Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research evaluated different features within an English for Tourism program at an international college in the north of Thailand. The features included course materials, activities, topics, and the reactions of the students to these aspects. In addition, the responses of stakeholders towards the overall tourism programs were documented. Furthermore, the teacher's log and course material evaluations were compared to the learners' responses. This chapter offers the conclusions to the research questions, discussions, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for further studies.

5.2 Summary of the Results

The following section summarizes the results of the study by answering the three research questions stated in Chapter 1, based on the results of the data analysis in Chapter 4.

Research question 1 focused on the learners and stakeholders responses to the Tourism program. Through this evaluation, it was apparent that learners needed relevant content and achievable tasks to create a positive learning experience. Overall, the evaluation takes on a positive overtone from the students when provided with authentic comprehensible input such as the airport situations, and group activities within the relevant context.

The stakeholders felt the program was a necessity to the curriculum, but cited faults in qualifications of teachers, and the English level of the learners in the programs. They offered little in terms of solutions for the problems, with the exception of higher standards for students and hiring more qualified teachers with a background in Thai culture. They viewed tourism information concerning Thailand as very important to the development of the learners. However, the majority of learners felt this information was unhelpful to them. The ineffectiveness of these features are possibly due to the teacher not creating tasks that the students felt they needed, or the lack of course book materials covering tourism in Thailand.

Research questions 2 and 3 are answered congruently because the teacher contributions were considered: materials, activities, and topics of the programs. In addition, the goals of the instructor's contributions were to create communicative interactions among the learners. From the data collected the results showed positive responses by the learners to topic areas that they saw as part of their future. The most

influential topic focused on the airline industry. Task-based activities and role-plays centered on airport situations created engaging learning opportunities for the students. The case studies also proved fruitful for the learners in using the target language when they were adapted to the meet the learners needs. Both of these activities received positive responses from the learners and the instructor felt the learning objective of practicing the target language was achieved.

However, other materials and activities concerning general tourism information, tourism information related to Thailand, sustainable tourism, and tour development were utilized in the program. Of these topics, the majority of learners viewed only tour development as useful since the majority desired to run their own tourism operations. The materials and activities focusing on tourism, tourism in Thailand, and sustainable tourism were not effective in producing communicative interactions, either due to the difficulty level, or the learners not feeling they were important to their future needs.

5.3 Discussion

This ESP course demonstrated both the absolute and variable characteristics of ESP courses as put forth by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). Furthermore, the use of the multi-skilled approach follows closely with Oxford's (2001) theory of an integrated approach to ELT. The integrated approach to the design of this course followed closely with studies by Coskun (2009) and Luka (2009). These findings were similar in demonstrating the benefits of including multiple skills in a tourism program.

Furthermore, Towell and Tomlinson's (1999) research demonstrated learners' positive reactions to comprehensible input, especially when guided toward a specific goal and audience. In addition, this evaluation showed positive learner reactions to the teaching style, most materials, and the overall experience of the course, but some learning goals may have not been achieved in the course by all the learners. These findings are similar to the study of the overall learning experience of the students in Kiely's (2009) research, where the innovation was not as effective for one learner, but the learner felt the overall experience was positive.

In addition, these findings show the benefit of a communicative language teaching approach (Brown, 2007), and task based learning (Nunan, 2004). When the students were presented with achievable tasks and content to achieve the tasks, they were successful in producing the target language. However, difficult content and tasks they felt were unachievable proved unproductive in the classroom. The content that was perceived as too difficult was also viewed as not constructive to their future goals. Overall, the adjustments made throughout the course by providing materials, activities, and tasks that engaged the learners created a positive learning experience. These findings relate to Kiely's (2009) finding that teachers' beliefs and experiences influence the language program. In addition, the instructor changing her beliefs during the course in order to create engaging learning opportunities shows similarities to Richard's (2006) study.

Overall, the study provided similarities to other research in ELT and evaluation within language programs. In addition, it adds valuable evaluative research that is lacking in the field of ELT. The following section discusses pedagogical recommendations based on these research findings.

5.4 Pedagogical Recommendations

Evaluations often include both formative and summative evaluations for respective reasons (Brown, 1995; Ghani & Hunt, 1991; Sawyer, 1991). This evaluation includes both as well, with the intention to modify the program in the future to better meet the needs of the students and stakeholders, and providing a summative report to present a record for the administrators.

The most revealing facts of this evaluation are the contextual features in the program that contributed to the evaluation process. The contextual features include innovation, teachers at work, and the quality of the learning experience (Kiely, 2009). The innovation in this evaluation is the Tourism language program itself, as this was the first time the course was instituted at the university. The evaluation illustrated problems with materials, activities, and topics throughout the program based on learner and teacher reactions. The recognition of these shortcomings allow for remodeling or eliminating features from a course, or the entire program itself, as suggested by Kiely and Rae-Dickens (2005). However, the positives discovered in some innovations provide opportunities to grow and continue being utilized, similar to the findings in the immersion English camp program in Thailand (Rugasken & Harris, 2009).

