

The CEFR-TBL in Fostering Thai Pre-service Teachers' English Speaking Ability Using the Peer Interview Task

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to promote English pre-service teachers' speaking ability by integrating task-based learning (TBL) and the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) in designing an innovative program (the CEFR-TBL). This presentation discusses the results of an investigation of the pre-service teachers' speaking ability using peer-interview technique. Also, their perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program were examined. The participants were thirty-six 4th year students in English Education Program at a Rajabhat University in the central part of Thailand. Research method applied in this study was action research and case study approach. Data sources were collected from interview video recordings, and a set of questionnaire. Data analysis employed Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) for qualitative data, and means and S.D for quantitative ones. Findings from the peer interview task revealed five aspects of students' English speaking although they were able to successfully communicate in their interview conversation. Also, the results from the questionnaire showed that the students perceived the benefits of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program and that the program enhanced them in using English in both verbal and non-verbal communication.

INTRODUCTION

This research study originates from English policy launched by the Ministry of Education in Thailand at the time of study. This policy put importance on the crucial role of English as an international language (EIL) and the CEFR as an international required standard and a guideline of English proficiency. To make the national policy productive at the university level, the researcher considered task-based learning (TBL) an effective approach to promote speaking ability. Regarding EIL, it has played a significant role in every area of Thai education, particularly in English curriculum for pre-service teachers of Rajabhat universities. The Rajabhat University at the research site as well as other Rajabhat Universities (RUs) in the country provides English Education Program (EEP) as their ultimate mission. And their students in the EEP who are pre-service teachers of English Education Program are required to take two internship courses in the fifth year of study. The purpose is to have them practice their English language use in both their teaching and communication ability at the schools for their teaching practicum. However, from the researcher's experience in teaching the students in the EEP, it appeared that most pre-service teachers were not able to speak English successfully (English Education Program, 2016). To solve the problem, the CEFR-TBL Innovative

Program was designed and implemented to foster their English speaking ability at this research site.

The CEFR-TBL Innovative Program was an integration of the CEFR and task-based learning (TBL) approach. The CEFR is an international standard for describing language ability (Council of Europe, 2001) and has been employed as a guideline for learning, teaching, and assessment for pre-service teachers' English speaking at the research site since 2016. On the other hand, task-based learning approach (TBL) is considered an effective method to promote students' English speaking ability. The reason is that tasks are activities which the learners use language to communicate and achieve a goal (Willis, 1996). Similarly, Ellis (2003) points that students' motivation is enhanced while filling gaps for meaningful communication. This study aims to investigate the students' English speaking ability to promote their speaking ability through the tasks assigned by using the CEFR as a guideline and TBL as an EIL learning approach. Students' perceptions towards teaching and learning using the innovative program were also explored. Two research questions addressed in this study are "To what extent do students change their speaking ability in EIL after an implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program?" and "In what ways do students

perceive the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, three major arenas of literature review were examined. They were: 1) speaking ability in English as an international context, 2) task-based learning (TBL), and 3) the CEFR, as discussed in the followings:

Speaking Ability in English as an International Context

English speaking has played a significant role in an international context including in Thai education. In particular, English is regarded as a required subject for Thai students at Rajabhat universities all over the country. In general, English is regarded as an international language in four main areas. They are: 1) English as a means of communication, 2) English as a means of intercultural communication, 3) English as a means of business communication, and 4) English as a medium of instruction and education.

Firstly, English is obviously seen as a common means of communication in that it is used by a lot of people at both international and national context in the country. This could be resulted from globalization and evolution of information technology. For example, as being stated in the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN, 2008), English is the only working language in ASEAN countries regarded as the expanding circle in the world (Kachru, 1985).

Next, English is also regarded as a device for intercultural communication. This refers to the appropriate use of language and nonverbal communication for mutual understanding when speaking (McKay, 2002). Concerning non-verbal communication, this comprises the use of visual cues such as body language, distance, place, appearance, voice, and touch. It can also include the use of eye contact and the actions of looking while talking and listening (Guerrero, Hecht, & DeVito, 2008). In this study, the opportunity for intercultural communication was provided for the students through the 3-phase tasks in the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program.

Thirdly, English is acceptable as a major tool in the world of business. This refers to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is specifically used in a community of particular experts, such as doctors, lawyers, and business people. It is also used for communicating with other members of that particular community (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). For example, TOEIC is a measurement that is required by business organization in Thailand for their employees, in particular.

