

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Being a nurse herself, the researcher has a constant concern about the adequacy of nursing care. As a foreign patient, the researcher also understands what other patients might go through in a strange country and environment, with people speaking different languages. Additionally, as a second language learner, the researcher is aware of the Thai nurses' feelings when serving a foreign patient without being able to use their mother tongue. Patient satisfaction is an ultimate goal of most health centers. Thai hospitals are no exception, especially because there are a considerable number of expatriates living in Chiang Mai and foreigners/tourists seeking medical care. The curriculum designed has a tactical plan that came from an aspiration of helping Thai nurses to deliver a better service using English as a second language.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study aimed to design and develop a learner-centered, specialized English curriculum to improve the Thai nurses' communicative skills and to evaluate to what extent the developed curriculum improved the nurses' communicative skills. The study was based on a qualitative and quantitative method and made use of eleven instruments divided into three sets. The first set includes a needs analysis questionnaire, structured interviews (nurses, patients, and hospital director) and situational analysis. The second set consists of curriculum design (protosyllabus/lesson plans), expert's evaluation form, curriculum evaluation (learners' evaluation questionnaire, learners' log, teacher's reflective journal, observer's evaluation). Finally, the third set is comprised of a performance test (pre- and post-test). The research was carried out in a big hospital, using

eight nurses, and the course took place over a period of 30 hours. The quantitative data collected was analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation (S. D.), percentage, and Wilcoxon. The qualitative data collected was analyzed by a descriptive method and categorized by relevant issues. In conclusion, an examination will follow assessing to what extent this research points to a successful curriculum to improve the Thai nurses' English communicative skills. The results gathered from the curriculum construction process based on nurses' needs analysis, situational analysis, interviews and learners' performance revealed that the learner-centered specialized English curriculum is effective and improved the Thai nurses' English communicative skills from an *average* level to a *good* and *very good* level. This chapter offers the conclusions to the objectives, discussions, limitations of this study and provides recommendations for further studies.

5.3 Curriculum Design

The design of the ESP curriculum was all centered on the ultimate goal of improving the Thai nurses' communicative skills. This goal to increase proficiency, particularly in the area of listening and speaking skills, would enable the nurses to succeed in communicating with foreign patients.

According to Howatt (cited in Nunan, 1988), the strong version of communicative language teaching sees language ability as being developed through activities which actually simulate target performance. Class time should be spent in activities which require learners to do in class what they will have to do outside of the classroom. Nunan (1988) posited that a learner-centered curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught. For that reason, the elements necessary to elaborate a strong version of a learner-centered specialized English curriculum were considered.

The following discussion will demonstrate the three phases which were followed during this research to construct the curriculum, needs analysis and situational analysis, learner-centered specialized English curriculum – experts' evaluation, and curriculum implementation. Those features revealed the effectiveness of the designed curriculum.

5.3.1 Needs and Situational Analyses

There were specific features that the nurses themselves wanted to gain from the language course. For example, the majority of them rated themselves *weak* in listening and speaking skills, while also considering those skills to be most needed in work. The nurses cited the following as the top four situations in which they need English the most: educating the patients, explaining drug interactions, telephone skills, and giving advice. Regarding cultural topics, the nurses were interested in festivals and lifestyle. For activities in class, the nurses showed preference for work in pairs and groups.

During the nurses' interview, the interviewer was able to identify their previous level of English proficiency and the language areas that appeared to be problematic and a more clarified idea about their needs and wants towards the course. The patients' interviews gave the researcher an interesting perspective of how they felt being attended by a nurse with such a low English of proficiency level. The director's responses during the interview completed the overall view of how and why the nurses need to improve their English communicative skills.

The observations allowed the researcher a thorough understanding of the nature of the nurses' job, noting their job duties, details of the environment and the nature of spoken interactions that took place. It was clear that the nurses had an urgent need for English in their jobs because of lack of confidence, cultural differences, misunderstandings caused by pronunciation problems, and occasionally an inappropriate volume of speech.

