

Utilizing Task-Based Learning Activities to Enhance Students' English Workplace Communication Skills

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Received June 30, 2026; **Revised** July 26, 2026; **Accepted** August 11, 2026

Abstract

Workplace communication in English is a common challenge for Thai university graduates when transitioning to office-based careers. This study aimed to 1) develop and test instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication, 2) determine whether the instructional materials utilizing task-based activities improve students' workplace communication skills, and 3) explore students' reactions toward the materials. The study employed a pre-experimental research design, a one-group pre-test-post-test with a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Thirty-five students who enrolled in the English for Office Management course participated over 15 weeks, with 45 instructional hours of instruction. The data were gathered through a 40-item workplace vocabulary knowledge test and a role-play speaking task scored with a communicative-competence rubric, students' learning logs, and semi-structured interviews. For vocabulary knowledge, the post-test mean ($M = 30.60$, $SD = 3.50$) was significantly higher than the pre-test mean ($M = 15.71$, $SD = 3.35$), $t(34) = 25.63$, $p < .05$. For speaking performance, the overall role-play mean rose from 2.74 to 3.14, with the largest gain in sociolinguistic competence and the smallest in strategic competence. Students responded positively, valuing the authentic office scenarios and the culture notes. Students' anxiety was reported when speaking during role-play tasks. These findings indicate that task-based materials grounded in a prior needs analysis and built on authentic workplace language can effectively develop the practical communication skills Thai students need for their future workplaces, and they support integrating explicit pragmatic instruction and low-stakes speaking practice into ESP courses.

Keywords: Workplace communication; task-based activities; instructional materials development

Introduction

English language has become a core skill for office jobs in many workplaces. Employees use English for emails, reports, phone calls, and meetings on a regular basis (Kankaanranta &

Planken, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Kim, 2021). Thailand's EF English Proficiency Index places the country at rank 116 out of 123 countries and regions in 2025, within the very low proficiency band (EF Education First, 2025). This ranking points to a gap between the English skills that Thai graduates bring and the skills that office jobs demand. Task-based language learning offers one way to close this gap, since it gives learners real communication goals instead of only grammar practice (Willis, 1996). However, teaching materials that combine this approach with a needs-based design for Thai university students in office contexts remain scarce (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021).

This study takes place within a Bachelor of Arts program in English at a Thai university, where many students complete internships in office administration before graduation. Needs analysis data from these students show consistent demands in phone calls, meetings, client contact, and formal correspondence. The researcher has worked directly with this student group through course design and needs analysis, which gives a close view of the gap between classroom instruction and workplace tasks. Other studies on Thai EFL learners report similar problems in spoken interaction and conversational tasks (Sinwongsuwat et al., 2018; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021).

This study aims to develop and evaluate task based instructional materials that respond to the English needs of Thai university students entering office administration roles. The research follows a needs-based approach. It begins with a needs analysis phase, moves to material design and expert validation, and ends with a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest trial with the target student group. This article presents the needs analysis findings, the design principles behind the materials, the trial results, and the implications for English for Specific Purposes instruction in Thai higher education.

Research Objectives

Therefore, this study was conducted with three objectives.

1. To develop and test instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication.
2. To determine whether the instructional materials improve students' workplace communication skills.
3. To explore students' reactions towards instructional materials.

Literature Review

English communication in the workplace has been in the spotlight of researchers in English language teaching (ELT) due to its growing importance. This study is based on the theoretical background of task-based language learning, the development of communicative competence in the classroom, the principles of EFL materials development, and the language features and vocabulary requirements for professional office communication. The use of role-play as a

communicative tool in developing the students' speaking skills in the workplace is also studied, because it is a main part of the instructional package that has been developed in this study.

1) Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Learning

Task-based language learning (TBLL) builds upon three established theoretical stances. The first is the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996), which considers negotiating meaning in communicative tasks as a pivotal process in second language learning. Tasks should provide learners with a purpose to use the language and a chance to negotiate meaning and adjust their product in real time, as in real-world workplace communication. The second theoretical basis is the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985, 2005), which holds that language production forces learners to pay attention to their own deficits and to process the language in depth beyond what is necessary for comprehension. The third is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that argues that the communicative development of the learners can be extended through collaborative peer interaction where they can do things that they could not do on their own. Drawing on these foundations, Willis (1996) offered the most widely used TBLL framework, which involves three phases: pre-task, when learners are introduced to the topic and relevant language; task cycle, when learners complete a communicative task, plan and report; and language focus, when focus is directed to grammar and vocabulary that arose naturally in the task. The sequence was chosen as the structure of lesson activities of this study since it leads the learners from input to meaningful use of the language to conscious reflection on the language form in a systematic manner.

For materials design, Ellis (2003) made a valuable distinction between focused tasks, which are designed to elicit specific language forms, and unfocused tasks, which are geared towards the development of communicative fluency in general. Both types have distinct functions, and both are important in the context of the workplace, where written communication needs to be accurate and oral communication needs to be fluent. Research on TBLT indicates that Ellis, Long, and Willis have had a profound influence on this approach and that when task design is appropriately planned and sequenced to meet the needs of the learners, TBLT is effective in EFL contexts. The needs analysis phase that preceded material development in this study was directly informed by the principle proposed by Long's (2015) that tasks should be selected and sequenced by carefully analyzing real-world communication demands.