Last but not least, English is considered a medium of instruction and education for further education at high levels both international and national levels. This is often reflected by the special status of English as an official language or the first foreign language in the language curriculum (McKay, 2002). For instance, in Thailand, the exchanging practicum program of English Education Curriculum in Rajabhat Universities with other ASEAN countries has been implemented using English for learning and teaching since 2017.

In this study, English speaking ability of the pre-service teachers was investigated. Moreover, by employing the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program, the students' verbal and nonverbal communication (NVC) was examined. In other words, their intercultural competence was observed via the peer interview task given.

Task-based Learning (TBL)

Task-based learning is defined as meaning-based learning approach which makes the assumption that learners develop a language system by themselves (Ellis, 1994; Willis, 1996). To support this approach, the teacher's role is to provide opportunities for learners to involve in meaningful activities, to be exposed with appropriate input that help supporting natural learning, and to be encouraged to find a new way of expressing a specific meaning (Willis & Willis, 2009). In addition, teachers play significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of TBL as motivator, organizer, conversational partner, and supporter (Van den Branden, 2009). However, in during-task phase, teachers' role is only either observer or counselor to promote student-centered learning (Ellis, 2009).

Concerning the benefits of TBL, learning within a group helps learners develop critical thinking skills, reflective skills, and creative skills during interaction (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009). Similarly, TBL is beneficial for enhancing learners' speaking ability through authentic teaching materials (Myers, 2000; Adams, 2003; Ellis, 2003). To be specific, pre-task phase prepares learners to use language effectively for task performance through authentic materials (Ellis, 2009). In addition, TBL promotes learners' active learning through interaction in order to complete tasks (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Luchini, 2004). This helps enhancing the students' speaking ability with accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness use of language. In particular, the CEFR-TBL helped improve the students' speaking skills through meaningful communication (Luchini, 2004). Moreover, the students practiced speaking by focusing on both meaning and form during doing tasks (Ellis, 2009). Nevertheless, insufficiency of familiarity with types of task, understanding of the task purpose, and cultural knowledge could cause task difficulty (Nunan & Keobke, 1995)

According to previous studies, it has been shown that task-based learning (TBL) could enhance Thai students' English speaking ability. Many teachers in tertiary institutions have employed task-based approach as it supports communicative language teaching (Darasawang, 2007). There are some research focusing on the benefits of task-based learning for Thai students' speaking ability (McDonough & Chaikitmonkol, 2007; Prasansaph, 2009; Sirisatit, 2010; Pietri, 2015). For example, it is found that task-based learning could enhance Thai students' speaking skills through the task repetition. Sirisatit (2010) reported the increased scores in her study relating to task repetition. Besides, the participants were motivated to perform the tasks better when they were repeated (Sirisatit, 2010). Moreover, Sirisatit (2010) supports the important role of the learner-centeredness during the task. She argues that teachers should reduce their control in students' activities. This means that the activities

initiated by the learners should be allowed and encouraged since they would engage in the tasks more creatively and independently.

In contrast, Prasansaph (2009) found in her study that her Thai university students had less competent in oral skills in task-based learning. Although there was no obvious evidence of participants' cognitive improvement, the effective side demonstrated increased risk-taking, raised self-esteem and lower anxiety in this study. However, the three main significant issues were revealed in this study (Prasansaph, 2009). Firstly, a group task or project was not employed because of the many constraints, such as time and the available of each participant. As the result, the students have no chance to use language to discuss, declare the points, or organize the work that will help students acquire speaking skills. Secondly, accuracy was least focused on among the three aspects of speaking performance- accuracy, complexity, and fluency. Even though the participants could produce understandable language through the complete task, they sometimes made many grammatical mistakes. Lastly, the positive attitude observed might come from the participants' volunteering to join the program in their free time (Prasansaph, 2009). In brief, task-based learning has principles in providing learners opportunity to implement language speaking through meaningful tasks. However, it is beneficial and applicable for Thai learners with some limitations of time, task type, and their backgrounds.

In this study, peer interview task was assigned to the students as an assessment for their speaking ability. To design this task, the teacher as a researcher analyzed the functions and the topics that could describe the language learners' speaking ability in level B1+ guided in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2011). Then, certain speaking functions and the topic of leisure activities were synthesized. Eventually, they were integrated with some kinds of subtasks (Willis, 1996) applied for both enhancing and assessing the students' speaking ability after the three task-phases of the peer interview task completed.