Nunan (1988) also mentions that what little class time there is must therefore be used as effectively as possible to teach those aspects of the language which the learners themselves deem to be most urgently required. This increases surrender value and consequent learner motivation. In consequence, based on the results from the analysis, a course was developed and ran over 30 hours, 5 days per week, one-hour sessions per day.

The aim of the course could be described as improving the Thai nurses' communicative skills. Within this broadly specified aim, the researcher was able to

focus on specific content including patient registration, signs and symptoms, pain assessment, greeting the patient, giving directions around the hospital, general communication, administering medication, appointments and health education. The main focus of the course was on listening and speaking skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The activities and tasks used during the course were mainly brainstorming, gap fill, group discussions, matching vocabulary, listening for main ideas, followed by role-plays. The aim at this stage was to give learners an opportunity to rehearse all of the functions and vocabulary they had previously practiced in more controlled contexts.

5.3.2 A Learner-Centered Specialized English Curriculum (Experts' Evaluations)

Richards (2001: 161) observes that some theorists on second language acquisition have advocated "task" as a basis of syllabus design. Long & Crooks (1991: 43) argue that tasks serve as vehicles of presenting suitable target language models, which learners could restructure through cognitive process where difficulties could be negotiated during comprehension and production.

The learner-centered, specialized English curriculum was designed and based on a task-based method which targeted on the nurses' immediate needs. According to Willis (1996), a task is an activity "where the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome." The kinds of tasks that have been widely used as the syllabus basis is related to the real-world which were found to be significant through needs analysis and situational analysis and would turn out to be significant and useful in real world communication (Richards, 2001: 162).

Based on the designer's perception of ESP as learning-centered approach and the objective describing both process and product, together with the information gathered through needs analysis about the learners' target performance, a task-based syllabus was decided on for the course.

This learner-focused curriculum relies on communicative interactions by learners, focusing on their learning needs and motivation. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) offer, and often cite, a learning-centered approach to ESP.

Communication needs come to attention when it is believed that what learners are taught should be specifically what they will really use, and that this should determine the contents of ESP courses (Munby, 1978; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

The designed syllabus consists of seven units, addressing the specific topics: patient registration, signs and symptoms and pain assessment, greeting the patient, directions around the hospital, general communication, administering medication, appointments, and health education – diabetes. These topics, together with lesson plans, were evaluated by two experts and were considered *good*, providing evidence that the curriculum is reliable.

5.3.3 Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum implementation was also considered effective since it made use of the course evaluation which consisted of learners' questionnaire, expert's observation, teacher's journal, and learners' log, together with the learners' performance evaluation. These instruments helped the researcher to assess whether the characteristic features of designing the course were met as well as enabling the teacher to improve and promote the effectiveness of the curriculum. When considering this curriculum evaluation, which involved learners (nurses) and outsiders (foreign patients, teachers, hospital managers), it follows with what Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 156) say, "course evaluation needs to involve all those who share the learning process in making the ESP course as satisfying to the parties as possible." The process of evaluation during the course was developed when learners, by participation, gave clues to the teacher on how their learning was progressing which was noted in teacher's journal. Also, there were questionnaires handed out after each unit and learners' logs were kept. Finally, consecutive evaluation was implemented at the end of the course after learners had experienced the language by using a performance test.

To be able to construct an effective and standardized curriculum, the teacher's flexibility in course planning was important. Adjustments on the curriculum were necessary, and slight changes while teaching were made. These changes helped the

researcher to develop a curriculum that could best address learners' interests and needs.

As was discussed above, changes were required in order to adjust the curriculum to this group of learners. After implementing the course, specific features were analyzed. The results revealed that the top five activities the learners preferred were drills, pronunciation, listening, pair work, and role-play. According to the learners, the level of the content was appropriate, *very useful*, and the materials were considered *useful*, facilitating their learning.