2) TBLL and Communicative Competence Development

Task-based instruction aims at developing communicative competence, which is its primary goal. This idea was first proposed by Hymes (1972) and subsequently developed into four aspects by Canale and Swain (1980): grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. These elements manifest themselves in certain and visible ways in professional English settings. This framework was further developed by Walsh (2011) with his interactional competence, which refers to learners' skills in handling the interaction in real-time. Forey and Lockwood (2010b) also suggested the idea of workplace

discourse literacy to refer to proficiency in the kind of genres and registers employed in the workplace. Both notions emphasize the need to create classroom activities that replicate real communicative needs and not decontextualized grammar practice.

Nunan (2004) offered solid empirical evidence for TBLL in EFL settings. He argued that there are three characteristics of effective task-based instruction: it is learner-centred, it is directly related to the language in the real world, and it makes the learning processes transparent to the students. Willis (1996) indicated that TBLL learners' confidence in speaking and their independence in language use increased. These results are confirmed in more recent studies in various contexts. Mutar and Nimehchisalem (2019) reported that Malaysian university students experienced significant improvement in both speaking and writing after TBLL intervention. Lin (2019) found that Chinese university students made some improvements in linguistic complexity and interaction patterns. A 2024 systematic review of studies on TBLT in EFL contexts (Mudinillah et al., 2024) revealed that this method is always effective in fostering communicative language development, provided that the task design and support are designed appropriately to learners' needs.

3) Role Play Tasks for Workplace Speaking Skills

Among the range of task types available in TBLL, role play has received particular attention as an effective tool for developing speaking skills in professional contexts. Role play tasks require learners to take on specific professional identities and use language to accomplish realistic communicative goals, such as handling a client inquiry, conducting a meeting, or giving instructions to a colleague. Research has shown that role play fosters improvisational dialogue, contextualized vocabulary use, and real-time problem solving, which are skills essential to spoken fluency. When professional contexts are used in role play activities, students are more likely to develop pragmatic competence and communicate more adequately in formal workplace situations, and they become more strategic in their language use when role play is integrated with professional tasks (Bora, 2021).

Empirical studies with secondary and tertiary learners report that role play enhances students' speaking fluency, accuracy, and overall performance compared with more traditional, teacher-centered approaches. Khasbani and Seli (2021) found that learners who practiced regular role play tasks outperformed their peers in oral assessments. Ahmada and Munawaroh (2022) emphasized that role play improves pronunciation and intonation by providing repeated exposure to conversational patterns in emotionally engaging contexts, while Henisah et al. (2023) observed that the technique also boosted classroom participation among reluctant speakers. In the Thai EFL context in particular, affective problems such as anxiety and lack of confidence are one of the main obstacles to speaking fluency, and this makes role-play tasks very useful in that they can give the students a low-risk environment for practicing spoken English before using it at work.

4) Principles of EFL Materials Development

The creation of effective materials for language instruction is a principled endeavor that is theory- and context-based. According to Tomlinson (2011), there are some guidelines for materials design: materials should be rich with authentic language, affect the learner's emotions and thoughts, and be based on prior knowledge. Richards (2001) further stated that materials should be in line with the latest theory of language teaching and should be usable in the institutional context in which the teacher is operating. The limitations for designing in this study are the constraints of the Thai University classroom, which include the fixed syllabus, the different skill levels of the students, and the limited amount of class hours per week.

Needs analysis is the crucial initial stage of all principled materials development projects (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The ESP tradition distinguishes between target needs, which are what learners need to do with English in their professional lives, and learning needs, which are what they need to do in their classrooms to achieve these target needs. This research was carried out using a four-stage materials development process proposed by Sucharitrak (2015), namely identifying instructional goals and objectives; defining the scope of content and language skills; selecting and developing content materials; and specifying instructional design and activities. The instructional materials developed here are designed to supplement rather than replace the existing course syllabus, a similar function that supplementary ESP materials serve in the case of university EFL programs (Tomlinson, 2011).

5) Language Features and Vocabulary in Professional Office Contexts

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is a well-established sub-field of ESP which aims at the specific language needs of the workplace. Key communication activities in office administration include communicating with clients, conducting meetings, handling written correspondence, making requests, and giving and receiving instructions (Forey & Lockwood, 2010b; Nickerson, 2015). These functions have certain vocabulary, collocational patterns, and discourse structures unique to them that require targeted instruction and are not the same as general English.

Business English is a type of ESP, which is a blend of business content knowledge and English as the means of communication. Its technical and context-specific nature of Business English requires learners to have first-hand experience of the language forms used in business. In specialized fields, it is necessary to acquire the basic words and collocations as the basis of correct and fluent production (Nation, 2013). The vocabulary used in the materials developed in this study was adopted from authentic workplace communication texts to enable learners to practice language that reflects workplace communication in office administration. The research on needs analysis for Thai learners also supports that EFP should be tailored to the communication needs of the learners' future profession, and vocabulary and speaking tasks should be related to the situations that learners are likely to encounter after graduation (Namtapi, 2022; Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). Kanoksilapatham (2019) also revealed that EFL graduates of Thai universities

often feel a lack of the English they learned in university compared to that of their jobs, thus further supporting the need for the targeted instructional materials developed in this study.

