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## The Development of English for Social Sciences Curriculum Using Experiential Learning with e-Learning to Enhance Students' Paragraph Writing Ability, Analytical Thinking Ability and Moral Awareness of University Students

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### ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research are to develop the English for Social Sciences curriculum using Experiential learning with e-learning to enhance students' paragraph writing ability, analytical thinking ability and moral awareness after the implementation. The population comprises 88 students enrolled in the English for Social Sciences course in the second semester of the 2013 academic year at Maejo University – Phrae campus. The research instruments are classified into 3 groups: 1) curriculum development instruments consist of need analysis and proto syllabus; 2) experiment instruments consist of lesson plans, a curriculum evaluation form for the experts and for the students; 3) the instruments used for data collecting consist of the paragraph writing ability tests, the analytical thinking ability tests, and the students' moral awareness assessment. The obtained data were analyzed by using percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis. The results of the study revealed that the English for Social Science curriculum was very effective and appropriate. Students' paragraph writing ability after learning the implementation was at a competent level and met the set criterion at 50 percent. Students' analytical thinking ability was at a competent level and the students had a high level of moral awareness.

**Keywords : Experiential learning / e-Learning / Paragraph writing / Analytical thinking /  
Moral Awareness**

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## Introduction

In this era of globalization, the most important language being used among countries, institutions and individuals all over the world is the English language. English has come to be considered globally as the international or global language. English has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a gatekeeper to social and economic progress. This is the reason that many countries are now giving importance to English because it is a pathway towards progress and learning (Dumanig, 2008). Although Thai students have learned English in formal education for at least ten years before they graduate from the universities, recent research on the proficiency of the graduates suggests that the English language curriculum in Thai schools and universities has not been meeting the demands for workplace (Wiriyaichitra, 2002, pp.4-9; Keyurawong, 2002, p.10). The curriculum in higher education should be designed and developed to provide university graduates with desirable balance regarding knowledge, critical thinking, capability, virtue and social responsibility that will prepare them to adapt to a rapidly changing society. With regard to developing academic language, students are expected to access and process information, and to construct knowledge in both spoken and written forms. There should be a reform of teaching and learning as well as curriculum reform to enable the learners to acquire critical thinking skills, problem-solving skill; a desire for lifelong learning; ability to create new tasks; self-adjustment to the world of work; self-dependence; and capability of attaining social benefits (Sangnapaboworn, 2003). The curriculum in higher education should be designed and developed to provide university graduates with desirable balance regarding knowledge, critical thinking, capability, virtue and social responsibility that will prepare them to adapt to a rapidly changing society.

Maejo University policy recognizes the goal of educating students to meet employer expectations which conforms to the National Education Act of B.E 2542. Faculty members are encouraged to adopt a student-centered learning approach to improve student learning and develop the quality of graduates that meets the Thai Qualification Framework (TQF) set by the Office of Higher Education Commission. However, the report on the satisfaction of stakeholders towards Maejo University graduates of the year 2010 indicated that Maejo University graduates needed improvement in English language proficiency, analytical thinking ability, writing, self-direction, and social responsibility. The researcher noticed that most students who studied in this course had a low level of English proficiency and thinking skill. Based on the discussion with some students majoring in Political Science of Maejo University,

it was found that the English for Social Sciences course did not meet their needs and interests. The course did not prepare them for their life beyond the classroom, so they lacked interest or motivation to learn. In response to the problem mentioned, the curriculum of English for Social Sciences course needed to be developed to meet students' expectation and support their continued development. Students should be provided with academic writing skills, analytical thinking ability, as well as moral awareness needed for their life, their work, and their social growth.

Nowadays enhancing analytical thinking in learners is considered one of the foreign language teachers' tasks due to its high position in foreign language classrooms (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011). As students are getting exposed to a vast amount of information at an increasing rate, they must develop skills not only examine logical relationships between statements but also construct argument, respect different points of views and be flexible to change their way of thinking. Language teachers need to devise tasks and activities, and improve their teaching methods by emphasizing analytical skills. Students should be encouraged to go beyond explicit meaning (Khajavi & Shahvali, 2011) and discover a deeper understanding of key concepts, and applied knowledge rather than simply reading a book or recall of facts.

Recent approaches to foreign language education emphasizes the significance of the students' own contributions to their language learning through initiative-taking and active involvement. Students need to take charge of their learning in order to enhance their autonomy as students and language users (Kohonen, 2001). Experiential learning was considered as one approach that allows students to develop their academic English skills, analytical thinking ability, as well as value and attitude important for their life from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting. Experiential learning is based on the principle theories supporting student- centered learning that included: constructivism learning theory, constructionism, and humanistic learning theory. It emphasizes learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the phenomenon being studied, rather than just watching or reading, hearing or thinking about it (Mollaei & Rahnama, 2012, pp. 268-279).

