

# A NEW VOICE IN ELT: PLANNING INTENSIVE WORKPLACE CURRICULUM

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## Abstract

The emergence of AEC and its consequences on English language teaching leads to three critical issues that involve ELT, ESL and EFL. In response to this, practitioners and teachers of the fields find it necessary to identify the language required in workplace. This paper describes one approach by means of survey to discover the necessary language functions in which they are used in the workplace and apply the language functions to draft a work-based curriculum. The results illustrated the general language functions necessary for: 1) a work topic; 2) work interaction; 3) appropriate usage for verbal communication; and 4) nonverbal communication. Practically, Master of Arts in English for Careers, a work-based curriculum, was drafted to serve the local, regional and global marketplaces.

*Keywords:* Workplace curriculum, English for careers, language functions necessary for the workplace

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## 1. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The emergence of a new stage of AEC and its consequences on English language teaching/learning leads to three critical issues that involve ELT, ESL and EFL. On the first issue, AEC will result in the further spread of English as a regional language and a shift of authority to English for practicality. This change will call into question basic notions of language, culture, context, and the relationship between ELT and EFL. On the second issue, economic and employment trends will change the way English is used. Increasingly, ASEAN speakers will need to use the daily language for work, presentation of complex ideas, international collaboration and negotiation, and location and critical interpretation of rapidly changing information. On the last issue, new information technologies will transform notions of critical skills for learners of English in response to the advance of technology. The above changes, taken together, will render ineffective curricula based strictly on syntactic or functional elements or narrowly defined tasks. Rather, work-based learning—incorporating situated practice and practical inquiry, and based on students' own cultural frameworks—will be required if students are to master the practical English work and communication skills required by the emerging transformational AEC.

In response to the emergence, practitioners, designers and teachers of ELT, ESL and EFL often find it necessary to identify the language required for specific purposes, especially for jobs. This paper describes one approach to discover the necessary language functions in which they are used in the workplace. The approach is illustrated by means of survey of language use in the workplace for a wider applicability (i.e. curriculum design) with an assumption that the language a worker needs on the job hold up under a thorough on-site use. Thus, on-site survey of language use is important in the identification and interpretation of the language appropriate to the workplace. This survey served as a needs analysis for work-based curriculum design with the following research question: What are the general language functions necessary for the workplace?

## 2. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The purposes of this study aimed to:

1. Find out the general language functions necessary for the workplace, with four specific purposes of the study to identify English language functions for:
  - 1.1 understanding and interpreting spoken and written language on a work topic;
  - 1.2 using spoken and written English to participate in work interaction;
  - 1.3 using an appropriate language variety and register to audience, purpose, setting and culture;
  - 1.4 understanding and using nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, setting and culture;
2. Apply the findings of needs analysis survey in purpose 1 to design a work-based curriculum.

### **3. METHODS**

This was a survey study. The instrument for data elicitation was a questionnaire. The samples including 90 professionals in various business fields were asked to identify the most important English language functions necessary their workplace as revealed in specific purposes 1-4 as a results of the work skill needs analysis. The first five highest items were drawn as presented in the result of the purpose 1. Then, a curriculum was drafted by five committees who hold a doctoral degree in ELT or equivalent and have been teaching in the field of ELT, ESL and EFL at least for 20 years. The drafted curriculum was finally reviewed by another five committees who have equivalent or higher qualifications plus administrative experience regarding to curriculum rules and regulations as the reviewing committees.

### **4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

On purpose 1 which aimed to find out the general language functions necessary for the workplace, the results of study were presented based on each specific purpose.

On specific purpose 1, the English language functions necessary for understanding and interpreting spoken and written language on a work topic can be classified listening and speaking skills at three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced.

#### **A. Listening skill**

At a basic level, listening skills include these indicators:

- a) understanding basic courtesy formulas (e.g., greetings, welcoming, leave-taking, thanking, introductions, etc.);
- b) understanding basic expressions used to attract attention; request and offer assistance; express warnings and cautions; grant permission and give advice; repetition and clarification; express thanks, complaints, hopes, disappointment, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, approval and disapproval;
- c) understanding key information in small talk/ short phone calls (e.g., numbers, letters, places, keywords, time references, etc.);
- d) understanding simple questions, explanations, simple instructions, positive and negative commands, requests, suggestions, advice, compliments, refusals; complaints and orders;
- e) understanding brief descriptions (people, objects, work, daily);
- f) identifying attitudes, emotions, and intentions of customers.

