



# Exploring Thai EFL Learners' Learning Outcomes from a Real-World Interview Task: A Sociocultural Perspective

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## Abstract

This study explores Thai English as a foreign language students' reflections on their learning outcomes from doing a real world interview task. From a sociocultural perspective, we adopted adventurous learning as an alternative pedagogical approach to encourage students to learn from social and educational experience in real world situations. Data were collected from an audio-recorded stimulated recall reflection and students' written reflections on what they believed they had learnt from doing the real world task. Quantitatively, a corpus-based approach was used to generate keywords from students' spoken and written reflections. Qualitatively, using the keyword list together with the identified learning outcomes in task-based learning literature, themes of students' perceived learning outcomes were explored from students' spoken reflections. Findings show that students learnt from conducting a real world interview task with professionals as a real audience outside the classroom to learn and use language skills such as speaking and listening, and wording of questions, to acquire life skills such as communication strategies, problem-solving and decision-making skills and team spirit, as well as to gain knowledge of the real world such as people, places, cultures and themselves. Limitations and implications are discussed.

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## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, language educators and researchers have been seeking innovative strategies to encourage students to learn meaningfully in order to become global citizens who should be able to “engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors” (UNESCO Global Citizenship Education, 2014, pp. 15–16). Task-based learning (TBL) situated within experiential-learning-by-doing philosophy has been recognized and favoured by language teachers and researchers for decades to serve this purpose (Littlewood, 2014; Long, 2015; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). In Thailand, the National Education Act of 1999 proposed a shift from focusing on content to the students and suggested incorporating learning processes that integrate content and activities in response to students' interests and aptitudes in the curriculum (Iemjinda, 2003; Watson Todd, 2001). To answer the call for educational

reform, TBL has been intensively used in a number of educational institutes in Thailand (Meksophawannakul, 2015), especially in the university where the current research is conducted, which is one of the pioneers in the adoption and implementation of TBL (e.g. Watson Todd, 2001, 2006). Since its inception, the task-based curriculum has been constantly evaluated and revised for its continuation (Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015; Watson Todd, 2005, 2006). Researchers investigated Thai teachers' and students' reaction to the task-based curriculum, and the findings revealed that Thai teachers and students were positive towards TBL (e.g. McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Poonpun, 2011; Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015; Tongsakul, Jitgarun, & Chaokummerd, 2011).

So far, in the Thai EFL context, many studies have explored the challenges of TBL adoption, workability, satisfaction, and innovation from teachers and students' perspectives (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Meksophawannakul, 2015; Simpson, 2011; Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015; Tongsakul et al., 2011; Watson Todd, 2005; 2006). However, most of the early studies largely investigated the effectiveness of task/project-based tasks within classroom/school/university contexts. Sparse empirical evidence has been gathered on Thai EFL students' learning outcomes from doing real world tasks beyond classroom and school/university contexts. To fill this researchable gap, the current study explores Thai EFL students' reflections on their learning outcomes from doing a real world interview task. We argue that in-class tasks and activities fall short of meeting the needs of students who are confronting the real world of change, unpredictability and complexity. We propose the alternative of using a real world task aiming to encourage learners to use English in real world situations for an adventurous learning experience. This study contributes to TBL literature by adopting adventurous learning as an alternative pedagogical approach to better facilitate students in gaining broader educational learning outcomes.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 *Development of TBL and its derivatives: An overview*

In principle, the meaning of 'task' varies depending on the type of learner-centered approach that is applied. The conventional TBL approach focuses on students' needs by putting them into authentic communicative situations and allowing them to use all their language resources to deal with them. The core focus of the lesson is the task itself, not particular linguistic forms or patterns, and the goal is not to 'learn the structure' but to 'complete the task'. Building on TBL, the project-based learning (PBL) approach takes learner-centeredness to a higher level. It shares many aspects with TBL, but has an even more ambitious objective. PBL can be characterized as follows (Poonpun, 2017; Watson Todd, 2005):

- It provides students with opportunities to use several skills (e.g. problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, as well as language) at different work stages.
- It allows students to demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge through an end product (e.g. an oral presentation, a poster session, a reflective talk).
- It is experiential and opens up for unanticipated and ad hoc learning outcomes rather than relying on prescribed and decontextualized content.
- It bridges using English in class and using English in real life contexts.
- It emphasizes non-language objectives, such as confidence, sociocultural understanding, intercultural awareness, and communication skills, through social interactions.

TBL makes a task the central focus of a lesson; however, PBL often makes a task the focus of a whole term or academic year. Further building on TBL and PBL, real world tasks bring learner-centeredness to a much higher level by allowing students to take control of planning and managing the task over a certain period, with the teacher playing the role of a counsellor. Similarly, TBL, PBL and real world task learning all focus primarily on the achievement of realistic objectives, and then on the language that is needed to achieve those objectives. A distinction between real world tasks and pedagogical tasks is that students must accomplish real world tasks outside of the classroom setting, whereas pedagogical tasks are activities or actions conducted as a consequence of processing

or understanding language that typically occur in the classroom (Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1989). To differentiate real world tasks from project-based learning (PBL), which is simply defined as “an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting students with problems to solve or products to develop” (Moss & Van Duzer, 1998, p. 1), a real world task emphasizes the actual use of the target language with an unknown situation for students to explore the potential problems and develop their learning products by going on adventures to interact with people in the real world situations without time constraints. This is different from TBL and PBL, which are process- and product-orientated (Stoller, 2002), respectively, as real world tasks are more experience/process-orientated rather than product orientated.