Kolb's experiential learning theory is one of the best known educational theories in higher education. According to Kolb (1984, p. 41), knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience. When a person engages in an activity, reviews the activity critically, abstracts some useful insights from the analysis, and applies the results in a practical situation, experiential learning occurs. Experiential learning involves active participation of the student in the planning, development and execution of learning activities,

is shaped by the problems and pressures arising from the real-world situation. The facilitator's job is to guide them through each part in an ever increasing level, expanding their learning of a topic (Beaudin & Quick, 1995, pp.11-12). Experiential learning is a well-known model in education and also contributes to language learning. Language-learning is facilitated when students are cooperatively involved in projects or tasks that are challenging, communicative and meaningful, and that provide opportunities for students to participate in their own language learning (Knutson, 2003, pp. 52-64).

Today, there is a trend for incorporating technology into the classrooms to support instructional learning methods. Integrating e-learning applications in experiential learning process helps motivate students because they actively engage with the content, the instructor, their peers, and themselves in a meaningful discovery. Social networking tools, such as Google Docs and Facebook are effective e-learning tools that facilitate students' collaborative writing in English language classroom. And promote target language use among language students (Promnitz-Hayashi, 2011, pp. 309-316). Integrating technology into classroom instruction gives students opportunities to control over their own learning develop analytical thinking, and cognitive processing.

As the primary goals of education should be enabling students to gain knowledge and moral awareness, students need to prepare themselves to be good citizens in society. Experiential learning is an approach that helps enhancing educational experience as well as moral thinking and action. Since it emphasizes direct, hands-on involvement as a catalyst to learning, this gives students a real awareness of relevant social issues, an experiential pedagogical approach to engage real-world situations helps students to identify deeply with what they are learning, contributing to their development as persons who demonstrate a commitment for the shared values that lead to a strong character and common good (Glennon, 2004).

The researcher was interested in developing the curriculum of English for Social Science course by using experiential learning with e-learning to contribute the development of student in all aspects: knowledge, skills, and morality. Language course should not only provide language skills needed for students, but also the elements of analytical thinking, problem-solving and moral awareness or social responsibility should be incorporated to train students in new easy to think and learn.

The written assignment will enable the students to express their viewpoints on socio-political matters and at the same time improve their paragraph writing ability and analytical thinking ability. By creating an opportunity to engage in complex issues, students are given the opportunity to develop not only knowledge, but also develop awareness of what is happening in their surroundings. It fosters a sense of belonging and a desire to act morally for others. The results of the study will be a guideline for development of other courses offered at Maejo University and its campus as well.

### Objectives

1. To develop the curriculum of English for Social sciences course using experiential learning with e-learning to enhance students' paragraph writing ability;
2. To investigate students' paragraph writing ability after implementing the English for Social sciences course using experiential learning with e-learning;
3. To investigate students' analytical thinking ability after implementing the English for Social sciences course using experiential learning with e-learning;
4. To investigate students' moral awareness after implementing the English for Social sciences course using experiential learning with e-learning.

### Methodology

This study employs a research and development approach. The process of curriculum development is based on Taba's curriculum development model that comprises of seven major steps: 1) diagnosis of need; 2) Formulation of objectives; 3) selection of content; 4) organization of content; 5) selection of learning experiences; 6) organization of learning activities; and 7) evaluation of the curriculum. The population is a group of 88 undergraduate students majoring in Political Science enrolled in GE-245 course in the first semester of the 2013 academic year at Maejo University – Phrae Campus.

### Research Instruments

The research instruments are classified into 3 groups: 1) curriculum development instruments consist of students' need analysis and proto syllabus; 2) experiment instruments consisting of 9 Lesson plans in 3 experiential learning units which are developed based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle supplemented with the application of e-learning tools which included Facebook and Google Docs to make the learning experiences more active and motivating, a curriculum evaluation form for the experts, and a curriculum evaluation form for

the students; 3) data collecting instruments consisting of the paragraph writing ability tests, the analytical thinking ability tests that included three essay writing tests and three group project reports, and the moral awareness assessment that included the reflective writing assignments and the moral behavior observation form. Research instruments were examined for appropriateness by the experts before being used with the population.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection is divided into three phases as follows.

#### **Phase 1 : Development of course syllabus**

The first phase involved studying basic information and researching the theories behind the pedagogical approach for designing the proto-syllabus of the English for Social Sciences course by using experiential learning with e-learning.

