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TOUR GUIDE SIMULATION: A TASK-BASED LEARNING ACTIVITY TO ENHANCE YOUNG THAI LEARNERS' ENGLISH

[1] Budsaba Kanoksilapatham & [2] Todsapon Suranakkharin

[1]Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, Thailand

[2] Department of English, Faculty of Humanities Naresuan University, Thailand

[1] Corresponding author: kanoksilapatham_b@su.ac.tn

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aimed to explore the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) with a tour guide simulation as a focused activity on young Thai learners' English speaking skills and their attitudes towards the instruction.

Methodology – Based on a three-phase framework (i.e., pre-task, during-task, and post-task), TBLT was implemented with a Grade 4 class for a period of eleven weeks. Initially, a set of English lessons developed based on the context of local tourist attractions was implemented at the pre-task stage. In the second stage, a simulated tour guide task was used to assess learners' ability to turn the language input into practical and authentic use of spoken English. Subsequently, corrective feedback on each student's performance was provided, and their attitudes towards the instruction were examined at the last stage.

Findings – The students were able to satisfactorily complete the tour guide task in English, indicating the potential of the task as a

device to strengthen their speaking skills. Moreover, they generally had a favourable attitude towards the instruction.

Significance – These findings are significant for both school teachers and curriculum designers. In addition to confirming the effectiveness of TBLT, this study highlights the promising use of context specific-based lessons and class activities as an avenue for young learners to practice speaking English in a context relevant to them.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching, tour guide task, elementary English education.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the task-based approach has gained popularity in the field of second language (L2) education. Numerous L2 scholars have attempted to empirically investigate the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Thus, there has been a steady increase in the number of analytical studies on this issue (e.g., Barrot, 2017; Butler, 2011; Rashid, Watson, & Cunningham, 2017). By definition, and in contrast to the more traditional approaches to teaching, the task-based approach is a learner-oriented instruction in which the learning revolves around the completion of meaningful tasks in real world contexts (Merrill, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). When applied to L2 classrooms, this approach provides opportunities for learners to involve themselves in authentic use of the target language through meaningful tasks (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). TBLT is highly beneficial for L2 learners as it not only helps to create a real purpose to language use but also provides learners with a natural context for studying the language (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Kamalian, Soleimani, & Safari, 2017; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007).

In the Thai scenario, interest in TBLT has mainly proliferated in response to an English language reform policy (Meksophawannagul, 2015; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Wichitwarit, 2014). To satisfy the growing demand for English proficiency in a globalized world, there have been several attempts to bridge the gap between the language that is taught in class and the language actually used

for communication outside the classroom (Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015). Among a number of possible solutions, TBLT has been implemented in place of the grammar-translation and rote learning methods to give learners the opportunity to acquire the language naturally through meaningful communication. However, relatively little research has been conducted to assess the actual impact of this teaching approach on young learners. With the assumption that elementary education is the foundation of the entire education paradigm and thus deserves crucial attention (Kanoksilapatham & Chanuan, 2018), the current study specifically set out to explore the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) with a tour guide simulation as a focused activity on young Thai learners' English speaking skill and their attitudes towards the instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the theoretical concept of TBLT is described. Then the use of TBLT in English classes is discussed. Finally, the current position of TBLT within the context of Thailand is provided.

Brief Overview of TBLT

To a number of researchers (Butler, 2011; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011), TBLT is an instructional approach developed on the premise of communicative language teaching in the late 1980s by emphasizing the usefulness of tasks. Prabhu, one of the early pioneers of TBLT, provided insight into L2 acquisition: that a form is best acquired when the focus is on meaning. Instead of concentrating on form-focused grammar instruction, the main focus of L2 teaching should therefore be on communication by engaging learners in doing "a task" – a term which he defined as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows a teacher to control and regulate that process" (Prabhu, 1987. p. 24).

Since then, TBLT has been widely adopted across different educational contexts (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). Despite a vast number of instructional designs, four recurrent features of TBLT can be elicited from previous studies. First, TBLT is a learner-centred type of education

(Ellis, 2003; Long, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Second, it comprises particular components such as a clear purpose, procedures, and a specific outcome (Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). Third, it puts more emphasis on meaning-focused activities rather on form-focused ones (Nunan, 2004). Finally, it aims at engaging learners in a natural context in which they have the chance to use the target language in real life situations (Ellis, 2003; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007).

In terms of implementation, the design of a task-based lesson goes through three major stages, i.e., "pre-task," "during-task," and "post-task" (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 2006). The pre-task stage is essentially devoted to introducing the topic and preparing learners for the upcoming task. To provide adequate support for learners, Skehan (1996) highlights two issues for teachers to focus on at this stage, either on the general cognitive demands of the task or on the linguistic features pertaining to the task. In the second stage (during-task), learners are given a chance to use what they have previously acquired to carry out the assigned task. As mentioned earlier, learners can be asked to perform various sets of meaning-oriented activities that promote communicative competence in real-life communication. However, Skehan (2001) further adds that the assigned task should offer a problem for learners to solve, and the performance should be evaluated based on the task outcome. The third step (post-task) creates an opportunity for following on the task performance (Ellis, 2003). In this final phase, teachers may give reflection and direct learners' attention to language forms, especially those that proved problematic to learners during the task. If necessary, learners may be asked to re-do the task.

