

Thailand TESOL E-Newsletter



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New ThailandTESOL Board of Committee

The new official term of the working committee is between 2021 and 2023 led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Singhanart Nomnian.

Thailand TESOL gathers ELT professionals, practitioners and stakeholders to make differences in the digital era of language learning and teaching. You are welcome to become our community to share expertise, to raise issues and to challenge with different learning situations in the multicultural society.

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In Search of the Essence of Online Teaching

by Woravut Jaroongkhongdach

Due to COVID-19, in March 2020 learning and teaching at several universities in Bangkok had to be relocated to online teaching. The drastic move as such posted a challenge for me and many teachers. Apart from technical difficulties (e.g., familiarizing with an online learning platform, I had several other teaching challenges such as how to create a class that is engaging and meaningful for the students. For almost a year, I have tried to improve my teaching by using different online learning activities with different learning apps available on the Internet. Upon reflection, amid confusion and struggles in attempting to teach online, I have come to realize that it is not about the new activities nor emerging learning apps, but it is about three teaching principles that underlie the essence of online teaching which are being supportive, being relevant, and being interactive. These three principles are generally known but may perhaps be neglected, and thus not practiced. Thus, I write this paper as a call for attention to the essence of online teaching from my perspective.

Being supportive

'I feel more comfortable as the teacher does not force me to turn on my camera.' (Student A)

For online learning where we do not know what is happening behind the students' screens, creating a supportive learning environment is important. A supportive learning environment refers to a learning situation where students feel comfortable to learn and express their ideas.

For instance, they may choose the learning setting that is most productive for them. Some students may prefer to listen to music while others cannot focus if they are not in a silent place. Some students may feel at ease turning on their cameras whereas others may feel not comfortable. Forcing students to turn on their cameras may create an uncomfortable learning environment. Another example is that some may not feel confident to speak out. In an online learning environment, several alternative options are available for us to let our students respond such as by typing or using emoticons.

Being relevant

'I can see what I am learning can be useful for my future.' (Student B)

One problem I find in teaching is that some topics are not relevant to the student's interests. Given students' different backgrounds and interests, it is impossible for material designers to make all the learning contents relevant to all the students. However, if we, as teachers, simply present the contents from the book, try to finish all the materials without thinking clearly about what our students are learning can be relevant or useful to their life. Then, we may need to reconsider our purpose of teaching. Being relevant means that we present the contents in a way that enable our students to see that what they are learning can be relevant or valuable to them. In each lesson, we can show how contents being learned can possibly be linked to their backgrounds, experiences, or surroundings. One way to do this is by simply encouraging them to think about how the contents can be relevant to their future.

In Search of the Essence of Online Teaching (continued)

Being interactive

'I like playing games as I don't feel sleepy.' (Student C)

'I enjoy group work because I can learn from my classmates even though I have no idea to discuss with them.' (Student D)

Online interactions can be in different forms and at different levels, namely as a class, as a small group, or as a pair. Students can interact with their classmates by using voice or texts based on their preference. Allowing students to interact whether with the materials, their classmates, or the teacher is about creating a classroom culture where interactions and exchanges are promoted. In each lesson, we can organize two to three different activities where students must interact whether with their classmates (e.g., group work) or with the content (e.g., answering questions). This is where we can make use of learning apps or activities available online. I believe most of the teachers try to organize fun and interesting activities for the students. However, what is important is that interactions should be meaningful, challenging, and if possible enjoyable.

Author's biography:

Woravut Jaroongkhongdach teaches at the Department of Foreign Languages, Kasetsart University. He received a PhD (Applied Linguistics) from King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi and a PhD (Linguistics) from Macquarie University (Australia). He can be reached at woravut.j@ku.th.

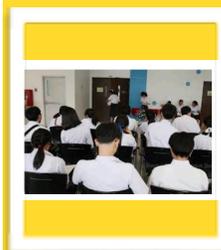
Do Thai Students Study Too Much English?

by Kirk R. Person

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 39th Annual Thailand TESOL International Conference, January 18-19, 2019, The Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.

For decades, Thai and foreign teachers—as well as parents and Ministry of Education officials—have lamented the low English proficiencies of Thai students. As a result, the time Thai students spend studying English in school has increased. Yet their skills remain low. Why?