## ***2.2 Implementations and challenges of TBL in Asian contexts***

In Asian contexts, according to Ji (2018), in TBL implementation, it is rather difficult to match the goals of tasks with the contextual reality in Asian EFL classrooms, which are teacher-centered, text-directed and exam-oriented, all of which are noted as key constraints to the implementation of TBL (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2007; Littlewood, 2004; Yan, 2015; Zheng & Borg, 2013). Another obstruction in implementing TBL in Asia lies in students’ resistance to the perceived lack of grammatical inputs. In McDonough and Chaikitmongkol’s (2007) study, some Thai students complained of the insufficient grammatical instruction in the tasks and were of the impression that TBL contributes little to their grammatical improvement and has little effect on their English learning. Thai students’ perceptions were revealed in the study by Zheng and Borg (2013), which shows their doubts regarding the effectiveness of TBL, with less time spent on explaining grammar to help students improve their English ability for exams. As a countermeasure to these problems, they suggested that teachers change their stereotypical mindsets to view teaching and learning as processes rather than products, and accommodate tasks tailored to exam requirements. TBL’s perceived lack of grammar-based instruction hinders its implementation in Asia by reducing the confidence of both teachers and students in terms of its benefits. In implementing a task, the teachers shall clarify whether the focus is on forms and/or meanings, and establish a specific learning outcome for reasonable assessment (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). As a result, uncertain assessment in TBL also needs special attention as it differs from the traditional assessment of language students’ performance which measures their scores with a focus on accuracy in grammatical usage of English.

## ***2.3 Related studies investigating learning outcomes of TBL and PBL***

In literature, several previous studies have investigated the learning outcomes of TBL (e.g. Beretta & Davies, 1985; Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Mackey, 1999). For example, Beretta and Davies (1985) compared the learning outcomes of task-based language teaching and form-focused teaching. Adopting a Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) syllabus without including any linguistic specification at all, Beretta and Davies (1985) conducted a series of experimental and structural tasks in the form of problem-solving, task-based tests in India. They compared the learning results from communicational language teaching and traditional language teaching. Their findings suggest that language form is best learnt when the learner’s attention is focused on meaning. One of the salient results from their evaluation demonstrated that students in the task-based experimental group had acquired both linguistic knowledge and the capacity to utilize their linguistic knowledge more communicatively than those in the structural group. However, as noted by Ellis (2009), Beretta and Davies (1985) were careful to acknowledge that conducting a post hoc evaluation was problematic. As a result, until now there have been no further comparative evaluations of this kind. There are, however, small-scale studies demonstrating task-based learning outcomes in terms of language acquisition. For instance, in an experimental study on a listen-and-do task, Ellis et al. (1994) examined the effects of Japanese students’ acquisition of English vocabulary. They found that, even when the focus of the task was primarily on meaning – as required by TBL principles – students were able to acquire and retain forms of new words over time. In other research, Mackey (1999) investigated

the outcomes of task-based interaction and reported that performing tasks can also assist in the acquisition of linguistic forms by referring to the noticing hypothesis, which believes students do pay attention to linguistic form, and this can result in learning (e.g. Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2001; Sheen, 2004).

When it comes to studies on PBL in the Thai context, few researchers have investigated the implementation of PBL and its effectiveness in terms of learning outcomes (Watson Todd, 2005) and in enhancing English skills (Poonpon, 2017). Watson Todd (2005) explored university EFL students' learning outcomes from a survey project about interviewing foreign tourists based on 34 intermediate-level undergraduate computer engineering students' oral statements. To investigate task-based learning, the students were asked what they believed they had learned from doing the real world interview task. Although the extent of the relationship between students' beliefs about their learning and their actual learning is debatable, this student-based approach would "appear the most appropriate approach" as it allows the "investigation of unanticipated outcomes, learning outside the classroom and both language and non-language outcomes" (Watson Todd, 2005, p.12). 13 learning outcomes were identified from students' written reflections (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Facets of outcomes reported learnt, as identified by Watson Todd (2005, p. 18)**

<b>Outcomes reported learnt</b>	<b>Language (L) or non-language (N)</b>	<b>Anticipated (A) or unanticipated (U)</b>	<b>Primarily learnt in class (C) or from experience (E)</b>
Confidence in using English	N	A	E
Oral presentation skills	L	A	C/E
Foreigners' views on Thailand	N	U	E
Wording of questions	L	U	C
Identifying aspects needing improvement	N	U	E
Communicating with foreigners	N	A/U	E
Working together as a group	N	A	E
Practising general listening and speaking skills	L	U	C/E
Awareness of and improving accent	L	U	E
New vocabulary items	L	U	E
Planning	N	U	E
Foreigners' English competence	N	U	E
Analysing data	N	A	C

Among the 13 learning outcomes, eight were unanticipated, which raises the question of how to include predetermined learning objectives in a task/syllabus. This leads to the implication that PBL may be an instrumental approach for use in real world task learning situations where non-language outcomes are highlighted. The findings of Watson Todd's (2005) study suggest that it might be productive to explore non-language objectives and unanticipated learning outcomes from students' perspectives beyond the classroom context. More recently, Meksophawannakul (2015) used a questionnaire to analyze the effects of PBL on language achievement in relation to Thai university students' perspectives on English, favorable characteristics of English teachers and English language teaching strategies.

The results indicated that the students believed that their language skills had improved, and they had positive attitudes towards the PBL. The results also revealed that the PBL instruction helped improve the students' creative thinking skills, and collaborative (teamwork) skills. Importantly, the students reported that they had fun and were happy learning with the PBL activities. These findings

suggest that PBL could be a valuable incentive for language teachers to adopt in their teaching practice.

As for real world task learning, through interviewing individual and focus group teachers to obtain their perceptions of how the teachers designed and implemented real world tasks, Singhasiri and Thepsiri (2015, p. 100) found that all of the teachers agreed that a real world task should possess the following ten characteristics:

- Having opportunities to use language in real settings
- Focusing on communication
- Having a real audience
- Less preparation
- Having fun
- Manifesting both language skills and life skills
- Having interaction between students and interlocutors
- Focusing on both the process and product
- Transferring experiences learned from the tasks to other real world situations
- Challenging

Singhasiri and Thepsiri (2015) noted that a real world task provides an opportunity for students to have real exposure to the target language and use the language spontaneously, not just for the sake of language learning. They further reported that the teachers agreed that “the real world tasks allowed for a focus on broader educational goals, i.e., the students can learn cognitive, cultural and life skills in addition to language skills” (p. 103). Taking departure from the principles of TBL and PBL as well as findings from previously identified characteristics of real world tasks, we thereby conceptualize the real world task as an adventurous learning experience from a sociocultural perspective in the next section.

