

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the study is described and the limitation of the study is discussed. Afterwards, an implication is stated, and then suggestions and recommendations for further study are provided.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study aims to develop an intensive English course for Buddhist missionary monks going abroad. The primary objective is to investigate the English-language needs of such monks. Afterwards, these needs together with target situation analysis and recommendations from the administrations will be used to develop a syllabus and materials for the intensive English course. Considering students' learning styles, ways to enrich students' autonomy, and the time allotment for the course, the task-based approach is proposed as a main method of instruction. The next objective is to study the effect of task-based instruction on the learning outcomes of Buddhist missionary monks, and to explore their views on such type of instruction. Finally, the last objective is to propose a good implementation procedure for an intensive English course for Buddhist missionary monks using TBI.

There are four main parts in the study: needs analysis, course development, course implementation, and evaluation.

5.2.1 Needs Analysis

Participants in the needs analysis stage included two groups of respondents who answered the questionnaires. The first group was composed of 75 monk students who joined the Buddhist missionary monk training program in the class of 2005 but only 70 sets of questionnaire were collected, and the second group consisted of eleven missionary monks who were working abroad, primarily in the USA and the UK in the same year. Moreover, to get in-depth information, two administrators of the program

and a few missionary monks in Thai temples in the USA were interviewed unofficially.

5.2.2 Course Development

The needs and recommendations from both groups were listed, and the top needs were selected and classified into nine different main topics that missionary monks should know in order to help themselves use English in various situations before going to work abroad. Task-based instruction, adult-learning style, and learner autonomy were the underlying principles in designing the course content and methodology. The course materials mentioned were the real or actual props that could be found, some of which were originally created by the researcher, and some adopted from commercial texts. Each of the lessons was divided into three parts using Willis's framework (1996). The first part was pre-task stage or the introduction to topic and task. Then the second part was a task cycle where students worked on task, did the planning, and then reported to class. The last part was language focus which was the stage where the teacher gave feedback and suggestions on language structure she found emerged during the task cycle or answered questions students asked. Grammar and expressions would be analyzed, practiced, and reviewed, and tasks could be repeated during this stage.

After the course was developed, it was validated by six experts. It was then piloted with 75 monk students who were in the training class of 2005 as already mentioned. The information obtained from the pilot study was used as a guideline in adjusting the activities and materials in the lessons for use for main study conducted in 2006 to make sure that they were most appropriate for monk students.

5.2.3 Course Implementation/ Evaluation

The developed course was implemented in a class of 77 monk students who joined the Buddhist missionary monk training program for forty-five hours from April 30 to May 17, 2006. The subjects in the main study comprised only 30 students who were systematically selected from the whole group. These 30 students were the ones who provided quantitative data from their pre-test and post-test scores. The top ten students with the highest pre-test scores were grouped by the researcher as the high

ability group, and another ten students who got the lowest pre-test scores were clustered as the low ability group. The members of these two groups were the participants who provided qualitative data for this study. However, these thirty students were treated the same as all the other students in class the whole time, except that they were the only groups who had a chance to take the speaking pre-test and post-test. They were also called on to provide more data, by being interviewed on the last day of instruction.

A few months after the end of the course, questionnaires were distributed to the entire group of monks who graduated from the program to follow up on how such monks used English in their real life abroad. This data represented the long-term outcome of the course, and it could reaffirm the results of the instruction based on tasks.

5.3 Findings

Findings from the study are represented by the answers to the research questions as follows.

The first research question is “What are the language needs of Buddhist missionary monks?” The answers from the questionnaires indicate that monk students and the Buddhist missionary monks on duty needed to use English in order to accomplish fifteen top tasks, which can be divided into two categories. The first category is the work-related tasks, such as listening and responding to congregations’ problems, explaining and discussing Dhamma issues, and talking about monks’ roles and requisites. The other category is survival skills in daily routine, such as listening and responding to phone calls, reading and responding to instruction, schedule, or announcement, reading signs and maps and following directions, as well as filling out required forms and documents. Reporting problems was the least important topic in using English in their point of view. These needs were then incorporated into lesson topics and the content of the course, using task-based instruction as the principal method of teaching.

