

Providing Business English Instruction: Thai Instructors' Practices and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine how Business English courses conducted in the Thai Higher Education, and to investigate students' perceptions toward the instructional management of the courses in their universities. The participants were four instructors, and one hundred and forty students enrolling in the courses of four universities in the Bangkok metropolitan areas and the suburbs. The course syllabuses were analyzed, and the questionnaire was administered for data collection. The results revealed that the current situations of the instructional management of Business English courses in their universities were different in terms of course content, a primary focus on learners' development, and instructional materials. Despite the difference among those institutions, Thai learners have positive perceptions toward the instructional management. The results may benefit Business English instructors and course designers in terms of improving and revising the course in the right direction which respond to the present professional world and the trend of Business English instruction.

Keywords: business English, instructional practice, Thai tertiary education

1. Introduction

In the changing professional world where directly influences educational institutions, particularly at the tertiary level, instructors of Business English as a trainer have encountered a great challenge on the instructional management which has to be practical and relevant to the realistic workplace communication. The traditional approach to developing basic knowledge of business vocabulary and grammar does not seem to yield a great profit to students any longer, as the professional success in the global economy requires more abilities which are problem-solving skills, goal-setting skills, interpersonal skills, visioning skills, IT and computer skills, leadership skills, self-assessment skills, numerical competency, lifelong learning, global mindset, and particularly communication skills (Zaharim et al., 2008).

Ideally, the most effective instruction of Business English course is to cultivate English language knowledge and skills, business knowledge and skills, and intercultural communicative competence (Brieger, 1997; de Beaugrande, 2000; Donna, 2000; Doyle, 2012; Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Najeeb-us-Saqlain, Qazi, & Simon, 2012; Raimaturapong, 2006; Strelchonok, 2012). However, in reality, a huge gap between the language classroom and the real-life workplace has been reported recently as worldwide phenomenon (Bouzidi, 2009; Freihat & Al-Machzooni, 2012; Makassar, 2010; Thomas, 2007). The issues seeming to be problematic are that the contents provided are not appropriate to the demands of professional world (Bouzidi, 2009; Freihat & Al-Machzooni, 2012; Makassar, 2010; Thomas, 2007), a heavy focus on developing knowledge and skills from textbooks or books tend to be incomplete, and more theoretical (Nicoleta, 2008), there is no balance between essential knowledge and skills such as business communication skills, domain-specific terminology, and basic business concepts (Strelchonok, 2012), and thinking skills such as analytical, critical or creative are not greatly enhanced (Talmacian, 2008).

In Southeast Asian region including Thailand, the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 has a direct impact on its citizens' ways of life, one of which is the participation in the regional labor market under highly competitive situation. Only people with high English language proficiency and communicative competence, apart from the domain-specific professional competence, tend to gain advantages in terms of job employment. In addition, because of the linguistic diversity, English language seems to be merely a communicative tool, facilitating those people during communication, in particular in professional or business context.

Comparing to other ASEAN member countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, Thai citizen's English language proficiency lags behind. The underlying causes of such fact may arise from that the role of English is used as a foreign language, not an official one, and more obviously, that English language education in Thailand, especially in the Higher Education, does not fully support the development of the language proficiency and communicative competence. For undergraduate students, courses in general English and ESP including Business English are provided to develop essential language skills and ability prior to entering the real professional world. However, Thai novices and professionals are reported to have difficulties in effectively using the language in the workplace, and the language improvement in workplace communication is on great demand. This fact reflects that providing English language education at the tertiary level needs to be immediately revised (Charunsri, 2011; Luankanokrat, 2011; Laohachaiboon, 2011; Nimmuch, 2011; Rajprasit & Pratoomrat, 2012; Rajprasit et al., 2014; Thaveeprayoon, 2011).

To pinpoint the cause of such problems, this research aims to investigate how properly Business English courses conducted by Thai instructors in relation to the present era, and to survey students' opinions toward the instructional management of the courses in their universities.