### **3 Conceptualizing the real world task as an adventurous learning experience: a sociocultural perspective**

In the extant TBL literature, there is a controversy in conceptualizing the term ‘task’. Some researchers define a task by emphasizing its pedagogic meaning (Krahnke, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 2003), and others highlight its cognitive process of learning a language (Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Williams & Burden, 1997). For example, in Krahnke’s (1987) notion, task-based learning is characterized with activities for non-instructional purposes of cognitive, cultural and life skills. According to Nunan (1989), goals of a task refers to the expected outcomes of language students via the implementation of TBL in their language learning, which can be in the form of linguistic, communicative, sociocultural or cultural achievements. Similarly, in Ellis’ (2003) and Skehan’s (2003) views, there are two theoretical motivations of using tasks for language teaching: the psycholinguistic and the sociocultural. Being psycholinguistically motivated, TBL facilitates L2 development in terms of language production and affect students’ motivation and engagement during task performance (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). Being socioculturally oriented, this study was informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory which advocates social interaction that encourages individuals to co-construct the meaning of the language in use, consolidate existing knowledge and appropriate new knowledge of the real world. In other words, students learn better when they work together and are actively involved in the task-based learning process. To operationalize the real world interview task as a type of adventurous learning from a sociocultural perspective, we consulted the definitions of a task in the TBL literature and adventure education.

It is believed that task-based interaction encourages students to co-construct meaning since “a learner’s language system develops through communicating meaningfully in the target language” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 168), which therefore creates learning opportunities for students to appropriate new knowledge and consolidate their existing knowledge (Watson Todd, 2001). At this

point, a related notion termed 'real world task' was adopted and implemented in the language curriculum in the current research context aiming to "provide opportunities for students to use their English in real world situations" (Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015, p. 97).

Therefore, in this study, we operationalize the real world interview task by putting more emphasis on its sociocultural rather than psycholinguistic orientation.

When it comes to pedagogy of adventure, according to Brown and Beames (2017, p. 9), a pedagogy of adventurous learning would:

- situate learning in authentic contexts
- encourage students to be agents of their learning
- encourage the mastery of skills and knowledge
- embrace uncertainty in process and outcome

Adventurous learning can be viewed as a dynamic, outdoor, experiential, pedagogical approach that integrates learning across formal in-class school curriculum and through out-of-class extracurricular, real-life activities. Teachers play a role as counsellors to guide students to actively take responsibility for planning and managing their tasks through meaningful ongoing engagement with appropriate challenges that builds on and extends their current skills/knowledge base. In doing so, students are expected to thrive in a constantly changing world.

The ultimate goal is using communicative real world tasks as an option to motivate students to meaningfully use a target language in real-life communications (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Singhasiri & Thepsiri, 2015). Robinson (2011) advocated a pedagogy of adventure which goes beyond "linearity, conformity and standardization" (p. 8) to embrace unpredictability and cultivate learners' "powers of creativity" (p. 5). In this sense, educational implications of carrying out the real world interview task are perceived to have elements of personal, social or psychological challenges as well as unanticipated learning outcomes in real world situations.

## 4 Research design and methods

### 4.1 Research design, the research setting and participants

This research adopts an exploratory case study approach (Yin, 2009) that enabled a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The current study was conducted in an academic listening and speaking course involving 23 first-year students of an international Chemical Engineering program at a renowned government university in Bangkok, Thailand. There were eleven pairs, and one student preferred to work individually. Being accepted into the international program, most of the students' English proficiency was good enough for daily communications.

### 4.2 Designing and implementing the real world interview task

As noted by Darasawang, Reinders, and Waters (2015), in Thai national culture, people show a predisposition towards social hierarchy, high 'collectivism', which prefers the group-oriented to the individual-based, avoids uncertainty, and emphasizes the values of social relationships and group harmony. As a result, most of the students appeared quiet or uncomfortable in speaking English in classroom activities or in public. Therefore, the real world task approach was adopted into the university curriculum.

Bearing in mind that the conceptualization of a real world task in this study is linked to a sociocultural perspective, and drawing on characteristics of real world talks reported by Singhasiri and Thepsiri (2015) and principles of adventurous learning pedagogy (Brown & Beames, 2017), '*A Real World Task: Interview a Professional*' was designed to encourage students to take opportunities outside the classroom and university to use language in other settings. It would be challenging but also exciting or fun for them as they were encouraged to take initiatives as learning agents to approach unknown people as a real audience with less preparation, to embrace uncertain processes as well as outcomes. The real world interview task with professionals in real world situations can be

embedded under adventurous learning with a sociocultural perspective as the main goal is to encourage students to use English through social interactions with people in real world situations.

Students were expected to work in pairs to find a professional outside the university and arrange an interview with them. The professionals could be either Thais or foreigners. The reason why they were not required to interview foreigners in particular was that Thai students are mostly shy, especially when they are supposed to speak English with foreigners. Additionally, the primary goal of this task was to build students' confidence in speaking English in real world situations (see Appendix A for task guidelines).

In week 10 (out of 15 weeks) in the first semester of 2018, students were assigned to do the real world interview task. Students received only guidance from the instructor (first researcher) in planning the interview questions in week 10. In-class activities like how to approach a stranger, how to start a conversation, how to write interview questions, and basic techniques about how to conduct an interview were run in the forms of brainstorming and role plays, together with the instructor's feedback and inputs. Towards the end of the session, each pair would have their interview proposal with planned questions. In this sense, there was an explicit teaching of relevant language they needed to do the task. Language skills like listening and speaking as well as the wording of questions could be "primarily learnt in class" in this study. Table 2 illustrates the stages and activities of the real world interview task implementation.