The increase in the learners' confidence after taking the course was clear from the results of the study, and the participants' attitudes towards learning English were positive. They appreciated the course, as much of it had immediate communicative relevance for their jobs.

An instructor must take into account many factors to be able to deliver a successful course. The teaching plan and performance were considered reliable after being evaluated by an expert in TESOL.

5.4 Learners' Performance Assessment

Another feature that reflects on the effectiveness of the curriculum is the comparison of the results gathered from the pre-test and the post-test.

Testing is perhaps the best way for learner assessment. The teacher finds out if the content of the course meets the learners' expectations and whether the learner is able to apply the new information and employ learnt skills in a particular situation. "This assessment takes on a greater importance in ESP, because ESP is concerned with the ability to perform particular communicative tasks" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 144). Scriven (1991) explains that a summative evaluation looks at the learners' performance to see how well a group did on a learning task that utilized specific learning materials and methods. The final aspect of the research was to assess the learners' ability in English communication skills.

Looking at the learners' level of English ability before and after the curriculum implementation, there is a considerable improvement (21% to 33%) in

each unit. These results can imply that the designed curriculum improved the nurses' English communicative skills from an *average* level to a *good* level of English ability.

When comparing the findings on the pre-test and post-test, it clearly indicates that the nurses' communicative skills after the 30 hours of instruction improved significantly ($Z = -2.521, p < 0.05$).

Other important features were used to make value judgments about the efficiency of the course. Formative evaluations also took place through the course. Scriven (1991) says that formative evaluation is typically conducted during the development or improvement of a program or product (or person, and so on) and it is conducted, often more than once, for in-house staff of the program with the intent to improve. First, observations made by the teacher determined the learners' progress through the course, such as the learners' confidence. They used more gestures when performing the role-plays, they had a better interaction with colleagues, and they tried to use the language that they learned.

In conclusion, evaluation by the learners, teacher, expert and the learners' performance indicates that the curriculum designed addressing the Thai nurses' needs helped them to develop their English communicative skills.

5.5 Other Findings

Aside from learners' improvement on their communicative skills and the results of this study gathered from the pre-test and post-test, classroom observations and also the teacher's reflective journal showed other features that are considered worthwhile to mention. First, there were changes in the learners' behavior, such as confidence, politeness, speech volume, and the way they use language to socialize (interaction). Second, learners demonstrated improvement when using language structures and vocabulary that were taught. Finally, learners revealed cooperation and participation during role-play.

5.5.1 Learners' Behavior

Learners came to class with specific interest for learning to discuss the subject matter. They were in charge of developing English language skills to reflect their

native-language knowledge and skills. The teacher was open-minded in hearing, analyzing, and implementing learners' comments during the evaluation of the course. It was an important step to improve and promote the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Looking through the teacher's reflective journal, the learners' logs and observations, it can be seen that in addition to the improvement on learners' communicative skills, they also acquired confidence to approach the foreign patient, used an appropriate volume of speech, used more polite expressions, and were able to interact with the patients by having a small talk, using gestures and maintaining eye contact.

5.5.2 Language

Another important feature found on this research is related to learners' language fluency development. They could speak English with a smooth pace and without many pauses. The majority of the learners used correct language structures, moreover, their vocabulary increased significantly.

5.5.3 Activities

The methods developed for teaching communicative skills for this course were mostly borrowed from the acting role-play model in which learners were placed in imaginative circumstances and they had to use the language for each specific situation. Harmer offers the following definition: "role-play activities are those where learners are asked to imagine that they are in different situations and act accordingly" (1998: 92). The use of this method in teaching English is by no means a technique that can be found in many textbooks designed to teach English as a Second Language.

In this study, pair work was marked as *useful* by most of the learners. In ESL classes, pair work provides practice of newly learned forms and increases the opportunity for speaking and reduction in predominance of teacher talk. Additionally, it affords the teacher the opportunity to observe and identify learners' difficulties on areas of communication.

