

Developing an Effective English Instructional Package for Non-English Major EFL Learners in

Graduate School

Received: 8 February 2024

Revised: 22 February 2024

Accepted: 23 February 2024

Suwitchan Un-udom^{1*}, Nathaya Un-udom² and Pinyada Wiriy³

^{1,2,3}Lecturer from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Rajabhat Maha sarakham University

*Corresponding Author Email: Suwitchan.un@rmu.ac.th

Abstract

This research consists purposes were 1. to assess the language needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education, 2. to create a customized English instructional package to address these needs and 3. to evaluate the effectiveness of this instructional package in enhancing the English skills of the participants. The research unfolded in three distinct phases: first, by examining the specific language requirements of the learners; second, by designing and developing an English instructional package tailored to meet these needs; and finally, by assessing the package's impact on the English proficiency of the participants. The study involved 9 Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education for phase 1, 5 experts who evaluated the instructional package in phase 2, and 30 Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education for phase 3. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, an instructional package evaluation form, drafts of the English instructional package, and pre-posttests. The data were analyzed using percentage, mean score, standard deviation, and a paired sample t-test. The results indicates that 1) the language needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education include Vocabulary Knowledge regarding research components and methodology principles, result Interpretation, abstract writing, and oral presentation; 2) the English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education was developed in a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach with the content regarding the need analysis results, and it was found to have appropriate quality evaluated by exerts ($\bar{x} = 4.52$, $S.D = 0.51$); 3) There was a significant difference between participants' English proficiency before and after the implementation of the developed instructional package at a statistical level of .05.

Keywords: Instructional Package, Non-English Major EFL Learners, English for Graduate Studies

Introduction

Graduate study is an academically rigorous and demanding educational context that often proves to be considerably more challenging than undergraduate programs (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Pursuing a master's or doctoral degree requires a substantial commitment of time, effort, and intellectual rigor. Students are expected to engage deeply with their chosen fields of study, conduct advanced research, and contribute novel insights to their disciplines. The coursework and research responsibilities can be overwhelming, necessitating a high level of dedication and perseverance. According to Stewart (2010), graduate students must not only excel in

their academic pursuits but also manage various other aspects of their lives, including work, family, and personal commitments. As they progress in their studies, they are confronted with increasingly complex subject matter, demanding assignments, and a heightened need for effective communication skills. These challenges make it imperative to provide tailored support and resources to help graduate students succeed in their academic endeavors (Seferoğlu, 2001).

English proficiency is undeniably another vital requirement for success in graduate study. The importance of a strong command of the English language cannot be overstated. English serves as the lingua franca of academic communication worldwide, making it the medium through which research findings are disseminated, scholarly discussions take place, and international collaborations thrive (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Seferoğlu, 2001). Proficiency in English is essential for understanding complex academic texts, effectively participating in seminars and discussions, and producing high-quality research papers and dissertations (Fareed, 2023). Moreover, it enables graduate students to connect with a global academic community, access a wealth of academic resources, and expand their horizons by studying and researching abroad. However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that while English is undeniably useful, it also presents challenges for some individuals, particularly non-English major EFL learners. These challenges can include language barriers, difficulties in academic writing, and the need to adapt to a different academic culture (Ho, 2013; Ma et al., 2022).

In the context of Thailand, where the English language situation is not as robust as in some other countries, unique challenges arise. Thailand is considered an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) country, where the predominant language used in most official, educational, and daily life situations is Thai (Noom-ura, 2013; Parnroch, 2018). This linguistic landscape, coupled with significant grammatical and vocabulary differences between Thai and English, complicates the process of teaching and learning English (Iwasaki & Ingkapirom, 2005). Additionally, the Thai education system has often been criticized for its lecture-based, teacher-centered approach to English instruction (Oeamoum & Sriwichai, 2020; Padermprach, 2017). These factors collectively contribute to the challenges faced by non-English major graduate students in Thailand, who encounter difficulties when using English in their studies. These challenges can also hinder their performance on standardized tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, or university-developed assessments designed for graduate students.

Considering English as a practical communication tool that facilitates success in real-life situations, we can discern a distinction between using English in one's post-graduate life and the requirements of passing standardized tests. To elaborate, passing such tests necessitates a strong grasp of intricate grammar rules, a command of complex scientific vocabulary that may seldom be encountered in actual professional settings, and adherence to speech patterns that may not reflect the natural negotiation of meaning that often occurs in conversations between non-native speakers.

