

**Meeting Specific English Oral Communication Needs of
Thai Learners through Interactive Self- Initiated
Simulations for Oral Skill Improvement**
การตอบสนองความต้องการเฉพาะทางในการสื่อสาร
ภาษาอังกฤษในการพูดของนักเรียนไทยโดยใช้
สถานการณ์จำลองที่ริเริ่มโดยผู้เรียนเองแบบเน้นการสื่อสาร
ระหว่างกันเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการพูด

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Abstract

Although English is considered as a working language of the ASEAN to connect people from different cultures, most of Thai learners haven't been able to effectively achieve this goal especially in terms of oral communication (Khamkhien, 2010, Wiriyaচিত্র, 2001; Kongsom, 2009). In spite of recognizing the learners' needs, wants and lacks of English language (Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A., 1987), most of Thai teachers are still struggling to help their learners to improve their oral communication skills. This is because they recognize that learners with knowledge and skills of English can better keep up with a rapidly changing world. Thus, this study aimed at serving the specific oral

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communicative needs of the target learners through self-initiated simulations which help bring authentic language into classroom context (Konetes, 2010; Tompkins, 2011). This was carried out according to the principles of language acquisition (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2009) within the learner centeredness (Tudor, 19960) where learners were empowered to actively participate in the learning process with their own initiation. The learners' higher satisfaction with their improved oral communication skills strongly confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative data clearly reflected that the study has successfully achieved its goal.

Keywords: specific oral communication needs, interactive, self- initiated simulations

บทคัดย่อ

ถึงแม้ว่าภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่ใช้ในการติดต่อสื่อสารในประชาคมอาเซียน เพื่อเชื่อมโยงประชาชนจากหลากหลาย วัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกันในอาเซียนเข้าด้วยกัน แต่ดูเหมือนว่าผู้เรียนไทยส่วนใหญ่ยังไม่บรรลุถึงเป้าหมายโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในการ พูดสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ (Khamkhien, 2010, Wiriyaichitra, 2001; Kongsom, 2009) ทั้ง ๆ ที่มีการตระหนักถึงความต้องการ ความจำเป็นในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ รวมทั้งการขาดความรู้ความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียน (Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A., 1987) แต่ครูไทยส่วนใหญ่ก็ยังคงประสบปัญหาในการช่วยเหลือนักเรียน ในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูด แม้ว่า ครูเหล่านั้นรู้ตระหนักดีว่าความรู้และทักษะภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนสามารถทำให้นักเรียนตามทันโลกที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปอย่างรวดเร็วได้ ดังนั้นงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงมีจุดประสงค์ที่ตอบสนองความต้องการเฉพาะทางในการ สื่อสารของผู้เรียนผ่านการใช้สถานการณ์จำลองที่ริเริ่มโดยผู้เรียนเองซึ่งหลักการนี้ ช่วยนำภาษาที่สมจริงในการสื่อสารสู่บริบทของห้องเรียนได้ (Konetes, 2010; Tompkins, 2011) โดยอิงตามหลักการของทฤษฎีการเรียนรู้ภาษา (Tomlinson and

Masuhara, 2009) ภายใต้หลักการการเน้นผู้เรียนเป็นสำคัญ (Tudor, 19960) ที่ส่งเสริมให้ผู้เรียนได้มีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการเรียนรู้ที่ริเริ่มด้วยตัวเองอย่างเต็มที่ จากข้อมูลทั้งเชิงปริมาณและคุณภาพที่ได้จากการศึกษาครั้งนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความพึงพอใจที่สูงขึ้นของผู้เรียนกับการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดสื่อสารได้ดียิ่งขึ้นนี้ถือว่าเป็นสิ่งยืนยันถึงความสำเร็จและการบรรลุถึงวัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้อย่างชัดเจน

คำสำคัญ: ความต้องการเฉพาะทางในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษในการพูดเน้นการสื่อสารระหว่างกันสถานการณ์จำลองที่ริเริ่มโดยผู้เรียนเอง