The CEFR (The Common European Framework for Languages)

The CEFR is defined as an international standard for describing language ability. In fact, it is globally employed as a guideline for describing language learners' ability. The CEFR was published by the Council of Europe in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001) as a framework for English language learning, teaching and assessment. This framework is employed as a guideline for describing language learners' ability in terms of speaking, reading, listening and writing at six reference levels (Council of Europe, 2011). To be specific, the CEFR classifies learners' language ability by using the 'can do' statements at six proficiency levels. These levels are named as follows: Breakthrough for A1, Waystage for A2, Threshold for B1, Vantage for B2, Affective Operational Proficiency for C1, and Mastery for C2. A1 and A2 are for basic users. B1 and B2 are for independent users. C1 and C2 are for proficient users. In Thailand, the CEFR have been promoted for all English skills and levels at schools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The purpose was to benchmark Thai students' communicative language ability in all four skills. In other words, applying the CEFR in learning and teaching management is expected to achieve the standard of English language learning, teaching, and assessment. This covers the areas of English skills in listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, written interaction, and written production for all Thai learners in all levels. For English Education Curriculum at the research site, the English language proficiency goal is at B1+ level (English Education Program, 2016).

In this study, the CEFR was employed as a guideline for learning, teaching, and assessment English speaking (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR level B1+ related to speaking was applied through the 15-week CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. This application integrated functions, grammar, discourse markers, vocabulary, and topics of the CEFR level B1+ in learning objectives, contents, and task types of this innovative program. The CEFR oral assessment scales of linguistics and sociolinguistics competence in level B1+ were adapted for designing lessons and task-assignments.

METHOD

This study applied action research approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990) and case study design (Nunan, 1992; Yin, 2009) for research method. Regarding the major characteristics of action research, this study employed four spiraling steps of action research of Kemmis and McTaggart (1990) that consist of: 1) planning, 2) acting, 3) observing, and 4) reflecting the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program conducted by the teacher-researcher to investigate the students' speaking ability and their perceptions. In addition, the case study design was also employed because of its unique strength 'to deal with a full variety of evidence' (Yin, 2009, p.8). In this study, the 'phenomenon' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25) or the evident observed were the students' speaking ability of the 4th year English Education students at the research site.

The Participants

The participants of this research study were 36 of 4th year students in English Education Program in a Rajabhat University. They were purposively selected. All of them answered the questionnaire after the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program was completed. However, only three pairs of students were selected purposively for peer interview data collection. In Group A, Melisa was an interviewer and Sophia was an interviewee; while Sasha was an interviewer while Tony was an interviewee in Group B. And finally, in Group C Natalie was an interviewer whereas Ruby was an interviewee. As thus, there were six students in total who were video recorded during their interview sessions.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data collection was from 1) three sets of video recordings of the students' peer interview sessions, and

2) a set of questionnaire. Concerning data analysis, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) was applied for qualitative data from the peer interview whereas quantitative data from the questionnaire used percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Regarding the intervention of the study, it was the combination of the CEFR and task-based learning called the CEFR Task-Based Learning innovative program (the CEFR-TBL). The TBL program employed consisting of three phases of task cycles. They were: 1) pre-task phase, 2) during-task phase, and 3) post-task phase. Firstly, in the pre-task phase, the students watched video and next they worked in groups to brainstorm and discuss about the video they watched. Secondly, in the during-task phase, the students were assigned to work in pairs and practiced an interview according to the topics provided by the teacher. Finally, at the post-task phase, the teacher led the discussion feedbacks given by their peers about the interview activity they had practiced. To elaborate, at this stage the teacher helped the students come up with the language expressions and certain non-verbal cues might be used for their peer interview activity.

Finally, in giving the interview task assignment, the teacher asked the students to choose topics of interview provided by the teacher. These interview topics were about 1) watching movies, 2) doing exercises, and 3) eating habits which applied from the CEFR topic of leisure activities in Level B1+ (Council of Europe, 2011). And finally the students conducted a peer interview session.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, two sets of findings revealed in accordance with the two research questions previously addressed. They are: "To what extent do students change their speaking ability in EIL after an implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program?" and "In what ways do students perceive the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program?"

The two aspects of the investigation presented below are: 1) students' speaking ability from the peer interview, and 2) their perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program.

