Students' Needs and Vocabulary Development in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course

Piyada Low
Kasetsart University, Thailand
e-mail: fmspyl@src.ku.ac.th

Abstract

Vocabulary is very important for language learners. Limited knowledge of vocabulary can cause problems in language learning, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Students' needs on English vocabulary should be invested for learning achievement. The research study was conducted with all students registering in an ESP course, English for Food and Beverage Service. The total number was 54 students: 48 females and 6 males. Three instruments were employed: first and post-activity questionnaires, task assignment, and a vocabulary test. The food lists in the questionnaires fall into five groups: herbs, spices, and food seasonings; vegetables; fruits; meat and poultry; fish and shellfish. Vocabulary list with more than 50% chosen as needed in each food group from the first questionnaire distributed at the beginning of the course were used to create a test on students' vocabulary knowledge. Two most chosen food groups for vocabulary knowledge development were herbs, spices, and food seasonings group (98.1%) and fish and shell fish group (96.3%). Fish and shellfish list was the only group indicated as a very great problem for the students (48.1%). Vocabulary test results showed the lowest score of 0/23 while the highest score is 22/23 from fish and shellfish group list. Mean of the fish and shellfish food list is 10.80 which is the lowest mean among the five group lists on the vocabulary test. 63% of the students admitted that task assignment responded to their needs of English food vocabulary development.
Keywords: vocabulary knowledge, ESP, English for Food and Beverage Service, needs analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

An analysis on English language need is important in constructing and designing the structure and contents of a language course, especially in higher education. The need analysis will help implement a successful course and response to learners' needs. The perceived need and awareness are acceptable as reasonable content in the language course (Hutchinson and Waters, 2005, p. 53) and they are the 'real world' needs. Kavaliauskiene and Užpaliene (2003) had pointed out and explained that 'keeping learner needs in mind, teacher can use textbooks and supplement additional information from the Internet and other media sources, thus creating updated and interesting for students materials', and as a result, successful learning can be implemented by adjusting the course to the learners' needs.

An ongoing needs analysis is significant for language teaching and learning. Radjaa (2012) suggested that a course syllabus can be done by asking ongoing feedbacks from students, emphasizing on giving opinion on the quality, the method and the contents of the course. According to Hou (2014), teachers should act as a facilitator to know about the availability of useful and authentic resources to fit students' needs and the teaching objectives and also as a guide to assist students in identifying the language patterns and behaviors of words and phrases on their own as language researchers. In addition, teachers should focus on teaching specialized vocabulary and expressions that students will use or be expected to use in their subject areas.

In Thailand, research studies on learners' needs of English language and skills are of interest especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and have been conducted with learners not only in academic institutions but also in workplaces.

English training courses in workplaces are developed to enhance employees' career advancement. In terms of communication, listening and speaking skills were most needed by Thai sales staff in English bookstores in Bangkok (Piwong, 2011). The same results have been found in different workplaces with the reason for customer communication. Professionals and employees perceive that listening and speaking skills are most important to perform their duties and enhance their career advancement: professionals from local and international companies in Bangkok (Pratoomrat & Rajprasit, (2014), front desk agents in hotels in Pattaya City (Low & Pongsukvajchakul, 2014), and employees of 7-Eleven shops in Buriram province (Nuemaihom, 2017).

English courses for learners in various fields of study in academic institutions have been investigated on their needs. Not only listening and speaking skills are needed but reading and writing skills as well as translation skill are also of the emphasis. Kaewpet (2009) conducted a research with civil engineering students on their needs of communication skills in English and concluded that talking about daily tasks and duties, reading textbooks, reading manuals, and writing periodic/progress reports were needed. Linguistics needs and language skills were also examined with engineering students by Ulla & Winitkun (2017), and speaking skill was mentioned as the most needed skill to be developed and emphasized in English classes. Classroom activities and strategies, exposure to the language, and

use of technology in the classroom were preferred. Food science and technology is also an area conducted by Chatsungnoen (2015) to investigate English language skills of undergraduates in both academic and occupational contexts. Reading and translation skills were most needed in academic context while listening and speaking were considered as most needed skills in occupational context.