2. Literature Review

In this section, Business English instruction and its instructional problems are to be reviewed and discussed, based on theories, concepts, and related studies.

2.1 Business English Instruction: Development and Management

Teaching Business English is a challenge for any instructor, as the instructor must train students with the ability to communicate in an information-overloaded environment, and to encode and decode messages with interactants at various competency levels. The ultimate goal of both instructors and stakeholders is to provide the efficient and effective instruction of Business English. Many experienced scholars have proposed theories, concepts, and models to facilitate Business English teaching and learning for satisfactory learning outcomes.

2.1.1 Course Development: Recent Trend

In order to achieve the goals of Business English instruction, old-fashioned methods of teaching, such as those with a focus on lexical and grammatical structures, should not be employed. The instruction is more than a set of grammatical rules with sets of vocabulary to be memorized. In this case, the emphasis is on enhancing the ability of the students to communicate in the English language, rather than to merely develop the ability to form correct sentences. Additionally, Business English instruction should not only prepare students to develop expertise for the business world, but also encourage them to be sensitive to issues of inequality and social injustice, and to be agents of change.

According to Doyle (2012), Business English courses can be divided into eight categories which can be applied to Business English courses: generic (general or functional areas of business); regional or prevailing industry-specific (business language content covering prevailing local, state, or regional needs in business and trade); functional area-specific (business vocabulary covering more in-depth study of key topics for marketing, finance, etc.); secretarial (an emphasis on correspondence and other forms of written communication); examination (preparation of learners to take a specific business language test); special topics (business in literature, prosperity and poverty in specific regions, development and sustainability); hybrid (combination of elements of two or more of the aforementioned course types); and business and culture (broad cultural overview including geographic literacy, demographics, historical highlights, customs and courtesies, lifestyle, society, and work environment).

The current development of such course depends on the theoretical bases for course design which are components of knowledge and abilities, requirements of proficiency levels, teaching principles, and methods. Needs analysis and situation analysis also play an important role in determining course goals and objectives. Instructors and stakeholders should emphasize on the relationships between business, language, and communication (Wang, Chen, & Zhang, 2011). Moreover, developing such course mainly regards a sense of purpose (i.e. characteristics of exchanges in business meetings, telephone calls, and discussion, social aspects (i.e. meeting and socializing international business people from different cultures and mother tongues, and clear communication (i.e. conveying information with a minimal risk of misunderstanding (Ellis & Johnson, 1994).

To keep such courses relevant in an ever-changing and evolving global community, Du-Babcock (2006) maintains that instructor need to conduct business communication research to be able to understand how to better communicate in specific workplace situations, and how to achieve specific tasks with interlocutors at various competency levels.

With regard to the aforementioned scholars, the design and plan of Business English courses are primarily based on English language skills, domain-specific knowledge in each area, and intercultural communicative competence. In other words, international professionals are required to communicate effectively in English in an intercultural and a professional context in order to succeed in the global community.

2.1.2 Course Content: Primary Focus

Ideally, language knowledge and skills, business-related vocabulary, the necessary grammar for appropriate grammatical construction, sentence cohesion and coherence, and the four skills, as well as business knowledge and skills such as Economics, Management, Marketing, Finance, International business law etc. can be combined with business skills, intercultural communication and cognitive skills, and intercultural accommodation and interaction skills (Ellis & Johnson, 1994). There should also be aspects of the Humanities or Liberal Arts, such as critical and innovative thinking skills, the ability to take an ethical or political position, and an understanding of both local and foreign cultures (Zhang & Wang, 2011).