**Table 2. Real world interview task implementation stages and activities**

Stages	In-class activities	Out-of-class task
Planning (week 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Writing interview questions</li> <li>- Role play: How to start a conversation with a stranger</li> <li>- Creating an interview proposal (See Appendix B for an example of interview proposal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conducting the real world interview with a professional</li> <li>- Creating a PowerPoint presentation with a short video clip (at most 5 minutes long) highlighting the most interesting/funny moments of your interview</li> </ul>
Presenting (week 14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presenting interview videos and reflect on their experience of doing the real world task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uploading the videos on Edmodo and/or YouTube for real-life audience before presentation</li> </ul>
Written reflection (week 15)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Writing a 300-word reflection on their overall learning experience and learning outcomes from doing the real world task</li> <li>- Uploading the written report on class Edmodo page</li> </ul>

### **4.3 Data collection and research ethics**

To collect data, firstly, the students' stimulated-recall reflections during presentation were audio-recorded and students' written reflective reports were collected. For stimulated recall reflection, students would be asked what they believed they learned/gained from the most interesting/funny moments of their interviews with professionals highlighted in their 5-minute video clips. Students' spoken reflections were audio-recorded and transcribed. Then, the students were guided to write reflective reports to (1) compare their past experiences in classroom-based learning with the real world; (2) share encountered problems together with their solutions and interesting moments; (3) reflect on what they had learnt from doing the real world interview task. Both spoken and written reflections were collected only once. Obtained data included students' spoken reflections (9528 words) and written reflections (3816 words). Admittedly, the data size is relatively small, which undeniably affects the size of the corpus for the keyword analysis. However, the corpus is highly relevant, as it was obtained through the most appropriate student-based approach (Watson Todd,

2005) and used complementarily for keywords and to guide qualitative exploration for themes of learning outcomes from students' reflections.

With regard to research ethics, participants of this study were formally asked for their permission to audio-record their spoken reflections and to use their written reflections for the purpose of research. A consent form (see Appendix C) was used to obtain their permission at the planning stage of the task. Moreover, participants were required to ask their interviewees for permission to videotape the interview once the interviewee agreed to help them with the interview task, and to ask them to allow them to post the videos on Edmodo or YouTube. Meanwhile, we assured the participants that the data we collected from them would only be used for research purposes by protecting the participants' identities.

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

According to Biber, Connor, & Upton (2007), a corpus-based approach sequences a quantitative overview of the data before a qualitative analysis is conducted by generating a set of distinctive words to guide interpretation of the target texts. By using this method, keyword analysis is believed to play an important role in the initial analysis of linguistic clues for potential themes of learning outcomes in the data. Due to the small set of the target corpus, the results are not necessarily representative. That means, in the current study, this approach may not identify inclusive themes of learning outcomes. But it may help to generate distinctive keywords; otherwise, some may possibly go unnoticed if analyzed manually.

Quantitatively, a corpus-based approach was used to identify keywords from the students' spoken and written reflections. The purpose of identifying keywords was to guide theme exploration at the next stage of qualitative analysis. To prepare the students' stimulated reflection transcripts and written reflection texts for keyword analysis, redundancies such as turns without content, response tokens ("Yeah", "Okay", "Uhm" or "Well"), false starts ("Yeah", "Well just", "You know", "You see"), and unintelligible turns were deleted. Keywords means words that occur noticeably more frequently in the target corpus when compared to a normative corpus (Scott & Tribble, 2006). To identify keywords, firstly, the word list containing different words and their frequencies was generated by using AntConc (Anthony, 2018). The target corpus (the students' spoken reflections) was compared against KeyBNC (available at <http://crs2.kmutt.ac.th/Key-BNC>), a freeware program developed with the British National Corpus (BNC) which is designed to represent general English as the default reference corpus (Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2016). The frequency of every single word in the students' reflections was compared to its frequency in the BNC using a log-likelihood statistic to generate a list of keywords which occur significantly more frequently in the students' reflective reports than in general English. Any keywords with a log-likelihood (LL) value of greater than 120 were counted as keywords.

Qualitatively, guided by the generated keywords, together with Watson Todd's (2005) identified learning outcomes, we explored for both language and non-language outcomes from students' spoken and written reflections on their experience of doing the real world interview task. Watson Todd's (2005) student-based approach was adopted, as it fits the purpose of the current study to explore students' beliefs about what they learned from the real world interview task experience. Using the concordance produced by each of these keywords and Watson Todd's (2005) identified learning outcomes, two researchers worked independently to iteratively categorize them into themes. Once we had each coded for learning outcomes, we worked together to compare and discuss the coding. For example, 'question' and 'speaking' were coded as a theme of language skills as asking questions automatically involving speaking and listening skills. Next we focused on turns where we disagreed in order to reach consensus. In certain cases, the difference was a result of interpretations of the features. For instance, it was debated whether "communication skills" should be coded as "life skills" or "language skills". According to the Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programme (Evaluation Report, 2012), communication and interpersonal skills, together with decision-making and problem-solving as well as teamwork skills, are areas of life skills. Also, since students were



guided to strategically approach and start conversations with strangers at the planning stage, “communication strategies” was more suitable than “communication skills” in this study. Once we agreed on the coding, we used the results to revisit the data qualitatively to find out where and how the identified themes generated from the keywords and informed by Watson Todd’s (2005) list serve to explore students’ reported learning outcomes. Pull quotes which serve as exemplars were identified and agreed on. Data analysis at the qualitative stage focused on describing the instances of students’ reported learning outcomes, building explanations, and interpreting how a real world interview task approach can provide students learning opportunities in real world situations.

## 5 Findings

Results from students’ spoken and written reflections show that students not only practiced language skills but also gained life skills as well as knowledge of the real world and self. The identification of the keyword list provides the distinctive lexical items used in students’ spoken reflections. The top 14 keywords are presented in order of log-likelihood values in Table 3.