In this two-part series, I will draw on the work of Lambelet and Berthele (2015), Kirkpatrick (2016), the British Council (2011, 2019), the Education First English Proficiency Index (2018, 2019), and innovative programs in Thailand's Deep South and Far North (UNICEF 2018, PCF 2019) to advance a startling hypothesis: **Thai students study too much English!**



I hope that this article will stimulate a fresh debate on the study of English in Thailand, resulting in broader research that can better inform policy makers and parents—leading to improved English levels throughout the Kingdom. Low outcomes, desperate measures

The headline was depressing: “Thai English skills dip for third year.” In 2017, Thailand ranked 53rd of 80 countries participating in the Education First English Proficiency Index (EPI).

A year later, Thailand dropped to 64th out of 88 countries, and on the 2019 test, Thailand ranked 74th out of 100 nations (Bangkok Post 2018, 2019).

The bad news was met with a flurry of response from Thais and expats alike. In the “comments” section of the Bangkok Post article cited above, netizens proposed a long list of reasons for Thailand’s English, such as the fact that Thailand was never colonized by European powers, the differences in quality between government and private schools, student laziness, teacher laziness, the tendency of Thai teachers to never fail students, a lack of interest in English on the part of students/teachers/parents, low teacher salaries, and visa renewal inconveniences that might discourage native speaking teachers from working in the Kingdom.

But is EPI accurate? EPI has a strong sampling bias, as it is a *voluntary* test taken online. As the EPI website states:

The test-taking population represented in this Index is self-selected and not guaranteed to be representative. Only those who want to learn English or are curious about their English skills will participate in one of these tests....The EF SET is free and online, so anyone with an Internet connection can participate. Almost all of our test takers are working adults or young adults finishing their studies (“EF EPI 2019 - EF English Proficiency Index - About EF EPI” 2019).

In other words, the EPI is not based on a representative sample of all English language learners in Thailand. That might not be a bad thing: Thailand’s ranking would probably be

lower if non-voluntary (and thus presumable less interested) people were included. While the EPI website states that 2,300,000 worldwide people took the test, and that in order to be included in the final report a country had to have a minimum of 400 test takers, it does not specify how many people took the EPI in each country. Thus, a small number of highly-motivated, high-performing test-takers in country X could make country X look great, while a large number of low-performing test-takers in country Y could make country Y look terrible.

Furthermore, Education First is a worldwide, for-profit English teaching business. Thus, EPI results should **not** be considered as authoritative as unbiased international assessments such as PISA.

Regardless of EPI’s validity, low English levels in Thailand are a reality which brings grief to government officials, English teachers, parents, business people and foreign-educated Thais. As an expat known online as “DickFarang” observed, “I have met Thai university students who were not able to find a word in a dictionary, although they had been studying English from age 3” (Bangkok Post 2019).

More English earlier?

However unintentionally, “DickFarang” pointed out an essential truth: Thai students spend an enormous amount of time learning English at ever-younger ages. Parents demand it, schools organize it, the media encourages it. Ask an older Thai person when they began studying English, and the answer will usually be fourth grade, secondary school, or never. Today, Thai youngsters are exposed to English videos, smart phone apps, and basic English vocabulary drills almost from birth! The “Critical Period Hypothesis” is cited as the technical reason for teaching more English to ever-younger children.

An event from 19 October 2016 illustrates the conundrum. The previous months had seen more of the “same old bad news.” In March, the Ministry of Education had once again been embarrassed by low scores on the nationwide grade 12 O-NET exam; the average English score was a meager 24.98%--the lowest of the five subjects tested (Bangkok Post 2016). A high-ranking Ministry of Education official thus took the opportunity, at the 5th International Conference on Language and Education, sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF, to announce that, effectively immediately, Thai first grade children would be required to study English five hours per week, instead of only two.

The irony is that, had that official stayed at the conference a little longer, he would have heard presentations from two world-renowned scholars explaining how international research indicated that **the “more English earlier” approach was not effective, and could actually be harming children’s learning.**

The first scholar was John Knagg, Global Head of Research for the British Council, who alarmed the audience by decrying “Asia’s suicidal rush into early English.” Many countries, said Knagg, were requiring their children to learn more and more English, even though there was **no evidence** showing that such approaches were working. Indeed, it seemed likely that the obsession with English was actually *hurting, not helping* children in their learning of English, as well as other subjects. His statements were quite similar to findings in the British Council’s *Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language* (2011) and *English Language and Medium of Instruction in Basic Education in Low- and Middle-income Countries: A British Council Perspective* (2019).