These three stages in TBLT are strongly grounded in the premise of L2 acquisition (Gass, 2001; Izadpanah, 2010). Gass (2001) proposed that L2 should be acquired through a series of steps, including comprehended input, intake, internalization and output. In order to acquire language, the learners must first be exposed to a considerable amount of language input. The first stage of TBLT (the pre-task) serves as means of providing quality language exposure to the learners, ensuring that they attain sufficient comprehended L2 input. However, comprehended input alone is by no means a sufficient condition leading to successful L2 learning (Du, 2016; Motlagh, Jafari, & Yazdani, 2014). Rather, another key factor in L2

development is determined by learner-internal processes in which they are required to make use of input to process their communicative intentions into practice. According to this view, the second stage of TBLT (during-task) is designed to promote L2 learning by providing a communicative context that activates these processes in learners, enabling them to achieve goals of language intake and internalization. As stated by Richards and Rogers (2001), "[t]asks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning" (p. 228). Through their task completion, learners manage to produce language output which can subsequently be assessed in terms of its accuracy and fluency in the last stage of TBLT (post-task). As error corrections and language feedback are done after the task, learners are encouraged to practice the language without anxiety, and feel confident to play an active role in learning, leading to increased L2 achievement (Chuan, 2010; Córdoba Zúñiga, 2016).

Use of TBLT in English Classes

Numerous scholars have recently investigated the effects of TBLT on the development of various language skills. Scholars in L2 speaking research (e.g., Albino, 2017; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Ho & Long, 2014; Marzban & Hashemi, 2013; Sarıçoban & Karakurt, 2016) have attributed significant improvements in learners' performance to TBLT. They also found that learners had positive attitudes towards this instructional approach. For example, Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) affirmed that the use of role plays as a TBLT-centred activity had a significant and meaningful impact on Iranian learners' oral ability. After a two-month implementation period, participants in their experimental group were able to perform better than those in the control group who had no experience working with TBLT-based role plays. Similarly, Albino (2017) asserted that the implementation of the TBLT approach contributed to Angolan learners' general success, and particularly in improving speaking fluency. In this investigation, picture description tasks were used to measure learners' communication skills. It was demonstrated that the learners' speaking performance significantly improved, and that they were very satisfied with the instruction. Ho and Long (2014) found that Vietnamese learners also felt more comfortable and confident in communicating in English when performing task-based learning activities, and that TBLT helped learners to achieve progress in learning.

Current Position of TBLT in the Thai Context

Similar to the learning contexts described above, considerable attention has recently been given to the implementation of TBLT in Thai classrooms. An increasing number of studies have examined how the successful implementation of TBLT can help Thai learners improve their English communication skills (e.g., Kongkaew, 2009; Meksophawannagul, 2015; Wichitwarit, 2014). For example, in a recent study Meksophawannagul (2015) found that the task-based approach was not only effective in improving engineering students' English language skills but also in promoting their critical and collaborative skills. Moreover, it had a positive impact on the students' attitudes towards the course; they actually enjoyed performing the tasks.

In addition to its effectiveness, certain issues and concerns about the implementation of TBLT in the Thai context have been reported. For example, Todd (2006) examined the changes in a task-based curriculum made by instructors during the first four years of its implementation at a Thai university, and found that the curriculum appeared to be more of "a mixed methodology" rather than "a pure version" of TBLT (p. 9). The reduction of tasks introduced in class and the greater emphasis on explicit grammar instruction were among major changes made. Similarly, in their survey of instructors' and learners' reactions towards a task-based English course at a Thai university, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) reported that both groups had some concerns with the number of activities per lesson, and that the learners required more support and guidance to carry out the tasks successfully. In addition, Bruner, Sinwongsuwat, and Radić-Bojanić (2015) suggested that in comparison to Serbian learners who had a higher English language proficiency, it was necessary for Thai learners to acquire more independent skills, to be more proactive, and to use English more spontaneously instead of spending a great deal of time preparing and performing unrealistic scripted role plays.

A scrutiny of the Thai TBLT studies described above demonstrates that they tend to concentrate almost exclusively in higher education, thus leaving other educational contexts unexplored. More precisely, only one study (Kongkaew, 2009) on Grade 6 students in Krabi, a southern province of Thailand, indicated the positive effects of

TBLT on young tour guides' communicative skills. Along this line of research, the current study aimed to fill the gap in a relatively unexplored dimension of TBLT, namely the implementation of task-based instruction in teaching young Thai learners. Based on the theoretical concept of TBLT, a tour guide simulation was selected as the focused activity of this study. In addition to confirming the effectiveness of TBLT, this study compliments previous studies by providing additional evidence of the extent to which a tour guide simulation can be valuable in creating a classroom environment where learners are involved in an authentic and meaningful activity that promotes their English speaking ability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

Grade 4 was purposefully selected for two reasons. Firstly, with regard to the scope of this study, students in this grade are expected to have learned how to read and write English. Since English education in Thai public schools currently starts in Grade 1, Grade 4 students would have adequate prior basic knowledge of English for this study to build on. Secondly, with regard to the interventional nature of the implementation, the students were to be taken from class for two hours each week, i.e., from their regular schedule, to participate in this research. Grade 4 students seemed to be the most appropriate target group because they did not need to attend additional preparation for the national examinations, which was required in Grades 5 and 6. A class of Grade 4 students with mixed levels of English proficiency from a public school in Phitsanulok, a province in northern Thailand, was randomly selected. The participants consisted of 49 students (26 males and 23 females) between 10 and 11 years of age.