The literature review mentioned above covers several principles that can build a strong theoretical foundation in this study. Willis's (1996) three-phase sequence offers a practical structure that scaffolds weaker students through shared pre-task input and peer support while still allowing stronger students to extend their production during the task cycle. Needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Long, 2015) provides a means of concentrating limited class time on the communicative functions that matter most in the workplace, and role play supplies a low-risk, repeatable format well suited to anxious or reluctant Thai students. Despite this strong theoretical base, few studies have combined these strands into instructional teaching materials that are grounded in a prior needs analysis of office administration graduates and evaluated within an authentic Thai university course. The present study addresses this gap. This study draws its theoretical framework as a blueprint for instructional materials design and development. The framework shows the relationship between the task-based instructional materials and the role-play tasks that build on office administration content, which comes from a needs analysis. The process links them to the outcome, and it follows the three steps of task learning activities for students in an office management course.

Conceptual Framework

This study is a pre-experimental research design, supplemented with quantitative and qualitative data. The conceptual framework of this research was developed based on the concepts and theories of task-based language learning (Willis, 1996), the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996), the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985, 2005), Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence. The framework consists of the independent variables, the process, and the dependent variable, with the following details:

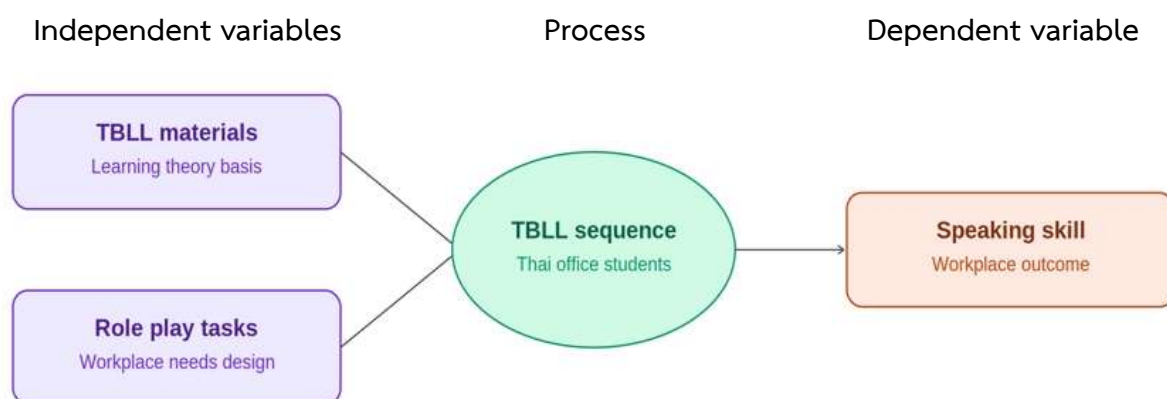


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a pre-experimental design involving a one-group pre-test-post-test arrangement, combining a mixed-method approach with quantitative and qualitative data collection to provide a fuller account of how the instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication skills worked in practice. This design is appropriate for exploratory classroom-based research. A control group is not feasible due to institutional and ethical constraints (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study was structured into three consecutive phases which directly relate to the three research objectives: a needs analysis phase, a material design and development phase, and an implementation and evaluation phase. The details of each phase were described.

Phase I. Need Analysis

A needs analysis was done before any instructional design to provide a principled, empirical foundation for materials development. A total of 30 students who had previously taken the course English for Office Management or English for Human Resources Management during the 2023 to 2024 academic year and had undergone internships at office-based organizations in different parts of Thailand. Those were invited to be a part of giving workplace information. Thus, they could speak about their first-hand experience of English use in the workplace.

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data. The participants marked the level of difficulty of specific English language tasks using a 5-point scale from 1 (no problem) to 5 (could not do it). Each item was ranked by skill area, and mean scores and standard deviations were computed to determine the overall ranking of language difficulties. The questionnaire did not address personal or sensitive issues, and the names of the respondents were not disclosed for research purposes.

Phase II: Development of the Instructional Materials

The instructional materials package was developed based on the four-stage approach put forward by Sucharitrak (2015) as follows: (1) identifying instructional goals and objectives, (2) defining the scope of content and language skills, (3) selecting and developing content materials, and (4) specifying instructional design and activities. The results of Phase 1 influenced Stages 1 and 3. The main language focus of the materials was communication issues that students encountered in their internships, including giving instructions, making polite requests, and handling client interactions. Design and development of instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication skills were illustrated.

Stage 1: Identifying instructional goals and objectives

Set the overall purpose of the materials based on student needs found in the survey, such as giving instructions, making requests, and understanding office routines.

Stage 2: Defining the scope of content and language skills

Decide on the topics and skills to cover, matching the course content of English for Office Administration, including vocabulary, grammar, and the four language skills.

Stage 3: Selecting and developing content materials

Create reading texts, listening tasks, and vocabulary based on real workplace situations. Materials reflect the language problems students reported during their internship.

Stage 4: Specifying instructional design and activities

Organize each unit into a clear sequence of tasks: warm-up, reading, listening, language tasks, business skills, culture notes, and wrap-up. This sequence guides students from prior knowledge to real use.

The instructional materials package consists of eight thematic workplace lesson units; each is organized around a single communicative domain within office management. Each unit follows Willis's (1996) three-phase task-based sequence, and each lesson unit is designed for six-hour lessons, giving a total of 45 instructional hours. The unit structure moves students progressively from a Warm-up stage through Reading, Listening, Language Tasks, Business Skills, and Culture Notes, before closing with a Wrap-up and Reflection stage. This sequence reflects the task-as-center principle of TBLL, in which meaningful communication is the organizing point of every lesson, and grammar and vocabulary are addressed in direct service of communicative goals (Long, 2015; Ellis, 2003).