**Table 3. Top 14 keywords identified in students’ spoken reflections**

Rank	Word Type	Frequency	Frequency BNC	Log Likelihood
1	interview	482	5121	1721.18
2	we	706	350867	1084.93
3	English	263	23745	187.33
4	excited	183	710	183.40
5	interviewee	157	163	175.95
6	us	672	81029	157.68
7	KMUTT	25	0	156.47
8	speaking	46	9	151.08
9	occupation	189	2339	150.84
10	skills	289	6848	142.54
11	professional	312	11218	142.26
12	decided	421	14592	135.91
13	questions	365	14070	123.88
14	knowledge		804	120.91

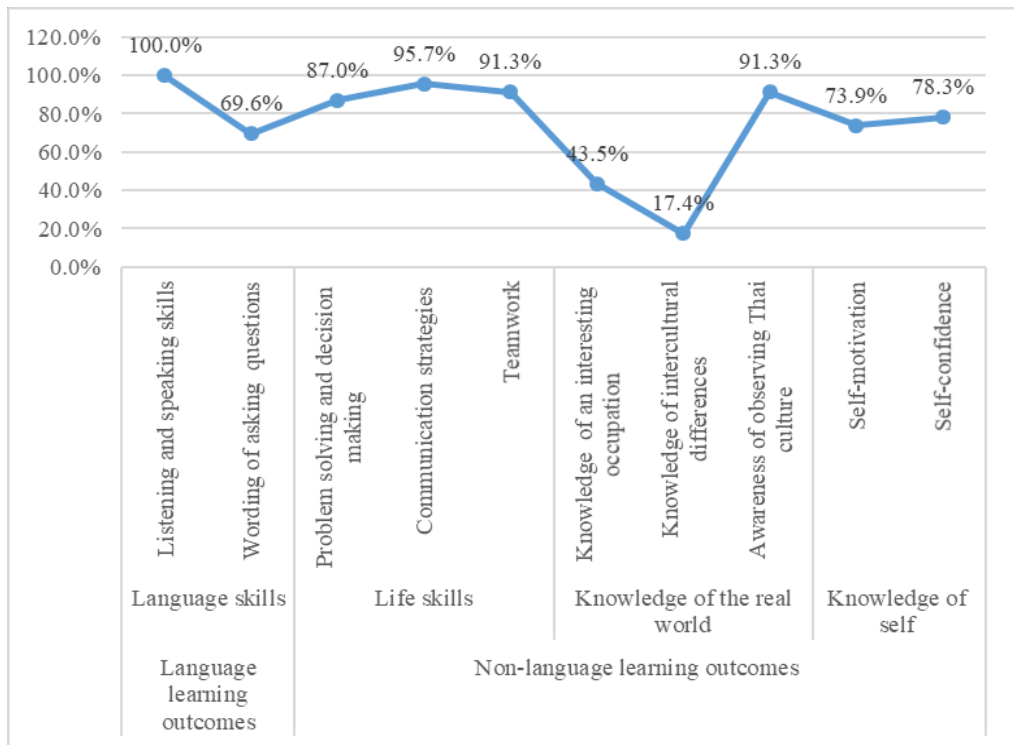
Taking a closer look at the identified keywords, words like ‘English’, ‘questions’ and ‘speaking’ were categorized as language skills, as they indicate the linguistic requirements for doing an interview. Pronouns like ‘we’ and ‘us’ can be associated with team work. The word ‘excited’ can be associated with students’ feelings about doing the interview task. Words like ‘decided’ and ‘choose’ were linked to ‘problem-solving’ and ‘decision-making’; ‘knowledge’, ‘occupation’ and ‘professional’ can be categorized as knowledge of the world or people. Then, using Watson Todd’s identified learning facets as further guidance in terms of 1) language or non-language, 2) anticipated or unanticipated, and 3) learned in classroom or from experience, themes and subthemes from students’ spoken and written reflections were coded into two categories:

- A. Language learning outcomes which included: a) learning and speaking skills, and b) wording for asking questions
- B. Non-language learning outcomes which included: a) life skills (including problem solving and decision making, communication strategies and teamwork); b) knowledge of the real

world (including knowledge of an interesting occupation, knowledge of intercultural differences and awareness of observing Thai culture; and c) knowledge of self (including self-motivation and self-confidence).

The findings show that apart from two anticipated facets of language learning outcomes which were reported to have been learnt either from the classroom or the real world, unanticipated non-learning outcomes were believed to have been learnt from the real world experience. Totally, 10 sub-themes falling into four-subcategories were examined in-depth (see Appendix D for detailed facets of learners' reported learning outcomes from doing the real world interview task).

Figure 1 visualizes the descriptive result of each theme. Themes of the students' reported learnt outcomes are illustrated by quoting the students' responses. Redundancies like repetitions, self-talks, and paralinguistic features were removed, and grammar errors were corrected, in order to provide readers a comprehensible context.



**Fig. 1. Facets of learners' reported learning outcomes**

The themes of reported learning outcomes will be presented according to the levels of percentages, namely, high, mediated, and low in terms of language or non-language outcomes, by explaining whether a reported learning outcome was anticipated or unanticipated, and whether it was learned in the classroom or from the experience.

## 5.1 Language learning outcomes

### 5.1.1 Listening and speaking skills

All students (100%) reported they practiced listening and speaking skills, which is the prime anticipated language objective of this task that they primarily learned in the classroom.

According to the task requirement, we must use English to do the interview. We had to use English to answer questions, do presentations and share our experience. So, we practiced speaking and listening skills a lot. (Cream and Tutor, interviewed professional: airline staff)

### 5.1.2 *Wording of questions*

16 out of 23 students reported (69.5%) that they learnt how to develop planned interview questions (anticipated) from the planning stage in class and unplanned questions from doing the real world interview (unanticipated).

We prepared eight planned questions before the interview, but I just managed to ask two questions and then the interviewee changed the topic talking about his homeland. I tried to come up with unplanned questions. It was challenging but it was a great experience practicing our speaking and listening skills without scripts, and we managed to carry on the interview. (Ohm and Frame, interviewed professional: freelance writer)

## 5.2 *Non-language learning outcomes*

Four non-language learning outcomes were identified in students' reflections such as life skills, knowledge of the real world, cultural knowledge, and self-knowledge.

### 5.2.1 *Life skills*

#### 5.2.1.1 *Problem solving and decision making*

87 percent of students reported that they encountered various problems as well as funny moments at each stage of doing the interview task. However, they managed to solve the problems and brought their learnt problem-solving and decision-making skills (unanticipated) through interacting with people in the real world situations.

