responsibility of students who actively take charge of one's own learning which could later

on lead them to develop their language competency. In summary, there are no students who will be completely autonomous or completely teacher dependent.

What is more, while enhancing students' communicative skills and promoting autonomous learning, this study also found that the task-based strategies syllabus enhanced motivation and thinking skills. The results from teacher reflection indicated that students were motivated in doing the tasks and after completing the tasks they were motivated to take on new tasks. Students asked question when they did not understand how to complete the task. Ellis (2003) suggests that the task-based approach brings a variety of benefits to learners; one of the most important is motivation. And, motivation is provided by the need to realize the objectives of the task and to report back on it.

Students mentioned in the interview that they were satisfied and got more confident after completing the tasks. That feeling or experience motivated students because they were knowledgeably completing an activity leading to a valued end. Once students are motivated, they can complete the given tasks or desired goals. (Brophy, 2005). Among the evident indicators of fundamental motivation, the following are found in this research: 1) desire demanding aspects of tasks, 2) spontaneously communicate learning to external interests, 3) ask questions to increase their understanding further than the learning within reach.

During the training, students were able to develop their thinking skills by doing the tasks. Students used creative thinking skills when they were doing writing tasks and presentations. Sternberg (2002) explained that analytical thinking skills are higher-order processes used in planning, monitoring, and evaluating performance of a task. Students needed to analyze the reading when finding the context clues and in writing they also needed to reflect their thinking which links to their real life. As most of the reading tasks enhance cognitive strategies, students' critical thinking skills were also developed. It means students needed to use cognitive skills in completing reading tasks. Halpern et al. (1996) explained the meaning of critical thinking skills as the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desired outcome.

Since the students had the previous learning experience of remembering facts (rote learning), the task based strategies syllabus reduced that type of learning situation and instead

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

built higher thinking skills. For completing tasks, first students need to recall their knowledge; second, comprehend the tasks; next, use a new concept in the new situation; then break down the information they learned from reading to distinguish between explicit facts and inferences, comparisons and contrasts; after that, create, design, and summarize; finally, analysis the task to evaluate. All these steps were done when completing each task. Thus, Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) was fixed for this study. It can be found that the syllabus also enhanced students' critical thinking skills through the tasks.

Conclusion

As the finding showed that besides giving the students communicative tasks to develop their English language ability, training them how to use language learning strategies in improving students' autonomous learning in order to become more successful learner in any other learning situation. Thus, it could be assumed that the task-based strategies syllabus does enhance the students' communicative English skills and promote autonomous learning through training learning strategies rather than telling the name of the each learning strategies. Moreover, the finding of this study also showed that not only the students' communicative English ability and autonomous learning behaviors are developed, but also students' critical thinking skills are improved through the tasks. Furthermore, as to the details of the task design, realistic factors have been considered so that the syllabus can really fit the particular learner group, namely, first year Burmese migrant students .In addition, in terms of the topics and materials, students' opinions have been investigated. From the result of the survey, we can discover students' preference and needs, and thus design the syllabus accordingly. It can be concluded that the communicative skills have developed along with the autonomous learning to become autonomous learners.

Recommendations

For the related further research, the task-based strategies syllabus should be developed to address language skills in different learning settings and contexts. Thinking skills, language skills, and autonomous learning behaviors will be more improved and learning

motivation will also be developed by adding more communicative tasks in the syllabus for further study.

=====

References

- Atkinson, D. (2003). L2 writing in the post-process era: Introduction. *Journal of Second Language writing*, Vol. 1, N. 12, 3-16.
- Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow. Pearson Education Limited.
- Brophy, J. (2005). *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Chamot, A. Ul., Barnhardt, S., El-Dinary, P.B & Robbins, J (1999). *The Learning Strategies Handbook*. NY. Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
- Cotterall, S. (1995). Reading for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System*, 23 (2), 195-205.
- Cohen, A. D. (1995). *Second language learning and use strategies*: Research Report. Minneapolis: Center for advanced research on language acquisition. University of Minnesota.
- Cunningsworth, A. (2002). *Choosing you coursebook*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, D & Miller, L. (1999). *Establish Self-assess: From theory to practice*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Hayati, M. & Jalilifar, A. 2010. *Task-based teaching of micro-skills in an EAP situation*. Taiwan International ESP Journal, Vol. 2: 2, 49-66. (Online), (<http://www.tespa.org.tw>), accessed on August 26th, 2013.

Huttum, T. V. (2006), [*The Communicative Approach Rethought*](#), retrieved 18.06, 2013

Iranmehr, A., Erfani, S. M. & Davari, H. 2011. *Integrating Task-based Instruction as an Alternative Approach in Teaching Reading Comprehension in English for Special Purposes: An Action Research*. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 142-148, February 2011. Academy Publisher, Finland. (Online), (<http://www.ojs.academypublisher.com>), accessed on August 26, 2013.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (1986). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and Development Autonomy In East Asian Contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, volume 20, number 1. P.71-94.

Littlewood, W. (2004). The task-based approach: Some questions and suggestions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 319-326.

Mercer, S. (2005). Vocabulary Strategy Work for Advanced learners of English *Forum*, 43(2), 24-35

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

O'malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. Uhl. (1990). *Learning strategies in second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

Penitz, T. (2000). Collaborative learning.[Online].Retrieved August 26,2013.

Prabhu, N. S., 1987. Second language pedagogy. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Richards J. C. (1994) . *Reflective teaching in second language classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rigney, J. (1978). *Learning strategies: A theoretical perspective*. In O'Neil, H. F. Jr. (Ed.) Learning Strategies. New York: Academic Press.

Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. New York: Prentice Hall

Snow, D. (2006) *More Than a Native Speaker: An Introduction to Teaching English Abroad*. Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

Samuda, V., & Bygate, M. (2008). *Tasks in second language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sternberg, R. J (2002). Raising the achievement of all students: Teaching for successful intelligence. *Educational Psychology Review*.

Swan, M., Walter, C., & O'Sullivan, D. (1992). *The New Cambridge English Course 3 Teacher's Book*. Cambridge University Press.

Snow, D. (2006) *More Than a Native Speaker: An Introduction to Teaching English Abroad*. Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

Van den Branden, K. (Ed). (2006). *Task-Based Language Education: From Theory To Practice*. Cambridge University Press. CUP.

Wang, C., (2006). Designing communicative tasks for college English courses. *Asian- EFL- Journal*. China: School of Foreign Languages and Literature Chongqing Normal University &Yangtze Normal University.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

M Htang Dim @ Angela

Developing the Task-based Strategies Syllabus to Enhance Communicative English Ability of Burmese Migrant Students

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.

Willis, D. & Willis, J. (2009). Task-based language teaching: some questions and answers. *The Language Teacher*, 33/3, 3-8.

M Htang Dim @ Angela, M.A. TESOL
61/149, Soi 8, Baan Thipparat, Ving Ping Road, T. Changklan, A. Muang
Chiang Mai 50100, Thailand
angeladim202@gmail.com

Payap University
Super-highway Chiang Mai - Lumpang Road
Amphur Muang
Chiang Mai, 50000
THAILAND