Speaking Ability from the Peer Interview

Data analysis revealed five aspects of using English in students' speaking from the peer interview task assessment. They were: 1) employing discourse convention, 2) use of grammar and structure, 3) using fillers, 4) using repetition, and 5) use of non-verbal communication (NVC) as discussed below:

Firstly, discourse convention in greetings for opening the conversation was mostly found in the students' interview conversation. Findings indicated that two groups (Group A and C) greeted their friends using the opening convention while Group B didn't. In fact, the expressions the students used for opening their interview were common discourse expressions like, "good morning, good afternoon, how are you, and how are you today." Obviously, these were the language learned from the teacher's presenting in pre-task phase, the

students' practicing in during-task phase, and the teacher's teaching in post-task phase. However, some students applied their Thai greetings with English discourse convention. For instance, Sasha started her greetings with, "Good morning, Tony, where are you going?" instead of using conventional greetings "How are you going?" This indicated that although their communication was successful, they used English in Thai ways in greetings instead of using the English discourse convention learned in the post-task phase learning. Regarding closing the conversation, it was noticeable that closing discourse convention with leave taking did not occur in any groups. The expressions the students used were, "Okay, we will go.", "Okay, thank you.", and "Uh... Let me prepare myself for a moment." Both phenomena of using discourse convention in all three groups indicated that the students' speaking was problematic in spite of their successful in opening and closing the interview conversation.

Secondly, concerning grammar and structure, the results revealed that the students in all three groups used long sentences and formal questions in their interview. An example of the long sentences found was when Sophia said,

"Of course. Umm... please listen to me again. Umm... Harry in wonderland is the story about the man who name who name is Harry. One day, he falls in the hole on the rabbit and and he and the next morning, he appear in another world that is called Wonderland."

Obviously, the long sentences used by all students were also ungrammatically corrected. In other words, the students had difficulties in selecting expressions to handle their interview both the interviewers and the interviewees. On the other hand, findings revealed that all students used formal questions in their interview conversation. For example, Tony said, "Could you tell me what kind of sport can you play?" It appeared that Tony could use a formal question for polite requesting for information despite ungrammatical use of clause in the question. This implied that the students had problems in grammar and structure learning of formal questions. Also, it showed that the students put an effort in applying the language expressions of formal questions previously learned during post-task phase. However, their relationship in the interview session was close friends and not strangers to use formal language. Both of these features in using long sentences and formal questions were found in every student's language use. Noticeably, the students used ungrammatically and incorrect structured sentences. This can be interpreted that appropriateness in language use should have been taught during the task intervention as well as the grammar structures accuracy.

Thirdly, using fillers was another aspect of language use found in students' speaking. This occurred in every group in the interview session. Data analysis showed that most filler found were 'ah', 'uh', and 'um' before phrases and sentences. This could be interpreted that the students needed time for recalling the words learned and arranging the sentences they wanted to say. However, using fillers was advantageous in that it might help the speaker signaling the listener to wait for their turn as that speaker had not finished their speaking yet. For instance Melisa said, "Yes, I like to watch movie ...uh... for

example I like to watch Alice in Wonderland. Do you know?" This could appear in natural speaking to make a smooth interaction during the interview conversation. However, it was found that two students used their fillers before correcting their errors they made. For example, Tony said, "...you can bike...um...you can ride a bicycle to work..." This could be implied that Tony had difficulties in choosing words and structures during the conversation and he was aware of the mistake so he corrected it himself. Noticeably, a lot of fillers found in all students' interview conversation indicated that they did not have confidence in selecting the vocabulary and structures taught by the teacher during the previous three task-phases.

Next, using a lot of repetition was mostly found in data analysis. Interestingly, the students mostly repeated certain pronouns in their interview. These were: 'it it it', 'III', 'II', 'I have I have', 'you you you', 'you you', and 'your your'. For example, Tony said, "I confirm your your help will be good." As it appeared on the video that words of repetition occurred when the students got stuck or hesitated to speak. This distracted the listener's attention and showed that the speaker did not feel confident or comfortable in answering the questions asked by the interviewer. However, by making repetitions on purpose could help make the listener attentive to the conversation. For example, in order to describe how much her favorite movie was good, Sophia said to Melisa, "So, it's so very very very good and I love it so much." And this was good since the repetition of the word 'very' could help intensify her speaking and hold Melisa's attention although this showed her problem in using adverb modifying adjective that had been taught.