Food and Beverage Service is an ESP course designed for students majoring in Hotel and Tourism management in higher education. The course aims to develop students' vocabulary knowledge in the area of food and beverage service in hotel industry. The course contents should respond to the learners' needs and are based on real materials in food and beverage service. Investigation on students' needs of English vocabulary would fulfill course's objective and enhance learning achievement.

Prior group reports on English translation of Thai food menus in previous semesters showed students' lacks of English vocabulary knowledge on food ingredients despite the course objectives aiming at English vocabulary knowledge. The research study, therefore, should be conducted with the learners' engagement in task assignment focusing on English vocabulary. Through group tasks, students can build up their vocabulary from the context of the assignment and implement autonomous learning. The more vocabulary the students have gained from the task assignment, the more confident the students will be. Built up vocabulary helps raise students' achievement and confidence and also aids the students in becoming independent learners.

The research study's objectives are:
1. To investigate needs on food vocabulary of the students registering in an ESP course
2. To develop students' English food vocabulary knowledge of Thai food menus

2. CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK
2.1 Needs Analysis
The term 'needs analysis' was originated by Michael West in the 1920s when he was trying to establish the way learners should learn English. In the field of language program planning, Brown (1995) pointed out that needs analysis is the first step in developing a language curriculum which consisted of three basic steps: making basic decisions about the needs analysis, gathering information, and using the information. The information will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum or a course that will meet the needs of the language learners.

2.2 Needs for English for Specific Purposes
Needs analysis is advantageous for ESP practitioners in specific purposes program design and is also fundamental for planning of any language courses (Robinson, 1991). No ESP courses should be conducted without needs analysis (Kaewpet, 2009) as ESP aims to meet the needs of particular learners. According to Robinson (1980), an ESP course is purposeful and aimed at successful performance. This should be based on a strong analysis of the learner's needs. Learning needs will respond and implement successful language learning.

Munby (1978, p.2) has defined ESP in relation to ESP courses based on the analysis of students' language needs as follows: "ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner".

Vocabulary learning is one of important issues in general English and ESP courses. For Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge is an integral part of learners' general L2 proficiency and a prerequisite for successful communication. Biemiller and Boote (2006) have pointed out that contextual word teaching is more effective than non-contextual word teaching. Therefore, teaching vocabulary should be set with a context for successful learning.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The followings are related research studies on vocabulary knowledge and ESP courses.

An exploratory study was conducted by Diaz-Gilbert (2004) on vocabulary knowledge of 25 pharmacy students whose first or best languages are not English. The results showed that these students lacked of fundamental knowledge of certain basic and common pharmacy and related vocabulary words both in isolation and in context. The study had strong implications for addressing the English language needs and developing the word knowledge of English non-native speakers, as the researcher pointed out that 'language should not be a barrier to professional practice'. In an ESP course, Business English at INSIM Institute.,Radjaa (2012) notices that though the course instructs a rich repertoire of business vocabulary, it still lacks the essence of meeting the students' needs. The research started to design the syllabus based on developing specific competencies using the questionnaires from students and business companies and corpus analysis. Tasks related to target competency were assigned to students. Results of the research help with the decisions upon selecting the appropriate teaching materials that go along with the designed syllabus.

Research studies related to food and cooking were conducted by M. Nordin et al (2013) and Blaco (2015). In food writing course at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), M. Nordin et al (2013) used compiled word corpus of 11 PowerPoint slide presentations. The researchers found out that the amount of vocabulary was far too small for vocabulary development. Students should be given numerous opportunities to encounter specialized vocabularies for optimum vocabulary growth. For cooking domain, Blasco (2015) aimed to extend students' vocabulary by means of introducing it in terms of cognitive domains and dealing with basic level categories. The result showed that students could relate their previous knowledge to the new elements in an appropriate context and obtain better results at comprehending them.