The second question is “Is task-based instruction workable in an intensive English course for Buddhist missionary monks?” The post-test scores of all students were significantly higher than the pre-test scores especially in terms of speaking skills, but not in terms of listening skills. This may be due to the fact that the speaking

test was based on what they specifically studied in class, while the listening test measured their general listening proficiency. The inadequacy of time to practice listening and the lack of supporting materials for the monk students to listen to English media on their own during their free time may also contribute to the problem.

As for the question, "To what extent does TBI increase learning outcomes?", the outcomes for the whole group in the form of statistical data showed that students made significant improvement in grammar, fluency, communication, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The high ability group gained the most in terms of grammar, followed by communication, fluency, pronunciation, and then vocabulary. For the low ability group, grammar knowledge also came first, followed by fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and then communication. The reason why students with both high and low proficiency improved most in the areas of grammar and fluency was probably due to the principles of TBI that initially focused on conveying meaning, when students could get the message across during the task cycle. After that, students would get a chance to analyze and practice on structure; this would enable them to be more aware of grammatical structures and become more fluent. In addition, reinforcement on grammar occurs during the language focus stage. With their grammar knowledge background, they could construct more grammar knowledge through TBI. As for the application in real situations, it is found that the monks who graduated and then worked abroad felt the most confident when using English in getting around, followed by boarding the plane, talking about culture and requesting information, talking about monks in general, explaining Dhamma, and applying for a visa.

Another question was, "What are the views of the monk students on TBI?" These data were collected through students' logs and interviews. In addition, the open-ended part of the questionnaire sent to the monks who graduated provided clearer views of the students who were trained in the course and obtained real experience abroad. The majority of both the students and the graduates felt that TBI helped a lot in preparing them to face the real challenges of the various situations they had to face when working abroad. Moreover, the role playing gave them opportunities to rehearse and increase their confidence in using English in real life. Group work was also found to be useful for this group of students. They learned to share, mingle, and compromise different ideas in order to accomplish team work. Their taking turns presenting their groups' projects in front of the class gave the students, even the shy ones, a chance to speak and be heard. The feedback from the teacher after the

students' presentations provided them opportunities to focus on their language usage without losing face. All the findings based on both quantitative and qualitative data seemed to confirm each other suggesting that TBI was workable in an intensive English course for monk students.

For the last research question, "How can TBI be made effective in the intensive English for Buddhist missionary monks course?", the answer was based on the experts' approval of the lesson plans and course content, students' language skills improvement and the learners' attitudes towards TBI. Interesting findings were presented. In general this course proved to be practical, useful, and challenging; however, more practice time was needed and the modern multimedia would make the lessons more effective, so videos or films should be added.

5.4 Implications and Conclusions

Some theoretical implications can be made based on the findings of the present study. As far as needs analysis is concerned, it has been found that surveying students' needs before the class can heighten learner motivation, as students may feel what is taught in class will be relevant to their needs (Brown, 1995). Since needs of students may change, it is important that needs assessment be conducted at various stages of learning. Also when students' needs are in conflict with those of other stakeholders, care must be taken to appropriate those needs, so that needs, lacks and wants of all those concerned are kept in balance. Moreover, as part of course evaluation, it would be useful to follow up on how students use English in real situations. This is to ensure that their needs are met in real life.

Another interesting finding is the success of TBI for teaching oral communication skills. This yields an important pedagogical implication. The factors that make teaching speaking in this study successful are as follows: first of all, the ESP content specific to this group of students are based on the real needs of the monks preparing themselves for overseas missions, so they have the clear goals to fulfill and they have high motivation to learn the course. Second, the content is suitable for the learners. Third, peer learning/ instruction helps push one another beyond their potential to the Zone of Proximal Development, so this confirms Vygotsky's theory that the interaction among peers can help enhance learning

performance. Lastly, the classroom anxiety-free and non judgmental atmosphere of collaboration made students feel relaxed and learn better (Krashen and Terrell, 1983).

