A Combination of a Textbook and E-Learning

in an ESP Classroom

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Abstract

As an English language teacher in a state university, the author has written three textbooks for three ESP courses. They have been published by the university press, mainly for the use of our own students. Teachers from many other universities order the books published by our university and use them in their classes as well. One textbook among the three has already been transformed into an E-Learning format with the financial support and facilities provided by the university; however, the students taking this course, English for Import-Export Business, had previously never used this E-Learning program by themselves. Instead, they relied only on the textbook and lectures. They were accustomed to doing traditional activities and practice exercises in class. Even though announcements were made in the classroom about the existence of E-Learning for this subject, the students did not show much interest. However, the instructor continued to believe in the potential of E-Learning, with its vivid pictures, interesting audio content, and lively videos and activities adapted from the textbook. On top of that, the instructor had received positive comments from a student who had enjoyed the E-Learning. Thus, the decision was made to implement a new teaching method: the integration of online E-Learning technology and the traditional style of teaching using a textbook in the classroom. So far this method has worked very well with this subject, which requires a content-based pedagogy.

Keyword: Technology, E-Learning, Textbook, ESP, Content-Based Pedagogy

Introduction

In November 2012, the author of this paper decided to start using E-Learning together with the traditional classroom mediums in the class 'English for Import-Export Business' (EL 226). E-learning here refers to web-based E-Learning. Nations (2000) posited that web-based instruction is quickly becoming a major avenue for delivering courses to students. Web-based instruction enables students to access more knowledge, and it is especially useful as a supplement to face-to-face teaching/learning in a real classroom. Thus, the following mediums were used by the author in her course that semester:

1. The textbook entitled "ENGLISH FOR IMPORT-EXPORT BUSINESS" published by Thammasat University Press (The author of this paper is the author of this textbook);
2. Web-based E-Learning incorporated into the website of the university;
3. PowerPoint slide presentations created by the author for sharing the answers to the exercises and explaining parts not included in the web-based E-Learning.

This paper reports on the preliminary study of the use of E-learning as a part of learning-teaching for educational purposes in an English for Specific Purposes course. It discusses the decision-making processes concerning the selection of the mixed course materials, as well as the design, form and content of the E-Learning and guidelines for lecturers and students. Moreover, the author gives recommendations on encouraging students to increase their utilization of E-Learning. Detailed feedback from the students who were taught with these mixed materials is also discussed.

Details of the course, the learners, and their learning needs

Course of EL 226: English for Import-Export Business

The course of Import-Export Business (EL 226) is an elective English course designed for undergraduate students at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand. It is a three-credit course that requires students to have passed three foundation English courses. The objectives of the course are specified as the following: "Introduction to thorough and authentic reading, writing, listening and speaking negotiations in international business settings." The content of the E-Learning for this course was designed according to the objectives mentioned in the curriculum above, as Kang (2005) recommended that online content should be developed in accordance with the curriculum and the level of learners.

A textbook designed according to the curriculum was the core medium of this course. As a result, the E-Learning for this course was designed to follow the content of the core textbook. The core textbook used for this course contains six chapters as follows:

Unit 1: Currency Exchange

Part 1: Warm-Up

Part 2: Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3: Reading Comprehension

Part 4: Reading Skill (Context Clues)

Part 5: Expansion

Part 6: Language Focus (Relative Clauses)

Part 7: Paragraph Writing (Description)

Part 8: Listening-Speaking (At a Money Exchanger)

Part 9: Documents Used in Import-Export (Incoterms)

Unit 2: International Organizations

Part 1:   Warm-Up

Part 2:   Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3:   Reading Comprehension

Part 4:   Reading Skill (Skimming Technique: Finding the Topic)

Part 5:   Expansion

Part 6:   Language Focus (Participial Phrase)

Part 7:   Paragraph Writing (Chronological Order)

Part 8:   Listening-Speaking (At a Trade Exhibition)

Part 9:   Documents Used in Import-Export (Letters of Credit)