Recently, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) have argued that business communication should gear toward the development of global professionals who are equipped with (a) global communicative competence, or an ability to communicate globally in any professional situation), (b) multicultural competence or an ability to adapt and understand the culturally different ways of doing things, and (c) Business English as a Lingua Franca competence, or an ability to achieve a communicative goal in English, with a focus on content rather than form, and an emphasis on business knowledge, or the accumulated information regarding each professional context

Another other practical idea for global professionals created by Doyle (2012) is a combination of three essential elements: (a) business content, or fundamental knowledge in each domain-specific profession, (b) cultural content, or essential knowledge for international professionals, and (c) geographical content, or key information for international professionals in the present era, prior to making an investment decision or starting a business operation.

Furthermore, other components have been introduced, such as the thinking process (cognition). Undeniably, the thinking process is significant to international professionals. Even though these professionals have a high level of English language proficiency, as well as domain-specific knowledge, intercultural flexibility and tolerance of professional communication situations, they tend to fail in these situations due to a lack of thinking skills (i.e. analytical, critical or creative). Because not all of these professional communication situations may reoccur, or either similar or different situations will happen all the time, the thinking process can be regarded as a key element in each communication situation.

2.1.3 Learning Activities: Various Approaches

As suggested by Ellis and Johnson (1994), the ideal instructional activities should (a) balance language skills and business knowledge; (b) combine language skills and intercultural communication skills, (c) provide both classroom teaching and autonomous learning, (d) enhance professional and humanistic understandings, (e) teaching both theories and practicum, (f) employ traditional methods and modern IT approaches, (g) use learner-centered and teacher-guided approaches, and (h) motivate students with classroom activities (i.e. case study, simulation, project method, or task-based learning. Their concepts always sound true, and are effective guideline.

Due to the nature of business operations which mainly involve with interpersonal communication, communicative language teaching approach regards more beneficial. Such approach promotes a learner-centered and experience-based view of teaching English as a second language, and focuses on the communicative process, not only the mastery of language forms (Yan & Zhai, 2012). Based on such approach, communicative activities which are role-play, simulation, projects, and case studies have become the most important Business English task-based learning techniques, as students will be familiar with real-life situations in which the language use, practice, and communicative skill development are interrelated (Du-Babcock, 2009; Netiksiene, 2006; Strelchonok, 2012; Wang, 2011). Apart from the communicative skill development, business-related projects, and case studies should be used, as students will have an opportunity to developing their business communication skills which are meeting, presentation and negotiation, as well as management, team work, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, and organizational skills (Yan & Zhai, 2012).

Additionally, a practicum which is laboratory learning, professional internships, and business plan design regards an important means of Business English instruction. The development of Information and Communication Technology regards as part of people's daily life. Thus, using modern technology based on computer networks or a multimedia environment is another practical approach to a new teaching method (Athar

& Iqbal, 2009). Regarding employing modern IT approaches, Guan, Ma, and Han (2012) proposed a new teaching method for Business English teachers based on computer networks or a multimedia environment. The method is a combination of graphics, images, vibrant colors, realistic sounds, dynamic images, and text. By using this method, students will be stimulated to be more interested in learning, to pay more attention to their coursework, and to improve their English language proficiency. The authors argued that students will be able to gain an opportunity to experience a three-dimensional language learning environment, to develop their initiative, enthusiasm and creativity, their business communication skills, and their ability to be innovative and learn independently.

2.1.4 Instructional Materials: Teacher's Decision

Instructional materials, whether published or authentic, bring students distinct advantages. Instructors and course planners have to rationally decide on either or both types of materials in order to enhance the learning process and outcome, and to meet the objectives of each course. Published Materials (i.e. general business course book packages, supplementary materials, job-specific materials, reference books, self-access materials, video materials, and business simulation games) is produced on the basis that the nature of Business English differs from General English, and specific lexis and genres are required.

Authentic materials (i.e. books, other media, company-specific materials, public information material, and recordings of live events on audio or video) are in flavor for certain teachers who realize teaching with published materials seems to be appropriate to a classroom context, but to be less relevant in an authentic workplace context. Using such materials yields a great profit, because they provide realistic discourse, keep students updated about the present professional world, and raise an awareness of the language changes (Heiter, 2005).