We first approached a mechanical engineer but he had to go abroad and was not sure he could come back on time for our interview. We decided to interview a doctor assuming the doctor would be always in the hospital. However, we got the interview appointments postponed twice because the doctor had emergency cases from her patients. The third time she called us and fixed the time. We travelled far to the hospital and then a nurse came to tell us we had to wait for the doctor for around thirty minutes outside of her office. We were upset but we understood the doctor must be too busy as many patients waiting for her. We noticed several nurses were around and finally decided to interview a nurse. (Thea and Soft, interviewed professional: doctor)

We were running out of the time as we spent too much time on finding a professional we could interview. At the end, due to the time limitation, I interviewed my uncle, that made my interview boring and funny when I followed our planned questions asking about his name, age, and his education, and so on. It was funny and we could not help laughing at the beginning of the interview. However, I decided to ask him more questions for something I did not know about him and his profession as a senior policeman, and the interview became interesting. (Atlu and Arm, interviewed professional: senior policeman)

#### 5.2.1.2 *Communication strategies*

Almost 96 percent (95.7%) of students reported that they learnt how to approach and communicate strategically with their interviewees, such as talk politely and negotiate respectfully. Communication strategies were coded as life skills, as students could have chances to try out when they need to use what kind of communication strategies, with whom, in real world situations. As a result, communication strategies could be both anticipated or unanticipated, but were both largely learned from experience.

We interviewed a café bar owner. It was so noisy there that our first video was in very low quality. We asked the owner politely whether we could do the interview again. He said he was quite busy at that

evening time. We negotiated respectfully by proposing several time slots. Finally, he agreed to help us again to do another interview in the late afternoon. We gave him a small gift as a token of appreciation and thanked him for his time and kindness. He was very happy. (Aek and Pete, interviewed professional: café bar owner)

### **5.2.1.3 Teamwork**

Over 90 percent (91.3%) of students reported that they had learnt teamwork spirit and collaborative skills either from their peers and/or from their interviewees. Since students were assigned to do the real world interview in pairs, they were expected to learn how to work as a team (anticipated). However, when they got on the task in the real situations, they reported that they learned how to cope with some unexpected problems together (unanticipated) from their real experience.

The task needs to be done collaboratively. We worked out the interview proposal together, discussed and decided what professional what could interview, and went together to do interview. During the interview, I was responsible for asking questions and my friend was responsible for doing recording. However, when I finished asking the planned questions, then I got stuck. We stopped for a while and worked together to come up with the unplanned questions. The interviewee also helped us to compose questions. (Baipor and Pae, interviewed professional: football coach)

## **5.2.2 Knowledge of the real world**

### **5.2.2.1 Knowledge of an interesting occupation**

Just over 43 percent (43.5%) of students reported that although they searched for some information about the professional's job before they conducted the interview, they gained deeper knowledge about the professional's job after the interviews. At this point, both anticipated and unanticipated learning outcomes were reported to have been learnt from the experience.

We interviewed an English teacher with a doctoral degree and learnt about an English teacher's life. After teaching in the classroom, the teacher has to spend many hours preparing teaching materials and lesson plans, checking students' assignments and doing research. It is different from what we thought about a university teacher's life. (Jim and Few, interviewed professional: teacher of linguistics)

### **5.2.2.2 Knowledge of intercultural differences**

Only four out of 23 (17.4%) students reported that they interviewed foreigners and gained some unanticipated intercultural knowledge from their interview experience.

We interviewed a travel agent who is from Nigeria. At the end of the interview, she asked us to teach her how to Wai (Thai traditional way of greeting) properly to males and females. We acted out to her as a role play and in turn she taught us Nigerian traditions when greeting people. We learnt that the most common greeting is a handshake with a warm, welcoming smile. If meeting a person of great importance, men may place their left hand on the other person's shoulder while shaking hands, smiling and showing sincere pleasure at meeting the person. We told her in Thailand, traditionally, Thai people just Wai to each other without touching any parts of one's body. Especially, don't touch people's heads. (Kim and Toey, interviewed professional: travel agent manager from Nigeria)

### **5.2.2.3 Awareness of observing Thai culture**

Up to 90 percent (91.3%) of the students reported their awareness of observing Thai culture as an anticipated learned facet when interacting with Thai people.

We went to meet our interviewee who has a newborn baby girl. Although it was a weekend, we chose to wear our university uniforms and light makeup to show our respect to her. We brought a gift, a cute teddy bear, for her baby as according to the Thai culture, we should not go empty handed to visit a family with a new life. (Phim and Pat, interviewed professional: English teacher)

### 5.2.3 *Knowledge of self*

#### 5.2.3.1 *Self-motivation*

Nearly 74 percent (73.9%) of students reported that they felt self-motivated to project the best of themselves to do the interview task and improve their English for the future use. Being motivated to speak English well is noted as an unanticipated outcome and was gained from the real experience.

I tried to recite the planned questions before interview because I wanted to present myself confidently in front the interviewee. However, I got stuck after the second question since I found the third planned question was a bit long with some technical words about the interviewee's profession. At that time, I spoke broken English and the interviewee could not understand me. She asked me some questions, I didn't understand either. I felt bad and embarrassing. I should practice speaking and listening hard in the future. (Por and Bonus, interviewed professional: channel strategy marketing analyst)

#### 5.2.3.2 *Self-confidence*

More than 78 percent (78.3%) of students reported their increased confidence in using English in real world situations. This was an anticipated and expected learning outcome from real experience.

I gained some confidence in using English as I noticed the interviewee, who was a native speaker working as a tutor in a language center, did not care about my accent and my grammar mistakes. He tried to understand my questions and gave me good feedback on my planned questions. With his nice help, I managed to ask some meaningful unplanned questions. (Lukpud and Phim, interviewed professional: English tutor)

## 6 Discussion

Findings from students' spoken and written reflections show that students learnt from conducting a real world interview task with professionals as a real audience outside the classroom. They learnt and used language skills such as speaking and listening, and wording of questions, to acquire life skills such as communications strategies, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and team spirit, as well as knowledge of the real world such as people, places, cultures and themselves.