In conclusion, word knowledge is important for non-native English learners and it should not be a barrier for professional practice (Diaz-Gilbert, 2004) because vocabulary learning is teachable (Jurkovic, 2006). Limited resource from textbook will be too easy for students and will not enhance vocabulary learning whereas multiple exposures to target words help accelerate vocabulary growth (M.Nordin et al, 2013). Tasks related to target learning should be assigned to learners (Radjaa,

2012) and specialized vocabulary should be implemented for ESP course (Hou, 2014).

The research study, therefore, were designed to develop learners' vocabulary knowledge with the use of authentic materials, Thai food menus, as parts of task assignment to learn more vocabulary, especial technical vocabulary which are related to the course.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study was conducted with students registering in an ESP course namely English for Food and Beverage Service. It is a selected English course for students majoring in Hotel and Tourism Management at Kasetsart University Si Racha Campus. Duration of the research study was four months from August to November.

4.1 Subjects

The subjects of the study were all students registering in an ESP course namely English for Food and Beverage Service. The total number was 54 students. The duration for the research study was four months from the beginning of August to mid of November.

4.2 Instruments

Two sets of questionnaires were used in the research study. The first questionnaire was distributed to students in order to check on their needs of English vocabulary on food at the beginning of the course followed by the post-activity questionnaire at the end of the course. Task assignment was undertaken in groups followed by a test on English food vocabulary. The test was used to check on students' performance on English food vocabulary knowledge.

The first questionnaire consisted of four parts: Part I- Questions addressed general information of the students**,** Part II- Necessities of English food vocabulary according to the students' perception, Part III – Problems of English food vocabulary knowledge, and Part IV – Wants on English food vocabulary development.

Task assignment was employed as a mean for students to engage in the activity. Students worked in groups and chose the restaurant menus to list out the food ingredients in each food menu item in Thai and English languages. The students were encouraged to do with their preferable methods so that autonomous learning was implemented.

Vocabulary test was then created and taken from the food lists chosen as needed by the students in the first questionnaire. The food lists fall into five food categories: herbs, spices, and food seasonings; vegetables; fruits; meat and poultry; fish and shellfish. Food lists with over 50% chosen as needed by students in each categories were used in the test. Matching Thai food lists with English vocabulary was instructed due to the fact that the test only focused on students' vocabulary knowledge.

Post-activity questionnaire was for the students to express their attitudes towards the task assignment and their development of English food vocabulary knowledge. The post-activity questionnaire as well as vocabulary test was given to the students after the submission of group task assignment.

4.3 Data Analysis

Vocabulary test was scored to check on students' food vocabulary knowledge in English. Questionnaires were evaluated by using SPSS software (frequency, percentage, mean and S.D.) These items can be interpreted according to the following levels:

Very small (the lowest) = 1.00-1.80
Small (low) = 1.81-2.60
Moderate (medium) = 2.61-3.40
Great (high) = 3.41-4.20
Very great (the highest) = 4.21-5.00

5. FINDINGS

Results from the first questionnaire can be described into four parts. The first part of the questionnaire showed that 48 students are female and 6 students are male. Nearly half of the students are 20 years old (46.3%) and 21 years (38.9%). The students started learning English in kindergarten level (74.1%). Most of the students (87%) said they searched for new English vocabulary when they did not know the meaning. Online dictionary is the most preferable method for finding English words (94.4%) while website is the second preferable (59.3%), and conventional dictionary is the least preferable (46.3%). Three students mentioned that they preferred to ask their teachers or the others for the English words. Tweeter, LINE, and Facebook were also mentioned as ways for consulting English vocabulary. More than half of the students (61.1%) admitted that they had had little knowledge on English food vocabulary before registering in this course.