However, based on Nicoleta's study (2008), students in reality at the university level gain their knowledge of Business English and their skills mainly from textbooks or books. As a result, their knowledge and skills may be incomplete, and more theoretical than practical. Even though some scholars maintain that published materials are not realistic in comparison to authentic materials, some publishers have recently solved this problem by having a corporate business specialist work with the authors.

2.1.5 Learner Assessment: Innovative Approach

In the course, testing, assessment or evaluation are suggested to consist of both formative assessment (i.e. self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher assessment, student rating of teaching, assessment of students by the teaching affairs or academic division), and summative assessment (i.e. final examination, proficiency test, and dissertation), as ascertained by Wang, Chen, and Zhang (2011). Recently, Doyle (2012) has suggested "a global assessment" which seems to be compatible to the present needs of global economy. Such assessment consists of core business (functional areas), business language and cultural content (i.e. speaking and listening comprehension, interpretation, reading and writing, translation, and paralingual expression, including Kinesics and Proxemics, and cultural and cross-cultural competencies). Thus, students are to be assessed, based on their actual abilities. In contrast to global assessment which regards a beneficial approach to gauging necessary abilities in the professional context, he reports that some Business English courses still employ "a traditional assessment" which focuses only on listening comprehension, reading, writing, interpreting, and translating.

2.2 *Reported Problems in Business English Instruction*

Due to the gap between the classroom and the real-life workplace, many scholars have conducted research to identify the problems encountered by instructors and students, indicating that Business English instruction has been imperfectly conducted. The feedback from the employers revealed that they felt that their employees did not possess the necessary skills required for the contemporary workplace (Rajprasit et al., 2014; Thaveeprayoon, 2011)

2.2.1 Inappropriate Content

Academic literature does not reflect the reality of the lives of practicing managers. Unless scholars venture into the field and connect with those who have actual experience of business communication, the academic literature will continue to be irrelevant, quickly outdated and out of touch with the realities of the contemporary business world. Otherwise, students tend to depend on teachers who cannot bridge the gap between workplace changes and business communication to understand their problems and develop new strategies to deal with the realities of the contemporary business world (Makassar, 2010; Thomas, 2007). In addition, the textbooks used in the classroom did not reflect the realities of individual learning situations. That is, (a) the contents of textbook were insufficient in terms of the presentation and practice of specific language functions in the workplace, (b) only a minority of teachers used supplemental materials, which included text and pictures from general business

magazines, newspapers, free material available from business organizations, company websites, and off-air audiovisual materials (Bouzidi, 2009).

2.2.2 Lack of Practical Knowledge and Skills

The employees needed more experience and further instruction in a range of oral communication settings, while some of them found that they were at a disadvantage in the workplace because of a lack of English oral communication skills. The authors suggested that both universities and corporations should be responsible for developing the communication skills of students and employees (Freihat & Al-Machzooni, 2012). The cause of such problem is that students at the university level gain their knowledge of Business English and their skills mainly from textbooks or books that may be incomplete and more theoretical than practical. (Nicoleta, 2008).

2.2.3 Heavy Focus on Grammar and Vocabulary

Even though grammar and vocabulary are as part of Business English instruction, there should be the balance among other key knowledge and skills as suggested by Ellis and Johnson (1994), and Zhang (2007). Such instruction aims to develop the reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills of Business English students, developing their business communication skills (i.e. meetings, presentations, and negotiations), acquainting students with domain-specific terminology, and making students familiar with basic business concepts. Strelchonok (2012) reports that certain Business English teachers focus only on language knowledge and skills. Doing so regards a very serious mistake, and does not seem to develop students in the right way.