Lastly, findings revealed that all students employed three types of non-verbal communication (NVC) to support their speaking. Evidently, the NVC aspects were classified as: 1) making eye contact, 2) smiling, and 3) using hand movement. Noticeably, making eye-contact and smiling were mostly employed by both interviewers and interviewees in all three groups. In contrast, using hand movement was obviously observed in some students. Regarding maintaining eye-contact most of the time, the findings revealed that the students aimed to hold each other's attention and signal each other turn taking. Concerning smiling, the purpose of their smiling was to maintain friendly talking and relaxing atmosphere. For example, Sasha smiled when she said, "Oh! You really care about your health. I'm not surprised why you look so strong." Her smiling showed her supportive sincere compliment to her peer, and this made her friend feel relaxed at the beginning of their interview. Relating using hand movement, it appeared that the speakers' purpose was to facilitate their explanation or description in their responses. It was observable that using NVC previously learned and taught in the three task-phases in the interview of all three groups resulted in the students' successful speaking since it helped them to convey meanings of what they wanted to speak.

In brief, there were five aspects of students' speaking features found in this study. They were: 1) employing discourse convention, 2) use of grammar and structure, 3) using fillers, 4) using repetition, and 5) the use of NVC. The findings revealed that their use of language was problematic although their purpose of the interview conversation was achieved. This showed in their difficulties in using discourse

convention, vocabulary, grammar, and structures that had been learned and taught in the three task-phases. And lastly, the students' use of NVC was fruitfully beneficial to make their interview conversation go smoothly.

Perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program

To explore the students' perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program, a questionnaire was employed. Results indicated three areas the respondents viewed the program. They were their views towards: 1) verbal and nonverbal communication, 2) the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program, and 3) the teacher's role as reported:

Students' perceptions towards verbal and non-verbal communication

Regarding the students' perceptions towards verbal and nonverbal communication, their mean perceptions were analyzed and interpreted into four scales. They were: 1) 3.51-4.00 means the most, 2) 2.51-3.50 means a lot, 3) 1.51-2.50 means little, and 4) 1.00-1.50 means the least. Results are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1 indicates that generally the students perceived that they used a lot of verbal and non-verbal communication. Moreover, the findings revealed that they employed more non-verbal communication than their verbal communication. This was supported by Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd (2010) that persons normally use a lot of non-verbal communication more than verbal communication.

Overall, the students perceived they had a lot of English ability and confidence about their verbal communication. Regarding speaking ability, they also viewed that they were mostly able to pronounce English words/expressions learned correctly and clearly, and choose vocabulary/expressions appropriately when speaking with interlocutors/audiences respectively. In contrast, they viewed they had little ability in keeping the talk naturally and communicatively when making a conversation with friends and foreigners. On the other hand, they perceived that they had a lot of confidence in taking an active part in discussion in the role-play, the peer interview task, and the foreigners interviewing assignment respectively. Nevertheless, it was observable that they thought they had little confidence when communicating with interlocutors/audiences using correct grammars and structures.

Concerning non-verbal communication, overall the students reflected that they used a lot of NVC. To be specific they used a lot of eye contact, facial expressions, gesture and body movement, and appropriate volume of voice respectively. Surprisingly, they perceived they had a lot of confidence with their appearance, and a lot of NVC awareness in appropriate space when speaking with interlocutors/audiences.

Students' perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL innovative program

Findings showed the students perceived the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program in five aspects. They were about:

1) learning and teaching activities, 2) group learning, 3) the learners, 4) teaching materials, and 5) overall finding of students' perceptions. The mean scores of the students' perceptions were analyzed and interpreted into four levels: 1) 3.51-4.00 means strongly agree, 2) 2.51-3.50 means agree, 3) 1.51-2.50 means disagree, and 4) 1.00-1.50 means strongly disagree. Results are shown in Tables 2-6 below:

Table 1. Students' perceptions towards verbal and non-verbal communication

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----------|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | Students' perceptions towards their verbal communication | 2.86 | 0.562 |
| 1.1 | I was able to pronounce English words/expressions learned correctly and clearly. | 2.86 | 0.424 |
| 1.2 | I was able to choose vocabulary/expressions appropriately when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 2.67 | 0.586 |
| 1.3 | I was confident to communicate when speaking with interlocutors/audiences using correct grammars and structures. | 2.36 | 0.683 |
| 1.4 | I was confident to take an active part in discussion in the peer interview task. | 3.19 | 0.525 |
| 1.5 | I was confident to take an active part in discussion in the role-play task. | 3.36 | 0.487 |
| 1.6 | I was confident to take an active part in discussion in the foreigners interviewing assignment. | 3.19 | 0.624 |
| 1.7 | I was able to keep the talk naturally and communicatively when making a conversation with friends and foreigners. | 2.42 | 0.604 |
| 2. | Students' perceptions towards their non-verbal communication | 3.20 | 0.626 |
| 2.1 | I used gestures and body movement when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 3.19 | 0.668 |
| 2.2 | I used facial expressions (e.g. smile, frown, and wink) when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 3.36 | 0.639 |
| 2.3 | I used eye contact when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| 2.4 | I felt confident with my appearance when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 2.69 | 0.710 |
| 2.5 | I used appropriate volume of voice when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 3.06 | 0.674 |
| 2.6 | I was aware of the appropriate space when speaking with interlocutors/audiences. | 3.44 | 0.504 |
| | Total | 3.02 | 0.591 |