Unit 3: Border Trade

Part 1:   Warm-Up

Part 2:   Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3:   Reading Comprehension

Part 4:   Reading Skill (Skimming Technique: Finding the Main Idea)

Part 5:   Expansion

Part 6:   Language Focus (Present Perfect Tense & Past Simple Tense)

Part 7:   Paragraph Writing (Opinion paragraph)

Part 8:   Listening-Speaking (At an Informal Discussion)

Part 9:   Documents Used in Import-Export (Bill of exchange)

Unit 4: Copyright and Intellectual Property

Part 1:   Warm-Up

Part 2:   Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3:   Reading Comprehension

Part 4:   Reading Skill (Scanning Technique: Getting Details)

Part 5:   Expansion

Part 6:   Language Focus (Concessive Clauses)

Part 7:   Paragraph Writing (Contrast)

Part 8:   Listening-Speaking (Asking for More Discount)

Part 9:   Documents Used in Import-Export (Invoice)

Unit 5: Containerization

Part 1:   Warm-Up

Part 2:   Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3:   Reading Comprehension

Part 4:   Reading Skill (Recognizing Transitional Words)

Part 5:   Expansion

Part 6:   Language Focus (Infinitive)

Part 7:   Paragraph Writing (Process)

Part 8:   Listening-Speaking (Explaining How to Get Information from an Ocean Liner's timetable)

Part 9:   Documents Used in Import-Export (Bill of Lading)

Unit 6: Electronic Commerce: Growing

Part 1:   Warm-Up

Part 2:   Vocabulary from the Passage

Part 3:   Reading Comprehension

Part 4:   Reading Skill (Context Clues)

Part 5:   Expansion

Part 6:   Language Focus (Relative Clauses)

Part 7:   Paragraph Writing (Description)

Part 8:   Listening-Speaking (At a Money Exchanger)

Part 9:   Documents Used in Import-Export (Incoterms)

The Learners

As the course is an elective English course, it is open to Thammasat University students from any faculty with an interest in knowledge concerning the English used in the import-export business. Most of the students who enroll in the course are undergraduate students from the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, whose major subjects include Marketing; Finance; International Business, and Logistics and Transportation (IBLT). However, some of the students who take this course are students from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, whose major subjects are languages such as English, Chinese, Russian, etc. In addition, some students who join this course come from the Faculty of Political Science, with the major subject being International Relations. Once in a while, students whose major subjects are Geography and Philosophy choose to enroll in the course.

Learners' Learning Needs

From the author's observations and informal talks with the students of this course, most identify their needs as increasing their understanding and knowledge of English, both in general and in regard to international trade, so that they can prepare themselves to enter the job market.

This means that they want to learn import-export procedures, payment methods, and the documents used in import-export in addition to the jargon and technical terms used in the field of international trade. Also, they may want to improve their speaking so that they can use the skills they have acquired when they are hired to work in an organization involved with international trading. Finally, students can also use the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and reading techniques that they gain from this course in their future workplaces.

To sum up, in this course students need to learn English to improve the four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening used in a special context; that is, in the context of the import-export business. Thus, students must be prepared to expose themselves to English that is slightly different from general English.

Steps or procedures involved in implementing innovative activities: strategy, approach, testing or platform

Steps or procedures involved in implementing innovative activities

About three years ago (2010), the university that the author has been working for invited instructors to produce E-Learning for the subjects that each instructor taught. This was an opportunity for the author to transform the textbook she had authored into multimedia, which provides significant advantages for students. Clark (2000) maintained that some of the benefits of E-Learning are the flexibility of time and space; moreover, it can make lessons become permanent records. Kruse (2002) pointed out that from a learner's standpoint, E-Learning is beneficial as it is self-paced, interactive, and can be accessed on demand.

Because the author thought that E-Learning together with the textbook and traditional classroom teaching would be beneficial for the students, she decided to adapt the content from the textbook to E-Learning. E-Learning in this sense refers to web-based E-Learning since students have to go to the website of the university in order to gain access to the program.