Task and Research Materials

In this study, a tour guide simulation was selected as the focused activity for two reasons. First, it was chosen to avoid what Butler (2011) refers to as one of the "classroom-level constraints" when implementing TBLT in Asian EFL contexts (p.41). According to Butler (2011), what has been perceived to be accurately reflecting the actual use of the English language in English-speaking

countries is always contrary to the English language that Asian students would use in real communicative contexts as a means of global communication. In order to lessen such complications, the implementation of TLBT in the Asia-Pacific region should therefore be flexible and context-specific. Instead of directly adopting what has been identified as an effective pedagogy in other cultural contexts, the content of the tasks should target real-world activities that the learners are likely encounter outside the L2 classroom. For example, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) suggest that Thai learners might be asked to practice sharing information about Thailand with non-Thais. Second, a tour guide simulation was chosen because it was potentially appropriate in terms of addressing and conforming to the national goal. The Thai government has recently implemented a number of policies to reinforce Thailand's position as the tourism hub of Southeast Asia. Therefore, Thai students' knowledge about local tourist attractions expressed in English would be highly beneficial for them in the long run. If possible, the knowledge and skills being taught in this project can be further built on. Some students may be able to earn extra money to help support their families and at the same time boost the tourism industry of Thailand.

To sufficiently provide the students with the necessary content and linguistic input for the tour guide task, lesson plans and corresponding materials consisting of eight topics were constructed based on information about prominent tourist attractions in northern Thailand. The lesson topics were identified by local residents in 17 northern Thai provinces (N = 1698) through the completion of a questionnaire. Out of 32 tourist attractions generated by an Internet search, the eight most popular tourist attractions that local people thought elementary students in northern Thailand should be knowledgeable of were as follows: Phra That Doi Suthep Temple, Rong Khun Temple, Sukhothai Historical Park, Thai Elephant Conservation Centre, Bhumibol Dam, Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat Royal Temple, Boraphet Lake, and Khao Kho. To confirm their representativeness of northern tourist attractions, these eight topics were subsequently validated by two local elementary school teachers.

Based on the eight tourist attractions, eight English lessons were developed using the same format. Each lesson begins with a set of

ten vocabulary items which are accompanied by their corresponding Thai translations. Following the vocabulary section is a reading section of 6-7 sentences (50-65 words in total). The content of this reading section was based on the ten selected vocabulary items previously presented, covering specific information about individual tourist attractions from diverse perspectives, such as geographical details, historical accounts and highlighted activities. In order to accommodate the young learners' limited English proficiency, certain language constructions (i.e., passive construction, extraposed '*it*' construction, or complex sentences) were intentionally avoided.

The lesson content was subsequently validated by two groups of people. First, the difficulty level of the English language used in the lessons was validated by two Grade 4 English teachers from the participating school, to ensure that the language is appropriate for the Grade 4 learners. Second, the linguistic accuracy of the lessons was validated by two native speakers of English. In addition, a set of colourful slides containing pictures taken at the actual sites of the tourist attractions were projected to the class to make each lesson more attractive to Grade 4 learners (see Appendix A for a lesson example).

TBLT Implementation

The implementation of TBLT in the current study was based on the three-phase framework (i.e., pre-task, during-task, and post-task). It was conducted over a period of eleven consecutive weeks, as shown in Figure 1.

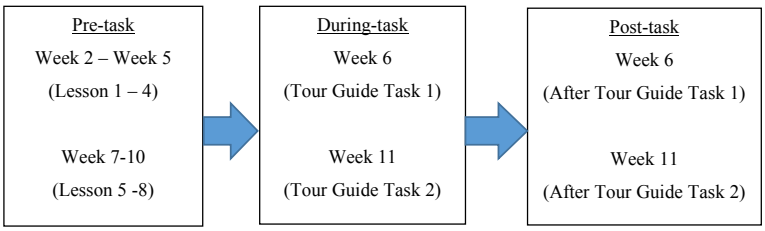

Figure 1. Procedures of the Study.

In the classroom setting, Week 1 was set aside for providing general information about the project, including informing students about the tour guide task to be performed towards the end of the project. The subsequent 10 weeks (Week 2 to Week 11) were divided into three phases, as follows.

