



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing literature concerning major areas related to the present study. The first part involves scholars and researchers' explanation of oral communication. The second and third parts provide an overview of the Project-based Learning Approach and project work instruction. The fourth part reviews the issues concerning needs analysis. The final part presents theories and concepts underlying curriculum development.

#### **Oral communication**

##### **Communicative competence**

Developing learners' oral communication abilities involves a process which is complicated and well-organized. However, to outline this process, the second language acquisition process and the factors that influence this learning need to be made clear. Studying how second or foreign languages (SL or FL) are learned and the factors that influence the process of learning, the SL and FL acquisition researchers try to explore how *communicative competence* develops in the learners.

The term "communicative competence" earns many definitions. Hymes (1972) proposes that one should study the knowledge that people have when they communicate or what is called 'communicative competence.' Lin (2004) explains that communicative competence entails whether a sentence is appropriate or not in the situation where that sentence is used, but linguistic competence determines whether a sentence is grammatical or not. While Lin points out that one needs to have grammatical knowledge and the appropriate use of the utterance when communicating, Hymes' more broadly defines communicative competence to cover every aspect of linguistics knowledge that needs to be learned in order to communicate effectively. In this sense, the aspects of knowledge required for making appropriate communication should be investigated in order to support and provide the SL and FL learners with appropriate aspects of knowledge necessary for producing such communication.

To Hymes, competence should describe the knowledge and ability of individuals for appropriate language use in the communicative events in which they find themselves in any particular speech community. The four factors of his communicative competence model reflect the speaker-hearer's *grammatical* (formally possible), *psycholinguistic* (implementationally feasible), *sociocultural* (contextually appropriate), and *de facto* (actually occurring) knowledge and ability for use. In short, Hymes emphasizes the psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and de facto dimensions of competence as well as the linguistic competence.

The four factors of the notion of communicative competence that Hymes proposes are quite similar to what Canale and Swain explain. They describe the communicative competence under the modular framework stating that communicative competence is composed of four components (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Swain, 1984). They are as follows:

a) *grammatical competence* including vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling, and linguistic semantics.

b) *sociolinguistic competence* addressing the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction.

c) *discourse competence* concerning the mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

d) *strategic competence* consisting of the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual situations or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence, as well as to enhance the effectiveness of communication.

Canale and Swain suggest that the *strategic competence*, which means the strategies used by interlocutors to cope with the problems arising in the course of communication, should be included as one of the factors of communicative competence. This competence is another dimension which is different from what Hymes points out. Canale and Swain emphasize that these strategies should be considered as an essential aspect of communicative competence, which is no less important than grammatical or sociolinguistic competence.

From the previous discussion, communicative competence may be defined as composed of linguistic competence, psycholinguistic competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. Savignon (1983) points out that communicative competence is *an interpersonal trait* that involves two or more persons negotiating meaning together, whether through oral or written communication. She considers the *social relationship* between the interlocutors as an important factor for communication. The central characteristics of competence in communication are associated with the following:

1. *the dynamic*, or interpersonal nature of communicative competence and its dependence on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who share to some degree the same symbolic system;

2. *its application* to both spoken and written language as well as to many other symbolic systems;

3. *the role of context* in determining a specific communicative competence, the infinite variety of situations in which communication takes place, and the dependence of success in a particular role on one's understanding of the context and on prior experience of a similar kind; and

4. *communicative competence* as a relative, not absolute, concept, one dependent on the cooperation of all participants, a situation which makes it reasonable to speak of degrees of communicative competence.

Savignon (1983) also points out that communicative competence may be difficult to measure as she sees it as a relative, not absolute, trait because it depends on the cooperation of all the participants; therefore, she prefers the term 'degrees of communicative competence' to measure one's communication ability. Her suggestion lends the idea that when measuring one's oral communication abilities, it is necessary to categorize these abilities into a number of levels and give the description of the abilities in each level clearly.

The definition and the description of the term 'communicative competence' and 'the communication ability' as mentioned earlier are similar to Bachman's explanation. Bachman (1990) suggests a model for a theoretical framework of the term '*communicative language ability*' that consists of three major components which are *language competence*, *strategic competence*, and *psychophysiological mechanisms*. He incorporates the 'knowledge of language'—grammatical competence, textual competence, illocutionary competence, and sociolinguistic

competence—with the mental capacities and physical mechanism by which that knowledge is implemented in communicative language use.

In this study, *communicative competence* concerns the knowledge of a person to appropriately integrate *linguistic competence* or the rules of language structure and the other three competencies relevant to language use which are *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence*, and *strategic competence* so as to be able to communicate accurately, appropriately, and effectively, e.g. the correct use of grammar and sound, the appropriate use of grammar form and meaning, and the correct and precise use of words in appropriate contexts. To develop communicative competence, SL or FL learners need interaction in *social contexts* to apply their linguistic knowledge with the appropriate use of the other three competencies in certain situations. As oral communication is one of the aspects of communication, SL or FL learners need the opportunities to interact in the social contexts in order to develop their oral communication competence. The oral communication ability will be explained in the following section.

### **Oral communication ability**

Speaking is quite similar to oral communication. Speaking is one of the four language skills and is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves receiving, processing, and producing information (Brown, 1994). It is the ability to accomplish linguistic tasks, which represent a variety of levels from beginner to superior. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs that can be ranged from very informal to very formal, which includes the speakers and the interlocutors, the purposes for speaking, and the physical environment, in short, the participants and the social contexts.