As E-learning can include a variety of media such as text, audio, video, animation, etc., students can be exposed to more authentic situations and experiences in learning English. As a result, E-Learning can improve their understanding of some complicated concepts in import-export; for example, import-export procedures or the steps involved in a Letter of Credit as a method of payment can be explained to students more easily and the explanations can be done more clearly. In this regard, E-Learning can be helpful in terms of channel richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Strategy

It is important that the needs of teachers in a particular course along with the pedagogical aspects are taken into consideration in the design of E-Learning (Svetsky, Moravcik, Schreiber & Stefancova, 2011a; 2011b). The E-Learning for EL 226 contains four parts that correspond to the content of each unit in the core textbook. These are: 1) Part One: Warm-Up; 2) Part Seven: Paragraph Writing; 3) Part Eight: Listening-Speaking; and 4) Part Nine: Documents Used in Import-Export. Figures 1-5 show a comparison between what is contained in the core textbook and the adapted web-based E-Learning content.

The reasons for not including Part Two (Vocabulary from the Passage), Part Three (Reading Comprehension), Part Four (Reading Skill), Part Five (Expansion), or Part Six (Language Focus) in the web-based learning for this course include the following: 1) These parts of the course content are easy for students to learn through the core text in the form of reading and writing exercises; 2)The parts included in the web-based E-Learning were chosen because they utilize the space provided more effectively, while this was not the case for the parts that were excluded; and 3) Students can do practice exercises and revisions "offline" in their textbooks and keep a written record of these parts; moreover, students are more familiar with the concepts in the excluded chapters as compared with the specific technical content covered in Part One, Part Seven, Part Eight and Part Nine (as mentioned in the previous paragraph).

According to Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni (2000), one of the many benefits of applying E-Learning is authenticity, which is vital for teaching/learning English. Part Eight was originally designed for web-based E-Learning by a company outsourced by Thammasat University. The company decided to use animation showing cartoon characters, specifically a farmer wearing a woven peasant hat and typical farmer's clothing. This was intended to represent a Thai exporter dealing with a foreign importer. However, the author objected to this design concept, viewing that E-Learning should strive to offer a more authentic experience of modern international trade in Thailand for students.
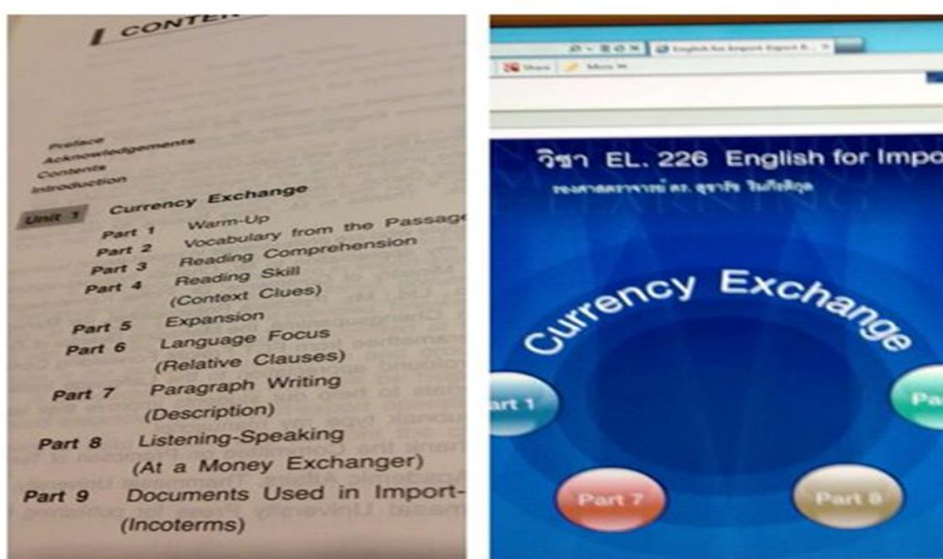