Furthermore, the teacher's beliefs and actions were influential in this evaluation, as her previously held beliefs as to what features should be included in the course changed as the course moved forward. The teacher's change was a result of a needs analysis questionnaire similar to Kiely's (2001) study where a teacher changed her beliefs also because of student responses to a questionnaire. In response to the learners' desires, the teacher in this evaluation selected topics that would provide more engaging learner opportunities; both the learners and the instructor formed identities throughout the course. Richards (2006) highlighted this feature in demonstrating how both teachers and students mold identities as the class progresses, possibly leading to more enlightening learning opportunities. The changes that this course incurred over the thirteen-week period demonstrate the classroom as dynamic, not a structured text or discourse that is routinely followed. As one student noted "She didn't stick to just a few styles in the class. Also, she didn't do the leading all the time. I felt that I could always participate and be able to have fun at the same time." A variety of teaching styles allowed the learners to feel comfortable by consistently trying to provide engaging conversations and learning materials to lead to a positive learning experience.

Another of the most positive outcomes from this research is the usefulness of an ongoing needs analysis throughout the program. These findings were also documented in the task-based needs analysis by researchers in Japan (Iwai, Kondo, Lim, Ray, Shimizu, & Brown, 1999). The identification of the target situations where learners viewed themselves as being in a real life scenario were similar to the needs analysis by Purpura and Graziano (2004), which led to the redesigning of the language program. Similar findings by McDonough and Chaikitmongol (2007), and Brunton (2009), stress the importance of identifying the learners' needs and wants to structure language programs. However, the timing of the initial needs analysis in this research was inadequate, and not thorough enough due to time constraints in planning the course.

Furthermore, included in the needs analysis should be the stakeholders' views on what features should be included in the program. For example, one stakeholder felt that the north of Thailand should be the focus. However, the learners feel different aspects of Thailand should be included, and that international topics should also be included to improve their global competence. The idea to focus on the north of Thailand first is valid, as learners need to know themselves before they can understand others. In saying that, the focus of previous tourism programs focused mainly on the north of Thailand, and becoming knowledgeable of their home area. Some students failed this class, but were allowed to enroll in the more advanced tourism class. These were the weaker students in the class, and also were the students articulating that materials were too difficult for them and relying on other students for translation and help. This led to stronger students becoming frustrated with the ease and repetition of the materials. This leads to the dilemma of the teacher excluding some of the learners, either the more advanced, or the ones with lower English skills. One solution is to provide different tasks and materials to the different levels of the learners, but this possibly creates segregation in the classroom, which could cause a disruption of group dynamics. In addition, creating two and three different lesson plans for one class adds to the workload of the teacher. An increased workload can lead to a negative attitude on the part of the instructor, or a feeling of resentment towards university officials for allowing unqualified students in a class.

As noted before, the stakeholders are unaware of what goes on in the classroom, and this leads to a divide between the instructors and administrators at a school. Most instructors value teacher autonomy and do not like outsiders commenting on their classrooms. However, observations by outsiders could be beneficial to the students and the instructors. It would allow the outsiders to see firsthand **what** is happening in the classroom and **why,** possibly recognizing the extreme differences in the learners' English abilities. In addition, outside observations can be part of the professional development on the instructor's part. The observations should not take on the role of reflecting changes in pay or bonuses, as this may provide negative responses from the instructors. It should be viewed as a constructive process to bridge the gap between the teachers and the stakeholders with the students' interests in mind. Some may view this as an intrusion, but to be an effective instructor one must be willing to improve.

5.5 Limitations of Study

This study collected data from the instructor, students, two administrative officials, and some documentary sources in a northern Thai university for a period of one semester. This report is solely an evaluation and documented the course as a whole by relying on the participants' viewpoints and course materials. Assessment measures were not evaluated, the initial needs analysis was not extensive enough, and this report did not include a situational analysis of the university. In addition, this study focused on one group of students within the program and did not include previous instructors' opinions, or documents from prior programs. These limitations allow for further evaluations of this tourism program and others throughout Thailand and the north of Thailand, providing a broader viewpoint of tertiary programs in Thailand.

5.6 Recommendations for Further Studies

The research needs to continue into the next semester and beyond, as the class remains instituted in the curriculum, because of the importance of tourism in Thailand. A thorough needs, tasks, and situational analysis should be instituted in the program to provide a more comprehensive view of the program. Within this research, I suggest interviewing and observing people currently involved in tourism in the north of Thailand to discover the target language that is most often used. In addition, discovering problems that every day tour guides face and how they deal with these problems would be useful information to include in the study for possible integration into the tourism program.

Furthermore, investigation should be carried out as to the relationships of all the programs within the international college. All the programs build on each other, and in order to have coherence between the programs, instructors need to know what has been taught beforehand and what is currently being taught. This information allows for structured courses that could build upon each other. A prime example would be combining business classes with the tourism program to allow the students to practice their developing business skills in relation to the tourism program. Communication between educators is important to implement these changes.

5.7 Conclusion

The following research revealed strengths and weaknesses within the Tourism program at an international college in the north of Thailand. The overall learning experience, airports situations, role-plays, and communicative activities were viewed positively by the instructor and learners. The outside readings and topics of sustainable tourism did not create substantial communication among the learners, as they were often viewed as too difficult or not relevant to the learners. Overall, the evaluation was successful in determining the views of the students, and providing data that reflects their needs, as well as in describing the stakeholders view on the expectations, and the essentialness of this program in the overall curriculum. This research lays a foundation for further evaluation and needs analysis in respect to restructuring the course design and providing tasks and topics that the students perceive as valuable to them. Further research must be done continuously throughout the program in order for it to be successful on all levels.