The definition proposed by Brown is similar to the definition of the term ‘communication’ proposed by Owen (1984) that communication is the process of exchanging information, thoughts, and ideas between speakers and hearers. However, Owen proposes the three terms to define ‘communication’ as an active process that involves *encoding*, *transmitting*, and *decoding* the intended message. From these two definitions, speaking seems to be a sub-skill of the term communication.

According to Omaggio (1986), the term oral proficiency refers to the ability to communicate verbally in a functional and accurate way in the target language. A high

degree of oral proficiency implies having the ability to apply the linguistic knowledge to new contexts and situations. All the definitions given by Brown, Owen, and Omaggio indicate that speaking skill and oral communication refer to the same skill because they are the same process of conveying meaning and information verbally. Thus, in this study, these two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the process that involves encoding, transmitting, and decoding the intended message verbally in a functional and accurate way in the target language.

Lund (1996) proposes the concept of 'communicative competence' and the acquisition of both native language and second language that communicative competence comprises all four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Actually, individuals develop communicative competence in their native language, oral proficiency, and later, writing proficiency. The acquisition of communicative competence in another language takes place on the basis that learners already have a native language. Thus, they are dealing with the development of two systems of two languages that interact with each other. Communicative competence is a competence that an individual has or is in the process of developing, either each skill or all of the four skills. To Lund, oral proficiency is a sub-skill of the communicative competence. Therefore, it can be concluded that 'speaking competence or oral proficiency' should refer to the ability to communicate using the speaking skill, or, 'oral communication skill.'

As previously mentioned, communicative competence concerns the knowledge of a person to appropriately integrate linguistic competence and the other three competences relevant to language use in order to communicate in all four skills, including speaking skill, effectively. Therefore, speaking competence, which is a sub-skill of the communicative competence, requires the learners not only to know how to produce the language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary, but also to understand the appropriateness of how to use certain language in each of the social interaction situations.

The previous discussions view oral communication in terms of the ability to use the linguistic knowledge in social contexts and situations. However, Cummins (1983) defines this term in another light. He explains that oral communication consists of 'language functions,' which means how individuals use the language to accomplish specific tasks and to express meaning. Language functions are classified into 'communicative language functions' and 'academic language functions.' The

former refers to the language used to express meaning in a routine social context, e.g. greeting or leave-taking, while the latter is the languages that are critical for success in grade-level classrooms, e.g. seeking information, informing, comparing, ordering, and classifying, etc.

Brown and Yule (1983) remark that language can be seen as having two functions: transferring information or *transactional function*, and establishing as well as maintaining social relationships as called *interactional function*. Interactional spoken language is characterized by the shifts of topic and short turns. The primary importance is not the accuracy and clarity of information, facts, or views, which are not normally questioned. In transactional spoken language, longer turns are the norms, and there is a clear topic. As the effective transference of information is the primary goal, interlocutors are actively engaged in the negotiation of meaning rather than trying to produce accurate language. Brown and Yule also suggest that interactional language is “listener oriented,” but transactional language is “message oriented” and that what the learners who intend to develop the communicative competence need more is the learning of both functions. However, the learners should develop more transactional language if they intend to improve their oral communication ability while still not neglecting the interactional functions.

Later, Cummins (1989) studied the oral language assessment of English language learners in school in order to define the components of the oral language. He points out that the oral language assessment aims to capture a student’s ability to communicate for both basic communicative and academic purposes. Communicative or conversational skills involve face-to-face interaction where meaning can be negotiated, while academic language proficiency is the ability to make complex meanings explicit.

In this study, the English oral communication ability is defined as the ability to appropriately use the English linguistic knowledge in social contexts and situations. The oral communication ability are composed of general oral communication ability and oral presentation ability. The general oral communication ability refers to the ability of speakers to communicate for basic communicative purposes which involve face-to-face interactions where meaning can be negotiated, including the ability of speakers to express their ideas clearly when communicating orally, to get the intended meaning across, and to deliver the intended message easily, smoothly, expressively, effectively, and fluently in the classroom discussions. The oral presentation ability, on

the other hand, refers to the ability of speakers to communicate for academic purposes to make complex meanings explicit, especially when giving oral presentations. For instance, the speaker is able to provide a skillful and effective presentation verbally.

### **How to develop oral communication**

As pointed out by Omaggio (1986), oral communication ability includes the ability to communicate verbally in a 'functional and accurate' way in the target language. Thus, a high degree of oral proficiency implies having the ability to apply the linguistic knowledge to new contexts and situations. Oral language acquisition is a natural process for first language (L1) learners who are young children. However, for second or foreign language learners who are older children or adults, it is important to study the factors affecting these learners' oral proficiency so as to design an appropriate oral communication instruction that promotes these factors to ensure the development of learners' oral communication ability.

As previously discussed, there are four components of communicative competence: grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociocultural competence. There are numerous research studies on this area. For example, Clouston (1997) reviews the research of Oxford carried out in 1989 on language learner strategies (LLS). He summarizes that Oxford distinguishes between direct LLS, which directly involve the subject matter, i.e. the second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learning, and indirect LLS, which do not directly involve the subject matter itself, but are essential to language learning nonetheless.