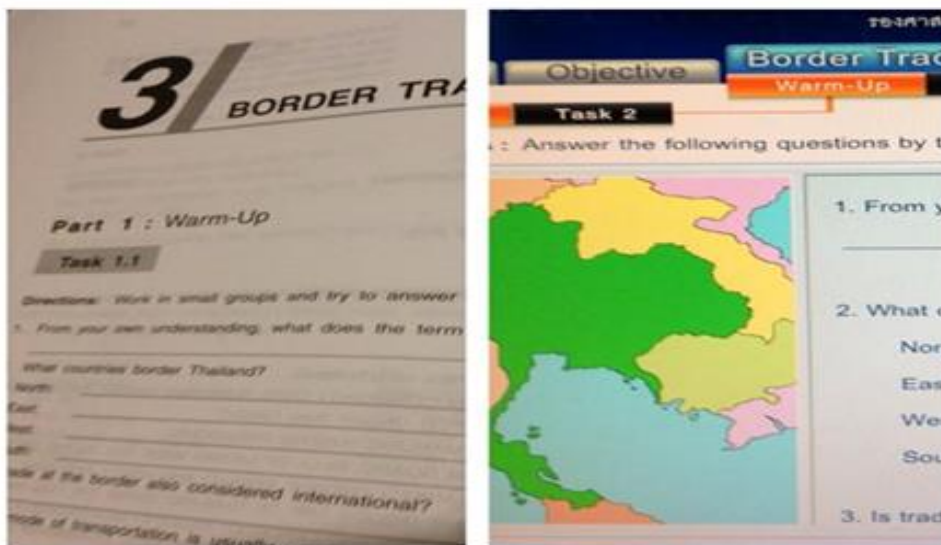Figure 1: Textbook Table of Contents and E-Learning Coverage of Each Unit

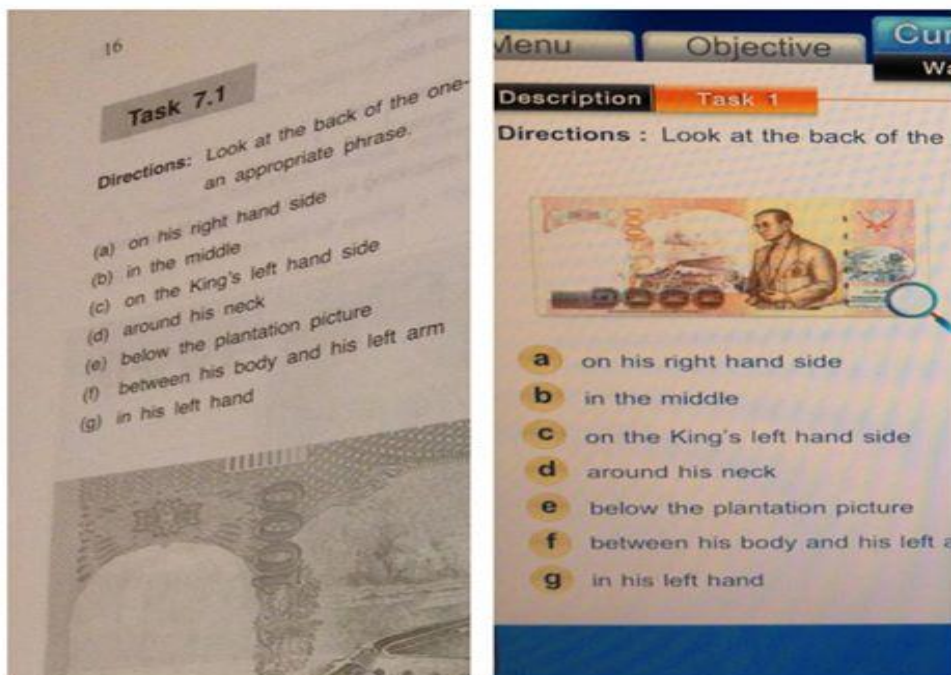Figure 2: Textbook and E-Learning, Part 1: Warm-Up