The second part addressed on the necessity of English food vocabulary according to the students' perception. Food vocabulary check lists fall into five groups: herbs, spices, and food seasonings; vegetables; fruits; meat and poultry; fish and shellfish. The vocabulary lists with more than 50% chosen as needed in each group were used in a vocabulary test on students' knowledge at the end of the research study. There were 20 items out of 35 vocabulary lists chosen in herbs, spices, and food seasonings group. While 24 items out of 46 vocabulary lists were chosen in the vegetable group. For fruit group, 10 items out of 24 fruit lists were chosen as needed. There was only one item out of six vocabulary list in meat and poultry group chosen, therefore, all six vocabulary list were used in the test. For fish and shellfish, there were 23 items out of 30 vocabulary lists chosen as needed.

The third part was for the students to indicate their problems on English food vocabulary. Fish and shellfish group was indicated as a very great problem for the students (48.1%). Herbs, spices and food seasonings group (37 %) and vegetables group (38.9%) were indicated as great problems. Fruit group was considered as a

moderate problem (35.2%). Meat and poultry group was mentioned as a small problem (27.8%).

Results from the fourth part showed students' want for development on English food vocabulary. The most two chosen vocabulary groups for knowledge development were herbs, spices, and food seasonings group (98.1%) and fish and shell fish group (96.3%). Vegetable group was chosen with 85.2% while meat and poultry group was with 40.7% and fruit group was with 38.9%.

Post-activity questionnaire consists of three parts: personal information, opinions on task assignment, and suggestions. Five statements with five-scale rating are for the students to express their opinions on task assignment.

S1: Task assignment responds to your needs of English vocabulary development
S2: Task assignment can implement autonomous learning
S3: You have gained more English food vocabulary knowledge
S4: You are confident in using English on food items
S5: You can apply your vocabulary knowledge into real daily activities

More than half of the students agreed at very great level that task assignment responded to their wants of English food vocabulary development (63%), that task assignment implements autonomous learning (61.1%), they have gained more English food vocabulary knowledge (51.9%), and they can apply vocabulary knowledge into their real daily activities (53.7%). Half of the students (50%) agree at great level that they are confident in using English on food items.

Table 1 shows scores of vocabulary test in the five food lists: herbs, spices, and food seasonings; vegetables; fruits; meat and poultry; fish and shellfish.

Table 1. Scores of each food list

	n	M	SD
Herbs, spices, and food seasoning	54	14.39	3.006
Vegetables	54	13.15	5.388
Fruits	54	5.46	2.117
Meat and poultry	54	6.00	0.000
Fish and shellfish	54	10.80	4.736

There are 20 items in herbs, spices, and food seasonings list. A student obtained full score (20/20) while four students obtain less than 10 scores, and the lowest score is 6/20. Mean of this food list is 14.39 and the score most obtained in this part is 16/20. For vegetables list, there are 24 items. Mean of the list is 13.15. The highest score is 21/24 and the lowest score is 1/24. The scores most obtained by students are 16/20 and 17/20. There are ten items in the fruits list. Two students obtained full scores (10/10). Mean of the list is 5.46. The lowest score is 2/10 and the score most obtained is 8/10.

There are only six items in meat and poultry list. All students obtained full scores (6/6). Twenty three items are in fish and shellfish list. Mean of this food list is 10.80. The higher score is 22/23 and the lowest score is 0/23. The scores most obtained are 12/23, 13/23, 14/23, and 15/23.

The test results show that most of the students learn and know more food vocabulary in English. Though most of the students did not leave any suggestions, a student mentioned that he/she had more knowledge on food vocabulary in English and there were two students requested for cooking in class or practical sections in kitchen.

6. DISCUSSION

This research aims to study students' needs of English food vocabulary and vocabulary development in an ESP course using three instruments: questionnaires, task assignment and vocabulary test. Discussion will be presented consecutively.