Pre-task

The first phase (i.e., pre-task) covered the first eight weeks, with the main purpose of providing the students with sufficient content and linguistic input for the upcoming tasks. Each class lasted 2 hours (or two class periods), and followed the same procedures. For each lesson, a handout was distributed to the students at the beginning of class to scaffold language tasks. Then the slides were projected on the screen to allow the students to see what the topic sites actually looked like. After that, a set of vocabulary was introduced, followed by the reading section. While teaching, the pronunciation and the meaning of the words on the vocabulary list were emphasized to ensure that the students were able to understand the sentences containing the highlighted words in the subsequent reading section. Various teaching and learning activities were conducted to reinforce what was taught. By the end of each class, the students were asked to describe the pictures they saw in each slide in English, without being allowed to read their handouts. At this point, the students were encouraged to produce language output using the vocabulary presented earlier without worrying about grammar.

During-task

The second phase (i.e., during-task) was the students' task performance. To make sure that these students would not feel cognitively overloaded with all of the eight lessons, the tour guide tasks were conducted twice: the first in Week 6, after Lesson 4 and the second in Week 11, after Lesson 8. The procedures for task execution were as follows: The students were initially divided into four groups according to the number assigned to the four lessons included in each tour guide task administration. One specific topic was then assigned to each group of students, who were instructed to individually perform the role of a young tour guide, using the

English language to describe what was seen in the set of six pictures in front of them (see Appendix B).

As pointed out by many researchers (e.g., Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996), preparation time is crucial in performing the task as it helps to promote complexity, accuracy, and fluency of language use. Accordingly, the students were told to spend as much time as needed to prepare themselves, and to perform the task only when they thought they were ready. They were also allowed to describe the pictures seen in the handouts in any order. Four university students majoring in English were assigned as facilitators for each group to assist the young students who might have difficulty with some words or sentences.

Post-task

The last phase (i.e., post-task) took place in Weeks 6 and 11, right after the tour guide tasks were executed. Once the students completed the tour guide task on each topic, four university English instructors, who were invited to contribute to this project as raters of the students' task performance, provided them with corrective feedback on content thoroughness and the language problems that had emerged during the task performance. Through this post-task stage, the "focus on form" instruction (Long, 2000) was eventually incorporated into a meaning-focused activity, allowing students to be aware of certain linguistic features that were problematic to them, and thus improving their English speaking competence.

Task Evaluation

In order to assess the students' tour guide performance, a scoring rubric was constructed. As seen in Table 1, a total of ten points were categorized according to the three major components of successful completion of the task, namely "content" (4 points), "vocabulary" (4 points) and "intelligibility" (2 points). In this scenario, content and vocabulary were crucial because without these two components, the task would not have been possible. Similarly, without intelligibility, what was produced by the students would not make sense no matter how much input they had acquired during the pre-task phase.

Table 1

Scoring Rubric for Tour Guide Task

Category	Score	Scoring Criteria Description	Score
1. Content (4 pts)	0	No production of information related to the topic.	
	1	One piece of information about the topic was mentioned.	
	2	Two pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.	
	3	Three pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.	
	4	Four or more pieces of information about the topic were mentioned.	
2. Vocabulary (4 pts)	0	No language output and no vocab produced.	
	1	Minimal language output with the mastery of 1 word	
	2	Moderate amount of language with the mastery of 2 words	
	3	Substantial amount of language output with the mastery of 3 words	
	4	Satisfactory amount of language output with the mastery of 4 words or more	
3. Intelligibility (2 pts)	0	Language output contains no intelligibility due to no production of language.	
	1	Language output can be understood with some difficulty.	
	2	Language output can be understood with minimal or no difficulty	

The scores each student received for the content and vocabulary categories were based on the amount of information they were able to use whilst describing the pictures representing each tourist attraction. In order to obtain full scores for these two sections (4 for content, and 4 for vocabulary), they were expected to use at least four pieces of information and four vocabulary items pertaining to the

focused topic. In terms of intelligibility, the student's performance was evaluated on how well they could make themselves understood. Two points were awarded if the language produced could be understood with minimal or no difficulty. Taking into account the relatively young age of the participants and their lack of experience in conducting an authentic task in English, the satisfactory level of their performance at this initial stage was therefore set at only fifty percent for the total scores, or 5 out of 10 for each task.

To complete the evaluation of all students' task performance in a two-hour slot, the tasks were assessed by four university English instructors. These raters were not only previously informed of this research project but were also trained to use the scoring rubrics (as presented in Table 1). To maintain the consistency of the assessment involving multiple raters, the following procedures were conducted to establish initial inter-rater reliability. In Week 3 (at the end of Lesson 2: Phra That Doi Suthep Temple), eight students were randomly selected to participate in the rubric trial. They were individually asked to assume the role of young tour guides, using English to describe the pictures of Phra That Doi Suthep Temple seen on the slides. At this juncture, each student's performance was video-recorded. In that same week, the four raters attended a training session conducted by the researchers to ensure that the students' tour guide performance was consistently assessed based on the same scoring criteria. Each rater was asked to independently watch the eight video recordings and score each student's performance using the constructed rubric. Overall, the agreement rate was 96 percent, indicating a high level of inter-rater reliability (Graham, Milnowski, & Miller, 2013). This high agreement rate showed that each rater was consistent at a certain level in scoring the students' tour guide task. In addition, this congruency indicated that the rubric developed to assess the students' performance was functional at a satisfactory level.