2.2.4 Lack of the Integration of Thinking Skills

Despite the high level of English language proficiency, as well as the abilities of domain-specific knowledge, intercultural flexibility and tolerance of professional communication situations, many professionals tend to fail in business communication situations because of a lack of thinking skills (i.e. analytical, critical or creative) as asserted by Talmacian (2008). The nature of professional communication situations may not reoccur. That is, either similar or different communication situations are to happen all the time: thus, the thinking process can be advantageous to all professionals as one of the key tools in facilitating, and leading to success of each communication situation.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions

Based on the review of literature, and the problems recently reported in Business English courses worldwide, this study was designed to answer the following research questions: (a) how properly are Business English courses conducted in Thai universities in relation to the professional world's demand? and (b) what are students' perceptions toward the instructional management of the courses in their universities?

3.2 Participants

The population comprised with instructors and students of Thai universities in the Bangkok metropolitan area and the suburbs. Of the four university types (Government University, Rajabhat University, Rajamangala University, and Private University), four instructors, and 140 students were selected. These universities were later replaced with the following pseudonyms: Universities A-C. The students were majoring in English (70.00%), Computer Science (20.70%), Marketing (4.30%), Finance (3.60%), and Business English (0.70%), respectively. The criteria to select the participants are that (a) Business English courses were conducted in the faculties of Arts, Humanities, and Liberal Arts, and in the first semester of the academic year 2012, (b) instructors who taught the courses have to hold the degree in English, Applied Linguistics, or the related area, since they are experienced in EFL instruction, and teaching methodology, (c) universities (of the four types) have to be situated in the Bangkok metropolitan area and the suburbs, and (d) those participants have to voluntarily agree to participate in the data collection throughout the semester.

Table 1. Types of university

Types of University	Number	Percent
Government university	23	16.40
Rajabhat university	35	25.00
Rajamangala university	41	29.30
Private university	41	29.30
Total	140	100.00

3.3 Research Instruments

Two kinds of instruments were employed as follows: First, course syllabuses from four universities consist of common elements (course description, course objectives, course contents, learning activities, instructional materials, and assessment and evaluation. Second, the questionnaire which was developed based on the literature review comprises with four elements: course contents; instructional styles; instructional materials; and instructional supports. It measured the level of students' opinion English instructional management. The five-point Likert scale was used with the following ranking scale (5 = the highest, 1 = the lowest). Originally, the questionnaire was written in Thai to be clearly understandable for the respondents, and translated into English after the data analysis.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection comprises with two phases: (a) a course syllabus analysis at the beginning of the course; and (b) a survey on students' perceptions toward the instructional management at the end of the course. The data from phases one and two were analyzed by means of comparison, and the data from the survey were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, such as percentages, standard deviation, and mean.

4. Results

4.1 Business English Courses Conducted in Thai Universities

Table 2. A comparison of the four universities' course syllabus

Details of course syllabus	University A	University B	University C	University D
1. Course description	A focus on writing and speaking skills	A focus on writing and speaking skills	A focus on writing skills	A focus on writing and reading skills
2. Course objectives	To develop business management skills	To develop office personnel skills	To develop office personnel skills	To develop office personnel skills
3. Course contents	Thinking skills for business management with a main focus of case studies	Language skills for workplace communication (i.e. telephoning, making notes, writing e-mail, dealing with communication difficulties, dealing with cultural difficulties)	Language skills for workplace communication (i.e. telephoning, note-taking, writing business report, writing a minute, group presentations)	Language skills for workplace communication (i.e. getting in touch, writing e-mail, crossing culture, working with others, performing at work, and presentations)
4. Learning activities	Group discussion, Oral presentations	Group discussion, Role play	Group discussion, Oral presentations, In-class practices	In-class practices
5. Instructional materials	Authentic materials	Published materials	Both authentic and published materials	Published materials
6. Assessment and evaluation	Formative and summative evaluation (i.e. written examination)	Formative and summative evaluation (i.e. multiple choice examination)	Formative and summative evaluation (i.e. multiple choice examination)	Formative and summative evaluation (i.e. multiple choice examination)