These two kinds of LLS are divided into LLS sub-groups. Oxford specifies three main types of direct LLS. *Memory strategies* aid in entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for communication. *Cognitive LLS* are used for forming and revising internal mental models and receiving and producing messages in the target language. *Compensation strategies* are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language. Oxford also describes three types of indirect LLS. *Metacognitive strategies* help learners exercise 'executive control' through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating their own learning. *Affective LLS* enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning. Finally, *social strategies* facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation.

The three types of social LLS are noted as asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. Examples of LLS are given as follows:

1. Asking questions: asking for clarification or verification and asking for correction.
2. Cooperating with others: cooperating with peers and cooperating with proficient users of the new language.
3. Empathizing with others: developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings.

In order to be a good speaker, one should integrate the linguistic knowledge with the sociolinguistic knowledge, the knowledge about discourse, and strategic knowledge to become successful in delivering the message orally. The implication in developing effective oral communicative language learners includes the training of the four elements of communicative competence by providing the learners with the opportunities to cooperate with others and with proficient users of the target language so that they will have more opportunities to be exposed to the new language, learn the linguistics knowledge and strategies, as well as use the language orally and appropriately in the social contexts.

In terms of language pedagogy, the approach to language learning and teaching has long been changed toward the Communicative Approach, which emphasizes learners' ability to use the language appropriately in specific situations. Simply put, it tries to make learners 'communicatively competent.' Learners should be able to select a particular kind of language and should know when, where, and with whom they should use it. Galloway (1993) explains that '*communicative language teaching*' refers to the teaching that makes use of *real-life situations* that necessitate communication as the teacher sets up situations that learners are likely to encounter in real life. Therefore, so as to develop the SL or FL learners' oral communication ability, which is one of the components necessary for learners' overall communication abilities, real-life situations should be provided to learners to stimulate them to produce the real-life language. This is one of the main challenges of the Communicative Approach; that is, to integrate the functions of a language, information retrieval, problem solving, and social exchange with the correct use of structures so as to enable learners to gradually develop and improve their oral communication ability appropriately.



## Oral language teaching approaches

When searching for a more effective teaching method to promote language learners' oral communication ability, it is deemed important to first review how some of the more prominent teaching approaches or methods have attempted to enhance, or neglected, in some cases, oral communication skills.

Richards (2005) points out that language teaching has been changed in terms of ideas about syllabus design and methodology in the last 50 years. According to Richards, the trends in language teaching within the last 50 years may conveniently be grouped into three phases:

Phase 1: Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

Phase 2: Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)

Phase 3: Current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the present)

Up to the late 1960s, language teaching followed the Grammar-Translation Method which was based on the techniques employed to teach classical languages. Also referred to as the formal or structural syllabus, the Grammar-Translation Method placed its focus on the study of the grammatical structures and rules of the target language. This approach was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin. However, it is still widely used in some countries as it requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers. One obvious reason is that tests of grammar rules and of translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored. As the focus of the method is on memorization of grammar, it is clearly difficult for learners to be able to orally communicate with other people as the practice of the oral communication skill is neglected in this method of teaching (Hopkins, 1981).

The Audiolingual Method is another language teaching method in which a new material is presented in form of a dialogue. Based on the principle that language learning is habit formation, the method fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and over-learning. Structures are sequenced and taught one at a time and structural patterns are taught by using repetitive drills. Little or no grammatical explanations are provided, and grammar is taught inductively. Skills are sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing and are developed in order. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context. In brief, the Audiolingual Method is teacher-centered and is designed to produce language users whose proficiency stems from some kind of habit formation. As such, many language educators point out that the

method does not deliver in terms of producing long-term communicative ability (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

One of the distinguished language teaching methods in this period is The Total Physical Response (TPR). Asher (1979) defines the TPR method as a method of language learning that combines information and skills through the use of the kinesthetic sensory system. This combination of skills allows learners to assimilate information and skills at a rapid rate. As a result, this success leads to a high degree of motivation. The basic tenet is the understanding of the spoken language before developing the skills of speaking. Imperatives are the main structures to transfer or communicate information. Learners are not forced to speak but are allowed an individual readiness period before spontaneously beginning to speak when they feel comfortable and confident in understanding and producing the utterances. A weakness of the TPR is the difficulty to employ it for the purpose of teaching abstract language as not all the things people do are “physical” and not all of people thinking are orientated around the visible physical universe (Richards, 2005).

Another teaching approach is The Silent Way. Gattegno (1972) refers to this as a learning approach that begins by using a set of colored rods and verbal commands in order to create simple linguistic situations that is under the complete control of the teacher. Learners respond to the gestures of the teacher and his/her mime, and learners practice oral skills through the manipulation of the rods. In order to maximize the learning potential of learners using The Silent Way, teachers would have to be prepared to invest quite heavily in materials. This is one of the drawbacks of The Silent Way (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The Functional-notional Approach (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983) refers to a method of language teaching which stresses a means of organizing a language syllabus. The emphasis is on breaking down the global concept of language into units of analysis in terms of communicative situations in which they are used. Notions are meaning elements that may be expressed through nouns, pronouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives, or adverbs. The use of particular notions depends on three major factors which are the functions, the elements in the situation, and the topic being discussed. Learners usually learn the oral language in the classroom setting, therefore, it might be difficult for them to transfer the knowledge gained from the classroom to appropriately use in the real-world situations outside of class.