Introduction

Based on the recent information from Travel and Tourism, Economic Impact (2014) focusing on Thailand, tourism industry has played an important role for Thai economic growth. It was clearly stated that “Tourism is a major economic factor in the Kingdom of Thailand. In 2013 it is estimated that tourism directly contributed 9% (THB1 trillion) to Thailand’s GDP. When including the indirect effects of tourism, it accounted for 20.2% (THB2.4 trillion) of Thailand’s GDP. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) uses the slogan ‘Amazing Thailand’ to promote Thailand internationally. In 2015, this was supplemented by a ‘Discover Thainess’ campaign.” This reflects the specific English oral communication needs of the target learners in this study who live in Trang Province, one of the most favorite tourist spots in the South of Thailand. Most of whom have encountered foreign tourists in their daily lives so they have realized their needs to use English for a real communication. More importantly, the majority of these students would not further higher education after completing high schools predominantly due to their family financial problems. Therefore, they have to start working to support their families. In this particular area, most of their work

involving providing products or services to tourists whose majority were foreigners by selling food or being hotel workers near the beaches in their hometown. As a result, they have to be able to communicate in English effectively, especially through an oral communication skill.

However, the real problem in learning English in class is their specific needs have never been directly met. Instead of being trained to be able to orally communicate with foreigners effectively, they have been taught to memorize the grammatical rules and focusing mainly on reading skill with uninteresting teaching techniques i.e. grammatical translation resulting in negative motivation for and attitudes toward learning English. This phenomenon is common in the English class in the Thai educational system but there are only a few active steps to seriously solve this problem (Intachakra., 2004, Kanoksilapatham., 2007). This gives rise to this study which tried to understand, measure and manage the problem of oral communication skill among secondary school learners.

Objectives

Based on the root cause of the problem mentioned earlier about the specific English communication needs of the target learners, this study particularly attempted to identify the needs of the target learners in terms of their English oral communication skill and then tried to satisfy their needs with the expectation to improve their English oral communication skill based on their specific needs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework to achieve the objectives of this research study covers the notions of needs analysis, interactive teaching and learning activities including principles of language acquisition.

In order to effectively and directly cater the specific needs of the target learners, the needs analysis in this present study was based on the needs analysis purposed by Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. (1987), in terms of what to learn and how to learn it and the needs analysis suggested by Robinson, P. (1991) for both present and future needs. This also covered how to integrate this iterative concept of needs into a course structure advocated by Nunan D. (1988).

In relation to needs analysis, the teaching and learning activities as a result of the needs analysis were implemented in order to improve oral communication skill. Obviously, the learners needed to participate in teaching and learning activities that were not only useful but also enjoyable. One of them is simulation which helped learners to actively get involved in the learning process with fun. This is because simulations are related to real life or the real world situations Tompkins (2011) as it can enable learners to stimulate the process of decision making and application for real life communication (Konetes, 2010). Consequently, this current study implemented simulation based on the results of the needs analysis due to its advantages. For example, it enables learners to experience authentic language used in a real life communication (Taylor & Walford, 1972; Tantiwong, 2009). David (1995) also stated the benefits of simulations that they not only facilitated teachers to test the language of the learners but also the process of their language use as well as their language appropriateness including how they solved problems in communicating in a real life situation. Moreover, Taylor & Walford (1972) and Tompkins (2011) advocated that simulations effectively benefit learners both in interpersonal relations and social interactions as learning through simulations can be fun or enjoyable (Lyu, 2006). This was in accordance with the work of Tantiwong (2009) confirming that simulations enabled learners to freely learn and use the language, which encourages their creativity and confidence as language learners and users.

Also, to make the simulation more effective in helping learners to improve their language skill, it was specially designed focusing on being interactive and self-initiated. The self-initiated simulation in this study is a type of simulation whereby students initiate the learning process by themselves with freedom in choosing their learning activities within the classroom whilst the teacher acts as a facilitator when students need help. In order to create interactive and self-initiated simulations, learners were empowered to learn and use the language as they wished. Actually the learner empowerment to create interactive self-initiated simulations is one of the four components of the learner centered approach through the interrelationships amongst language education, learner empowerment, learner training and learner involvement (Tudor,I.,1996). These components are interdependent of each other and interacting.