At an intermediate level, listening skills include these indicators:

- a) understanding key information/ specific details in simple spoken texts (e.g., announcements, conversations, meetings, conversations, meetings, etc.);
- b) understanding factual details and inferred meanings in conversation, discussions and presentations;
- c) understanding factual details and inferred meanings in a variety of media related to work;
- d) understanding sets of instructions related to technical and non-technical tasks;
- e) understanding attitudes, emotions, irony, sarcasm, humor and intentions of speakers in social and business transactions;
- f) understanding different accents;
- g) identifying problems in communication routine, situations, events, etc.

At an advanced level, listening skills include these indicators:

- a.) understanding stated and specified details in discourse containing expression of and response to formal welcomes, farewells, toasts, congratulations on achievement and awards, sympathy and condolences;
- b.) understanding factual details and inferred meanings in persuasive oral texts, reports or forecasts;
- c.) comprehending an extended oral exchange between several speakers: identify main ideas, bias and statements of fact and opinion from each speaker.

#### **B. Reading skill**

At a basic level, reading skills include these indicators:

- a.) getting key information from personal notes, e-mail messages and letters;
- b.) getting key information from short business brochures, notices, letters and flyers;
- c.) following short, common written instructions/ directions;
- d.) understanding basic common forms (e.g., signs, labels, schedules and simplified maps, etc.);

- e.) reading aloud with acceptable pronunciation and intonation;
- f.) understanding tables, graphs, diagrams, flow charts and time lines.

At an intermediate level, reading skills include these indicators:

- a.) identifying factual details in moderately complex notes, e-mail messages, letters and announcements
- b.) identifying factual details and inferred meanings in moderately complex texts or reports on a familiar topic
- c.) understanding and follow moderately complex written instructions

At an advanced level, reading skills include these indicators:

- a.) following formal instructions of advisory, instructional texts, and instructions for a familiar process or procedure that requires integration of several pieces of information;
- b.) understanding factual details and inferred meanings in articles, research papers and manuals;
- c.) inferring attitudes, emotions, intentions and motivations and draw conclusions from letters, memos or notes, e-mail, etc.

On specific purpose 2, the English language functions necessary for using spoken and written English to participate in work interaction are divided into speaking and writing skills at three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced.

#### A. Speaking skill

At a basic level, spoken English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) using and responding to basic courtesy formulas (e.g., greetings, welcoming, introductions, etc.);
- b) asking and responding to simple questions, explanations, requests, opinions, suggestions and advice;
- c) giving simple introductions, directions, confirmations, apologies, opinions, suggestions, advice, cautions, warnings and compliments;
- d) giving basic descriptions (e.g., people, object, work, daily routine, situations, etc.);
- e) using basic words and expressions related to work with acceptable pronunciation;
- f) handle basic phone situations and standard replies.

At an intermediate level, spoken English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) expressing and responding to opinions, advice, appreciation, complaints, emergency, gratitude, disappointment, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, hopes, warnings and permission;
- b) providing descriptions, instructions, processes, opinions, explanation dealing with daily actions and routines (technical and nontechnical);
- c) carrying on a brief phone conversation in a professional manner;
- d) participating in an informal conversation;
- e) participating informal conversations/ small group discussions/ meetings; express opinions and feelings; qualify opinion; express reservations, approval and disapproval; solve problems; make decisions, etc.;
- f) speaking with a considerable fluency and accuracy in pronunciation patterns;
- g) giving presentations/ demonstrations to small groups.

At an advanced level, spoken English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) expressing doubts and concerns; oppose or support a stand or a proposed solution;
- b) providing detailed or complex information on issues related to work;
- c) participating actively in formal meetings, interviews, or seminar;
- d) giving demonstrations, briefings, reports, seminars, presentations to describe and explain a complex structure, system or process;
- e) contributing to a debate, case study discussion in an academic/ workplace context;
- f) negotiating effectively;
- g) mediating a conflict/ dispute between others fluently;
- h) speaking fluently with clear pronunciation patterns.

#### B. Writing skill

At a basic level, written English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) copying letters/ words/ phrases to record short information;
- b) writing key words related to work;

- c) filling simple forms;
- d) writing short notes (e.g. orders, messages, reminders, announcements, etc.);
- e) writing simple instructions, short social messages;

At an intermediate level, written English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) writing a social message in a formal short letter, or through e-mail, expressing and responding to appreciation, acknowledgment, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, hopes, congratulations and condolences;
- b) taking notes from phone conversations, voice – mail messages or pre-recorded information;
- c) taking notes from an oral presentation or written information;
- d) filling out moderately complex forms;
- e) Writing business messages; notes, memoranda, letters of request, letters of recommendation, minutes of a meeting or work record log entries;
- f) writing a summary report or a report on work-related topic;
- g) writing press, news, media releases and public relations materials.