Richards and Renandya (2002) point out that around 1970, the aforementioned teaching methods largely disappeared as the improvements in language teaching would come about through the adoption of new and improved teaching approaches and methods that incorporate breakthroughs in the understanding of language and how language learning takes place. According to Richards (2005), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the language teaching approach that prompts a rethinking of approaches to syllabus design and methodology. Briefly, CLT is learner-centered and emphasizes a focus on communicative functions and the use of authentic and real-life materials to develop learners' competence in the target language. As such, it appeals to many language teachers and educators who are ready to accept that communicative competence should be the goal of language teaching and grammar is no longer the starting point.

Between 1970s and 1990s, several new syllabus types were proposed by advocates of CLT, for example, skills-based syllabus. It focuses on the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and each skill is broken down into its component microskills. For instance, recognizing key words in conversations is an example of the microskills in listening skill. Learners develop their oral skills by practicing fluency activities based on interactive small-group work. This leads to the emergence of a fluency-first pedagogy (Brumfit, 1984) in which learners' grammar needs are determined on the basis of performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus. The skills-based syllabus has been criticized since in real life the skills often occur together and they should also be linked in teaching.

Later on, a functional syllabus was introduced. The syllabus is organized according to the functions learners should be able to carry out in English, such as expressing likes and dislikes, offering and accepting apologies, and introducing someone. Communicative competence is viewed as mastery of functions needed for communication across a wide range of situations. Vocabulary and grammar are then chosen according to the functions being taught. Accordingly, a sequence of activities is used to present and practice the function. Finally, learners need to produce the language they have learned. Functional syllabuses are often used as the basis for speaking and listening courses because learners are able to improve their oral fluency as well as accuracy as vocabulary and grammar are taught to them.

In late 1990s, the current CLT syllabus which specifies topics, functions, notions, situations, as well as grammar and vocabulary, was first proposed. According to Richards (2005), CLT today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways which are depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, and their learning goals. The core assumptions of current CLT focus on the following characteristics:

- the engagement of the learners in interaction and meaningful communication
- the use of several language skills in a holistic process of communication
- the development of learners' language learning depending on their needs and motivation
- the successful language learning involving the use of effective learning and communication strategies
- cooperative learning tasks
- the switched role of teachers to facilitators.

He also suggests the four approaches for CLT developed based on these assumptions, namely content-based instruction, task-based instruction, text-based instruction, and competency-based language teaching, each of which can be briefly described as follows:

1. Content-based Instruction (CBI) refers to the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teaching the language itself separately from the content being taught.

2. Task-based Instruction (TBI) is the specially designed instructional tasks that create the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, with a belief that language learning will result from doing these tasks.

3. Text-based Instruction, also known as a genre-based approach, sees communicative competence as involving the mastery of different types of texts, the term used here in a special sense to refer to the structured sequences of language that are used in specific contexts in specific ways.

4. Competency-based Language Teaching refers to an approach that has been widely used as the basis for the design of work-related and survival-oriented language

teaching programs for adults, aiming to teach learners the basic skills they need in order to prepare them for situations they commonly encounter in everyday life.

The four CLT approaches share the similarity in terms of the main objective of the language learning. It is the improvement of the language learners' communication ability. However, the focuses on how the syllabuses are constructed and developed are varied. competency-based instruction and text-based teaching focus on the outcomes of learning and use outcomes or products as the starting point in planning teaching, while content-based instruction focuses on the input to the learning process and stresses that the content or subject matter of teaching drives the whole language learning process. The last approach, task-based instruction, focuses more directly on instructional processes and advocates the use of specially designed instructional tasks as the basis of learning.

In improving learners' oral communication ability, it is possible to select a CLT approach that focuses either on the outcome or on the process of learning. With all related matters taken into careful consideration, it could be stated that the Project-based Learning Approach adopted in the present study combined content-based instruction and task-based instruction, with its focuses being placed on both the content and the process of learning, believing that this proposed method of instruction was appropriate for promoting oral communication skills of learners.

### **Research on oral communication**

In order to develop learners' oral proficiency successfully, communicative teachers should relate the principles of the communicative approach to any teaching methodologies such as the learner-centered approach and cooperative learning approach which provide the learners with the opportunities to integrate linguistic knowledge through oral communication activities. Numerous research has been carried out in an attempt to implement and improve oral communication abilities of language learners; some are worth discussing here.

Duan and Gu (2004) examined the effectiveness of an English for Technical Communication (ETC) program, which was a novel development of English for specific purposes on the demand of the society, to improve students' ability in communicating technical information and to investigate the importance of the four language skills viewed by the undergraduate students in China. According to the

study findings, 96% of the graduates found it was necessary to study the ETC course as a way to improve their technical communication, which proves the feasibility of ETC teaching. The results also showed that the ETC training significantly developed students' skills in technical reading and writing, but not so much in speaking. Although the researchers were aware of all four skills in teaching and learning, developing speaking skill seemed to be the most difficult task for instructional implication. Thus, it is recommended that pedagogies should be improved and mutual communication should be increased so as to raise students' ability in oral English. This research leads to the conclusion that teaching a language means teaching learners to communicate in all skills, and speaking skill is now considered more important especially for the undergraduate students who prefer to improve their oral communication skill rather the other three skills.