The second scholar was Dr. Andy Kirkpatrick, the world-renowned author of *World Englishes* (2007). Kirkpatrick had two key points:

1. Asians use English to communicate with *other Asians*, as opposed to speaking with “native speakers” from the UK, USA, or Oceania. In addition, the dialects spoken by “native speakers” of English vary widely. Therefore “more English earlier” policies enacted in the hope of developing “native speaker pronunciation” in Asian children were fundamentally flawed. Indeed, the emphasis should be on **how to communicate effectively in English with other Asians**, not “native speaker pronunciation” (which is impossible for most learners anyway).
2. Recent research indicates that “more English earlier” policies are *ineffective* for the *majority* of students. In fact, if an “ideal age” for most students to begin learning English were to be recommended, *it would be **eleven!***

...to be continued

Author’s biography:

Kirk R. Person, PhD (University of Texas, Arlington) came to Thailand in 1988 as a volunteer English teacher—and stayed! He is a Senior Consultant in Literacy and Education with SIL International, an NGO focused on minority language issues. He has conducted linguistic fieldwork throughout Southeast Asia, taught graduate linguistics courses at several Thai universities, represented SIL International to the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group (hosted by UNESCO-Bangkok), served on the Royal Institute of Thailand’s National Language Policy Drafting Committee, and contributed to the British Academy’s language policy recommendations for Myanmar. He is an advisor to the Pattani Malay-Thai Multilingual Education Programme in southern Thailand, which received the 2016 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize.

Group work in the age of social distancing: A hybrid approach to teaching Business English

by Daniel Schug

Introduction

This report presents a hybrid lesson given to students completing an undergraduate degree in foreign languages with a focus in International Commerce. With one 90-minute meeting per week, this Business English class helps students to expand their vocabulary, and practice various professional skills, including writing a CV and cover letter, presenting a new product or service, and holding meetings. While this course was offered in a blended learning setup, it could easily be adapted to a distance-learning format by using Zoom “breakout rooms” or Microsoft Team’s “channels.”

The Lesson: Blockbuster Video’s Bankruptcy

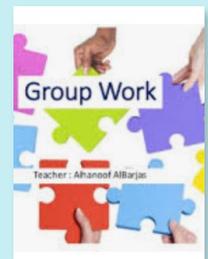
This article describes a lesson on the case study of Blockbuster Video’s bankruptcy. A small group of students chose this case for their class presentation in front of their peers.

The group posted a series of carefully selected materials, including both articles and videos, in the class Google Group along with a brief description of the case. This post was accompanied by a series of discussion questions which their classmates debated in the group’s forum prior to the in-person lesson. This exercise provides students with some new vocabulary, gives background knowledge on the case, and

offers the opportunity to analyze it via their exchanges on Google Groups forum. The discussion questions posted in the Google Group generally asked other students to debate the real reasons for Blockbuster’s disappearance.

Next, the in-person lesson started with an oral group presentation on the case study. The group responsible for this presentation would describe the events leading up to the company’s disappearance, the factors that resulted in bankruptcy, and the aftermath. To encourage natural, authentic speech, presenting students were not allowed to use notes. Their classmates could then ask questions or offer opinions on the topic.

After, the lesson continued with a focus on vocabulary; words, phrases, and expressions were carefully selected from the articles posted in the Google Group by the presenting students.



One might ask students to reason the meaning using context clues or provide a gap-fill exercise.

Lastly, the rest of the lesson was dedicated to a collaborative activity, a mock business meeting. The students were given the following directions: Imagine you are working for the company **Blockbuster, version 2.0**. Your task is to develop a new product or service to become a competitive member of the home-film market.

What product/service will you offer to distinguish yourself from popular competitors, such as Netflix and Disney+, while still including the DVD rental concept?" At the end of the activity, students had to present their group's idea for a re-invented DVD rental physical store. A bonus point was offered to the group that used the most of the day's vocabulary in their presentations.