In table 2, the four courses syllabuses were analyzed based on the six aspects. First, for the course description, writing skills which are a productive skill were similarly emphasized in the four universities, and speaking skills which is also the productive one were secondly in a focus in the two universities. Second, course objectives of the three universities (Universities B-D) were intended to develop the skills of office personnel, whereas the only one university (University A) attempted to develop business management skills. Third, course contents were not the same. Thinking skills for business management through case studies was mainly enhanced in one institution (University A), while the other three (Universities B-D) paid attention to language skills for workplace communication, such as telephoning, writing e-mail, oral presentations. Forth, even though learning activities were conducted in almost similar way (i.e. group discussion and oral presentations), in-class practices and role

play were employed differently in each institution. Fifth, authentic materials were solely used in one institution (University A), while published materials were used in the two (Universities B and D) and both authentic and published materials were used in the other institution (University C). Last, only evaluation which comprises with formative and summative assessment is consistent among all institutions.

4.2 Students' Perceptions towards the Instructional Management of Business English Courses in Their Universities

Table 3. Students' perceptions toward the instructional management of course content

Course Content	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. The course is relevant to students' needs.	2	5	4.26	.674	the highest
2. The course is appropriate to students' present level of the study.	1	5	4.26	.789	the highest
3. The course is arranged from easy to difficult levels.	1	5	4.24	.767	the highest
4. The course focuses on the development of language skills of the use in workplace.	2	5	4.38	.683	the highest
5. The course is modern in the social and business contexts.	2	5	4.14	.770	high
6. The course enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	1	5	4.04	.790	high
7. The course supports students in searching skills based on Business English	2	5	4.04	.812	high
8. The course enhances students' ability to apply both Business English knowledge and skills to use in real life and the workplace.	2	5	4.39	.727	the highest
Course Content			4.22	.549	the highest

In Table 3, students' perceptions toward the instructional management in course content are shown. Those students most highly agreed that the courses enhanced their ability to apply both Business English knowledge and skills to use in real life and the workplace ($\bar{X} = 4.39$), and paid attention to their development of the language skills for the real workplace communication ($\bar{X} = 4.38$). In addition, the instructors provided them the courses which were in relation to their needs ($\bar{X} = 4.26$), and suitable for their present level of the study ($\bar{X} = 4.26$). The courses were also designed, and arranged from easy to difficult levels ($\bar{X} = 4.24$).

Table 4. Students' perceptions toward the instructional management of instructional style

Instructional style	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. Instructor focuses on a student-center approach.	1	5	4.16	.792	high
2. Instructor gives students an opportunity of real practice.	1	5	4.13	.888	high
3. Instructor's learning activities encourage students' creativities.	1	5	3.95	.900	high
4. Instructor provides learning activities relevant to course content.	2	5	4.21	.763	the highest
5. Instructor enhances problem-solving skill and autonomous learning.	1	5	4.04	.852	high
6. Instructor enhances students' in-class activities' participation.	1	5	4.17	.865	high
7. Instructor follows up students' understanding and learning.	1	5	4.01	.956	high
Instructional style			4.09	.709	high

The results in Table 4 reveal that students mostly agreed that learning activities in the courses were relevant to the course contents ($\bar{X} = 4.21$). Further, other items regarding the instructional management of instructional style were rated at the high level, for example, the students were encouraged to participate all in-class activities

($\bar{X} = 4.17$), experienced in the student-center approach ($\bar{X} = 4.16$), and were given an opportunity of real practice throughout the courses ($\bar{X} = 4.13$).