However, there was a piece of evidence in this research that contradicted to Ellis's observation (2003). He mentioned that tasks do not enhance natural communication. In this study when students worked on task, they first focused on the communication and after they finished the task they concentrated more on grammar and pronunciation thus TBI can be used to provide ample opportunities for students to use language naturally and meaningfully.

As regards evaluation, Ellis (2003) mentioned three types of evaluation to assess whether the task-based course was successful. First, it is to check the students' attitudes towards evaluation, and tasks. In this research, the findings from students and the graduates were relatively similar in that both groups felt very positive to this approach of teaching. Second, it is important to find out if the actual outcomes of the task match the predicted outcomes. This is also true especially when these monk students finished the course and went to work abroad. The knowledge they gained from studying could be helpful when they are in the real situations. And finally, it is to assess the performance to see if the task has resulted in language learning as shown in the pre-test /post-test scores. Based on all these criteria, the findings indicated that this course is workable and this can be empirical evidence of a complete task-based approach fully adopted in an intensive English course.

This study presents a finding that contradicts to a belief that task-based instruction is perceived as an Anglo-American invention which made it suitable for only the western students (Ellis, 2003). It has proven that eastern students can also benefit from task-based instruction.

In addition, this study has shown that task-based instruction helps enhance the oral skills of this group of adult learners with particular learner characteristics. These monk students seem to favor collaborative work whereby they all aim at working towards group goals, and peer assistance is remarkable. Their high self-discipline further facilitates their mastery of grammar knowledge which consists of sets of systematic rules. Moreover, constant practice in different task cycles leads to fluency of communication. All in all, this study reveals that task-based instruction is a fruitful method in teaching oral communication to adult learners who cherish collaborative work, which is a means to facilitate co-construction of knowledge among learners of mixed ability.

The result of this study also confirmed the idea of Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) that ESP can be catered not only for the intermediate and advanced students but also the beginners. It is the teacher's responsibility to determine what to do when she has to teach a class with mixed-ability students. The best way is to use every resource possible. It is important to note that the fast students can be good teaching assistants. It is at the discretion of the teacher to decide whether and when to use peer teaching instead of carrying all the workload herself.

In addition to theoretical implications, this study also yields some pedagogical contributions. As the world today is becoming smaller, personnel, especially monks in many Buddhist countries, have to interact with or contact one another more often. Several conferences about Buddhism or religious affairs have been held in Thailand, for instance the 2nd World Buddhist Summit in 2000 and the 4th World Buddhist Summit in 2005 in which Buddhist monks from 22 countries around the world participated. Thai monks have been called to be part of the committees or the participants of these events. According to Ven. Phra Dhammagosacharaya, Professor and the President of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, "Thailand is going to be the center of world Buddhism" (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2005: 178). Based on the interview with some monks who graduated from monk universities, it was found that the English courses they had previously studied focused more on reading and writing rather than listening and speaking. Findings from this study suggest it may be time to reconsider whether to continue focusing only on these literacy skills, or to include listening and speaking to increase the potential of Thai monks for international communication.

Also, based on the needs survey, all stakeholders viewed English as an important skill which can be subdivided into survival and work-related skills. In the past, English may not have been useful to the monks, but the world has changed. Again, it may be time to reconsider this idea and revise the curriculum. The students' needs can indicate whether it is best to provide an ESP (English for specific purposes), an EAP (English for academic purposes) or a general English course for them.

For administrators who provide English education for monk students in Thailand, especially in the monk academic institutions, who want to **change** from the traditional methodology to TBI, they may adjust gradually by introducing group work and role play as additional activities in class as most monk students found them

useful. Oral skills may be integrated, and the monk students can benefit from the lesson, especially when they plan to become missionaries working abroad, or to further their studies in India.