In the actual task evaluation, each of the four individual raters was assigned to be in charge of only one lesson topic and assess the students' task performance based on the rubric. Once the students completed their first topic, they were free to proceed to the next topic of their choice. Although there was no time limit imposed for individual topics, the students were reminded that they would need to complete the four topics by the end of the class period.

Evaluation of Students' Attitudes

In addition to the effectiveness of TBTL, the students' attitudes towards this task-based instruction were evaluated using a questionnaire. Before its actual administration, this questionnaire was validated by three English instructors for content and linguistic accuracy using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) technique. Any statement with an IOC of less than 0.5 was revised and re-evaluated. The average final score was 0.66, indicating that the experts were satisfied with the questionnaire. The validated questionnaire was distributed to the students after their tour guide performance in Week 11. The students were asked to voice their opinions based on 9 five-point Likert scale items concerning the activities and materials implemented (5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree). They completed the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes.

Data Analysis

The students' tour guide performance was rated on an individual basis. As this was a meaning-focused activity, pronunciation deviation and grammatical mistakes were not taken into account as long as the students could make themselves understood. To gain insight into the effectiveness of TBLT, the students' total scores for each of the eight topics and the scores on each of the rubric categories across the eight lessons were combined and analysed. Similarly, to elicit the students' opinions towards the implementation of TBLT, the questionnaires were analysed by means of descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Tour Guide Simulation Task

As previously mentioned, each student was required to participate in the tour guide simulation tasks twice; one after the completion of Lesson 4 in Week 6 and the other after the completion of Lesson 8 in Week 11. Each task was evaluated by four different raters, who scored the students' performance on one specific topic. In order to assess the effectiveness of this task-based instruction, the scores that each student gained from performing the task served as the most crucial data of this study. Table 2 provides a summary of the students' scores for each lesson.

Table 2

Students' Tour Guide Scores (N = 49, total = 80 points)

	Lesson 1 (10 points)	Lesson 2 (10 points)	Lesson 3 (10 points)	Lesson 4 (10 points)	Lesson 5 (10 points)	Lesson 6 (10 points)	Lesson 7 (10 points)	Lesson 8 (10 points)	Total (80 points)
Minimum	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	32
Maximum	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	80
Average	6.20	5.86	5.16	6.55	4.69	5.24	6.08	6.31	46.10

As shown in Table 2, the students' task performance varied. The maximum score reached by the students for individual lessons was 10, yielding a maximum score of 80 out of 80. In contrast, the minimum scores ranged from 3 to 4, resulting in a minimum score of only 32 out of 80. These scores suggest that while some students were able to perform their task satisfactorily, others had a certain level of difficulty, needing additional support and encouragement in the process.

To gain further insight into the students' performance, their average scores for individual lessons were considered. As shown in Table 2, the average scores of the eight lessons were 6.20, 5.86 5.16, 6.55, 4.69, 5.24, 6.08, and 6.31, respectively. Despite the fact that the minimum scores for some individual lessons were less positive, there was only one out of the eight lessons (Lesson 5: Thai Elephant Conservation Centre) for which the students' average score was 4.69, slightly less than 50% of the total 10 points. The inconsistency of average scores among these eight lessons could be largely attributed to the fact that the topics of some lessons were more familiar to the students than others. For example, it was apparent that the students performed better in a lesson that focused on a temple located in their home province (Lesson 4: Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat Royal Temple), with the highest average score of 6.55. The average score of the whole class was 46.10 out of 80 points, implying that the majority of students were somewhat able to satisfactorily complete the task at the expected level of performance (i.e., gaining a total score of at least 50%).

In addition to the students' scores for each lesson, their scores for each rubric category was also analysed to shed light on how well the students were able to perform the tour guide task.

Table 3

Students' Tour Guide Scores in each Category (N = 49)

	Content (32 points)	Vocabulary (32 points)	Intelligibility (16 points)
Minimum	11	12	8
Maximum	32	32	16
Average	16.02	19.86	10.22

As shown in Table 3, the students' rubric category scores also lend strong support to the same supposition. Similar to what has been reported above, a wide gap between the minimum and maximum scores in each of the three categories indicates that the students' performance varied across different proficiency levels. Some students achieved full scores in every rubric category, while the others could not. Regardless of the variability in their proficiency levels, the average scores revealed the extent to which the students could satisfactorily perform the tour guide task. Out of 32 points for content and vocabulary (4 points for each lesson; 8 lessons), the students attained average scores of 16.02 and 19.82, respectively. These numbers clearly indicate that the students had somewhat acquired sufficient content and linguistic knowledge from the pre-task stage. In addition, the analysis shows that these students were able to put the knowledge gained to authentic and practical use in performing their set of tour guide tasks. This supposition is also supported by the students' average intelligibility score. Out of 16 points (2 points for each lesson; 8 lessons), the average score was 10.22, implying that nearly all of the students could at least make themselves understood during the task.

Students' Attitudes Towards the Instruction

In order to assess the students' attitudes towards the instruction received, the questionnaire described previously was administered in the final week (Week 11), after the completion of the tour guide task. Table 4 shows the mean scores of the students' responses to the nine statements on the questionnaire concerning activities and materials used in the instruction. The interpretation of the five-degree Likert scale for the results obtained from the questionnaire was as follows: strongly disagree (1.00-1.80), disagree (1.81-2.60), neutral (2.61-3.40), agree (3.41-4.20), and strongly agree (4.21-5.00).