In this context, it becomes evident that non-English major graduate students stand to gain more from instruction tailored to meet their specific needs and aspirations. Instead of solely concentrating on test-centric language skills, a shift in focus is warranted, aimed at equipping them with the language tools and strategies

capable of significantly enhancing their proficiency in their chosen fields and promoting effective communication in their professional endeavors.

At this point, communicative language teaching (CLT) approach could be the solution for the matter as it emphasizes the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills in English that are directly applicable to real-world scenarios. In detail, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language instruction that is rooted in the belief that the primary purpose of language is communication. This approach, as described by Richards and Rodgers (2001), encompasses a theoretical framework and research paradigm that focuses on equipping learners with communicative competence, or the ability to effectively use the language in real-life situations. CLT's ultimate objective is to foster learners' communicative abilities, as advocated (Hymes, 1971). While CLT does not have strict and universally defined characteristics, it now serves as an overarching term for various approaches tailored to specific educational settings. This adaptability acknowledges the importance of context, and educators are encouraged to personalize their communication-oriented language teaching (COLT) strategies (Littlewood, 2011).

When considering English for post-graduate studies as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), it becomes evident that non-language major learners in graduate school may not acquire the language skills necessary for their academic careers. To elaborate, a curriculum overly focused on test preparation, such as TOEFL and IELTS, may emphasize general academic language that applies to various fields but might not align with the diverse needs of learners. These standardized tests primarily assess a student's ability to study in English-speaking countries like the US and UK, which can lead to a disconnect between test content and the real-world demands of academic life, especially in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context where meaningful communication often takes precedence. Consequently, teaching English to non-language major students in an EFL setting should prioritize instructional methods that emphasize real-world application to achieve the true goals of EAP.

The present study is designed to address this imperative by developing a comprehensive instructional package, encompassing the stages of need analysis, package development, and implementation. The findings and outcomes of this study are anticipated to make a valuable contribution to the realm of English teaching and learning for individuals with limited prior exposure to English in post-graduate settings.

The purposes

1. to assess the language needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education
2. to develop an English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education
3. to implement the English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education

Literary review

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

In a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) course designed for English for Graduation Studies, the emphasis is placed on fostering communicative competence through meaningful interaction. CLT, as an approach,

prioritizes authentic language use and meaningful communication over rote grammar drills (Richards & Richards, 2001). Its principles include learner-centeredness, where learners actively engage in real-life tasks to develop language skills, and the focus on fluency rather than accuracy, encouraging learners to communicate effectively even with limited language proficiency (Hymes, 1971). Additionally, CLT advocates for the integration of all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within authentic contexts to enhance language acquisition. In adapting CLT to English for Graduation Studies, the course content should revolve around academic language and tasks relevant to thesis development, research, and scholarly discourse, providing learners with opportunities to practice language skills in authentic academic contexts.

2. English skills in graduate studies

English skills play a crucial role in graduate education, particularly in reading articles, writing academic papers, and delivering oral presentations. Effective reading skills are essential for comprehending and critically analyzing scholarly articles, which form the foundation of academic research and learning (Shamida et al., 2021). Writing skills are paramount for producing well-structured and coherent academic papers, including essays, research proposals, and theses. These skills involve the ability to articulate ideas clearly, cite relevant sources accurately, and adhere to academic writing conventions (Kostikova & Miasoiedova, 2019). Furthermore, oral presentation skills are indispensable for effectively communicating research findings, defending arguments, and engaging in scholarly discussions. This involves the ability to organize ideas logically, deliver presentations confidently, and respond to questions articulately, thereby contributing to academic discourse and knowledge dissemination. Therefore, proficiency in these English skills is vital for success in graduate education and scholarly endeavors.

3. Previous studies

Scholars have conducted several studies (Holden & Blake, 2022; Koçyiğit & Erdem, 2018; Pourshahian et al., 2012; Wongsothorn et al., 2019) to explore the key aspects of English instruction for graduate school. Holden & Blake (2022) focused on STEM education and successfully created a language teaching package that aligned with participants' needs and STEM education management. Koçyiğit & Erdem (2018) emphasized the importance of vocabulary knowledge, reading skills, and addressing foreign language anxiety in English preparation for graduate studies in Turkey. Wongsothorn et al. (2019) advocated for a pragmatic, global, and communicative approach to English teaching, with a preference for print media and final exams for student assessment. Pourshahian et al. (2012) stressed the development of all English skills and the need for instruction to emphasize practical real-life applications. These studies collectively offer valuable insights into tailoring English instruction to the specific needs of graduate-level learners.