As China has become one of the countries where international business and investment are significantly booming, the demand for learning English among the Chinese is rising. More English courses are provided in the higher education level, and research attempting to prove the effectiveness of the course and the instructional methods has been carried out. For example, Yang (1988) conducted research which aimed at improving the oral English communicative competence of post-graduate students in science and technology at Lanzhou Seismological Institute by using seminar techniques. In the first stage, essential knowledge of English structures was provided, special topics were chosen, and related reading materials were assigned to the students. After careful preparation, discussion was done in class with questioning and debating together. The findings revealed that the seminar technique helped students learn foreign cultures, science and technology, as well as the foreign language. The seminar approach also seemed especially helpful for these post-graduate students in giving scope to their special skills and interests, developing their intelligence, cultivating their creative ability, and providing a variety of practical communicative situations and a relaxed environment. The seminars helped them lose their communication apprehension, reinforced their learning of oral English skills, and evaluated their own success as well. The research concludes that seminar, a technique which includes discussion, questioning, and debating activities in real-life situations, can be one of the successful activities to promote learners' oral communication ability and the seminar technique can also be used as an activity in the process of developing projects.

Apart from research to investigate the effectiveness of instructional approaches and methods, the bilingual programs, English programs, and immersion programs which emphasize content learning in the target language have also gained popularity since many parents consider that the ability to use another language, especially English, will benefit their children's further professions. However, learning in the schools where native English speakers teach does not mean that the children will easily or automatically achieve what their parents expect. According to Stein (1999), teachers who are able to teach in a second language and who are implicit language teachers are needed for teaching these courses. That is, the immersion teachers are not only responsible for the child's knowledge and achievement in content areas such as math and science, but for the child's second language development as well. Simply put, the emphasis is that learning English is not simply about what contents are taught and who teaches those contents, but how the contents are implemented. Stein suggests the idea that English can be taught through other subjects and that it will be more effective if learners can select the topics that they are interested in. Stein's suggestion lends support to the project-based instruction as the learners and teachers are able to discuss the topics of their interest in any subject areas at the beginning stage of the project. To do this, learners are expected to have higher motivation in learning since they are able to make their own decision in choosing the topics, and this is an important principle of the learner-centered approach. In addition, as learners and teachers discuss the topic, the learners' oral communication ability will improve through their engagement in this authentic task. In conclusion, one of the benefits derived from learning via project-based instruction is the improvement of the learners' oral communication.

In his article entitled 'Achieving High Oral Proficiency Levels in English as a Second Language,' Abe (2000) reports that most ESL speakers have to figure out how to reach the near-native communicative goal by themselves. The researcher interviewed six near-native English speakers and found out some commonalities among them in terms of the contribution of grammar, the way they overcame some of the difficult issues in ESL, and the communication systems they achieved. It was also found that careful imitation of native speaker speech and its continuation were key factors and that it was important to accept input as children did rather than depending on grammatical knowledge or reading. In addition, guessing was found to play a very important role in oral communication. Therefore, it is possible to point out that apart

from imitation, learning through guessing in the course of natural conversation fosters learners' proficiency. This research lends supported to the idea that 'real-life' situations provide learners with the opportunities to practice 'real-life' communication in which guessing is one of the situations that learners can encounter and need to master.

In addition to the aforementioned research studies which were carried out in China and the USA and which offer useful suggestions and guidelines on the development of learners' oral communication, a few studies on the same topic were carried out in the Thai context. For example, Sudrung (2004) developed a project-based process curriculum to enhance English language skills for upper secondary school students. The sample was 27 M.4 students of Navamintarachinutit Horwang Nonthaburi School who were enrolled in an English course in the second semester of the academic year 2004. This curriculum was implemented for a total of 18 weeks. Students were divided into five groups to complete five projects; that is, one group of students did only one project throughout 18 weeks. The five projects were the Theater of Dream Project focusing on developing writing skills, the Koh Kred Project focusing on developing reading skills, the Magic Project focusing on developing speaking skills, the Popular Music of Teen Vote Project focusing on developing listening skills, and the Survey of Tourist Places in Bangkok focusing on developing speaking skills. Before its implementation, the curriculum was evaluated by experts, and the results showed that this curriculum had high quality. At the end of the study, it was discovered that the students' English abilities increased significantly at the .05 level. Sudrung, therefore, concludes that the project-based curriculum is an effective instruction to improve learners' English ability as evidenced by the increase in students' English proficiency scores. Also, the students indicated a high level of satisfaction with this curriculum which proved the success of the instruction.

Another research study by Naknoi (2007) was recently conducted to investigate the effect of project work on Mattayomsuksa 2 students' ability in using English for communication. The instruments used were a pre-test and post-test of English, project work lessons, a task evaluation form, a questionnaire on students' satisfaction toward studying English, and an assertive behavior questionnaire in using English for communication. It was revealed that students' English ability in the project work learning experiment was at an average level. It was significantly increased at the .01 level through the project work.



Many research studies in Thailand often investigated the use of project work in science subjects, e.g. projects on environment. For instance, Pinyakit (2538) compared Mattayom three students' learning achievement in science by using the science project work and traditional teacher's manual and Saipantong (2535) studied students' learning achievement in science and their problem solving ability by using the science project work. Although there were some studies to investigate the effect of project work on students' English for oral communication, all of them were carried out with high school students. The investigation of the effectiveness of the oral communication course using the Project-based Learning Approach to enhance students' oral presentation ability and general oral communication ability through a series of projects has not been conducted in Thailand before, especially with the undergraduate students in a university context.