As a follow-up, this type of activity could lend itself easily to writing homework. For courses focused on academic writing, students can be asked to write a clear and concise summary of the case study or to analyze the main causes of the bankruptcy. For more professionally-oriented courses, students might be asked to prepare a report of the minutes of their group discussion during their **Blockbuster, version 2.0** mock business meeting.

Conclusion

This activity highlights the potential of a blended learning approach incorporating an online platform to present the material and offer a space for initial analyses from the students, while leaving class time for authentic language practice. It leaves room to practice writing skills, strengthen oral debating and negotiating skills, and acquire some new vocabulary to describe events in big business.

Author's Biography:

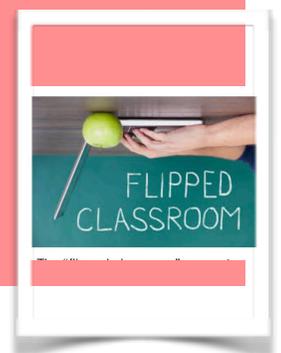
Daniel Schug holds a joint-PhD in Language Teaching from the Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (Italy) and the Université de Paris 8 (France) and now works as an associate professor at the Université de Paris Nanterre in Nanterre, France. He teaches English and conducts research on foreign language teaching and learning.

Using Microsoft Teams for Flipped Classroom

by Chakrit Yippikun and Sunisa Inpeng

Flipped classroom has initially become prominent among educators and researchers for a few years because of recent advances in technology. After inevitable online classes during COVID-19 pandemic, technologies are no longer obstacles; instructors enable to apply various online materials into English classes. Flipped classroom is the combination of in-class and out-of-class activities that are inverted from traditional classroom. In flipped classroom, lecture is provided online outside the classroom, but exercises and activities will be delivered to create cooperative and active learning inside the classroom. The following are my experiences of applying flipped classroom into English listening and speaking class through Microsoft Teams.

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, my university adopted to the situation rapidly; my colleagues and I were trained for Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Form before the university was closed. After a few months of teaching online classes, the COVID-19 situation was improved and students could come back to study in the university. I particularly redesigned my pedagogy as flipped classroom for my class. First of all, I started acknowledging my students about flipped classroom method that would be utilized in this semester.



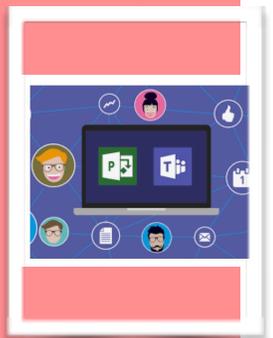
Next, I created Microsoft Teams room and invited my students to join. In terms of recorded online lecture, I used screen recording tool in Microsoft Teams to record my lecture and saved it into video file. Moreover, I created short quizzes in Microsoft Form to recheck my students' understanding. Then, I uploaded the video and short quizzes in the Microsoft Teams room a week before. In other words, the students had to participate to the online lecture and complete the short quizzes before the class time. When I uploaded the recorded online lecture and short quizzes in the post tab, the students were able to ask questions below the posts like a discussion board to strengthen their own understanding.

Inside the classroom, exercises and activities were prepared and student-center approach was employed. My class was divided into four steps and I positioned myself as a facilitator instead. The first step, I reviewed the lessons from the online lecture for 15 minutes as a warm-up activity. The second step, listening and grammar exercises from the books would be completed individually; therefore, the exercises were checked by calling on volunteers to read them aloud. The third step, the listening audios were played for the students to complete conversations and used the conversations as a model to write a new version using different vocabulary. Afterward, called on every pairs to take turn role-playing the conversation in front of the classroom. The last step, a topic which related to the lessons was



divided into two teams. I shared them about the technics of group discussing or brainstorming and I was walking around to monitor and facilitate them. Finally, the students presented each group's views about the topic in front of the classroom.

In conclusion, the students' achievement reveals that the students have positive attitudes toward flipped classroom and they also mention about this method can increase their self-discipline and autonomous learning. They interestingly point out that they have relax time and a flexible atmosphere to participate online lectures in their own pace. Moreover, it is clearly shown that they are satisfied with collaborating in various activities rather than lecture in the classroom. Thus, English language teaching and learning after COVID-19 pandemic would be shifted from lecture style to be more student-center approach in the class by using flipped classroom pedagogy.