These interrelationships directly entail language acquisition which Tudor stated that:

“Language education involves the acquisition by learners of an understanding of language, language use and language learning, and of their own subjective interaction with the process of language study. This needs not be an academic understanding, but something that is living and personalized which learners can use to direct their language –related behavior in an informed manner. Learner empowerment is the result and practical realization of language education. It relates to the learner’s ability to assume an active and informed role in their language study and, ultimately, to pursue their life goals which pertain to language use and learning in a self directive manner”(Tudor, 1996:27-28)

More specifically, simulations which are sometimes considered as physical language games (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2009) were based on these selected five basic principles of language acquisition as follows:

Principle of language acquisition 1

“A prerequisite for language acquisition is that the learners are exposed to a rich, meaningful, and comprehensible input of language in use” (Krashen, 1985, 1993, 1999; Long, 1985 cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). Simulations as physical games facilitate learners to acquire the effective language ability through being exposed to a variety of meaningful, comprehensible language experience with different repetitive ways, contexts and purposes.

Principle of Language Acquisition 2

“In order for the learners to maximize their exposure to language in use, they need to be engaged both affectively and cognitively in the language experience” (Arnold, 1999; Tomlinson, 1998 cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). The learners’ thinking process is activated for preparation before and whilst playing games with challenging, stimulating, and emotional rewards leading to their cognitive and affective engagement causing them to be able to acquire the language in use.

Principle of Language Acquisition 3

“Language learners who achieve positive affect are much more likely to achieve communicative competence than those who do not” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). This implies that taking part in physical games accommodating different aptitudes and capabilities allows learners to learn successfully for a period of time through emotional involvement in the learning process by feeling positive about their target language, learning environment, teachers, peers and texts (Dornyei, 1994; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009).

Principle of Language Acquisition 4

“Language learners can benefit from noticing salient features of language in use” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). The learners are more likely to achieve readiness for acquisition by noticing a particular language feature in use through a physical game resulting in their language awareness development.

Principle of Language Acquisition 5

“Learners need opportunities to use language to try to achieve communicative outcomes” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). As Swain (2005 cited in Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2009) claiming that “if they are participating in interaction, they are also being pushed to clarify and elaborate and are also likely to elicit meaningful and comprehensible input from their interlocutors”

This strongly confirms that simulations as physical language games help facilitate the acquisition of a second or foreign language if appropriately applied in the language classroom.

To sum up, all of these interrelationships obviously reflected the conceptual frameworks of this study which directly linked to the following research methods.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Samples design

The population of the study was 88 Mathayom 5 students from 3 sections who were taking the target English course i.e. taking an English foundation course: E 32102 in the second semester of academic year 2014 at Thungyaopadungsit School, Trang Province in the South of Thailand. However the samples of the study were 20 students from class 5/3 who volunteered to join the study taught by the researcher. Although the majority of them were not able to form a conversation and maintain it for a successful communication, they were classified into 3 groups; able (8 students), average (6 students) and less able (6 students), based on their performance or their grades in the previous English course which was also taught by the researcher herself. Thus, target groups of particular participants were formed to make the class easier to observe. However, all of these participants were able to interact with one another during the self-initiated simulations between different groups.