Figure 2: Unit structure of the learning tasks for English for Office Management

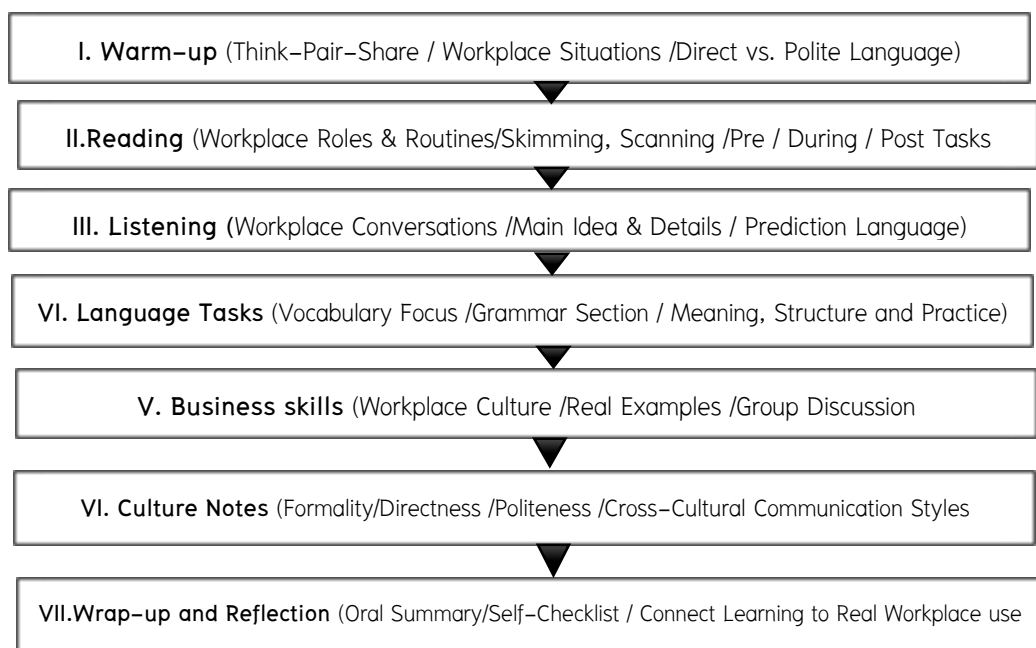
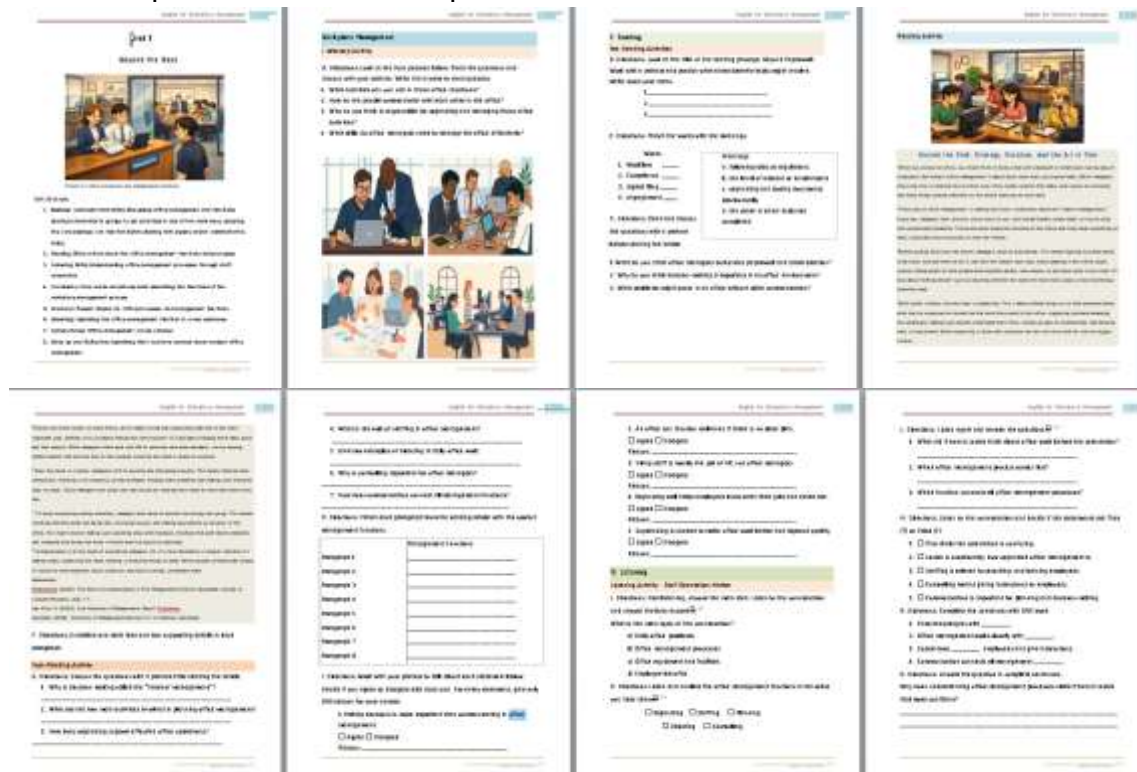


Figure 3: Examples of thematic workplace lesson units



Phase III: Implementation and Evaluation

The eight units of instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication skills were employed with 35 students who enrolled in the English for Office Management course during the second semester of 2025 at Kasetsart University. The entire group of students in the class was selected as the target group for several reasons. All the students shared a similar English language learning background since they passed the Introduction to English Reading and Writing, a prerequisite course. Importantly, these students were the real learners of English for Office Management; they came from the class with mixed English language abilities, but they had the intention to learn the course according to their interests.