As seen in Table 4, the students had a positive perception towards the instruction ($\bar{x}$ = 4.25, SD = 0.60). For example, they highly rated items such as "*The instructional materials and activities increase the students' English learning motivation.*" (Item 3; $\bar{x}$ = 4.53, SD = 0.54) and "*The students are able to introduce local tourist attractions in English.*" (Item 5; $\bar{x}$ = 4.55, SD = 0.54). The high scores in these two items affirmed the effectiveness of this task-based instruction. Both the materials and activities used in this task-based instruction

not only worked effectively in engaging students in the process of learning but also in ensuring overall learning success. Thus, towards the end of the instruction, the students perceived themselves as capable of giving information about local tourist attractions in English.

Table 4

Students' Attitudes towards the Instruction (N = 49)

	Statement	Mean	Std.	Level of Agreement
1.	The instructional materials (content, vocabulary, and sentences) and activities are suitable for the students.	3.43	0.74	Agree
2.	The instructional materials and activities enhance the students' confidence in using English.	4.18	0.70	Agree
3.	The instructional materials and activities increase the students' English learning motivation.	4.53	0.54	Strongly Agree
4.	The students are more knowledgeable of English words and sentences related to local tourist attractions.	4.37	0.49	Strongly Agree
5.	The students are able to introduce local tourist attractions in English.	4.55	0.54	Strongly Agree
6.	The students have better knowledge of local tourist attractions through the instructional materials and activities.	4.27	0.49	Strongly Agree
7.	The instructional materials reflect Thainess and uphold Thai regionality.	4.16	0.66	Agree
8.	The students are proud of their own region.	4.14	0.71	Agree
9.	The students benefit from the instructional materials and activities and wish to learn from them again in the future.	4.59	0.50	Strongly Agree
	Average	4.25	0.60	Strongly Agree

Interestingly, Item 1, "*The instructional materials and activities are suitable for the students.*" was ranked the least positive ($\bar{x}$ = 3.43, SD = 0.74), indicating the students might find the materials and activities somewhat daunting and challenging. However, a closer look at their performance, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, revealed that these young students were generally able to overcome a number of challenges. They eventually became more knowledgeable both in terms of the content (Item 6; $\bar{x}$ = 4.27, SD = 0.49) and the English language (Item 4; = 4.37, SD = 0.49). Most importantly, they agreed that the materials and activities were beneficial, and that they would like to learn them again in future (Item 9; $\bar{x}$ = 4.59, SD = 0.50).

Given the background of English language teaching in Thailand and the unsatisfactory performance of Thai learners of English across the entire educational paradigm (Kanoksilapatham, 2018; Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018), the findings generated from this study are revealing. Despite the fact that the contexts of the lessons were locally-based, the students still found them too challenging. These particular findings provide a wake-up call for English language practitioners who opt to use commercial textbooks with contents that are heavily loaded with cultural features pertaining to native speakers of English. Definitely, these kinds of features in young learners' prescribed textbooks, based on the implications of the findings presented here, seem to hinder or impose a negative impact on language learning to a certain extent.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess the impact of TBLT based on a tour-guide simulation as a focused activity on young Thai learners' English learning, and to investigate their attitudes towards such instruction. The overall results demonstrate the extent to which TBLT helped provide Grade 4 students with opportunities to use the English language through a meaningful tour guide activity that engaged them in the practical and functional use of English. With the content and linguistic input provided, Grade 4 students were able to successfully complete the tour guide task in a satisfactory manner. Moreover, the students expressed positive attitudes towards learning English through this instruction. The successful implementation of TBLT and the students' positive attitudes towards the instruction

can be discussed in support of three potential determinants: the use of context specific-based lessons, the task selection and the effective use of scaffolding strategies.

Firstly, the use of context-specific based lessons is likely to support the successful outcomes of TBLT and its positive impact on learners' attitudes. As demonstrated in this study, what are perceived to be authentic materials for language learners, particularly in a Thai context, are not necessarily the content that are inherent or pertinent to English-speaking countries. In fact, English lessons that work should be based on materials that are directly related and relevant to the students' local context. Therefore, in order to equip young students with sufficient input, particularly at the pre-task stage, local cultural content was deliberately selected as lesson topics. Among a whole range of constructs that might possibly define local culture, local tourist attractions seemed to be one of the most effective topics to be developed into lessons due to their concrete and tangible cultural reference points, allowing multiple cultural dimensions to be manifested including the arts, history, geography, traditions and architecture. These context-specific contents and language input that the students acquired from the lessons subsequently became a resource from which they could develop their English language skills, enabling them to successfully execute a tour guide task that might be considered intimidating for many young learners.