2. Measurement and Data collection design

There were two main steps in conducting this research: the initial and the main studies. The initial study was conducted throughout the second semester of the academic year 2013 with the relevant former group of 30 learners at the same level in the same school to try out the research instruments; a pre/post test, a pre/post semi-conversational interview, an observation form and an ongoing feedback form which was used as a lesson and a self-assessment form. The findings of the initial study were positive. Thus, the main study undertaken in the whole second semester of the academic year 2014 covering 34 hours with the modified research tools based on the results of the initial study to make them suitable for the main study. The quantitative data were collected through needs analysis questionnaire to identify learner needs for specific oral communication skill, a pre/post semi-structured conversational interview to discover their problems, learning preferences and satisfactions including an indirect test and class observation form by two native speakers for each simulation to assess their language improvement. The quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS program (One-Way ANOVAs) and presented in terms of means score ($\bar{x}$), and standard deviation (S.D.) with statistical significance. On the other hand, the qualitative data were also collated through a class observation sheet by the researcher herself, a lesson evaluation form and a self-assessment form by each learner as an ongoing feedback to represent their language improvement and their satisfactions on language improvement with the implementation of interactive self-initiated simulations. The qualitative data were video recorded. After each type of the qualitative data was collated, they were classified, analyzed and then presented in terms of a narrative description.

3. Analytical design

The analytical design of this study was based on the six principles of the analytical design by Tufte, Edward R. (1997) showing the cause and effect of

implementing interactive self-initiated simulations as an intervention of the study through learner empowerment within the learner centered approach as reflected through these two diagrams.

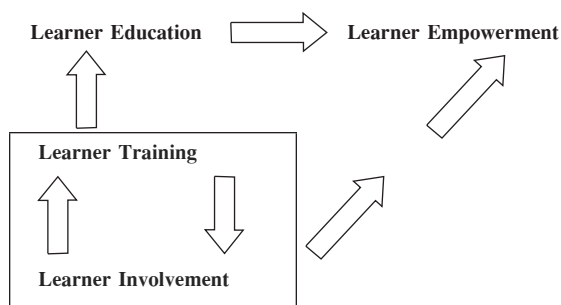


Figure 1. Components of learner centered approach (Tudor, 1996:28)

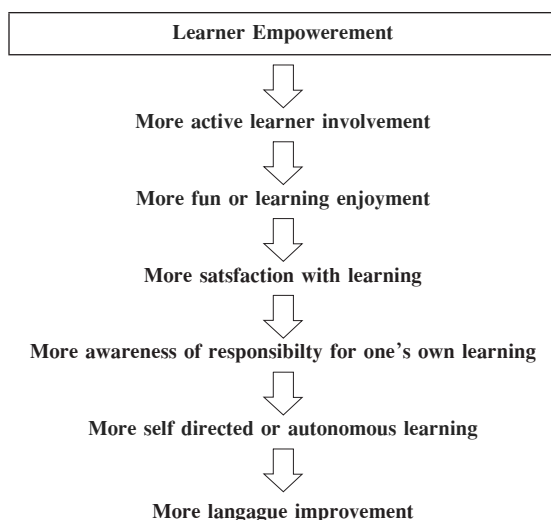


Figure 2. Positive effects of learner empowerment through interactive self-initiated simulations within a learner centered approach

By implementing the interactive self-initiated simulations through the learner empowerment within a learner centered approach fruitfully yielded five main outcomes. The learner empowerment gave rise to more active learner involvement leading to more fun or learning enjoyment causing more satisfaction with learning. This directly linked to higher awareness of responsibility for one's own learning which in turn brought about more self-directed or autonomous learning finally resulting in more language improvement.

Results

Quantitative appraisals

The results of the quantitative appraisals were drawn from different sources. First, the needs analysis questionnaire showed that all of the learners (N=20, 100%) needed to improve their specific oral communication skill through two main learning activities i.e. simulations (N=20/100%) and watching videos (N=13/ 65%) with 8 topics out of their own initiation facilitated by the teacher as a researcher.

Second, then the semi-structured conversational interviews represented their much greater satisfactions with learning to speak English with the interactive self-initiated simulations before and after the study. They all (N=20/100%) agreed that they enjoyed learning to speak English and their oral communication skill had been significantly improved through it.

Third, the result from the lesson evaluation form right after each simulation was in accordance with that of the semi-structured conversational interviews. Similarly, all learners (N=20/100%) stated they enjoyed learning to speak English through the interactive self-initiated simulation which not only helped them to improve their oral communication skill but also enabled them to transfer knowledge and skills acquired in class to real life communication.