As far as the language learning outcomes are concerned, it is not surprising that practicing speaking and listening skills was rated 100 percent, as these two skills must be used for doing an interview. Similarly, the relatively low rate of wording questions (69.6%) can be attributed to both the insufficient instructional inputs and inadequate practice on how to handle unplanned questions due to the limited time allocation for the task.

When it comes to non-language learning outcomes, the high rates for communication strategies (95.7%) and teamwork skills (91.3%) can be explained by the nature of the task, as students worked collaboratively in pairs to contact and communicate with professionals as their target interviewees in order to fulfil their real world tasks. In addition, awareness of observing Thai culture (91.3%) was reported as a similarly highly-rated learnt outcome, because Thai society is strongly hierarchical with an emphasis on the concept of superiority. Parents and seniors are considered to be superior to their children and juniors in terms of age or working experience. However, two students said they do not always follow all Thai customs, as Bangkok is a cosmopolitan city welcoming people from different cultures in this global age. Furthermore, students reported relatively high rates for learning problem solving and decision making (87%), self-motivation (73.9%), and self-confidence (78.3%). These promising outcomes show that the real world interview task provided the students opportunities to learn how to plan the interview, approach people in the real situations, experience unpredictable difficulties, solve problems and make decisions, and know the real world and oneself. According to the students' reflections, when they were in the real world situations, they didn't feel constrained compared to their feeling in the classroom in front of teachers and peers. At the same time,

the real world situations provided more challenges for them to use English to improvise questions and responses. In that case, it is reasonable to see their reported self-motivation and self-confidence rated relatively high. However, some students did express their lack of confidence in using English with people in real life situations. One female student said she was so shy and unconfident of speaking English with her uncle, who is a military doctor, because she had never previously spoken in English in front of him.

It was striking that knowledge of an occupation of interest (43.5%) rated rather low as a reported non-language learning outcome. This is an unexpected result, as the students were expected to learn about an occupation of their interest. The reason for this was again the limited time at the end of the semester; a majority of students reported that they had difficulties in finding their ideal interviewees whose professions were of interest to them, and who could speak English and were willing to be video-recorded during the interview. Some students just interviewed any professional who could speak English at their convenience. And others simply interviewed their relatives on the last day before the presentation deadline.

Finally, it is not surprising to see that knowledge of cultural differences (17.4%) was reported as very low. These results can be explained once more by the fact that many students had time constraints and difficulties in sourcing ideal interviewees; a majority of them decided to interview Thai professionals living near the university.

The findings confirm Krahnke's (1987) notion of task-based learning activities characterized with non-instructional purposes of cognitive, cultural and life skills, Ellis's (2003) and Skehan's (2003) psycholinguistic and sociocultural motivations of using TBL, as well as Watson Todd's identified facets of what is reported to have been learnt from PBL in terms of language and non-language outcomes, and anticipated or unanticipated outcomes from the classroom or experience. Furthermore, the findings manifested the characteristics reported by Singhasiri and Thepsiri (2015) as students took opportunities to use language in real settings, interviewing professionals as a real audience only with less preparation (e.g. an interview proposal with nine planned questions, some basic guidance for conducting the interview at the planning stage). Without exception, students highlighted the fun moments as well as challenging situations in their spoken reflections. This is in accordance with the principles of adventurous learning pedagogy (Brown & Beames, 2017), as the real world interview task serves to situate learning in authentic contexts, by encouraging students to be agents of tasks and learn to take initiative in finding professionals and communicating with them, with uncertainties along the task process and outcomes. In this way, students are encouraged to acquire the mastery of linguistic skills like speaking and listening, and the wording of questions as well as constructing sociolinguistic knowledge through social interactions with people in real world situations. From the sociocultural perspective, this is embedded in Vygotsky's (1978) observation that social interaction serves to encourage individuals to co-construct meaning of the language in use, raise awareness and gain knowledge of national culture and foreign cultures, consolidate existing knowledge and appropriate new knowledge of the real world via out-of-classroom adventure learning, as Robinson (2011) also noted, which embraces unpredictability and empowers learners' creative learning ability.

## 7 Conclusion

Before making conclusions, awareness and caution are called upon for two points. Firstly, the learning outcomes reported in this study are based only on students' spoken reflections; the findings may not truly represent whether or not the students actually learnt what they reported themselves to have learned. Therefore, caution must be taken before generalizing the findings to any other real world tasks. However, as noted by Watson Todd (2005, p. 17), since "many of the learning outcomes were unseen", students' reports of their real world learning "provide a potentially more valid picture than could be obtained by other methods". Secondly, the methods of analyzing the students' reported learning outcomes were subjective and therefore unreliable, especially when it comes to frequency counting. However, this approach proved to be practical and feasible in detecting under-

lying patterns of students' reported perceptions and learning outcomes in the data. We can also reflect on the practice and the extent to which the students articulated the unambiguously intended theoretical purposes. The students in this study talked about how they fulfilled the real world interview with collective efforts and with the support of the interviewees. However, it is uncertain what individual learners learned from each stage of doing the task.

To conclude, the overall findings suggest that the real world interview task with professionals in real world situations can be embedded within adventurous learning with a sociocultural perspective, as the main goal was to encourage learners to use English in real world situations to learn and practice several skills (e.g. problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, as well as language) at different stages, build their confidence, gain sociocultural understanding, raise intercultural awareness, and learn communication skills through social interactions with people in real world situations.

## **8 Limitations and pedagogical implications**

It should be noted that EFL learners in this study were not required to interview only native speakers, as students were encouraged to explore different cultures and accents. However, due to the constraints of task time and students' limited social networks, only two pairs interviewed foreigners, who were not even native speakers. This could be one reason why most of the participants of this study interviewed Thai professionals instead of native English speakers, and why they said they learnt about Thai culture rather than the culture of native English speakers. Ideally, a real world task for EFL learners should include talking and listening to native speakers so that they not only use the target language, but also get some language inputs and sociolinguistic knowledge from native speakers.