To measure the improvement in students' English workplace communication skills, two sets of parallel tests, a pre-test and a post-test, were administered before and after learning with the instructional materials package. Each set comprised two parts: a 40-item multiple-choice test of workplace vocabulary knowledge covering essential office and business terms, and a role-play workplace communication task. The role-play speaking task was assessed with a rubric adapted from Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework, covering four criteria—grammatical (grammar and vocabulary use), sociolinguistic (language use in context), discourse (organization of speech), and strategic competence (communication strategies)—each rated on a four-point scale. Three EFL teachers with experience in business English instruction served as independent raters. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using the intraclass correlation coefficient,

ICC (2,1), following Koo and Mae (2016). Both tests were conducted as part of normal classroom practice and caused no harm to participants.

Results

The results are presented according to the study's three research objectives.

Develop and test instructional materials utilizing task-based activities for workplace communication

Needs Analysis Results

The findings showed that speaking was the most challenging skill area with an overall mean of 4.10. The most difficult items were answering or making a telephone call in English ($M = 4.30$) and giving opinions or asking for clarification during meetings ($M = 4.23$). These findings indicate that students had inadequate oral language skills and self-confidence in oral communication for authentic professional exchanges. Writing was in second place with a mean of 3.76, and the most challenging items on the scale were appropriate vocabulary for office and HR tasks ($M = 3.97$) and using correct grammar in written documents ($M = 3.67$). The other two skills, reading ($M = 2.94$) and listening ($M = 2.62$), were ranked third and fourth, respectively, which meant a moderate level of difficulty. The needs analysis results gave clear empirical evidence for prioritizing speaking and writing as the main language skills to be covered in the instructional teaching materials, while reading and listening are covered as supporting skills.

Table 1: The statistic result of English language difficulty in speaking areas and summary.

Rank	Skill Area	Language Difficulty Item	Mean	SD
1	Speaking	Expressing ideas clearly when speaking in English	4.07	0.58
		Using polite or professional language when speaking	3.83	0.70
		Making requests or asking questions in a formal way	4.07	0.74
		Speaking on the phone (opening, taking messages, closing)	4.30	0.53
		Participating in meetings — giving opinions or asking for clarification	4.23	0.63
Total			4.10	0.64

Table 2: The result of English language difficulty in writing areas and summary.

Rank	Skill Area	Language Difficulty Item	Mean	SD
2	Writing	Choosing the right level of formality (tone) for emails or memos	3.90	0.66
		Starting and ending a professional email correctly	3.57	0.68
		Organizing ideas clearly and logically in writing	3.53	0.78
		Using correct grammar in written documents	3.67	0.76
		Knowing the right vocabulary for office or HR tasks	3.97	0.56
		Writing meeting minutes in a clear, accurate format	3.90	0.61
Total			3.76	0.68

Table 3: The result of English language difficulty in reading areas and summary.

Rank	Skill Area	Language Difficulty Item	Mean	SD
3	Reading	Understanding formal or technical vocabulary in documents	2.80	0.57
		Identifying key information from a long document	3.00	0.95
Total			2.94	0.76

Table 4: The result of English language difficulty of listening areas and summary.

Rank	Skill Area	Language Difficulty Item	Mean	SD
4	Listening	Following the main points when others speak quickly	2.67	0.88
		Understanding different English accents	2.43	1.01
		Understanding spoken instructions from a supervisor	2.77	0.82
		Following a meeting or presentation conducted in English	2.60	0.72
Total			2.62	0.86

Expert Validation Results

Prior to classroom use, the eight-unit package was submitted to seven expert reviewers: four subject matter experts with backgrounds in office administration and business English at higher education levels, and three language experts specializing in EFL curriculum and materials development. The experts scored the materials based on five criteria: content relevance and accuracy, appropriateness of language level, quality of task design, instructional clarity, and feasibility for use in the classroom. Content validity was determined by the Content Validity Index (CVI) based on Lynn (1986), and the acceptable value was 0.80. The item-level CVI scores were 0.88, 0.93, and 0.93 for the three independent raters, all of which were above the minimum threshold. Three items were originally not rated above 0.80 and were adapted to include guided preparation tasks and easier model texts before the actual production tasks to be used in the

classroom. The qualitative feedback from experts was mostly positive, and the authenticity of the language content and practical relevance of the scenarios to the Thai workplace were seen as the most positive features of the materials.

Determine whether the instructional materials improve students' workplace communication skills

Vocabulary Knowledge Test Results

The workplace vocabulary knowledge test results showed that students' mean post-test score was higher than their mean pre-test score. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 5 Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Pre-test and Post-test

Tests	$\bar{X}$	SD
Pre-test	15.71	3.35
Post-test	30.60	3.50

N=35

To examine the improvement in students' workplace vocabulary knowledge, the pre-test and post-test scores were compared using a paired-samples t-test. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 T-Test Comparison of Pre-test Scores and Post-test Scores

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
				Lower Upper			
Pre-test							
Post-test	-14.886	3.437	.581	-16.066 -13.705	-25.626	34	.000

*p<.05

Table 6 shows the comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores on the workplace vocabulary knowledge test (40 items, n = 35). The pre-test mean was 15.71 (SD = 3.35),

representing 39.3% of the total score. After learning with the instructional materials package, the post-test mean increased to 30.60 (SD = 3.50), representing 76.5% of the total score. The paired-samples t-test showed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(34) = 25.63$, $p < .05$ (one-tailed), with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference of $[-16.07, -13.71]$. All 35 students improved, and no student's score decreased. These results indicate that the instructional materials package had a strong positive effect on students' workplace vocabulary knowledge.