At an advanced level, written English required for the demand includes these indicators:

- a) writing a paper or report to describe phenomena or processes; pose a problem and present arguments for a solution;
- b) writing formal business reports, summaries, requests for proposals and formal proposals.

On specific purpose 3, the English language functions necessary for using an appropriate language variety and register to audience, purpose, setting and culture include these indicators:

- a) using an appropriate degree of formality with different audiences, settings, and cultures;
- b) using a variety of writing styles appropriate for different audiences, purposes, settings, and cultures;
- c) responding to and using idioms appropriately;
- d) determining appropriate topics for interaction;
- e) responding to and using humor appropriately.

On specific purpose 4, the English language functions necessary for understanding and using nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, setting and culture include these indicators:

- a) interpreting and responding appropriately to nonverbal cues and body language;
- b) demonstrating knowledge of acceptable nonverbal work behaviors;
- c) using acceptable tone, volume, stress, and intonation in various social settings;
- d) recognizing and adjusting behavior in response to nonverbal cues (e.g., incomprehension, etc.);
- e) encouraging conversation (e.g., eye contact, smiling, etc.).

On purpose 2 which aimed to apply the findings of needs analysis survey in purpose 1 to design a work-based curriculum, the draft of Master of Arts in English for Careers consists of two groups (core and elective courses) as follows:

#### **A. Core courses**

##### **English Proficiency Development**

Development of the four English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) for communicative competency enhancement.

##### **English for Specific Purposes**

English for various purposes: work, mass communication in international business, health science, political science, social science, social welfare, engineering and architecture.

##### **Theories of Effective Communication in a Workplace**

Study of contemporary communication theories and models and their application to local, regional and international business settings. Practice in demonstrating communication skills in work and social situations.

##### **English for Business Occupations**

English for business, import-export, entrepreneurship, international business, airline business, legal business, banking and finance, accounting and economics.

## **B. Elective Courses**

### **1. English for Professional Development Courses**

#### **English for Service Industries**

Practical training designed to prepare for a wide variety of functions in the service industries such as hospitality, travel, tourism business and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions). Focus on vocabulary and expressions to facilitate effective, appropriate and polite communication in English.

#### **English for SME, Entrepreneurs and Start-ups**

Practical training designed to prepare for a wide variety of functions in SME, Entrepreneurs and Start-ups. Focus on vocabulary and expressions to facilitate effective and appropriate communication.

#### **English for IT and Technology**

Practical training designed to prepare for a wide variety of functions in the IT and Technology business. Focus on vocabulary and expressions to facilitate effective and appropriate communication.

#### **English for International Business**

Practical training designed to prepare for a wide variety of functions in an international business environment (negotiations, contracts, growth strategies, operational planning and costing, business plan preparation, feasibility studies, market surveys, and reports) and focus vocabulary and expressions based on professional knowledge.

#### **English for Airline Business**

Practice in all the language skills necessary for the airlines industry. Focus on vocabulary, expressions, procedures and terminology used to facilitate effective and polite communication.

#### **English for Health Care and Food Industries**

Practical training designed to prepare for a wide variety of functions in the health care and food industries. Focus on vocabulary and expressions to facilitate effective and appropriate communication.

#### **English for Public Administration**

Practice in all the language skills necessary for giving information and instructions, extracting information from different sources, making summaries, conducting meetings and seminars, presenting and proposing projects, and describing trends.

### **2. Language Skill Development Courses**

#### **Advanced Oral Skills**

Practice in listening and speaking skills at the advanced level in such academic and professional contexts as lectures, discussion, meeting, seminar and presentation.

#### **Advanced Reading Skills**

Study of and practice in critical reading, analysis of issues and arguments, analysis of contents and writing styles of various printed materials.

#### **Advanced Writing Skills**

Study of and practice in effective report writing in business situations such as note-taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, making agendas, taking minutes, and reports and in academic situations such as academic reports, thesis and research paper.

#### **Communication through Contemporary Media**

Study of modern communication models, their application in work and social situations and exposure to various contemporary media. Practice in their application to learner's needs.

#### **Public Speaking and Presentation**

Study of principles of effective public speaking in public. Practice in making speeches on a wide variety of topics. Delivery of speeches on assigned topics.

#### **Principles of Translation**

Study of translation principles and practice in translating English/Thai and Thai/English from a variety of texts. Focus on the use of appropriate and refined language.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The work-based curriculum which provides language skills required for the workplace is vital for learners as the skills will enhance their understanding and interpreting spoken and written language on a work topic; ability to use spoken and written English to participate in work interaction; capabilities to use an appropriate language variety and register to audience, purpose, setting and culture; and understanding and using nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, setting and culture. All these will increase the learners' efficiency in the new stage of AEC and increase the country's competitiveness in the future.

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