Together with pair work, role-play was also ranked by the learners as one of the top four useful activities. The researcher believes that pair work and role-playing

gives the learners more confidence to use the language. Martine (2005) says that in a small group or as part of a pair, there is a sense of security because learners are working with their classmates to come up with an answer or accomplish a task. There is no pressure on one solitary learner. As a group or pair they share the responsibility for the work. They are also allowed the freedom to come up with answers that reflect their own thinking.

In addition, through observations, the role-play model was identified as the most valuable activity for the specific group of nurses in this study, as we can see below:

'Learners after a few times doing role-plays interacted more with each other, they were more engaged, they seemed motivated to practice because they used more gestures, and more eye contact.' (Teacher's journal)

5.6 Discussions

A number of studies are related to this research. These studies support the research as well as provide different viewpoints. The following section is divided into four different sections of previous studies: needs analysis, materials design, ESP design, and classroom activities.

5.6.1 Needs Analysis

The use of learners' needs analysis follows closely with many professional examples of researchers who conducted needs analyses in order to develop a course for medical training (Shi, L., Corcos, R., & Storey, A, 2001; Boshier, S. & Smalkoski, K, 2002). The findings from these studies were similar to what the researcher discovered in demonstrating the benefit of developing an ESP curriculum in a health care setting according to the learners' needs. The needs analysis questionnaire for this research followed closely with the questionnaire from CosKun's study (2009). Cameron's research (1998) on needs analysis for ESP nursing students obtained data from multiple sources, such as conducting interviews, observations, and tape recordings. Based on the combination of information, categories of needs emerged. The construction of this learner-centered specialized English curriculum for Thai nurses also made use of several instruments to collect learners' needs, and situational

analysis was used to be able to develop a more reliable understanding of learners' needs. A study conducted within the EFL field by Kittidhaworn (2001) investigated the English language needs of undergraduate engineering students in a public university in Thailand and made use of a similar needs analysis questionnaire. Both the study with the Thai engineers and this current study with Thai nurses conducted a needs analysis questionnaire divided into two-parts. The first part of the questionnaire asked for demographic data and the second part dealt with items of English language needs.

After conducting the needs and situational analyses, a learner-centered specialized English curriculum was constructed and organized according to the nurses' urgent needs, which were their lack of confidence, difficulties in communicating with clients, low English proficiency levels, and low volume of speech. These findings relate to Boshier & Smalkoski's findings (2002) that there was difficulty for nurses being understood by clients because of inappropriate stress and intonation in their voices, and difficulty communicating with clients. Regarding the overall needs of the students in ENP (English for Nursing Purposes), Lee (1998) considered expectations needs and in-service needs, providing viewpoints based on practical job performance. The results from Lee's study are comparable to this research which had subjects participating as nurses working. Additionally both studies addressed similar topics: patient registration, signs and symptoms, greeting the patient, directions around the hospital, general communication, administering medication, appointments, and health education – diabetes.

5.6.2 ESP Design

Research conducted by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Dubin & Olshtain (1986), and Hutchinson T. & A. Waters (1987) corroborates the importance of the basis for ESP curriculum and syllabus design. The process of designing a learner-centered specialized English curriculum for Thai nurses reflects the situations that other ESP practitioners are confronted with when designing course tasks; that is, analyzing the needs of specific learners, identifying the occupation-related aims, and tailoring the authenticity-feature materials (Ting, 2010).

Furthermore, Yoshida's research (1998) revealed learners' recommendations for ESP curriculum design: some learners wanted to see improvement in course content and course teaching methods such as authentic and challenging materials. These findings are similar to this current study in which the learners evaluated the content of the course, materials, and teaching methods as being useful to their learning.