The aforementioned research studies carried out in both foreign and Thai contexts explored the students' English oral communication needs, the situations and conditions in which oral communication was appropriately developed, and the use of project work to promote students' oral communication ability. Their findings confirm the claim that learning a language does not simply mean studying grammar, reading, and writing. Rather, practicing oral communication skill may be as important as, if not more important than, the other three skills. This is because oral skill is more likely to be needed and used in learners' future careers and further studies. Besides, these studies yield support to the belief that the teaching methodologies that provide language learners with the opportunities to engage in real-life communication situations like discussion, negotiation for meaning, guessing, or conducting a seminar are appropriate for fostering their oral communication ability. Last but not least, the teaching methodologies which employ the cooperative learning and learner-centered principles that encourage group work and learners' involvement in decision making are crucial for the improvement of learners' oral communication ability.

### **Project-based Learning Approach**

Anthony (1963) explains that the term "approach" refers to theories or principles about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching. The three theoretical views of language and the nature of language proficiency that inform the current approaches

are structural view which emphasizes grammatical knowledge, functional view which puts an emphasis on the language functions, and interactional view which focuses on communication. Richards and Rodgers (2001) define the term 'approach' as the theoretical principles which concern a model of language competence, the basic features of linguistic organization and language use, the central processes of learning, and the conditions believed to promote successful language learning. From these two explanations, an approach refers to theoretical principles of the nature of language and language learning that result in successful language learners.

The Project-based Learning Approach is a learning approach which has recently earned its popularity in language teaching and has been described by a number of language educators. Generally defined, the Project-based Learning Approach is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop (Moss and Van Duzer, 1998).

Nunan (2004) explains that the Project-based Learning Approach or Project-based Learning is similar to the Task-based Language Learning Approach, but the differences is that Project-based Learning is a collection of sequenced and integrated tasks that all add up to a final product, while a Task-based Approach entails learners to accomplish the tasks in order to learn a language. These two approaches are developed under the theoretical principles of Communicative Language Learning Approach, analytical approach, and experiential learning approach. To Nunan, the communicative language learning principle views a language as a tool for communication rather than as sets of linguistic components to be memorized. However, Nunan points out that 'focus on form' is necessary in making meaning and needs to be incorporated into the learning tasks. The second approach, the analytical approach, refers to the principle that learners will be presented with holistic chunks of language and are then required to analyze them or break them down into their constituent parts. The third principle is the experiential learning principle which emphasizes engaging learners into the intermediate personal experience or learning by doing. As learners are actively involved in learning, using the language as a means to complete the tasks and reflecting on sequences of tasks, their intellectual grows.

The explanation of the principles underlying the Project-based Learning Approach by Nunan is similar to what Kim (2001) proposes. Kim explains that the Project-based Learning Approach is developed under social constructivism and cooperative learning theories. The principle underlying the approach is that if learners

want to succeed as a team, they will encourage their teammates to progress the tasks and will help one another to do so. Learners will work together to learn and will be responsible for their peers' learning as well because cooperative learning incorporates group work instruction. Kim also points out that instruction is sometimes adapted to suit learners' individual needs. This idea is one of the principles of the learner-centered approach, which is considered to be important for fostering learners' language proficiency. In the learner-centered approach, learners are actively involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught (Nunan, 1988). The learner-centered approach is a principle underlying the Project-based Learning Approach as one of the main purposes of doing a project is encouraging learners to get involved in making decision in all steps of working.

In short, a number of approaches, namely social constructivism, the learner-centered approach, and the cooperative learning approach underlie the Project-based Learning Approach. Put another way, the Project-based Learning Approach emphasizes working cooperatively in teams to accomplish a series of tasks which requires learners to be involved in decision making throughout the process of learning and working. As previously mentioned, the Project-based Learning Approach incorporates various language teaching and learning approaches. The more prominent ones are reviewed below.

### **1. Constructivism and social constructivism theories**

A major concept in the theoretical framework of Bruner (1966) is that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their current or past knowledge. Learners play an important role by selecting and transforming information, constructing hypotheses, and making decisions, and they need to rely on a cognitive structure in order to do so. Cognitive structures, such as a schema or mental model, provide meaning and organization to experiences and allow learners to go beyond the information that is given. Later, Bruner (1990) has expanded his theoretical framework to include the social and cultural aspects of learning.

According to Bruner's notion of constructivism, teacher needs to encourage learners to discover principles by themselves. The teacher and learners should engage in an active dialog. The task of the teacher is to manipulate information to be learned

into a format which is appropriate to learners' current state of understanding. As such, a curriculum should be organized in a spiral manner so that learners can continually build upon what they have already learned.

The constructivism theory is the basic principle of the social constructivism theory. *Social constructivism* is a variety of *cognitive constructivism* that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky, as a cognitivist, develops social constructivism but denies the assumption made by cognitivists such as Piaget and Perry that it is impossible to separate learning from its social context. He argues that all cognitive functions originate in, and must be explained as, products of *social interactions* and that learning is not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners, but it is the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community. He emphasizes that the role of language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality and that knowledge is not simply constructed but it is co-constructed.

According to Kim (2001), social constructivism emphasizes the importance of *culture* and *context* in understanding which are going on in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. This perspective is associated with the theories of Vygotsky's and Bruner's constructivism theories. Both Vygotsky and Kim consider the social context and culture important in the learning process.