Table 2. Students' perceptions about learning and teaching activities

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | Initial activities in pre-task phase helped me get ready for learning new vocabulary and structures in the lesson. | 3.25 | 0.439 |
| 2. | Initial activities in pre-task phase helped me aware of using language appropriately in performing the task given. | 3.47 | 0.506 |
| 3. | Initial activities in pre-task phase made me recognize the importance of non-verbal communication in performing the task given. | 3.53 | 0.506 |
| 4. | Initial activities in pre-task phase motivated me to perform the tasks given. | 3.31 | 0.583 |
| 5. | Activities during-task phase provided me enough time for practicing speaking. | 2.92 | 0.649 |
| 6. | In during-task phase, the interview-task assignment with foreigners outside classroom gave me chances to practice in real communicative situations. | 3.56 | 0.607 |
| 7. | Activities during post-task phase made me confident in speaking words and choosing grammar-structures. | 3.08 | 0.554 |
| 8. | Post-task activities enhanced my confidence in speaking English in real communicative situations. | 3.36 | 0.543 |
| | Total | 3.31 | 0.548 |

Table 3. Students' perceptions about group learning

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | Group learning helped me learn better than individual learning. | 3.58 | 0.692 |
| 2. | Group learning allowed me to share thoughts and opinions with peers. | 3.61 | 0.599 |
| 3. | Group learning allowed me to practice making judgment and decision. | 3.61 | 0.599 |
| 4. | Working in groups promoted my learning cooperatively. | 3.61 | 0.599 |
| 5. | Working in groups enforced my self-responsibility within a group. | 3.67 | 0.478 |
| 6. | I was relaxed while practicing speaking English with peers in a small group. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| 7. | Learning in groups helped reduce my anxiety if I had to speak English with foreigners. | 3.56 | 0.909 |
| 8. | Learning in groups gave me more opportunities to practice speaking English in class. | 3.33 | 0.632 |
| 9. | Group members encouraged me to speak English fluently. | 3.19 | 0.624 |
| 10. | Group members helped correct my speaking immediately. | 3.28 | 0.566 |
| 11. | Peer feedbacks/comments were useful for my speaking improvement. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| | Total | 3.49 | 0.620 |

Table 4. Students' perceptions about the learners

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | I was motivated to speak English after learning from the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. | 3.39 | 0.549 |
| 2. | I had confidence to communicate in English with non-Thai natives. | 3.11 | 0.667 |
| 3. | I had an active role in the peer-interview task assignment. | 3.50 | 0.507 |
| 4. | I had an active role in the story-telling task assignment. | 3.47 | 0.506 |
| 5. | I had an active role in the role-play task assignment. | 3.61 | 0.494 |
| 6. | From the peer-interview task assignment, I learned to use words and grammar-structures when speaking with interlocutors. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| 7. | From the story-telling task assignment, I learned to use words and grammar-structures when speaking with audiences. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| 8. | From the role-play task assignment, I learned to use words and grammar-structures when speaking with interlocutors and audiences. | 3.44 | 0.504 |
| 9. | In spite of making mistakes, I kept trying to complete the tasks assigned. | 3.61 | 0.494 |
| | Total | 3.45 | 0.538 |

Table 5. Students' perceptions about teaching materials

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | All visual and audio teaching aids in the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program motivated me to attend the class. | 3.56 | 0.504 |
| 2. | Teaching materials helped make the lessons interesting. | 3.42 | 0.500 |
| 3. | The teaching materials were relevant to my non-native English linguistic and cultural background. | 3.47 | 0.560 |
| 4. | The teaching materials in this class helped make my English speaking lessons easy to understand the activities and tasks assigned. | 3.44 | 0.504 |
| 5. | The instructions of using teaching materials were easy and understandable to follow the task- assignments. | 3.53 | 0.506 |
| 6. | The teaching materials challenged me to do the task-assignments. | 3.44 | 0.504 |
| 7. | The teaching materials helped me to save time in learning and doing the tasks assigned. | 3.56 | 0.558 |
| | Total | 3.49 | 0.519 |