Table 5. Students' perceptions toward the instructional management of instructional materials

Instructional materials	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. There are various kinds of materials.	2	5	3.92	.857	high
2. Materials are appropriate in course content.	1	5	4.09	.776	high
3. Materials are modern to the content.	1	5	3.87	.920	high
Instructional materials			3.96	.771	high

In Table 5, the results show that all items about the instructional management of instructional materials were rated at the high level. The students perceived that materials used in their courses were suitable for the course contents ($\bar{X} = 4.09$), and instructional materials were used variously ($\bar{X} = 3.92$), and up-dated to the present world ($\bar{X} = 3.87$).

Table 6. Students' perceptions toward the instructional management of instructional support

Instructional support	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1. Faculty and/or university provide books, journals, and other publication to enhance autonomous learning.	1	5	3.60	.943	high
2. Faculty and/or university provide sufficient facilities such as computer, and the Internet network to enhance autonomous learning.	1	5	3.41	1.086	high
3. Faculty provides training course(s) to supplement knowledge and skills.	1	5	3.57	1.094	high
4. Faculty provides extra activities such as organizing field trip and excursion for students, and inviting guest speakers to give lecture or share experience in the field of Business..	1	5	3.08	1.295	average
Instructional support			3.42	1.105	high

Based on the results in Table 6, students highly agreed that their faculties and/or universities offered them books, journals, and other publication ($\bar{X} = 3.60$), and sufficient facilities such as computer and the Internet network ($\bar{X} = 3.41$) for autonomous learning enhancement. In addition, they were experienced in training courses to supplement their knowledge and skills ($\bar{X} = 3.57$), and extra activities such field trip, excursion, and inviting guest speakers in the areas which those students were interested ($\bar{X} = 3.08$).

5. Discussion

The aforementioned results were discussed as follows:

5.1 Business English Courses in Thai Universities

The course syllabuses which were analyzed and compared among the four universities were not consistent. Each university designed their individual syllabus which instructors or course designers took a main responsibility to do so. Clearly seen, productive skills which are writing and speaking skills were in a focus of all institutions. This implies that those instructors realized the importance of professional communication which actually professionals need to actively deal with all kinds of communicative situations such as responding e-mails, writing report, and expressing any ideas through discussion and oral presentations in the professional context as mentioned by Doyle (2012), and Wang, Chen and Zhang (20011).

However, the three institutions emphasized on the development of office personnel, while one of them focused on the development of business management. This may because the instructors determined the learning focus

which is based on their professional backgrounds. To deal with this fact, the best way to interpret and emphasize the effective development of learners in Business English courses is to conduct a survey regarding the current situations and difficulties, and also the identification of corporate needs in using English language in the local context as Bouzidi (2009) and Strelchonok (2012)'s suggestions. Therefore, the right direction of learner's development will be consistent with the real workplace and almost similar among educational institutions, and lead to similar expected learning outcomes.

Interestingly, thinking skills were practiced through the group discussion and oral presentations of case studies in the only one institution. Such skills are actually necessary for the employees in this present era (Talmacian, 2008; Zaharim et al., 2008), because there is a flow of information and the interaction between people of different educational and cultural backgrounds. With those skills, the employees will be able to achieve their work performances (Makassar, 2010; Thomas, 2007), as they can think analytically, critically, and creatively in any communicative situations in their workplace. Thus, such skills are useful for students who will enter into the labor market after their graduation, and needed to cultivate to those students. On the other hand, the other institutions prioritized language skills. The explanation can be that the interpretation of the primary learning focus heavily depends on the instructors, and also the nature of their learners. Thus, instructors in this study might consider the performance level of their learners such as English language proficiency and educational backgrounds before designing appropriate course. The learning focus then was heavily on the language skills.

Using instructional materials is also various among those institutions. There are the only use of authentic materials, the merely use of published ones, as well as the combination of using both materials. The reasons of selecting different kinds of materials in the courses are seemingly dependent on those instructors' preference. Even though both kinds of such materials have individual advantages, a heavy reliance on only published materials does not seem to enhance learning in Business English courses as ascertained by Freihat and Al-Machzooni (2012) and Nicoleta (2008). Probably, a mixture of both materials would benefit those courses in Thai institutions, as language instructors are not an experienced Business professional, and do not hold a degree in Business Administration or the related areas. Thus, the published ones can be guidelines for instructors to determine the use of the authentic ones which will supplement a learning process, and achieve the learning goals.