In terms of language learning, Vygotsky points out the essential social nature of language, as it is called a collaborative process. He also suggests the two developmental levels: first, *the level of actual development*, the level of development that the learner has already reached, and the level at which the learner is capable of solving problems independently, and second, *the level of potential development* known as the "zone of proximal development (ZPD)," the level of development that the learner is capable of reaching under the guidance of teachers or in *cooperation* with peers. The social constructivism theory leads to the cooperative learning theories.

Cooperative learning lends support to communicative language learning when the term *scaffolding* emerged from an examination of parent and child talk (Bruner 1986). Scaffolding is based on a view of human development and learning as a social rather than an individual, cognitive process, and a view of language as elaborately blended in social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky 1978).

Scaffolding is used widely nowadays as a metaphor for the temporary supporting structures that assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities (Hammond, 2001). Initially, scaffolding provides high levels of support, and gradually reduces this support as learners move towards independent control of the learning task or text. Scaffolding also enables learners to achieve higher levels of performance than they could achieve on their own. In the field of language learning, scaffolding activities typically focus on making explicit the demands and learning expectations which are embedded in texts and tasks required for successful school learning, and on providing opportunities for joint or co-construction of knowledge between teachers and students (Gibbons, 2002).

That said, scaffolded learning refers to various forms of support or assistance provided to learners that enable them to complete a task or to solve a problem that would not have been possible without such support. Scaffolding can be given through hinting, questioning, prompting, probing, simplifying, or other similar learning supports. The notion derived from cooperative learning or learning from peers by using group work tasks and learning in the real-life situations offer learners with opportunities to learn from the experts or more capable peers. In particular, scaffolded learning provides the opportunities for learners with low oral communication ability to discuss, ask questions, seek advice, search for assistance, and interact with the more capable English speakers. In doing so, learners with low oral communication ability are expected to develop and improve their oral communication skills beyond their current level. Meanwhile, the ones with high oral communication ability are able to exercise their oral communication ability, as well as their intellectuality, by giving assistance to the less able learners while still being able to seek for needed assistance from the more able English speakers such as teachers or consult multiple resources available to them. As such, it is assumed that the oral communication instruction in which there is ample opportunity for scaffolded learning to take place will help learners develop and further enhance their oral communication ability, as anticipated in this study

Another issue which receives as much attention from social constructivists is motivation, which can be both *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* in nature. In traditional instruction, motivation is rarely taken into account as teachers pay more attention to the teaching of language skills rather than promoting learners' interest in their learning. According to Day and Bamford (1998), motivation refers to what make

people do or not do something. When applied to language learning, motivation makes learners decide how they are going to approach their learning tasks and how much involvement in the learning tasks they should have. Because learning is a social interaction, learners are partially motivated by rewards provided by the knowledge community as what they intend to convey is understood, which is seen as extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, learning also depends on learners' internal drive to understand and promote the learning process as the learners themselves actively construct the knowledge, as this is regarded as intrinsic motivation.

Kim (2001) suggests that there are four general perspectives that facilitate the learning within a framework of social constructivism:

1. *Cognitive tools perspective*: Cognitive tools perspective focuses on the learning of cognitive skills and strategies. Learners engage in the social learning activities, which are based on social constructivism, that involve hands-on project-based methods and utilization of discipline-based cognitive tools. Working in groups under cooperative learning basis, learners produce a product and then impose meaning on it through the social learning process.

2. *Idea-based social constructivism*: This perspective sets education's priority on important concepts in the various disciplines such as part-whole relations in mathematics, photosynthesis in science, and point of view in literature. These "big ideas" expand learner vision and become important foundations for learners' thinking and construction of social meaning.

3. *Pragmatic or emergent approach*: Social constructivists with this perspective assert that the implementation of social constructivism in class should be emergent as the need arises. Its proponents that hold the knowledge, meaning, and understanding of the world can be addressed in the classroom from both the view of individual learner and the collective view of the whole class.

4. *Transactional or situated cognitive perspectives*: This perspective focuses on the relationship between the people and their environment. Humans are a part of the constructed environment including social relationships; the environment is in turn one of the characteristics that constitute the individual. When a mind operates, its owner is interacting with the environment. Therefore, if the environment and social relationships among group members change, the tasks of each individual also change. Learning thus should not take place in isolation from the environment.

These four general perspectives are translated into language learning and teaching concepts as the cognitive tools perspective leads to the project-based learning method since learners engage in the social learning activities, e.g. discussion for the topics of the projects and collecting data from various sources including talking with people for the information that is useful for their projects. Furthermore, social constructivism suggests learning from parts to whole which is one of the ideas of project-based learning that requires learners to gather information from many sources, like putting the tiny pieces of the jigsaw puzzles into a complete picture, and then integrate them into the useful information for their projects. The pragmatic approach points out the needs of learners for learning and for using the language in negotiating meaning in all stages of doing the projects. To do this, learners have to use the language in the real-life situations in order to fulfill their needs. Finally, the transactional cognitive perspectives suggest learning from others. As learners work in group and in association with other people, they construct their knowledge from interacting with the environment which includes group members, teachers, and other people whom they get involved with. Interacting with the environment and reflecting on what has been experienced, learners develop themselves further in terms of the language and the working skills. These four perspectives of social constructivism are the basic components of the Project-based Language Learning and Teaching Approach.