Methodology

1. Research design

This study adopts a Research and Development (R&D) approach, which aims to create products or innovations. R&D involves systematically building on existing prototypes to develop tangible or intangible materials that reflect useful techniques or concepts. It emphasizes both quality and quantity, continuously monitoring and evaluating the process to ensure standardized and trustworthy outcomes. This mixed-method approach considers quantitative and qualitative aspects, catering to user needs. Overall, Research and Development design leads to desired outcomes by identifying and addressing the target audience's needs and problems through systematic design, expert validation, and experimentation. The study was divided into 3 phases as detailed in the following session.

Phase 1 Studying needs for the use of English of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education Phase 1 of this Research and Development (R&D) study focuses on addressing language skill enhancement needs and challenges faced by Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education. The research involves analyzing documents, textbooks, and related literature to design a structured interview that explores language-related issues and needs. The study's participants include nine Non-English Major EFL learners enrolled in graduate education at Rajabhat Mahasarakham University, and data collection occurred between September 2022 and March 2022. The research instrument used is a semi-structured interview form comprising 15 key questions regarding the language needs of these learners. The questionnaire's validity was confirmed through expert panel assessment ($IOC = 0.5-10$), indicating its suitability for studying the English language needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education.

Phase 2 Developing an English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education In Phase 2 of this study, the primary objective is to create an English instructional package tailored to the needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education, as identified in Phase 1. The data collected in the initial phase are analyzed to inform the development of this instructional package, ensuring it aligns with the target group's requirements. Phase 2 involves the participation of three English language experts and two experts in English language teaching, who are tasked with evaluating a draft version of the instructional package. The research instruments for this phase consist of the draft instructional package itself and an assessment form with the content validity ($IOC = 0.5-1.0$) used for the evaluation process.

Phase 3 The Implementation of the English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education In Phase 3 of this study, the main objective is to implement an experimental trial of the English instructional package developed in Phase 2, with the aim of enhancing the English language proficiency of a sample group. The sample group comprises 30 Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education, selected through purposive sampling while ensuring the confidentiality of their personal information. The research instruments for Phase 3 include the English instructional package designed for Non-English Major EFL learners. Additionally, a proficiency test consisting of 30 multiple-choice questions was used to assess the

participants' language skills and knowledge relevant to their English needs for graduate school. The test was initially implemented into the trial group with 10 participants having the similar characteristics as the sample group, and the trial process indicates the test difficulty of 0.24-0.76, discrimination of 0.26-0.82, and the reliability of 0.84 tested by Cronbach alpha.

Data analysis

The data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics, encompassing percentage, mean score, and standard deviation calculations. Additionally, a paired samples t-test was utilized to compare the participants' scores in Phase 3. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using content analysis in Phase 1.

Results

1. Objective 1. assess the language needs of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education

The interviews conducted with non-English major English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in graduate education unveiled significant insights into their language needs. Participants expressed a strong desire to enhance their English language skills, particularly in areas related to the development of their thesis and future academic careers. The following issues can be summarized from the content analysis of the interview.

1. Vocabulary Knowledge: The interviews illuminated that participants face challenges in comprehending research articles due to the specialized vocabulary used in academic contexts. They emphasized the importance of acquiring a robust and precise academic lexicon related to research components, such as variables, hypotheses, data analysis, and statistical terms. Building a strong vocabulary in these areas emerged as a primary need to read and understand research articles confidently.

2. Methodology Principles: Participants identified difficulties in grasping the methodology sections of research papers. Understanding the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures were cited as crucial for their ability to critically evaluate research articles. They expressed a desire to gain proficiency in comprehending the technical language used in these sections to interpret research studies accurately.

3. Result Interpretation: Participants recognized the significance of comprehending the results section of research articles. They sought to improve their ability to interpret and analyze research findings effectively. Understanding statistical analyses, graphs, and charts were identified as essential skills to extract meaningful insights from research papers. Acquiring this expertise would enable participants to engage more deeply with the content and implications of research studies.

4. Abstract Writing: Participants highlighted their need to improve abstract writing skills. As future researchers and professionals, they recognized the importance of succinctly summarizing research papers for presentations, conferences, and academic submissions. Developing the capacity to write clear and concise abstracts emerged as a priority to effectively communicate their own research and scholarly contributions.

5. Oral Presentation: The interviews revealed that participants were keen on enhancing their oral presentation skills. As aspiring professionals, they recognized that effective communication is crucial for conveying research findings and ideas to diverse audiences. Participants expressed the desire to work on their fluency, coherence, and confidence in oral presentations, enabling them to engage with academic and professional communities effectively.