5.6.3 Materials Design

Teaching English for Thai nurses using materials designed specifically for this context was considered a challenge for the researcher. Rattanapinyowong (1988) conducted a needs analysis study among medical students in Mahidol University in Bangkok. Data was collected from 351 questionnaires distributed to medical, nursing, and related fields learners. Interviews with teachers in different university departments were analyzed to identify the English language academic needs of these students. The learners emphasized the need for English courses designed for specific medical professions as well as for Asian learners. In this English course for Thai nurses, materials were designed addressing the specific needs of Asian nurses including proficiency level and background knowledge.

Ritchie (2005) notes the difficulty teachers face when writing their own materials specifically texts of spoken discourse. He offers four possible solutions: composing texts, using authentic texts, using transcripts of role-plays involving medical professionals and using transcripts of learner-teacher interaction. In this current study, the researcher implemented using authentic texts and transcripts and would have liked to implement Ritchie's other suggestions if time had permitted.

5.6.4 Classroom Activities

In addition, this current research revealed role-play and pair work to be the most useful activities, which is similar to the findings of Boshier & Smalkoski (2002). In addition, Coskun's research (2009) demonstrated that learners have consistently found role-plays to be among the most useful aspects of the course and pair work. Researchers support that small group work and pair work increases the opportunities the learners get to speak English. Regarding the learners' development, the course

helped the learners' to increase their level of confidence as they reported it during the course. The benefit of a communicative language teaching approach, which utilizes activities related to the learners' real world can establish a truthful exchange of meaningful communication. Role-plays foster true life situations, where conversational English can be used. In this current research, learners' acted out their character roles (nurses) so they could experience how conversational English was used in a specific situation. Bogart (2006) mentions in his research the importance of using role-play to develop the skills of the Thai students to communicate using English in social settings.

Overall, this current study with Thai nurses provided similarities to other research in ESP for nurses and curriculum design and development. In addition, it adds valuable materials that are lacking in the field of ESP materials for Asian nurses. The following section discusses limitations, and recommendations for curriculum design and further study based on these research findings.

5.7 Limitations

There are two noteworthy limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed regarding the present study. The first limitation concerns the problem with the missing learners which may have affected the results of the study. Several times a week some learners did not attend the classes because of their busy working schedule. For example: nurses' shifts are scheduled a month in advance, so some have to work 24 hours straight; others have to work night shifts and need to sleep during the day. Due to the small number of participants, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the cases studied. The number of cases is too limited for broad generalizations.

The second limitation has to do with the materials addressing the specific content of the course. There is a plethora of materials available addressing the nursing field but most of it is not specifically related to the Thai nurses' needs and nor is it designed for learners who are at lower proficiency level. Much of the materials in the current market focus on aspects with learners who are beyond the pre-intermediate level. In addition, the materials address topics that are in a western context, without introducing the cultural aspects to the Asian cultural background nurses. It is difficult

to find activities that suit all learners in the class. This study was undertaken to document the process with a pre-intermediate level adult class of Asian nurses.

5.8 Recommendations for Curriculum Design

5.8.1 Suggestions for Materials

People learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting. A teacher should be careful about the choice of ESP materials and activities in the lesson and about organizing the course in general. "Students will acquire English as they work with materials which they find interesting and relevant and which they can use in their professional work or further studies" (Fiorito, 2007).

There was a time issue during the current study; one of the researcher's recommendations for materials is spending more time on the preparation of materials. For example, teachers could create audio materials with a focus on the situations related to the nurses' background.

There are some researchers who point out that more authentic materials are needed in the classroom because of the wide disparity that is often found between materials developed specifically for English language teaching and authentic conversation.

While Nunan (1999: 27) realizes that it is not realistic for teachers to use only authentic materials in the classroom, he makes a point that learners should be fed as rich a diet of authentic data as possible, because ultimately, if they only encounter contrived dialogues and listening texts, their learning task would be made more difficult. He also goes on to say that it is important that learners listen to and read authentic material of as many different kinds as possible. This will help motivate the learners by bringing the content and the subject matter to life for them, and enable them make the important connections between the classroom world and the world beyond it.

Graves points out that teaching materials are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course (1996: 27).