This positive impact of context specific-based lessons on the students' English learning can be explained using the notion of schemata. L2 learners often come to class with culturally-specific schematic knowledge that has been developed while learning their mother tongue (Alptekin, 1993; Nault, 2006). As a result, the use of local culture in L2 lessons could help activate the relevant pre-existing schemata, connecting new information with previously acquired knowledge. Without this connection, the students may not only disengage and quickly forget, but they may also lose the motivation to learn because the lessons are not meaningful and comprehensible to them (Kaur, Awang Hashim, & Noman, 2014). For example, the learning of a long list of vocabulary words that do not have personal relevance or resonate with an engaging topic is most likely to be blocked by "the brain affective (or emotional) filters" (Johnson & Sessions, 2015, p. 62). This means the students' brain actually shuts down instead of learning new words, making

the learning process unachievable. Consequently, the use of context-specific based lessons in this study can be regarded as a scaffolding device that helps in reducing the unnecessary cognitive load that results from learning a language in an unfamiliar context. In so doing, these local-context based lessons potentially enable Grade 4 students to become more engaged and motivated in the learning process (Khan, 2016; Kristiawan, 2012).

Secondly, in order to maximize the benefits of context-specific based lessons implemented in the pre-task stage, critical consideration should be given to the tasks that students are assigned to do in the second stage. Although it is true that any communicative task that promotes the learners' use of actual language can be considered as part of TBLT, only tasks that potentially allow them to make the most of what they previously learned in situations that they are likely to encounter outside the classroom should be selected. In this study, among the different types of task-based activities, there was no better way to determine whether the students could actually use the input related to local tourist attractions productively and communicatively in the real-world than to ask them to perform a simulated tour guide task. In addition to being an avenue for the students to practice English in authentic situations, it is worth noting that the execution of a tour guide task also strongly corresponds to one of the main purposes of learning foreign languages, specified in the Thai Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008). Through their foreign language education, Thai learners are expected to be equipped with a device to creatively express the concepts and cultures of Thailand to the global society (Ministry of Education, 2008).

This use of communicative language tasks in TBLT also helps lessen one of the hindering factors affecting Thai learners' communicative skills in English, namely the over-emphasis on grammar-translation and rote-learning methods of teaching (Choomthong, 2014; Punthumasen, 2007). As Kaur, Young, and Kirkpatrick (2016) point out, these teaching approaches fail to engage Thai students for deeper learning because teachers mainly rely on reading and writing exercises for teaching English, rather than focusing on listening and speaking. Through their tour guide task, these Grade 4 students were led to realize the principal role of language as a crucial means of communication. Instead of merely memorizing the content and

taking a series of multiple-choice tests, they could use English for exchanging, presenting, and sharing data and information on various matters, including those relevant to their own local contexts. As long as this valuable and authentic need to study English is made clear to the learners, their ultimate and lifelong goal of learning English will gradually change from simply concentrating on passing tests to improving their language skills for real-life and successful communication.

Thirdly, the successful implementation of TBLT and its positive influence on the young students' attitudes are largely attributed to effective scaffolding. TBLT should make extensive use of scaffolding to provide adequate support to the students when performing a task that they might otherwise not be able to accomplish (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Within each step of the three-phase framework, crucial attention should therefore be paid to the learning process that may scaffold the students for the upcoming task. For example, both Willis (1996) and Skehan (1996) agree that in the pre-task stage, students should be given a chance to observe or be exposed to examples of similar tasks done by others. In this regard, the simulated tour guide task performed by eight student volunteers in Week 3 not only served the primary goal of establishing inter-rater reliability, but also the secondary goal of offering the rest of the class a glimpse of what was expected of them in the following weeks. By observing peers demonstrating their skills and performing the task successfully, the students' self-efficacy was reinforced; they could also see that they were able to learn and achieve the same goal as their peers (Mills, 2014; Raoofi, Tan, & Chan, 2012).

In addition, the need for explicit teaching in the pre-task stage (Skehan, 1996) is highlighted. In this study, this teaching strategy was implemented through vocabulary pre-teaching, a process which Munk, Gibb, and Caldarella (2010) define as the advanced introduction of new vocabulary that students will revisit and build on during the lesson. As previously described, a set of key content-specific vocabulary items was immediately introduced and contextualized at the beginning of class. This vocabulary pre-teaching worked effectively in scaffolding the students' reading comprehension and their preparation for the tour guide task, reducing the problem of low vocabulary knowledge, which Akkakoson (2016) identified as a major source of speaking anxiety even for older Thai

students. When the students started the reading section, they could understand the meaning of each sentence without the teachers' help with translation. A greater amount of time could then be devoted to pronunciation to ensure that the students became more confident when saying the sentences out loud. This practice in turn became very helpful to the students when they were asked to perform the tour guide task at end of the instruction. More precisely, this explicit teaching greatly reduced the chances of failure as it helped to equip the students with sufficient knowledge needed to perform the assigned task. The findings showed that the students in this study performed better in the domain of intelligibility, as opposed to the domains of content and vocabulary. Clearly, the instruction on pronunciation at the initial stage contributed to the enhanced intelligibility as assessed at the end of the instruction.