Question in the first questionnaire asking on methods in finding English words actually aims to remind the students on different ways of looking up for new words. Online dictionaries become the most preferable method for finding English words (94.4%) while general websites are the second preferable (59.3%), and conventional dictionary is the least preferable (46.3%). According to National Statistics Office in 2013, the use of computer, Internet, and mobile phone of Thai residents continuously increases every year. Personal computer (PC) and smart phones are normally used by the Thai students to connect to the internet (Low & Warawudhi, 2016; Low, 2017). The positive result of using online dictionaries corresponds to the research result of Jabar & Ali (2016) that online dictionaries were preferred for the ESL learners to explore the word meanings as online dictionaries are relatively convenient and easy to use; moreover, they can be downloaded to use on mobile phones. Language learners can use the web search engines and online dictionaries to search for new words whenever they like. Social networks such as Tweeter, LINE, and Facebook can be of use as preferable learning tools for teen language learners (Low, 2017). Application software and online learning platform are also useful to create language learning environment. Clark (2013) utilized an iPad application together with the use of visual and audio components to increase vocabulary knowledge as well as Low (2017) who employed Schoology which is a social learning platform to enhance language learning activities outside classrooms.

The close-ended and open-ended parts in post-activity questionnaire showed students' perceptions that task assignment could promote vocabulary knowledge and encourage autonomous learning. The submitted reports also showed the students' effort of finding the English words for all food ingredients of each food menu item on the restaurant menus. Some reports even presented new English words of Thai food ingredients which were not taught in class or in the teaching book. Therefore, task assignment is a significant treatment in terms of developing learners' competencies, especially vocabulary and should be assigned to learners (Radjaa, 2012). Various forms of treatment can be employed in research studies to help language learners develop their language knowledge. Successful treatments to enhance vocabulary knowledge in research studies are cartoon film media (Munir, 2016), video (Jabar & Ali, 2016), and storytelling (Rusiana & Nuraeningsih, 2016).

The findings from vocabulary test indicated that students could learn and acquire more food vocabulary knowledge in English although some students had obtained scores less than half in each food list. Among the five groups of food lists,

only fish and shell fish list was indicated as a very great problem by the students (48.1%). The test result shows that half of the students (27/54) obtained less than 12 scores out of 23 items of fish and shellfish list, and one student obtained zero score in this part. This might due to the fact that vocabulary test score was not considered as part of the course scores; therefore, some of the students did not take the test seriously.

The results of vocabulary test showed full scores in three food groups: herbs, spices, and food seasonings; fruits; and meat and poultry. Moreover, the students also obtained high scores in vegetable list with the highest score at 21 out of 24, and the highest score at 22 out of 23 in fish and shellfish list. However, almost half of the students did not perform well in the test and obtained scores less than 50% in three food groups: vegetable (20/54), fruit (20/54), fish and shellfish (27/54). Possible reason for these incidents could be group work contribution. Students who performed well on vocabulary test might put more efforts and work harder than his/her colleagues. Individual task assignment might be a good solution to the problem. Students should be able to work independently and to be responsible for their own learning. Thus, a deep study on factors that might affect their performances on vocabulary development is also recommended.

7. CONCLUSION

Students' needs analysis helps in implement language course contents. To achieve the learners' needs, task assignment can be used in various forms to develop vocabulary knowledge, especially in ESP courses. In this present study, new English food vocabulary emerged from students' group assignment reports. Moreover, students could find their preferable methods to look up for new English words. Online dictionaries are useful and convenient tools for language learners to acquire vocabulary knowledge. Computer technology such as application software and social learning platforms can be of use in teaching and learning activities. Vocabulary learning is essential, especially in an ESP course which aims at vocabulary knowledge development (M.Nordin et al, 2013; Hou, 2014), and could be accelerated with actual situation contexts which are the food menus in this research study. It is suggested for further study in digital classrooms in the 21st-century that there should be research studies on using new technology among English teachers and students to implement the ESP courses.

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