Although there are many differences (both major and minor ones) in terms of the course contents, a primary learning focus and instructional materials, only one similarity among those institutions is that formative and summative assessments were performed. This may confirm that the learners' performances were evaluated in the same format even though such assessments were different in terms of contents, and learning outcomes. In comparison to the model of "global assessment" created by Doyle (2012), the three components (i.e. language skills, core business, business language and cultural content) were not completely followed by those institutions. The assessment employed in those universities is mostly based on a traditional assessment, and partially on a global assessment. What differentiate the global assessment from the traditional one is that the former one includes assessing speaking abilities, paralingual expression and also cultural and cross-cultural competency while the later one neglect these key competencies. That is, listening comprehension, interpretation, reading, writing, and translation were included in the traditional method.

It can be explained that learners' English language proficiency and business knowledge background are a key part of determining the assessment methods. Therefore, the global assessment may be suitable for learners who are well-equipped with satisfactory language proficiency and knowledge background. For Thai institutions, adaptation from the traditional to the global assessments should be seriously considered among instructors and course designers. Otherwise, the quality of Thai graduates as future workforce will lag behind that of other nations' graduates, even in the same region.

5.2 Learners' Perceptions toward the Instructional Management in Their Institutions

Overall, Thai learners in this study perceived that the instructional management of Business English courses was satisfactory. The perception toward the course content was mostly agreeable, while that toward instructional style, materials, and support was agreeable. Clearly seen, those learners were satisfied with the provided Business English courses, even though there were differences in conducting such courses.

From the fact found in this study, it seems that Thai learners seem to passively follow and obey their instructors. Whatever is passed on them into the courses is their instructors' decision. Thus, it is essential for instructors and course designers that the instructional management has be carefully designed with an awareness of the present professional world, and provide the balance of language skills, business skills and cross-cultural awareness (Doyle, 2012; Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Zhang & Wang, 2011). Learning activities (i.e. role-play, simulation, projects, and case studies) should be various, together with using

modern information, and communication technology approaches (Athar & Iqbal, 2009; Guan, Ma, & Han, 2012), to draw attentions those students for the ultimate learning outcome, as naturally, Thai learners are passive in the classroom, especially in the EFL. In particular in the Thai institutions where English is as a foreign language, developing the language proficiency in the professional context is a key part of Business English course. Their instructors have to work harder in order to produce the well-qualified graduates for the future labor market where is highly competitive regionally and internationally.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored the current situations of the instructional management of Business English courses in Thai universities, as well as the Thai learners' perceptions toward such management of the courses in their institutions. Through the syllabus analysis, each university designed the course syllabus differently, although the courses were named the same. In spite of different instructional management, Thai learners in this study have positive perceptions toward their Business English courses.

Further, this study may provide some pedagogical implications as follows: first, the newly designed Business English courses should be in relation to the present models of Business English or Business Communication instruction, and the current professional world, as the results in this study show some inconsistency of the aforementioned idea; and second, there should be a needs analysis of learners and also the experienced professionals on the English language use prior to course design. Then, the gap between the analyses may lead to the creation of an innovative course, since the course syllabuses in this study were used continuously without any major revision. Each year, there may be some new and interesting issues to add into the course.

Even though the results of the present study have revealed the fact of the instructional management of the courses in Thai universities, there is some limitation due to the scope of this study. Further studies regarding how to design, to manage and to improve Business English courses in the circle of English for Specific Purposes course should be done in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The studies of managing Business English courses in other parts of the countries are of interests. Then, an understating about course management would be extensive.

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