It was emphasized earlier that adequate time was needed for the students to prepare for the tour guide task. The assumption was that the more time allocated for preparation and rehearsal, the better the students could execute a task that required a certain level of complexity, accuracy, and fluency of both language and content (Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). In this research, no time pressure was applied in the during-task. In fact, the students were notified from the beginning that they could take as much time as needed to be ready for the task performance. Once they completed their first topic, they could also spend more time preparing for the next topic. In so doing, the tour guide task turned out to be a more enjoyable and pleasant activity for these young learners, resulting in a more engaging activity and better task performance. At this juncture, a word of caution is needed when assessing students' performance, particularly based on lesson content. Students are highly likely to memorize the English sentences presented in individual lessons in order to complete the task. This practice, if possible, should be strongly discouraged. Instead, students should be encouraged to be brave and ready to deviate from the lessons. To scaffold their efforts in this regard, students should be encouraged to liberate themselves from grammatical concern and construct their own sentences as long as they can make themselves understood and deliver the message in a confident manner.

Finally, this research highlights the positive impact of TBLT integration in teaching young learners in the context of Thailand.

The findings corroborate those of recent studies conducted on learners at different education levels in different contexts, including Akkakoson (2016) on university students in Thailand, Albino (2017) on high school students in Luanda, and Barrot (2017) on middle school students in Korea. The current study contributes to the expansion of TBLT with its successful implementation.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In summary, this study provides valuable and practical insights on how TBLT with a tour guide simulation as a focused activity can be used to offer young learners an authentic and meaningful English learning experience. By providing Grade 4 students with sufficient content and linguistic input, they were able to perform the assigned task satisfactorily. Moreover, they displayed positive attitudes towards the instruction.

Pedagogically, in order to successfully implement TBLT in the L2 classroom, several factors should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the content of instruction should be related to the students' local context and community. This culturally relevant instruction helps in activating the students' background knowledge, which in turn becomes a resource on which they can build their language skills. The impact of local context-based lessons is likely to be more transparent and visible with young students who might be limited in their perspectives and experience. Secondly, the selected task should allow students to make full use of their acquired knowledge in real life situations. There is no doubt that the more authentic the task, the more powerful it is. Lastly, every single step of the implementation should be well-planned. Conducting explicit language teaching, providing examples of a similar task executed by peers and appropriate time allocation for task preparation are some contributing factors to the successful execution of the task. Without these scaffolding attributes, it might be difficult or even impossible for TBLT to engage students in the process of teaching and learning.

The findings of this study are constrained by the limited number of tasks and the relatively young age of the students involved. In future studies, it would be interesting to see more language tasks incorporated, such as tasks designed to systematically assess the

students' linguistic and content knowledge before conducting the tour guide task. With these tasks, it would be possible to determine the knowledge gained during the pre-task and the extent to which their enhanced knowledge contributes to their successful execution of the tour guide task. In terms of the time frame, further research is needed to examine whether the learners would be able to retain the knowledge and skills acquired from the instruction in the long term. With more advanced learners, it is also highly recommended that the expected learning outcomes with regard to their task performance must be raised to a certain degree; i.e., instead of aiming at fifty percent as practiced in this study, the class average scores can be raised to seventy percent of the total points. Moreover, particularly for advanced learners who are capable of understanding and handling more abstract concepts, some other areas of local culture including beliefs, traditions, and customs might be more challenging. If possible, local culture can be situated in a wider context of cultural diversity (e.g., national cultures, ASEAN or regional cultures, or international cultures) in order to fully develop students' intercultural competence, one of the skills needed for global citizenship.

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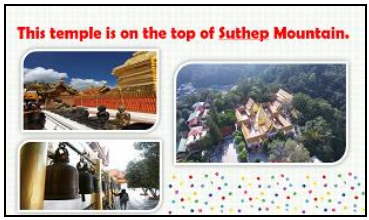
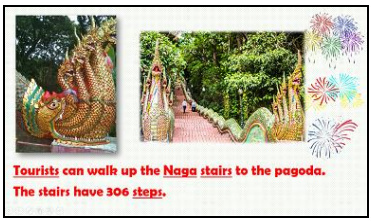
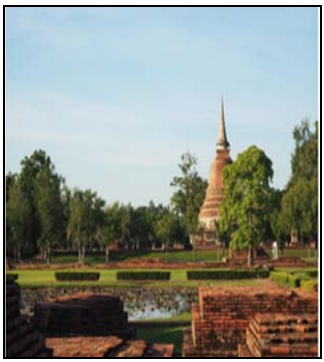
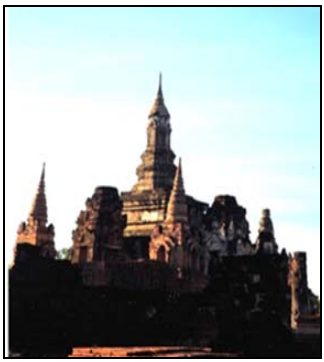
APPENDIX A

Lesson Example (Lesson 2: Phra That Doi Suthep Temple)

VOCABULARY	
beautiful	สวย
pagoda	เจดีย์
golden	สีทอง
style	รูปแบบ
tourist	นักท่องเที่ยว
Naga	พญานาค
stairs	บันได
step	ขั้นบันได
see	มอง, เห็น
city	เมือง





APPENDIX B

Tour Guide Handout (Lesson 3: Sukhothai Historical Park)