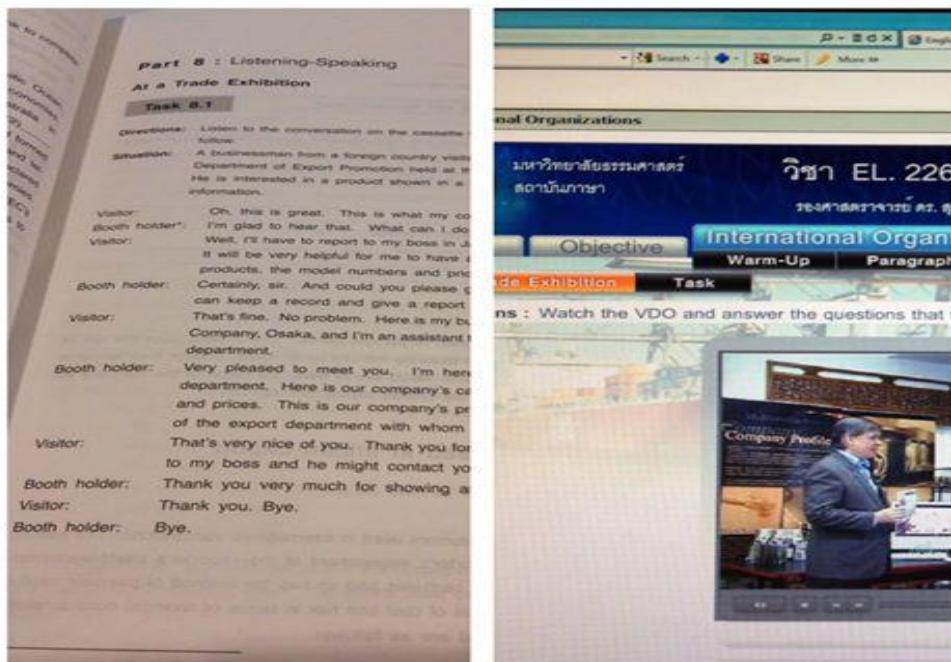Figure 3: Textbook and E-Learning, Part 7: Paragraph Writing

Figure 4: Textbook and E-Learning, Part 8: Listening-SpeakingDialogue script in the book and the embedded VDO in the E-Learning
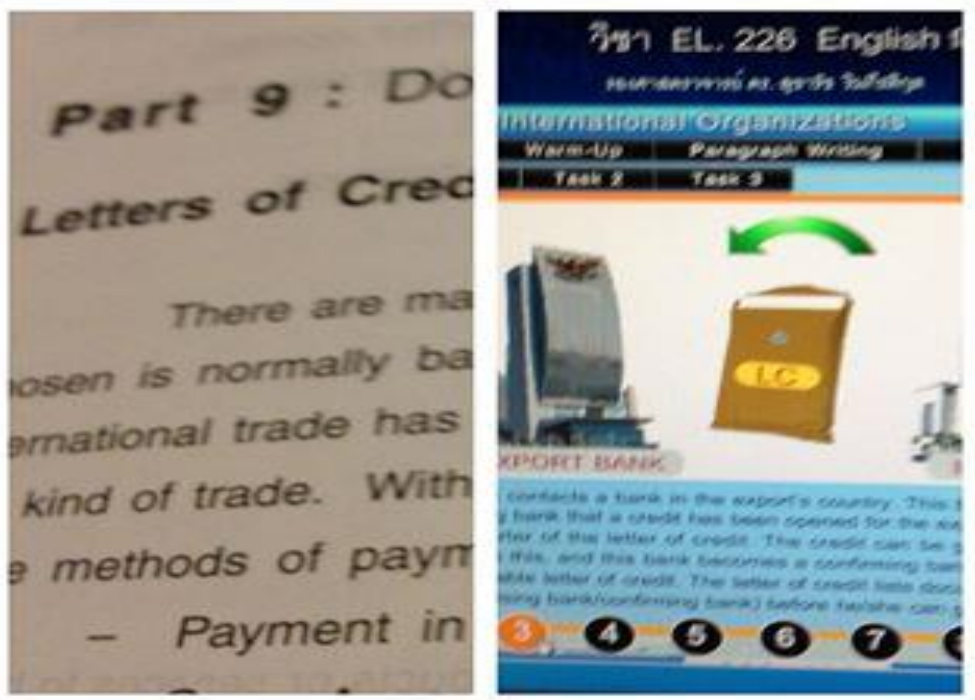
Figure 5: Textbook and E-Learning, Part 9: Documents Used in Import-Export