To determine students' achievement in the role-play workplace communication task after learning with the task-based instructional materials, the scores from the role-play speaking task were analyzed against the speaking assessment criteria to obtain an overall picture of students' speaking performance. The mean scores for each criterion are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Role-play Workplace Communication Task among Three Raters

Criterion (max score = 4.00)	Pre-test	Post-test
1. Grammar and vocabulary use	2.914	3.210
2. Language use in context	2.505	3.181
3. Organization	2.733	3.114
4. Communication strategies	2.819	3.048
Overall means	2.743	3.138
ICC (2,1) — absolute agreement	0.961 (excellent)	0.861 (good)

N=35

The value for the pre-test was 0.961, indicating excellent agreement among the three raters. The post-test value was 0.861, indicating good agreement. The slight decrease among the three raters at the post-test stage is consistent with findings in second language speaking assessment, where greater variability in student performance at higher proficiency levels can reduce rater consensus to some degree. In terms of student speaking performance, the overall mean score increased from 2.743 (68.6% of the maximum) at pre-test to 3.138 (78.5% of the maximum) at post-test, representing a mean gain of 0.395 points. The greatest improvement was found in sociolinguistic competence (Language use in context), which increased from 2.505 to 3.181 (a gain of 0.676), suggesting that students showed the most development in their ability to use contextually appropriate language in workplace role play situations. Strategic competence (Communication strategies) showed the smallest gain (0.229), which may reflect the fact that students already demonstrated relatively higher baseline performance in this area at pre-test (70.5% of maximum). All four criteria showed improvement from pre-test to post-

test, which supports the effectiveness of the task-based instructional materials package in developing students' communicative language performance.

Explore students' reactions towards instructional materials

Students' Reactions toward Instructional Materials Package

To address research objective 3, qualitative data were collected through students' written reflections at the end of each unit throughout the teaching period. This qualitative information led to insight into the way the materials worked in the real classroom, what students considered to be clear or unclear in the lessons, and how the design could be improved to better meet the needs of the learners. The semi-structured interview was used to assess the students' reactions toward the instructional materials package for English for Office Management Students, and to provide the researcher with more in-depth information about the strengths and weaknesses of the lessons. Ten students were randomly selected for a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews were reviewed, and the results of the students' semi-structured interviews were presented.

1) Overall Experience of Learning

When the students were asked about learning with the instructional materials package, it was found that all ten students liked to learn with the instructional materials package for the following reasons. The lessons in each unit followed a step-by-step sequence starting from warm-up to wrap-up with different activity tasks that help them get into the content of the workplace. Three of them mentioned that the lessons of reading before listening to language tasks allow them to learn about the business vocabulary used in the workplace. Four students noted that they liked the culture notes section that helps them know global business cultures, such as communication styles in job advertisements, the level of formality, defectiveness of language use, and details compared to Thai culture. Three of them said that the sequence of the lessons helps them follow and understand the lessons more easily.

2) Language Skills Development

Students were asked about their English workplace communication skills gained in areas related to vocabulary, grammar, and speaking after completing the course. Six students said they learned more words used in the office and could understand workplace conversations better. Two students expressed that their vocabulary improved a lot, but they still feel nervous when they have to speak in front of others. Two students mentioned that they never thought about how to speak politely with foreign colleagues. The culture notes made them more aware of when they have to go for their internship or future work.

3) Students' Suggestions for Adding More Exercises

Students were asked about whether there were any steps or activities in the instructional materials that they think should be changed, added, or given more time. Five students said the task activities in each step were meaningful for them, as they have the discussion time with pairs

and groups, which they think was a very practical use in real-life work situations. Half of them said they wanted more time to practice speaking as they enjoyed working with peers. Some students mentioned that the role-play activity was good, but some tasks were too short. They need longer conversations for real workplace communication practices. One said, “The grammar section was a little fast. I needed more examples and more practice exercises.”

Discussion

Results from the needs analysis conducted in Phase I showed that speaking was the most difficult skill area for Thai undergraduate students in an office administration context, with a mean difficulty score of 4.10 out of 5. The top two were speaking by telephone in English ($M = 4.30$) and meetings where opinions were given or clarification was requested ($M = 4.23$). The results are in line with the previous studies on Thai EFL learners in the professional context. Kanoksilapatham (2019) found that there is a mismatch between the classroom English teaching and the communicative needs of Thai graduates in the workplace, especially in speaking. Tantiwich and Sinwongsuwat (2021) also reported that speaking was the most challenging skill for Thai workers to apply in authentic workplace contexts. The current needs analysis provides additional evidence for this trend since the findings are based on the experiences of students who had finished supervised internships, and thus the reported problems are directly applicable to the actual working life communication tasks, not perceived needs only.

Writing was the second most difficult ($M = 3.76$), the most difficult being selecting office vocabulary ($M = 3.97$) and choosing the level of formality in emails or memos ($M = 3.90$). This result is consistent with the problem of register in professional English writing, in which learners should not only be familiar with grammar and vocabulary but also with the pragmatic rules of professional writing. Nickerson (2015) has argued that business writing in international contexts demands awareness of genre-specific conventions that are rarely taught explicitly in general English courses. The needs analysis results in this study therefore point directly to the value of instructional teaching materials that address the specific communicative functions students will need at work rather than providing general language instruction.