#### **Phase 2 : Implementation of the English for Social Sciences curriculum**

The researcher implemented the English for Social Sciences lesson plans with the population in the first semester of 2013, collected data from the implementation and assessed the effectiveness of each lesson plan. Collection of data was done in two manners for the qualitative and quantitative results. Students' paragraph writing ability was assessed from a cause – effect paragraph, a problem – solution paragraph, a persuasive paragraph, and a conflict –resolution paragraph. Students' analytical thinking ability was assessed from essay writings and group project reports. Students' moral awareness was assessed from students' reflection and students' moral behaviors observed during students engaged in learning activities.

#### **Phase 3 : Evaluation of the English for Social Sciences curriculum**

The data collected by the researcher were analyzed and concluded in accordance with the criterion of evaluating learning outcome.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was divided into two categories: the qualitative data analysis and the quantitative data analysis. The qualitative analysis of the data was done by using content analysis. The quantitative is analyzed for percentage, mean and standard deviation.

### Research Findings

1. The results of the development of English for Social Sciences curriculum using experiential learning with e-learning evaluated by the experts is effective. From students' opinions, the curriculum is appropriate.

2) Students' paragraph writing ability is at a competent level (71%). All of students meet the set criterion (50 %).

3) Students' analytical thinking ability is at a competent level (70.29%)

4) Students' moral awareness is at a high level.

### Discussion

The results of the research can be discussed as following.

1. The effectiveness of the English for Social Sciences curriculum using experiential learning with e-learning.

The results of the English for Social Sciences curriculum evaluated by the experts is effective. And from students' opinions, the curriculum is appropriate. The effectiveness of the learning content, learning materials and resources, learning assessment and evaluation, and the curriculum implementation are at high level whereas the learning process is at the highest level. There are several factors that contribute to the overall effectiveness of the curriculum.

Firstly, the basic data for developing the curriculum of English for Social Sciences are gathered from students' needs analysis on English language skills before determining the course objectives, content, activities, materials, and evaluation. The experience and content builds on students' needs, wants, and interests has promoted students' participation and created meaningful learning for them. This is in accordance with the study of Tsou (2009, pp.77-95) which revealed that an effective English program, based on students' reasons for learning helped students develop language, study skills appropriate for study in a particular academic discipline or profession. Better understanding of students' real needs and expectations helped teachers determine course objectives, design tasks and teaching activities that contributed to a more effective, efficient, and enjoyable learning experience.

Another factor that contributes to the effectiveness of the English for Social Sciences curriculum is the relevance of the learning content and the learning objectives. Each experiential learning unit comprises lesson plans which contain learning content, learning activities, and learning assessments which were relevant to the terminal objectives and enabling objectives. The learning content is carefully planned and sequenced with easier learning first, building to complex to help students develop their thinking ability, language skills, and moral awareness systematically. The use of Kolb's cycle of experiential learning in

teaching and learning process helped promoting the effectiveness of the developed curriculum. Throughout the experiential learning process, students are actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, solving problems, constructing meaning, making decisions, and experimenting. This is consistent with Moore (2010, p. 3) who noted that students are motivated to learn more as they take what they learn in the classroom and apply it in a real world setting where they grapple with real-world problems, discover and test solutions, and interact with others. The result is in accordance with the study of Yarana et al. (2011, pp. 69-84.) revealing that when students are provided opportunity to do their project or task as they are interested in, the integration between language skills and tasks as needed would enhance students' English language skill and higher-order thinking development.

Thirdly, interactive classroom activities provided in the English for Social Sciences curriculum is a factor contributing the effectiveness of the curriculum. Implementing online tools such as Facebook and Google Docs in the cycle of experiential learning reduced stress and motivated students to participate mindfully in the writing task that led them to learn English. The relax classroom environment motivates students to actively engage in language learning. The sequencing of writing tasks throughout the course helps students gradually build particular forms of writing. Authentic writing activities increase student interest and motivate students to try to communicate their thinking in a written form. This is in accordance with a point of view of Duke et al. (2006, pp. 344-355) asserting that language learning occurs best when the learning context matches the real functional context.