It was undeniable that as a Thai cultural value (Darasawang, Reinders, & Waters, 2015), collectivism was observed in the current study, as students were allowed to work in pairs. It restrains Thai students' individualism, adventurous spirit and creativity in maximizing the learning outcomes, as most students primarily focused on the completion of the task as an assignment. At this point, Thai culture, with its strong emphasis on collectivism with a preference for the group-oriented rather than the individual-based, may stifle students' individualism and inhibit behavior likely to lead to social conflict.

It is recommended that if the real world tasks are implemented in Asian contexts, especially with students heavily influenced by collectivism, the real world tasks should encourage individualism in which students can use English in the real world for the best of their personal motivations to achieve desired learning outcomes, rather than simply meeting the teacher's prescribed task goals and requirements. It is also suggested that the future implementations and investigations of real world tasks should be context-wise and time-wise in order to maximize the learning outcomes. If the real world task can be modified in Thai or any other Asian contexts, teachers as the authority shall design the real world tasks by encouraging individualism to propose ideas and options for personalized tasks in which students can use English in the real world for the best of their desired learning outcomes rather than only meeting the prescribed task requirements. Also, after launching the real world task, there should be sufficient time for teachers to provide instructional input and feedback on the students' language skills, especially the wording of the interview questions, for better preparation and confidence before they leave the classroom context. To maximize their learning outcomes, students can also be guided to learn reflectively from transcribing their video-recordings regarding knowledge of the language.

In order to maximize learning outcomes and meet the far-reaching sociocultural and educational goals of adventurous learning, real world tasks can be individualized and contextualized to address students' progressive needs by promoting social learning that empowers students to learn actively and reflectively from the classroom as well as the real world contexts. In doing so, students will become motivated and confident communicators with language, cultural and life skills, all of which are advocated by Global Citizenship Education (2014) as soft skills needed for global citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Task guidelines

#### Real world Task: Interview a Professional

##### 1. Interview: Interview a professional (Pairs)

Arrange an interview with a professional in a field you are interested in, and/or related to your survey project. The professional must be someone not affiliated with KMUTT; you cannot interview teachers from this university. The professional can be: (1) someone who has worked one or more years in the field; (2) someone with a master's degree or higher in the field. For example, if the topic of your survey was: "The fitness habits of KMUTT students", some examples of people you could interview are:

- a) a personal trainer at Love Fitness
- b) a physician at a hospital
- c) someone with a master's degree in sport science

Your interview should be seven+ minute long, and you should video record it. You should use wh- questions and follow-up questions to gather information.

You can plan some of your questions, but you should also react to the professional and use unplanned questions. NOTE: Interviews must be in English! Even simple English is OK.

**2. Follow up: Presentation (Pairs)**

In a 10-minute presentation, you and your partner will reflect:

How you planned your interview?

What happened during your interview?

What you each learnt from planning and doing your interview?

\* Prepare a short video (no more than 5 minutes long) of highlights from your interview; most interesting/funny moments; you will show it at the end of your presentation.

***Appendix B: Interview a Professional – Proposal***

<p><b>Student Number (last 4 digits) and Nickname</b></p> <p>1. Nickname: _____ ID: _____</p> <p>2. Nickname: _____ ID: _____</p> <p>We wish to interview the following person:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Job title and Company (example: programmer at AIS): <u>Travel agent manager</u></p> <p>We wish to interview this person because: <u>We love travelling. It makes us cheerful and relaxed.</u></p> <p><b>We want to ask the following questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How often do you travel?</li> <li>2. How adventurous are you when you travel?</li> <li>3. What is your favorite place to go on vacation?</li> <li>4. What do you do to stay healthy when you travel?</li> <li>5. How do you calculate the money you can spend daily during your trip?</li> <li>6. Have you ever had an accident while travelling?</li> <li>7. What do you like or dislike about staying at hotels?</li> <li>8. What is your favorite thing about travelling?</li> </ol> <p>What is the most interesting tourist attraction you've traveled in your own country?</p>
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***Appendix C: Consent form***

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Participant Consent Form</b></p> <p><b>Title of research:</b> Exploring Thai EFL students' learning outcomes from a real world interview task: A sociocultural perspective</p> <p>This study explores Thai EFL students' reflections on their learning outcomes from doing a real world interview task. From a sociocultural perspective, we adopt adventurous learning as an alternative pedagogical approach encouraging students to gain broader social and educational learning experience and outcomes in real world situations.</p> <p>No data concerning your task performance will form part of this research. All data collected will be confidential. You may also withdraw your participation in this research at any time.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>I understand that I am being asked to participate in this study and that my participation is voluntary. I hereby consent to participate in the study.</p> <p>Signed: _____</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Researcher Guarantee</p>
--

Any data collected under the purposes of this study will only be used for research, unless explicit consent is obtained for using the data for other purposes. Confidentiality will be respected and no information that discloses the identity of the participant will be released or published without consent.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher's name: Dr. Wenwen Tian  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: wenwen.tian@mail.kmutt.ac.th

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher's name: Mr. Anthony French Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: tony\_kmutt@yahoo.com

#### *Appendix D: Facets of learner's reported learning outcomes*

Outcomes reported learnt		No. of students reporting learning	Language (L) or non-language (N)	Anticipated (A) or unanticipated (U)	Primarily learnt in class (C) or from experience (E)	
Language skills	Listening and speaking skills	23	L	A	C	
	Wording of asking questions	16	L	A/U	C/E	
Non-language learning outcomes	Life skills	Problem-solving and decision making	20	N	U	E
		Communication strategies	22	N	A/U	E
		Teamwork	21	N	A/U	E
	Knowledge of the real world	Knowledge of an occupation of interest	10	N	A/U	E
		Knowledge of intercultural differences	4	N	U	E
		Awareness of observing Thai culture	21	N	A	E
	Knowledge of self	Self-motivation	17	N	U	E
		Self-confidence	18	N	A	E