Objective 2: To determine whether the instructional materials improve students' workplace communication skills

The t-test results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' workplace vocabulary knowledge from pre-test to post-test, $t(34) = 25.626$. The mean score increased from 15.71 (39.3% of the maximum) at pre-test to 30.60 (76.5% of the maximum) at post-test, representing a mean gain of 14.89 points. All 35 students showed improvement, and no student decreased in score. These results provide strong evidence that the instructional task-based materials were effective in building students' knowledge of workplace-specific vocabulary within the 15-week instructional period. This reflects the vocabulary knowledge that students brought to the course, which is itself consistent with the needs analysis findings from Phase I and with earlier research on Thai university EFL learners. The improvement trend is also consistent

with Nation's (2013) framework for vocabulary learning, which suggests that learners in specific disciplines need repeated exposure and contexts to retain and use words and collocations. The materials package was organized by lesson unit, with a number of encounters with target vocabulary provided by reading texts, listening tasks, language focus activities, and role play tasks, thus setting the stage for repeated exposure.

These results are similar to those observed in other TBLL intervention programs. Mutar and Nimehchisalem (2019) reported that the vocabulary development of the participants at the university level in Malaysia in the task-based course was found to be significant, and the reason was that the target vocabulary was repeated in meaningful communicative tasks. Richards (2001) has also observed that materials that focus on authentic tasks tend to generate better outcomes in vocabulary learning than decontextualized exercises, as the former involve the students in processing and producing words in a manner that reflects how they are used in real language. The findings of the vocabulary in the present study support these arguments and provide evidence from the context of the Thai university.

The results of the role-play task indicated that there was improvement from pre-test to post-test for all four of the communicative competence criteria. The overall mean rose by 0.395 points from 2.743 (68.6% of the maximum) to 3.138 (78.5% of the maximum). The largest improvement was in sociolinguistic competence (2.505 to 3.181, a difference of 0.676), that is, students' use of contextually appropriate language in terms of formality, politeness, and professional register. This is especially significant as sociolinguistic competence is known as one of the most challenging aspects in the communicative development of EFL learners because it involves sensitivity to the social context and not just to the grammatical rules (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). The relatively high gains in sociolinguistic competence may be attributed to the careful design of the materials, which included Culture Notes and Business Skills sections within each unit to make the pragmatic and social conventions of professional English explicit for learners. Forey and Lockwood (2010b) claimed that this literacy in the workplace as a sensitivity to register and genre conventions should be taught directly rather than be expected to happen incidentally. The current results indicate that this type of explicit instruction, together with role-play exercises which involved acting out workplace roles in a controlled environment, facilitated the development of sociolinguistic awareness in a way that may not have been achieved in a general English course. The lowest increase was in strategic competence (2.819 to 3.048, an increase of 0.229). This finding may be due to a relatively high pre-test performance level for this criterion (70.5% of the maximum). Strategic competence, including the use of communication strategies like paraphrasing, clarification requests, and repair moves, seems to be a skill area where students already have some working knowledge prior to instruction. In communicative classrooms, Walsh (2011) noted that learners frequently acquire basic interactional strategies through general exposure to English prior to being taught them directly. The relatively modest improvement in this area thus does not reflect a lack of effectiveness on the part of the materials,

but rather a point beyond which students were already functional in strategic communication prior to the course.

The development of all four communicative competence criteria helps validate the effectiveness of Willis's (1996) three phases of task-based sequence as the framework for organizing the lesson units. The pre-task phase focused on developing vocabulary and schema knowledge required for performing the task; the task cycle provided students with a scaffolded opportunity for production and peer interaction; and the language focus phase highlighted the forms which had been created during the task cycle. The following sequence was an operationalization of the theoretical claims of the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996), the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985, 2005), and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and was carried out consistently and replicably across the eight lesson units. The role-play tasks, which constituted the culminating production activity in each unit, provided conditions for authentic communicative practice that do not usually occur in general English classes, because the tasks are not usually based on activities that the students would be performing in the real world.

The results are in line with the increasing number of studies about role-play in the field of EFL speaking instruction. Khasbani and Seli (2021) concluded that role-play tasks resulted in significant improvement in oral performance in the case of university students, and Bora (2021) reported that professional role-play contexts supported students' pragmatic development and more strategic use of language. Role-play, in the context of the Thai EFL classroom, has been proven to mitigate speaking anxiety as it offers scaffolding and a low-risk situation for students to practice before engaging with real-world situations (Henisah et al., 2023; Ahmada & Munawaroh, 2022). The present study adds to this literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of role play tasks that are grounded in authentic office management scenarios and aligned with the specific communicative needs identified through prior needs analysis.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews indicated that students responded positively to the task-based instructional materials overall. Students most commonly reported that the workplace role-play tasks were interesting and that practicing real office situations made the learning feel relevant to their future work. Many students noted that they found the vocabulary sections useful and noticed the language they had studied appearing in the reading and listening texts and role-play scenarios. This awareness of input is consistent with Swain's (1985) noticing function of output, in which producing language in context sensitizes learners to relevant forms in the input they subsequently encounter. At the same time, several students reported feeling anxious when speaking during the role-play activities. These finding echoes research on EFL speaking anxiety in Thai university classrooms (Akkakoson, 2016; Noom-ura, 2013). Anxiety appears to exert its strongest influence at the pre-task stage: when learners feel unprepared to perform a role in front of their peers, part of their limited attentional resources is diverted toward managing apprehension rather than planning content and language, which in turn depresses the fluency and risk-taking that successful role play requires. To reduce students'