Table 6. Overall perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL innovative program

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD | Ranking |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|---------|
| 1. | Students' perceptions towards learning and teaching activities | 3.31 | 0.548 | 4 |
| 2. | Students' perceptions towards group learning | 3.49 | 0.620 | 1 |
| 3. | Students' perceptions towards learners | 3.45 | 0.538 | 3 |
| 4. | Students' perceptions towards teaching materials | 3.49 | 0.519 | 1 |
| | Total | 3.44 | 0.556 | |

Learning and teaching activities

Relating learning and teaching activities, findings showed the students perceived eight features about their learning and teaching activities as shown in Table 2 above:

Table 2 above reveals that overall, the students agreed that learning and teaching activities during the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program were helpful and could motivate them to have confidence in learning through CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. Apparently, they strongly agreed that the interview-task assignment gave them chances to practice speaking in real communicative situations, also the initial activities in pre-task phase made them recognize the importance of non-verbal communication respectively. Furthermore, they all agreed that the initial activities which helped them aware of using language appropriately and be ready for learning new vocabulary

and structures were helpful and motivating. Moreover, they agreed that the post-task activities enhanced their confidence in speaking English in real communicative situations, as well as choosing words and grammar-structures respectively. Also, they agreed that the during-task activities provided them enough time for practicing speaking although it came to the last on the list. Lastly, it was noticeable that the students all agreed with the learning and teaching activities in this innovative program.

Group learning

Concerning students' group learning, eleven aspects of group learning in the CEFR-TBL program were examined. The results were shown in Table 3 above:

Table 3 above indicates that overall the students agreed that group learning was beneficial to them. Evidently, the students

strongly agreed that group learning enhanced their self-responsibility, sharing mindset, and judgment skills. Additionally, they strongly agreed that cooperative and better learning were promoted by working in groups respectively. Interestingly, they also strongly agreed that group learning helped reduce their anxiety while speaking with foreigners. Furthermore, they all agreed that they felt relaxed and had more opportunities to practice speaking English with peers in a small group. In addition, they agreed that group learning was helpful for their English speaking improvement through peer feedbacks/comments, immediate correction, and peer encouragement.

The learners

Regarding students' perception about the learners, findings revealed that the students viewed themselves in nine aspects as demonstrated in Table 4 above:

Table 4 above reveals that overall, the students agreed that they had advantages learning through the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. Interestingly, the students strongly agreed that they had an active role in the role-play task assignment and kept trying to complete all tasks assigned in spite of making mistakes. Also, they agreed that the peer-interview and the story-telling task assignments were beneficial to their active learning. In addition, the students agreed that they became adaptive in using words and grammar-structures through all three task assignments including peer-interview, story-telling, and role-play. Moreover, they were motivated to speak English and confident to communicate in English with non-Thai natives. Obviously, the respondents agreed that they gained English speaking skill from the three task-assignments provided were motivating, and that the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program helped make them confident in speaking English

Teaching materials

Finally, the students' perception about teaching materials employed in the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program was investigated. The results were presented in Table 5 above:

Table 5 above shows that overall the students agreed that teaching materials employed were beneficial. It was observable that they strongly agreed the teaching materials helped motivate them attending the class; and that it helped save time for them in learning and doing the tasks assigned. Likewise, they strongly agreed that the instructions of using the materials were easy and understandable. Similarly, the students agreed that the teaching materials were relevant to their linguistic and cultural background. Moreover, the teaching materials were beneficial in making the lessons easy for them to understand and challenging them to do the task-assignments as well. Nevertheless, making the lessons interesting came to the last ranking due to the benefits of the teaching materials.

Overall findings of students perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL innovative program

To summarize the overall findings of the students' perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program, Table 6 presents the holistic picture of this innovative program as illustrated above.

Table 6 above indicates that overall the students agreed on the benefits of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program (\bar{x} =3.44). Interestingly, the students agreed that the group learning (\bar{x} =3.49) and teaching materials (\bar{x} =3.49) in this program were the first tops respectively. This was followed by learners (\bar{x} =3.45), and learning and teaching activities (\bar{x} =3.31) respectively.