Fourth, the self assessments as an on-going feedback, the learners were allowed to assess their ability in communicating in English from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). All of the results represented positive outcomes as shown in these following tables.

Table 1: Results of self-assessments with different groups of ability

Groups of students	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum (45)	Maximum (45)
Less Able	6	29.50	2.07	27	32
Averagely Able	6	30.34	3.27	26	35
More able	8	34.13	2.53	31	39

Table 2: Results of comparison of self-assessment within and between each group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Between Groups	87.092	2	43.546	6.18	0.010
Within Groups	119.708	17	7.042		
Total	206.800	19			

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons with Self-assessment

Group	Mean Difference* (P-value)		
	Less Able	Averagely Able	More able
Less Able	-	0.83 (0.594)*	4.63 (0.005)*
Averagely Able	0.83 (0.594)*	-	3.79 (0.017)*
More able	4.63 (0.005)*	3.79 (0.017)*	-

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

These results obviously reflected that the interactive self-initiated simulation did appear to help significantly improve the target learners' language skill with different levels of ability based on their own assessment.

Fifth, the results from indirect tests also strongly confirmed the results from the self-assessment indicating that the learners' language ability was greatly improved through the implementation of interactive self-initiated simulations. This improvement was demonstrated in these following tables.

Table 4: Results of Indirect test between groups of different ability

Groups of students	N =20	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Less Able	6	47.17	1.33	46	49
Averagely Able	6	52.83	0.75	52	54
More able	8	58.75	1.04	57	60

Table 5: Results of comparison of indirect tests within and between each group

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Between Groups	463.833	2	231.917	205.70	<0.001
Within Groups	19.167	17	1.127		
Total	483.000	19			

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons with indirect tests

group	Mean Difference* (P-value)		
	Less Able	Averagely Able	More able
Less Able	-	5.67 (<0.001)*	11.58 (<0.001)*
Averagely Able	5.67 (<0.001)*	-	5.92(<0.001)*
More able	11.58 (<0.001)*	5.92 (<0.001)*	-

*The mean different is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results also indicated that the interactive self-initiated simulations evidently enhanced the learners' language improvement with statistical significance. Finally, the quantitative results of class observation by two native speakers who were colleagues of the researcher as a teacher also convincingly approved the effectiveness of the interactive self-initiated simulations in developing the learners' oral communication ability as shown in these tables.

Table 7: The results of class observation by native speakers for each

Groups	N=20.	Simulations									Total	Mean	S.D.
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Less Able	1	15	16	17	17	18	18	18	18	19	156	17.33	1.22
	2	13	16	18	18	18	18	18	19	19	157	17.44	1.88
	3	12	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	19	159	17.67	2.24
	4	14	15	17	17	17	18	18	18	18	152	16.89	1.45
	7	15	16	16	17	17	18	18	18	19	154	17.11	1.27
	15	15	16	17	17	17	18	18	18	18	154	17.11	1.05
	9	16	17	17	18	19	19	19	19	19	163	18.11	1.17
Averagely Able	12	16	17	18	18	18	18	18	19	19	161	17.89	0.93
	13	16	17	17	18	18	18	18	19	19	160	17.78	0.97
	17	16	17	17	17	17	18	18	19	19	158	17.56	1.01
	18	15	16	17	17	17	18	18	18	20	156	17.33	1.41
	19	16	16	17	18	18	18	18	19	19	159	17.67	1.12
	5	18	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20	169	18.78	0.83
	6	19	19	19	19	19	19	20	20	20	174	19.33	0.50
More able	8	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20	20	171	19.00	0.87
	10	17	18	18	18	18	19	19	20	19	166	18.44	0.88
	11	18	18	19	19	19	19	19	20	20	171	19.00	0.71
	14	17	18	18	18	19	19	20	20	20	169	18.78	1.09
	16	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20	168	18.67	1.00
	20	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	20	20	166	18.44	1.13
	Mean	16.00	17.00	17.60	17.85	18.10	18.50	18.65	19.15	19.30	162.15	18.02	1.14
Total	S.D.	1.75	1.03	0.75	0.67	0.79	0.51	0.75	0.81	0.66	6.64	0.74	0.39

To sum up, all of the findings from quantitative data vividly showed that not only themselves but also the native speaker of English approved that interactive self-initiated simulations helped improve their oral communication ability.