anxiety, the pre-task phase could be strengthened with concrete, low-stakes scaffolding, including (1) modelling a completed role play through teacher or video demonstrations, (2) providing sentence frames and functional-language banks that learners can draw on during performance, (3) allowing individual and paired rehearsal before whole-class or graded performance, (4) beginning with shorter, tightly structured exchanges and gradually lengthening them as confidence grows, and (5) directing early feedback toward communicative success rather than error correction. Building such preparation and rehearsal routines into the pre-task phase can lower affective barriers and help anxious learners engage more fully in the communicative demands of the task cycle.

Knowledge from Research

This study contributes new knowledge on three connected points which form a coherent body of knowledge for the design of task-based ESP materials for Thai university students in office administration contexts. The first point, it was centered on a needs-grounded profile of workplace communication. It demonstrates that a needs analysis was conducted with former interns rather than with current students reporting only perceived needs. The study yields a workplace-grounded profile of communicative difficulty to prioritize the language functional area training for office administration graduates in Thailand. This needs analysis shows the real English skills students need at work. Materials development can then follow these real needs, not the skills we assume matter in the classroom.

Building on the needs-grounded profile, the second point shows that materials designed around it are effective. The eight-unit task-based instructional materials organized with task sequences can produce a statistically significant gain in workplace vocabulary knowledge, $t(34) = 25.63$, $p < .05$, with measurable improvement across all four dimensions of communicative competence, the greatest being in sociolinguistic competence. This confirms that task-based materials built from needs analysis findings work.

The third point explains the mechanism behind this pattern. The explicit culture notes and business skills components alongside authentic role-play assist learners in a scenario of professional English in a future career. Two gains come from explicit teaching of professional and pragmatic language norms with authentic role-play practice. These two elements explain the gains reported above.

The findings offer a replicable model for developing and validating task-based ESP materials in resource-constrained tertiary classrooms, and the study provides empirical evidence that pairing a rigorous needs analysis with authentic, role-play-centered tasks is an effective route to workplace-ready communication skills. The three points mentioned describe one continuous process as follows: identifying real workplace needs, building and testing materials that respond to those needs, and explaining the instructional mechanism that makes the materials work. This process is the body of knowledge that this study contributes to the field of ESP: a replicable,

needs-driven model for developing task-based instructional materials in the Thai university context.

Summary of the Study

This study developed task-based instructional materials for English students preparing to work in office administration. The research had three phases. First, a needs analysis was done with 30 students who had already completed internships. The results showed speaking was the most difficult skill, especially phone calls and meetings. Second, eight instructional units were developed using task-based learning and reviewed by seven experts. Third, the materials were used with 35 students. The results showed a significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge and in all four areas of communicative competence, with the largest gain in using appropriate language for context. Most students responded positively to the materials, but some still felt anxious speaking in front of classmates.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations.

1) Recommendations for Applying the Research Findings

The results of Objective 1 showed that students had the most difficulty with speaking, especially phone calls and giving opinions in meetings. Therefore, relevant departments should increase speaking practice time for these situations in the English for Office Management course, and develop more materials based on real office scenarios.

The results of Objective 2 showed that the task-based materials clearly improved students' vocabulary knowledge and communication skills, especially the use of language appropriate to context. Therefore, the university should support instructors in producing instructional materials in their teaching courses, and provide training on the task-based design principles to integrate into the learning activities so instructors would have similar materials for other courses.

The results of Objective 3 showed that students had positive attitudes toward the materials, but still felt anxious speaking in front of the class. Therefore, the instructor who has a similar classroom situation should add preparation activities before speaking tasks, such as pair or small group practice before the actual role play, to reduce their anxiety.

2) Recommendations for Further Study

From this study, several directions for further research have emerged as follows. Future research should involve a delayed post-test given 4-8 weeks after instruction to determine if vocabulary and communicative gains are maintained over time. Retention data would give a more complete picture of the long-term effectiveness of task-based instructional materials in ESP courses and would overcome one of the main weaknesses of the current study.

To determine whether students' improvement was due to the task-based materials or to other instructional factors, a quasi-experimental design involving a comparison group that is taught

without the use of the materials would be beneficial. This would better demonstrate the effectiveness of the TBLL approach in this context and enable a clearer picture of how well the materials work in relation to other pedagogical methods.

Further studies could also expand the range of materials to the English for Human Resources Management course, in which students are placed in a different but related professional context. A comparison of the two courses would yield information on the extent to which the same model for developing task-based materials applies to other ESP specializations within the same department and on the extent to which different emphases are necessary for the communicative needs of students in different office administration courses.

It would also be valuable to investigate the long-term career outcomes of students who received task-based ESP instruction. Following up with graduates in their first year of employment to assess their perceived and actual communicative competence in workplace settings would provide evidence about the transfer of classroom learning to professional practice, which remains one of the central goals of ESP instruction (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Long, 2015).

Finally, future studies could investigate the use of digital platforms and technology-mediated tasks as a means of extending task-based practice beyond the classroom. Online role play simulations, video-recorded professional scenarios, and digital communication tasks could offer additional opportunities for language practice in authentic formats and could make the materials accessible to students at other institutions through open educational resources.

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