Approach

In addition to using the core textbook, web-based E-Learning, PowerPoint presentations and visualizers in the classroom, students worked in groups of three to five people to finish a term report and give a final oral presentation on the last day of the class before they took the final examination. The term paper was designed to contain seven pieces of current news collected from the business section of an English language daily newspaper. Each piece of news had to relate to the content of each corresponding unit as follows: 'Currency Exchange', 'International Organizations', 'Border Trade', 'Copyright and Intellectual Property', 'Containerization', and 'Electronic Commerce: Growing Worldwide Trend'.

Instead of using only paper (textbook) and pencil (marker for writing on the classroom whiteboard) to explain complicated concepts, the inclusion of motion pictures with English sounds and video embedded in the E-Learning can give more codes to the students.

Web-based E-learning is best used to enhance the understanding of what is explained in the core textbook. That is, the course is supplemented by online resources, which can be beneficial for both the teacher and students (Jenkins, 2002).

In using E-Learning mixed with traditional or face-to-face classroom instruction, four essential components as mentioned by Lee and Lee (2007) should be taken into account: learning, self-paced learning, collaborative learning, and learning support.

Testing or platform

After introducing the web-based E-Learning, the author sought feedback from the students regarding the use of E-Learning in the classroom for the course of EL 226. The findings were translated and are summarized by grouping the ideas into categories as follows:

- Feedback on using web-based E-Learning in the classroom:

Student One*: It is easier for me to review the lessons. The revision can be done by using the core textbook and E-Learning.*

Student Two: *I like it (E-Learning) because it lets me enhance my English skills.*

Student Three: *I can feel that my listening skill is much better. Also, I am encouraged to read the newspaper more to catch up with current news (about international trade).*

Student Four: *There is a variety of media, which makes the class more interesting.*

- Feedback on pedagogy:

Some students also gave feedback on the pedagogy as a whole when E-Learning was combined with the core textbook, assignments, the term paper and the final oral presentation. The students' responses were as follows:

Student Five: *The core textbook allows me to study any place any time. E-learning also lets me study without carrying the book. The current news allows me to know our country's situation and the world situation.*

Student Six: *It (the class) has the quality of being current, and there is a wide variety of ideas as we (students) have chances to hear ideas from others (other students).*

Student Seven: *The class is not boring. I am not stressed.*

Student Eight: *I have learned a lot of new vocabulary, especially technical terms that are used in the field of import and export business. About reading, at the beginning of the semester, I did not understand the written publication, but after hearing others' ideas in the classroom and being guided by the teacher, I have a better understanding. In addition, I now understand the import-export procedures.*

Student Nine: *I have obtained knowledge about business that I had never gotten from any other place; this enables me to analyze business situations. I can apply this skill to my daily life as well as my workplace in the future.*

Conclusion

In the information era, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has inevitably become part of our daily life. Almost every aspect of our lives is affected by the Internet's development, including the field of education and specifically English language teaching. According to Leach and Moon (2000), ICT is a powerful tool for education reform. E-Learning is a new form of learning that has resulted from the evolution of the Internet and technological development (Rossett, 2002). With E-Learning, traditional learning in the classroom can become more attractive and more meaningful to both parties involved, teacher and students.

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