Qualitative appraisals

The qualitative appraisals were drawn from the class observation while the researcher as a teacher taught and actively participated in the simulations initiated by the learners themselves. This could be summarized into three phases namely on trial, the wind of change and on progress. The first or on trial phase with the first three simulations, both teacher and learners were struggling to adjust themselves to make them work as they were not familiar with this kind of learning. Thus, at the beginning they felt uncomfortable with a lot of stress but after putting more efforts, the fruitful outcomes were yielded. They felt more confident more ready and willing to actively take part in the interactive self-initiated simulations step by step. Then, on the second phrase which indicated a wind of change. This implied that there was an improvement which the learners started to show that they found this kind of teaching and learning activity fun and relaxing. More interestingly, they appeared to be more ready and willing to take charge of their own learning resulting in their bigger language improvement. Finally, on the last phase which showed they were on progress in improving their language skill. Success brings success seemed to be applicable to this situation. The more they actively took part in their learning process, the more they enjoyed and became confident in learning and using the language not only in class but also outside. One told the teacher with happiness that he could sell fruits to foreigners and the other said she could give direction to a foreigner on her way back home. To sum up, the learners had gradually improved their oral communication skill throughout the study with the implementation of the interactive self-initiated simulations.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion

Evidently, the results of the study from both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that the implementation of the interactive self-initiated simulations did appear to help improve the target learners' oral communication skills. This was conducted based on the results of the needs analysis which could identify their real oral communication needs according to their real ways of lives. In other words, they needed the specific English oral communication skills for communicating with foreign tourists in their local areas in the Southern part of Thailand. As a result, their needs had been directly catered effectively through the learner empowerment in the learner center approach by fulfilling their specific language and learning needs. This resulted in their higher satisfaction in their learning and finally leading to their language improvement.

Discussion

Actually the two main purposes of the study were to identify and satisfy the specific oral communication needs of the target learners in order improve their oral communication skill through interactive self-initiated simulations focusing on learner empowerment in a learner centered approach. Clearly from the finding, this study has successfully achieved its objectives both in terms of identifying their real needs and fulfilling them satisfactorily.

More importantly, there were other beneficial consequences out of this implementation. Firstly, four main components of the learner centered approach, apart from learner empowerment which was emphasized in this study, the other three which are language education, learner training and learner involvement simultaneously occurred in the process and they were all complementary with each other. Through the interactive self-initiated simulations, the learners were well

trained and actively involved in the learning process. Out of their active involvement in the learning process, they could gain not only the learning satisfaction but also higher awareness of their responsibility for their own learning. This directly entailed their self-directed or autonomous learning which in turn eventually helped them be able to acquire the language used in the learning process which they could transfer into their real world communication (Taylor & Walford., 1972, David., 1995, Lyu., 2006, Tantiwong., 2009, Konetes., 2010, Tompkins., 2011). In addition, the implementation of the interactive self-initiated simulations also facilitated these main outcomes: better teamwork skills and collaboration amongst themselves and with the teacher, better relationship and communication between the teachers and the students and more positive attitudes to and higher motivation for learning to speak English and other skills including more confidence in using English both in and outside the class.

Suggestion

As we all know that the major agent of change is a teacher, the research suggested that the teacher needs to be a good model of the learners in improving own language skill as in this study the researcher as a teacher took a role of participant in learners' simulations as well. This also reinforced the effective use of the learner centered approach which the learner were freely allowed to learn as they wished and needed while the teacher acted as a facilitator for them. In addition, the real situations needed to be added in the learning process apart from the simulations. That was the learners should be required to expose to real life communication with the English speaking people outside the class where they could learn how to solve problems in communicating in the real world. This is to enable them to naturally acquire the language as well.

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