2. Objective 2. to develop an English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education

The insights obtained from the initial needs analysis were instrumental in crafting an English instructional package tailored to the requirements of Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education. This package was meticulously designed adhering to the principles of the communicative language teaching approach, with a primary focus on developing practical communication skills within academic contexts. Its content encompasses a comprehensive range of areas, including vocabulary relevant to research and methodology, reading academic articles, interpreting results, crafting abstracts, and delivering oral presentations. The subsequent evaluation of this instructional package is detailed below.

Table 1 The evaluation of the drafted English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education

Aspects of Evaluation	Raters					\bar{x}	S.D.
	1	2	3	4	5		
Content Relevance: Whether the instructional package aligns with the stated learning objectives and addresses the specific needs of the learners.	4	4	5	5	5	4.6	0.55
Learning Objectives: whether the instructional package clearly outlines measurable and achievable learning objectives.	5	5	4	4	5	4.6	0.55
Engagement and Interactivity: Consider the level of learner engagement and interactivity provided by the instructional package.	4	5	4	5	4	4.4	0.55
Usability and Accessibility: The usability and accessibility of the instructional package.	4	5	4	4	4	4.2	0.45
Learning Outcomes: Whether the instructional package successfully achieves its intended learning outcomes and contributes to the overall improvement of learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes.	4	5	5	5	5	4.8	0.45

Overall	4.2	4.8	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.52	0.51
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	------	------

The results indicate that the developed English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education received a notably high evaluation rating ($\bar{x} = 4.52$, $S.D = 0.51$). This assessment suggests that the instructional package effectively aligns with the predefined learning objectives and effectively addresses the specific needs of the learners. It is evident that the instructional package clearly delineates measurable and attainable learning goals. Furthermore, the evaluation takes into account the level of learner engagement and interactivity provided by the instructional package, as well as its usability and accessibility. In sum, the instructional package has demonstrated its capacity to successfully attain its intended learning outcomes, contributing significantly to enhancing the learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

3. Objective 3 to Implement the English instructional package for Non-English Major EFL learners in graduate education

Table 2 The comparison between participants' pre and posttest scores

Test	n	Fullmark	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pre-test	30	30	17.5	1.73	11.49*	.000
Post-test	30	30	21.93	1.85		

* $p < 0.05$

The results demonstrate a notable enhancement in the participants' English skills related to graduate studies following the implementation of the developed instructional package. A paired samples t-test reveals a substantial difference between the pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 17.5$, $S.D = 1.73$) and post-test scores ($\bar{x} = 21.93$, $S.D = 1.85$), with a t-statistic of 11.49 and a p-value of 0.00. These findings indicate that the instructional package exerted a statistically significant impact on the subjects' scores. In summary, these outcomes affirm the effectiveness of the instructional package in elevating the English skills necessary for graduate studies among the participants.

Discussion

The findings reveal that EFL non-English major learners, who are participants in this study, have a specific set of English language skills requirements that significantly benefit their graduate studies. Notably, these requirements encompass a need for a robust vocabulary related to research and methodology, as well as proficiency in statistical interpretation to effectively engage with research articles. Furthermore, they recognize the importance of abstract writing, primarily for the purpose of completing their theses, as writing entire research articles or full theses in English may be perceived as challenging. Additionally, the demand for oral presentation skills arises from the necessity to present their papers at international conferences, a key requirement for graduation and publication in proceedings. It is noteworthy that the study's results align with the findings of Koçyiğit & Erdem (2018) and Pourshahian et al. (2012), who identified similar English language skill needs in various graduate study contexts.

Moreover, the findings highlight the effectiveness of employing a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in the creation of an instructional package geared towards enhancing the English skills of EFL non-English major learners for their graduate studies. This outcome is in line with the research by Holden & Blake (2022) and Wongsothorn et al. (2019), who similarly employed authentic materials and practices representative of real-world English usage. The success of CLT in this context can be attributed to its suitability for fostering practical language proficiency. CLT places a strong emphasis on interactive, real-life communication, which aligns perfectly with the communication needs of EFL learners pursuing graduate studies. By engaging in authentic language use scenarios, learners can develop not only the necessary linguistic skills but also the ability to effectively apply those skills in their academic and professional pursuits.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to create an Effective English Instructional Package tailored for Non-English Major EFL Learners in Graduate School, structured in three phases: needs analysis, instructional package development, and package implementation. The study's two key findings underscore the importance of equipping participants with skills directly applicable to thesis development and their future academic careers. Additionally, the study highlights the centrality of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the preferred instructional approach, aligning seamlessly with the needs of Non-English Major EFL Learners in Graduate School.