Authors' Biography:

Chakrit Yippikun is currently Head of the General Education Office and an English instructor at Christian University of Thailand. Second language acquisition strategies and language learning motivation are his fields of research interest.

Sunisa Inpeng currently teaches English at Christian University of Thailand.

Practical Vocabulary through "KOK NONG NA MODEL"

By Maneeyok Suriyavarman

Since I became an English teacher, I have been observing the learning styles of young learners. One of the best techniques that can help them to succeed in learning a foreign language is learning from the authentic things that they experience in their real life. Now, I would like to share some of my techniques to help learners practically gain more vocabulary in their daily life.

"KOK NONG NA MODEL" is the school's project which has been run by Mr. Pitak Klinbumlung, one of my colleagues since November 2020. I personally find that this project is useful and applicable to my English class. The project itself matches well with my students' learning styles. In the previous semester, I decided to set up a series of lessons called "Practical Vocabulary through KOK NONG NA MODEL"



I firstly started my lesson by introducing my students to Kok Nong Na Model. Then, I asked them to observe things in Kok Nong Na Model and drew out pictures on a given paper.



In this hour, I just let them enjoy things around them without my domination. After observing and drawing, they were gathered together with their art work to discuss things that they had seen in Kok Nong Na Model, for example, vegetables, trees, and constructions.



After the discussion, I let them work in a small group to build up the model of Kok Nong Na with the clay. They observed others' art work and helped others design the model. It took three hours for them to finish their models.



During another hour, they learned new vocabulary by using the internet to explore the spelling and pronunciation of words in English. I was the one who helped check if the words they used were be correct and suitable for the context. After that I asked them to write the words on small cards, glued them and pinned them on their models.

At the end of this lesson, they were full of joy. More than that they were able to present their work in English in a simple way with pride.



Author's Biography: *Maneeyok Suriyavarman has been employed under the position of English teacher at Wutwangluang School in Lumphun province since 2018. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Education from Chiangrai Rajabhat University in 2014.*

Recruitment Discrimination in the Thai ELT: A Long Overdue Professional Dilemma

by Yusop Boonsuk

Evidently throughout Thailand, including the area of three southern border provinces where I am working as a university lecturer, many ELT educational institutions (e.g., private tutoring houses, schools, colleges, and universities) have emerged and are using aggressive marketing strategies. Although I feel delighted that they are willing to help our Thai youths improve their English proficiency, I must admit that I have some concerns about teacher recruitments and hiring practices to share and discuss. After having a glance at advertisements from some of these institutions, I noticed a discriminatory and sensitive matter worth bringing up, i.e., the selling point that indicates that these institutions only contain "native English teachers." This means that ELT practitioners are being selectively hired based on where they are from, what first languages they speak, and how they look.



How necessary is it to sell a native-only emphasis? This action is direct discrimination against any non-native speakers who could also be impeccably fluent in English. In fact, the quality of an English teacher should never be determined by geographic origins.

To clarify, being born in the USA, the UK, or other Inner-Circle nations does not always guarantee that such English teachers are qualified. Based on my extensive experience in education, there are some non-native English teachers who are substantially effective, and some native English teachers who are underqualified, and vice versa. Hence, there is a fair chance that both teacher groups could excel at teaching English, and based on this observation, it is unjust to relieve psychological insecurity by solely depending on the ones born and bred in the Inner Circle.



As an English lecturer with years of experience, I have seen an excessive number of advertising signs and messages with this biased segregation. I hope that such ideologies and attitudes should have no place among us since TESOL International Association has already been working tirelessly to eradicate this prejudice across ELT communities, and I strongly agree with their stance. To wrap this up, ELT service providers should promote their marketing

campaigns without ethnic discrimination and avoid judging English teachers based on their ethnicities, mother tongues, and physical appearances. Instead, teaching performance, ELT experiences, educational qualifications, training, professional development, and other relevant but less discriminatory matrices should be incorporated.



Author's Biography:

Yusop Boonsuk holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the Centre for Global Englishes, the University of Southampton, UK. He is currently working as an English lecturer/researcher at the English Section, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. His research interest focuses Global Englishes (GE), World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International Language (EIL), Intercultural and Transcultural Communication, Intercultural Awareness, English Language Teaching (ELT), English Medium Instruction (EMI), and English Language Beliefs, Attitudes, and Identity.