For the practitioners who plan to arrange TBI for other students than missionary monks, findings from this research may not be applied directly for their purposes because the monk students in this program may have different nature from other groups of students, in the sense that they are adults who have goals related to their missions abroad. They are highly disciplined, self-directed, and self-motivated. Therefore, TBI can easily lead to autonomous learning. For young children, teachers may have to make sure that the tasks prepared are highly motivating and fun.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Some limitations must be noted here as they may affect the results of the study. This study was originally planned for 30 participants. However, when it was implemented, all 77 students had to be included in the class due to a number of constraints. All of them were students in the program who were to be trained for their duty abroad. They were supposed to get the same preparation in a tight schedule of only one month. There were neither personnel, nor places, nor time available to administer two separate classes during the training. Therefore, all of them were trained in the same class as it was supposed to be. The researcher wanted to treat all students as equally as possible. Every student took a listening test before and after the course. All of them were requested to write students' logs after each day of instruction. All the tasks were conducted in the class of 77 students. However, the speaking test had to be conducted with only 30 students because there was only one qualified teacher available for the class at that time, and the researcher had to interview the test-takers and become one of the raters, with another colleague acting as the second rater. A good point to note regarding this was that TBI was used in the real class with real limitations, and the findings can, therefore, be more readily applied to a real population.

One big problem mentioned by all stakeholders was the limitation of time. Usually an intensive course is a course arranged in a short time but the schedule should be divided consistently into a few hours per day, but in this study the schedule was a little too tight and inconsistent. It was a forty-hour course divided into six

hours a day for seven days. The students studied this course for two and a half hours in the morning, took a lunch break and continued for three and a half hours in the afternoon. Moreover, it was sometimes scheduled for two consecutive days which is too much especially for some students. Based on the interviews, one of the students reported that *it was good to study such a good English course, but it was like eating good food, no matter how good the food is, the body can receive only certain amount; eating too much would make you feel uncomfortable or might get sick*. If this course were conducted only in the morning while in the afternoon students could be free to study on their own in a listening lab or learning center, the results would have been much better especially for the listening skill. In learning a language, students need time to digest what they have learned, link the new knowledge with their prior knowledge, review or do homework, and prepare for the next class. However, the teacher in this study did what she could in the class to make the most of the time available. This administrative constraint is out of her control.

Another limitation was related to the responses from the monks who graduated from the program and who were working abroad. When the course ended, all the students promised to complete the questionnaire the researcher would send to them a few months after they settled down in temples in their respective foreign countries. The training program ended during the last week of May, 2006. About forty monks were allowed to go for their mission in July. However, only some could manage to go early in July; many others were unable to get all the necessary documents, so they had to wait because the Buddhist Lent started on July 11 and lasted until October 7, 2006. According to tradition, monks are not allowed to travel or stay overnight at any place other than their temples during the Buddhist Lent. The questionnaires were sent in August by e-mail to follow up on their performance in real situations. Unfortunately, only a few monks responded. The respondents were the monks who managed to stay abroad before the Buddhist Lent. A few answered without attaching the completed questionnaires to their emails, and a few submitted incomplete tables, or tables with unreadable fragments. One monk sent back a long e-mail outlining all his answers because he was incapable of sending back the questionnaire via an attachment. The researcher sent out the questionnaire several times and waited until the end of February 2007 to finalize the data. Finally, only ten responses could be used in the study.

5.6 Recommendations for Further Study

This may be one of the pioneering research studies done with monk students in the field of English language teaching. Other issues that may be worth investigating are as follows:

1. There should be an evaluation of this program within the next five years which may reconfirm the hypothesis or may lead to another revision.
2. An experimental research study which compares TBI with other methods of teaching may provide alternatives for the administrators who arrange training for missionary monks going abroad.
3. Future research may consider the development of EAP course using content-based instruction as an alternative method to teaching monks who may need English for other purposes than being missionaries.
4. To verify whether English is really necessary for monks, an ethnography research on monks studying in monk universities with plans to study abroad for a higher degree may reveal interesting findings related to this issue.
5. There should be a follow-up survey of stakeholders' attitudes towards the work performance of missionary monks on duty abroad who attended the intensive English course for Buddhist missionary monks using task-based instruction.