Students' perceptions towards the teacher's role

Regarding the teacher's role in the study, findings revealed that the students strongly agreed that the teacher's role was important in this innovative program. They were analyzed and interpreted into four levels: 1) 3.51-4.00 means strongly agree, 2) 2.51-3.50 means agree, 3) 1.51-2.50 means disagree, and 4) 1.00-1.50 means strongly disagree as shown in Table 7 above:

Table 7. Students' perceptions towards the teacher's role

| No. | Items | \bar{x} | SD |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | The teacher stated the topic before she started the lesson. | 3.81 | 0.401 |
| 2. | The teacher prepared the lesson and teaching and learning activities. | 3.78 | 0.422 |
| 3. | The teacher prepared teaching materials in every lesson. | 3.75 | 0.439 |
| 4. | The teacher spoke English well and clearly during teaching and learning. | 3.78 | 0.422 |
| 5. | The teacher was active in teaching and giving task instructions. | 3.83 | 0.378 |
| 6. | The teacher gave understandable and clear instructions when assigning tasks. | 3.67 | 0.478 |
| 7. | The teacher provided students chances to practice speaking independently. | 3.50 | 0.609 |
| 8. | The teacher provided support to students. | 3.58 | 0.500 |
| 9. | The teacher helped correct students' pronunciation during learning. | 3.67 | 0.478 |
| 10. | The teacher helped correct students in using correct expressions when being asked. | 3.72 | 0.454 |
| 11. | The teacher provided students chances to ask questions. | 3.72 | 0.454 |
| 12. | The teacher gave immediate answers and instructions when being asked. | 3.78 | 0.422 |
| 13. | The teacher provided useful comments when being asked. | 3.78 | 0.422 |
| | Total | 3.72 | 0.452 |

Table 7 indicates that overall the students strongly agreed on the teacher's role during the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. Obviously, the students strongly agreed that the teacher was active in teaching and giving task instructions, and that she stated the topic before starting each lesson. In addition, they strongly agreed that the teacher was active in preparing the lesson and teaching activities as well as teaching materials respectively. Similarly, the students strongly agreed that the teacher was proficient in English speaking and be able to provide immediate answers and instructions with useful comments when being asked. Also, they strongly agreed that the teacher was supportive in correcting their expressions and providing them chances to ask questions. Similarly, they strongly agreed that the teacher was also helpful in correcting their pronunciation and in providing understandable and clear instructions during giving task assignments. Likewise, while the students strongly agreed that the teacher provided them support, they agreed that the teacher gave them chances to practice speaking independently. It was observable that the students strongly agreed that the teacher's role was important in teaching and helping them in this CEFR-TBL Innovative Program.

CONCLUSION

This research study investigates students' speaking ability and their perceptions towards the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. In this study, task-based learning approach was employed, and the CEFR was embedded in the content lesson of the teaching and learning process. Peer interview session was the task assigned to examine the students' speaking ability after they had completed the three task-phases. In conclusion, the findings from the peer interview task assignment showed that although the CEFR-TBL program could foster the students' use of English, and they were able to achieve their communication goal in the interview conversation, their use of language was rather problematic. This appeared in employing English discourse convention for opening and closing their interview, and frequent use of ungrammatically long sentences and formal questions. Also they often used a lot of fillers and repetitions. The findings indicated that the students had certain difficulties in their speaking. Obviously, the teacher taught and completed the three task-phases in according to her lesson plan; however: the results showed the students' speaking was quite problematic. The argument could be raised that although the teacher taught but whether the students learned was questionable. Moreover, the implementation of the three-task phases of TBL might be new for both teacher and students, particularly teaching and learning activities of peer interview task. However, the students' use of NVC was quite applicable and successful in the interview. This kept their conversation flow smoothly by various techniques, which were, replacing difficult words, holding each other's attention, signaling their turns, and reducing their nervousness.

Regarding the students' perceptions, the results from the questionnaire indicated that most students agreed on the benefits of the CEFR-TBL, particularly group learning and teaching materials. However, the lowest ranking of their

perceptions was at the phase of learning and teaching activities even though they strongly agreed that the teacher has the most significant role in the implementation of the CEFR-TBL Innovative Program. To be straight forward, the teacher as a researcher reflected that this might result from two main reasons that were: her being an inexperienced teacher in using task-based learning approach, and the time spent in having students practice speaking. Since fluent speaking ability requires quite amount of time for students to practice. Moreover, the teacher's being new to students-based learning and teaching in using TBL could easily lead her back to the old traditional style, that is, the teacher-centered method. As thus, making variations of group task assignments for speaking practice is recommended as findings indicated that the students preferred collaborative learning.

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