

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Significance of the Problem

In the present era of globalization, knowledge of the English language is becoming more essential for people in different parts of the world. Since speaking and listening are the fastest and most convenient ways of communication, use of these skills in English to communicate with others is an advantage in present day society. People who speak English fluently and correctly will have more opportunities to get jobs than those who cannot, especially in the Hotel Service area.

Although English listening and speaking skills are very important for communication, it is still found that the speaking ability of most second language speakers is unsatisfactory. According to Aungwattanakul (n.d.), most high school students have few opportunities for practising English. It is the same at the vocational level when students are not provided with enough opportunities to

develop their English skills, especially their listening and speaking skills (Sethasatian, 1995). Learners are still not capable of using listening and speaking skills in performing activities effectively (Kanchanasathit, 1980, Atirat, 1985 and Sethasatian, 1995). Also, Deeprom (1997) says that vocational learners cannot communicate well in a real situation because they do not have enough practice.

Because of the lack of listening and speaking abilities mentioned above, it causes problems for those students who work in hotel services. For example, the front office manager at Porn Ping Tower hotel in Chiang Mai stated in an interview that the receptionists of the hotel still use English incorrectly in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation when communicating with foreign guests. The English trainer at The Imperial Mae Ping Hotel also complained that the English ability of hotel personnel is quite weak, especially grammar. For example, the receptionists will always say “no have” instead of “don’t have”. According to the managers at Felix City Inn hotel, they are also concerned a great deal about the English listening and speaking skills of their personnel since their personnel are not confident when communicating with foreign guests.

In Chuensuwimon study's (1996) it was found that the educational background of employees at the first class hotels in Bangkok is lower than a bachelor degree. As a result, they have problems in using English to communicate with the foreign guests. Apparently, there is a need for the hotel personnel to have English training in speaking and listening skills in order to provide better services to foreign guests.

The needs of learners who are confronting real situations in the workplace and those who learn English in a regular classroom are quite different. In a classroom, learners probably want to know how to use language in communication. On the other hand, learners who have to use English at work need to know more about how to communicate effectively in real situations. To receive benefits in their job performance, teaching them English through Task-based learning (TBL) is recommended. This approach will give them more opportunities to use language in carrying out their daily work.

Willis (1996) suggests teachers use the TBL Approach in the classroom. TBL can help teachers to focus on meaning and form as well. In addition, learners have more opportunities to use language when given a real world task. Since hotel personnel can use English

language taught through TBL in their real work and they will learn how to solve problems in communication by using knowledge learned through TBL, the researcher is interested in developing English listening and speaking lessons to teach the hotel personnel through TBL. The managers of the Amari Rincome Hotel are quite concerned about the poor listening and speaking skills of their personnel and they have expressed a strong desire to improve the ability of the staff to speak English. Thus, the researcher will help them to improve their personnel's English language performance by using constructed listening and speaking lessons based on TBL.

The researcher will follow an adapted TBL approach (Willis,1996) that comprises three steps:

1. Pre-task: the instructor introduces the topic, language vocabulary, and expressions to be used in different functions before assigning the learners tasks.
2. Task cycle: this step is divided into two phases:
 - 2.1 Planning for the report: Learners do the task in pairs or small groups, then prepare a dialogue to do a role play for the class. The instructor monitors and helps them to correct their work and acts as a language advisor to help

them rehearse the role play.

2.2 Report: The learners do the role play for the class and the instructor gives feedback on content and form.

3. Language focus: this stage comprises two parts:

3.1 Analysis: The learners discuss and correct the language mistakes by themselves.

3.2 Practice: The learners review words and phrases, and write them down in the notebook.

From these 3 steps the learners will gain more confidence since they can use better language to communicate more effectively with foreign guests during their daily work.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To develop English listening and speaking lessons for hotel service personnel through task-based learning activities.
2. To track the improvement of the English listening and speaking abilities of the hotel service personnel through task-based learning activities.

1.3. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is as follows:

1.3.1 Subject of the study

This study is confined specifically to 14 hotel personnel: 4 from the front office section, 4 from the housekeeping section and 6 from the restaurant section of the Amari Rincome Hotel in Chiang Mai.

1.3.2 Content of the Study

The contents developed are based on the course description of the English for Hotel II (1552601) offered at Rajabhat Institute Chiang Mai, 2001 and from needs of the hotel personnel.

1.3.3 Variables

Independent variable: English listening and speaking lessons for hotel service personnel through task-based learning activities.

Dependent Variable: Current English listening and speaking abilities of hotel staff.

1.3.4 Length of the Study

This study will be done from February, 4th 2002 to March, 1st 2002.

1.4 Definition of Terms

1. Development: the process of constructing, teaching, evaluating and improving lessons in order to suit the level of learners.
2. English Listening and Speaking lessons for the hotel service personnel: A course syllabus developed for the hotel service personnel, which consists of the proto-syllabus and the lesson plans. The course objectives are set by following the course description of the English for Hotel II (1552601) offered at Rajabhat Institute Chiang Mai, 2001. The contents are selected from a variety of sources in order to serve the learners' needs. After the contents are designed, the entire lesson plans for teaching are constructed.
3. Task-Based Learning: a process of learning following Willis' (1996) task-based approach. It is composed of three steps: pre-task, task cycle and language focus. The first step is the pre-task. The instructor introduces the topic, vocabulary, function and

expressions used in different contexts. The learners use the linguistic elements provided in the first step for practicing conversation and creating tasks. In the second step, the task cycle is to create a conversation in written form using given examples as guidelines. The researcher's role in this step is as a facilitator. The learners perform tasks both in pairs and small groups. After finishing writing a conversation, each group presents the conversation by doing a role play. While performing the tasks, they are assessed by the researcher and their peers. In the third step, the language focus, both the researcher and peers give comments to the group who performed the tasks about vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Each group has a chance to correct their language mistakes and practice more.

4. Listening and Speaking Abilities of Hotel Service Personnel:

The ability to communicate, especially in listening and speaking when providing the hotel services of housekeeping, front office and food and beverage sections. Listening and speaking abilities can be assessed from real performance by using the observation form after finishing each lesson. An interview is used for assessing learners' opinions on their listening and speaking

abilities improvement and the effectiveness of the lessons after the course is finished.

5. Learners: the hotel personnel at Amari Rincome Hotel in Chiang Mai of three sections: four front office personnel, four housekeepers and six food and beverage personnel.

1.5 Significance of the study

The researcher expected the following benefits from this research.

1. To provide a course syllabus for trainers or hotel managers to use for hotel personnel training to improve the communication skills of hotel staff.
2. To provide guidelines for further research on the use of the task-based learning approach.