The last recommendation reflects upon the nurses' busy schedule. Since there were a few learners consistently missing classes, it would be useful if self-study materials were designed for those who are not able to be present at the class, so they could have the chance to review the lesson at home by themselves. Another idea would be to videotape each class for the same reason. Yoshida's (1998) study about learners' recommendations for ESP curriculum design shows that they suggested a self-paced course which give them the freedom to study as much as they want and for as long as they want.

5.8.2 Cultural Consideration

Learners study English not because they are interested in the English language (or English language culture) as such but because they need English study for work purposes (Robinson, 1991). However, in a nursing care, establishing nurse-patient relationship is essential to be effective in expressing interest and concern for patient and their families. For this reason to provide efficient health care information, nurses must be able to communicate socially. An important language barrier is cultural differences, which should be taken into consideration.

Cultural values and beliefs do influence and, to a large extent, determine health behaviors. As the number of foreign patients in Thailand is becoming increasingly multi-cultural, the need to improve understanding of different cultures is a practical imperative.

Yu Xu (2007) says that Asian nurses are challenged to understand western culture. They have their own values, beliefs, and cultural norms which unavoidably clash with those of western societies as the two systems of thinking were likened to 'oil and water.' He also mentioned that these cultural differences ranged from different concepts of time (i.e., 'American time' equaling to "punctuality") to different communication styles, foods, and ways of life and customs.

Based on the researcher's own experience as a nurse, such content could have the potential not only to benefit care providers but also to benefit patients in terms of reducing their levels of stress by developing the nurse-patient relationship.

5.8.3 Learning Strategy Lesson

Adults must work harder than children in order to learn a new language, but the learning skills they bring to the task permit them to learn faster and more efficiently. The skills they have already developed in using their native languages will make learning English easier. Although some teachers may be working with learners whose English is quite limited, the language learning abilities of adults in the ESP classroom are potentially immense. Educated adults are continually learning new language behavior in their native languages, since language learning continues naturally throughout their lives. They are constantly expanding vocabulary, becoming more fluent in their fields, and adjusting their linguistic behavior to new situations or new roles. ESP students can exploit these innate competencies in learning English.

Introducing language learning strategies into the classroom could be considered a helpful tool to educators. It could help learners to learn easily and become more competent language learners. A lesson introducing the skill will help them to understand what kind of learners they are and identify in what situations they learn best can help them to become autonomous learners.

5.9 Recommendations for Further Study

5.9.1 Cultural Aspects

The present research design could be modified to acquire more information giving further insights into cultural aspects. Learning a language and culture often go together and highlighting this helps learners to understand the context much better. However, it seems that the nurses do not have a clear understanding about culture as a topic and how it comes together with language learning. Here is a clear example: when studying patient education in diabetes, the nurses were supposed to talk with the patients about diabetes and their diet. The nurses knew about Thai food, however when they explained about what the patients should and should not eat and how it

affects their diet, they referred to mangoes, sticky rice, watermelon, stir fried food, and so on. They did not realize that they should mention the patients' eating habits and the kinds of food that are familiar to them. The nurses failed to see the importance of learning culture along with English.

5.9.2 Comparing Participants

The second recommendation would be that applying this curriculum to nursing students may provide greater insight into the effectiveness of helping them to grow professionally. Future studies could also determine the differences between the working nurses working and the nursing students.

5.9.3 Effectiveness of the Curriculum

The final recommendation would be that applying the research with a different group of nurses or different hospitals at the same time would allow for more data to support the effectiveness of this curriculum.

'A Little Gift'

"Developing a new course is not just planning the course. In teaching, instructors are constant learners, developing new teaching skills, teaching concepts, methodological knowledge, continuously growing as a teacher and a person. There are different learners, with different needs and backgrounds, which will inevitably make it necessary to modify and adjust a course to that particular group of learners. For that reason, course development, should be viewed as an ongoing process, where teacher and learners work in progress."

(Anonymous)