2. The results of the English for Social Sciences curriculum on students' paragraph writing ability.

The results revealed that the average of students' paragraph writing ability assessed from paragraph writings as a whole was at competent level . All students meet the set criterion (50 percent). It was showed that the students' paragraph writing ability developed steadily during learning through the English for Social Sciences course. To promote students' paragraph writing ability, experiential approach is incorporated in the course to give students opportunities to engage in the writing process. It is apparent that experiential learning enhances students' metacognitive abilities, their capacity to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge to real-life situations, and the ability to become self-directed learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2006). From the observation, the researcher found that students are more motivating to write on a topic that was meaningful to them. As students had ownership in their work, they are allowed to control their own learning, determine what information they wanted to learn,



how to acquire the information and how to present, so they are actively and collaboratively engaged in the writing process. They can transfer their writing ability to construct various paragraphs to real world audiences such as a cause and effect paragraph to inform people about the impacts of social problems in their community, a problem-solution paragraph to propose possible solutions to social problems, a persuasive paragraph to promote social justice, and a conflict resolution paragraph to show how to solve conflict non-violently.

Integrating Facebook and Google Docs with experiential learning process created positive impact on students' paragraph writing ability. Facebook motivated students to participate in the writing process, facilitated peer interaction, and enhance their performance. Google Docs offers features which can be used in improve students' writing skills that include: document creating and editing, inserting comments, sharing, collaborating, and publishing. Online discussion activities encourage students to concentrate on the content of writing to express and exchange their ideas without worrying about correct language form. A more relaxed learning atmosphere provides students with an opportunity to practice and learn knowledge and skills in a supportive environment. As Sirikhan (2002, p.107) indicated, students should be motivated to use language to communicate their messages and ideas in authentic communication focusing on content. Incorporate digital writing into the curriculum not only supports the development of students' language skills, but also fostered students' interest and motivation in language learning (Lee, 2002, p. 17).

3. The result of the English for Social Sciences curriculum on students' analytical thinking ability.

The results of this research revealed that students' analytical thinking ability while studying through the English for Social Sciences curriculum as a whole is at a competent level. Comparing students' scores on essay writings and group project assignments in each experiential learning unit, the results indicate that students' analytical thinking ability has improved. As thinking skill is essential for students' learning both in university and in their life, the researcher applied various techniques to promote students' analytical thinking ability. The experiential learning process engages students in all phases of the activity. Students were challenged and motivated to engage in authentic task where they could develop their analytical thinking for solving real problem. Working in groups, students learn to analyze problems, identify and find needed information by posing and answering questions, share their research findings, and formulate and evaluate possible solutions appropriately. The result conforms with Yarana et al. ( 2011 pp. 69-84) who indicate that in learning by doing, students

face with problematic situation that they have to think and act reflectively leading to problem-solving skill development. Their learning is meaningful and improving learning as well. The researcher found that students gradually developed their analytical thinking ability through engaging in various experiential learning activities. This is in line with Eyler (2009, p.24) who notes that experiential learning is associated with academic achievements, such as deeper understanding of course material and greater ability to think analytically and apply classroom knowledge in new context.

4. The result of the English for Social Sciences curriculum on students' moral awareness.

The average of students' moral awareness assessed from students' reflection on moral issues as a whole is at high level and student's moral behaviors including honesty, public mind, discipline and responsibility are at satisfactory level. The English for Social Sciences curriculum is designed to support students' moral development by incorporate moral inquiry into the curriculum. Group project assignments were used to provide students opportunity for students to practice and develop their morals through active engagement in experiential learning cycle that promote students' morals, civic engagement, and enable them to take responsibility for themselves and their communities. Experiential learning approach helps enhancing educational experience as well as moral thinking and action. As experiential learning emphasizes direct, hands-on involvement as a catalyst to learning, this gives students a real awareness of relevant social issues. The real-world situation that students experience and engage helps students to identify deeply with what they are learning, contributing to their development as persons who demonstrate a commitment for the shared values that lead to a students' personal growth (Glennon, 2004). Incorporating group project in experiential learning encourage students' sense of involvement and responsibility as well as enhanced their moral awareness. Students investigated real world problems in their community to open their eyes and activate their concerns about others. By participating and engaging in activities that address people and community needs, students have a greater understanding of and ability to solve moral problems for the better world. They were empowered as effective citizens and gained a greater sense of involvement and responsibility as well as enhanced their moral awareness.

The findings from this study show that through experiential learning process, students have opportunities to develop their knowledge, attitude, and practice of morality. Experiential learning prepares students to function more effectively in careers and communities after

graduation because students encounter real-world scenarios that often involve complex scenarios that require adaptable application of fundamental concepts (Eyler, 2009, p.24). Through experiential learning students are no longer passively engaged with lecture materials but are actively observing, analyzing, and participating in various forms of learning experience making them more critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and effective lifelong learners

### Suggestions for Further Research

1. There should be further researches to investigate what specific knowledge and skills are gained through experiential learning that affect students' academic development and educational success;
2. There should be the development of local curriculum by using experiential learning with e-learning in other university courses in order to provide students with the engaged learning experience that influences interdisciplinary and professional development skills.

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