However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. One notable limitation is the relatively small number of participants involved in the needs analysis phase. A larger-scale data collection would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the language needs of Non-English Major EFL Learners in Graduate School. Expanding the participant pool could lead to a more robust and representative assessment of their requirements, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the instructional package's design.

Discoveries or new knowledge

A new discovery emerged in the form of an English instructional package designed to address the need for English skill development among non-English major students in graduate school. The package aims to cultivate the necessary vocabulary knowledge and skills essential for academic success.

Suggestion

1. Suggestions for use

1.1 The instructional package could be used in a graduate classroom with non-English major students as it was designed to serve the needs of EFL learners with similar characteristics and aims to develop necessary skills and knowledge that the learners could apply in real life career development.

1.2 Communicative language teaching (CLT) should be considered along with English for academic purposes (EAP) in the English education at the graduate level as purposes of the English uses in real life career

development should be the priority of English teaching. This idea should be considered by policy makers and curriculum developers.

2. Suggestions for next research

2.1 Further studies could employ greater numbers of the participants in the need analysis phase as it could cover the population of the non-English major students in graduate study in the context of Thailand.

2.2 Further studies could employ qualitative data collection in the implementation phase since it might give a broader picture of how the instructional package affected the learning process of the participants.

References

Fareed, M. (2023). English Language Needs at Postgraduate level. *Academy of Education and Social Sciences Review*, 3(3), 299–309.

Ho, M.-C. (2013). The difficulties in disciplinary research writing: A case study of first-year graduate students in Taiwan. *Journal of Teaching and Education*, 2(4), 77–87.

Holden, W., & Blake, J. (2022). *Development of an English for Research Purposes Program for STEM Graduate Students*. In G. Hill, J. Falout, & M. Apple (Eds.), *STEM English in Japan: Education, Innovation, and Motivation* (pp. 95–115). Springer International Publishing.

Iwasaki, S. & Ingkapirom, P. (2005). *A reference grammar of Thai*. Cambridge University Press. Hymes, D. (1972). *On Communicative Competence*. In J. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–285). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Koçyiğit, M., & Erdem, C. (2018). A content analysis of graduate research on English preparatory programs at universities. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 15(3), 1466–1480.

Kostikova, I. I., & Miasoiedova, S. V. (2019). Supporting post-graduate students writing skills development with the online machine learning tool: Write & improve. *Information Technologies and Learning Tools*, 74(6), 238–249.

Littlewood, W. (2011). *Communicative Language Teaching: An Expanding Concept for a Changing World*. In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Routledge.

Ma, Y., Yu, S., Reynolds, B. L., & Jiang, L. (2022). A Qualitative Investigation of Chinese Students' Willingness to Communicate in English in the Graduate School EMI Classroom. *English Teaching & Learning*, 46(1), 77–98.

Martirosyan, N. M., Hwang, E., & Wanjohi, R. (2015). Impact of English Proficiency on Academic Performance of International Students. *Journal of International Students*, 5(1), 60–71.

Noom-ura, S. (2013). English-Teaching Problems in Thailand and Thai Teachers' Professional Development Needs. *English Language Teaching*, 6(11), 139–147.

Oeamoum, N., & Sriwichai, C. (2020). Problems and Needs in English Language Teaching from the Viewpoints of Preservice English Teachers in Thailand. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 6(4), 592–601.

Padermprach, N. (2017). *The problems of English Language Education at the upper secondary level in Thailand*:

The perceptions of Thai EFL teachers and students in Bangkok. Phd, University of Warwick.

Parnroch, T. (2018). *English speaking skills of graduate students in a public university in Thailand: Problems and solutions.* Thammasat University.

Pourshahian, B., Gholami, R., Vaseghi, R., Ali, S., & Rezvani Kalajahi, S. A. (2012). Needs of an ESL Context: A Case Study of Iranian Graduate Students. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 17(7), 870–873.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Shamida, A., Sidhu, G. K., & Nawi, S. M. (2021). Postgraduate Students' Perceived and Actual Performance in Critical Reading Skills. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(3), 76–84.

Seferoğlu, G. (2001). English skills needed for graduate study in the US: Multiple perspectives. *Walter de Gruyter*, 39(2), 161-170.

Stewart, D. W. (2010). "Important, if True": Graduate Education will Drive America's Future Prosperity. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 42(1), 36–44.

Wongsothorn, A., Yordchim, S., Thitivesa, D., & Pongsurapipa, S. (2019). Innovative Use of English Language Teaching as an International Language in Graduate Studies in Thai Universities. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 12(2), 14–27.