## **2. Cooperative Learning**

The theory and practice of cooperative learning is based on the principle that learners can learn from each other (Oxford, 1990). Cooperative learning means working together to accomplish shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). It refers primarily to small groups of learners working together. Oxford, as well as Johnson and Johnson, suggests that cooperative learning offers more advantages over competition and individualized learning in a wide array of learning tasks. Compared to competitive or individual work, cooperation leads to higher group and individual achievement, higher-quality reasoning strategies, more frequent transfer of these from the group to individual members, more metacognition, and more new ideas and solutions to problems. From this explanation, the cooperative learning theory puts an emphasis on the social dimension for improving learners in various aspects.

In addition, Reagan, Fox, and Bleich (1994) point out that cooperation is an underlying social orientation in which the participants share a general sense of purpose and orientation and a discernible set of roles. Cooperative learning encourages learners to work together to accomplish the shared goals, while each of the individual learners earns more than the achievement of that goals, but also the individual progresses. Johnson and Johnson (1989) further explain that cooperative learning cannot be obtained by simply putting learners in groups and letting them go. There are at least three conditions that lead to a successful cooperation. Firstly, learners must see themselves as positively interdependent so that they take a personal responsibility for working to achieve group goals. Secondly, learners must engage in considerable face-to-face interaction in which they help one another, share resources, give constructive feedback to one another, challenge other members' reasoning and ideas, keep an open mind, act in a trustworthy manner, and promote a feeling of safety to reduce anxiety of all members. Lastly, effective group process skills are necessary for the first two to prevail. In fact, group skills are never mastered unless learners continually reflect on their interactions and evaluate their cooperative work. While group work aims at achieving common goals, each member fulfills a particular role or accomplishes an individual task. Then, both group and individual improvement will be developed simultaneously.

In terms of teaching, teachers who have adopted cooperative learning as a structure for classroom learning should provide the situations in which learners learn the real concepts of this learning theory and the three conditions that are important if they intend to develop their highest capacity of learning from each other. When the learners work cooperatively, they also interact among themselves. Interaction and cooperation among learners complement the affective factors in foreign language learning. Self-esteem, empathy, reduced anxiety, and improved attitude and motivation are all fostered when learners are engaged in genuine interaction (Shumin, 1997). This real-life communication in the target language is intrinsically interesting and useful to learners because they have to talk purposefully in order to get the information they want, negotiate, reach decisions, or solve problems.

Cooperative learning offers learners with many benefits; however, there are some weaknesses. Making members of the group responsible for one another's learning can be a problem if some learners or even one learner is not responsible for their own work. The result is that the more responsible learners do most of the work.



The other weakness concerns learners' styles. Some learners prefer learning in group, while others benefit more from learning alone. Hence, it is recommended that the teacher negotiate more with learners to determine how they learn best and apply these ideas to the way the class is structured.

In summary, the language learning and teaching syllabus which is based on the social and affective sides of learning along with the intellectual sides and which is based on the concept of learning cooperatively should be designed to foster learners' communicative competence in which oral communication is its sub-skill. This learning syllabus should emphasize the concept that learners will have to be responsible for their decision-making as this helps promote this learning theory. Working cooperatively with peers to achieve a goal is the main concept of project work. This means that this learning theory is the fundamental component of the Project-based Learning Approach. The effective communication and cooperation are essential to become successful learners in this project-based learning process. Through dialogues and examination of different perspectives while working on projects, learners become knowledgeable, strategic, self-determined, and empathetic. Moreover, involving learners in real-world tasks and linking new information to prior knowledge requires effective communication and cooperation among teachers, learners, and others. Learners will reap tremendous benefits from working in groups whether it is the whole class or a learning group within the class. As they accomplish the goal of the project, they simultaneously do accomplish the meaningful and effective communication.

As the main aim of this study is to improve learners' oral proficiency, learners need effective oral communication to make progress in their projects. Learners will reap benefits from working cooperatively in groups as face-to-face communication in all stages provides learners with opportunities to improve their oral communication as well as to achieve the group goals. Besides, reflection on their own performances in the last stage of the process leads to the improvement of the individual language and their personal skills.

### **3. Learner-centered Approach**

As previously discussed, one of the underlying concepts of cooperative learning is learners' being responsible for their own working in order to achieve the

group goals. Thus, learners are viewed as the most important component in the process of learning and teaching. Nunan (1988) explains the concept of the learner-centered approach that learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught and that learners play the major roles in making decision about topics and contents which they consider important and relevant to their needs that should be learned as well as how those contents should be taught.

Jurmo (1989) points out that there are different levels of learner participation. However, what is aimed for is the highest level of participation, in which learners have considerable control of and responsibility for classroom activities. Learners' involvement in the learning process is one of the components of the learner-centered approach.

The learner-centered approach involves cooperation between teachers and learners. Through ongoing dialogues, they determine the contents or topics of the curriculum and the learning objectives. This approach focuses on learners' real-life needs. Learners are responsible for setting personal and realistic goals and determining the steps toward achieving those goals. It also emphasizes flexibility. As learners progress and reflect on their learning, contents and goals may be modified. The final focus is placed on learners' self-assessment, which helps them develop further knowledge and skills.

Although the learner-centered approach lends many advantages to language learning instruction, it is not without any drawbacks. The most obviously perceived drawback concerns the teachers' styles of teaching. In the learner-centered approach, teachers need to change their role from the persons who transfer knowledge to facilitators of the learning process. Evidently, traditional teachers may not fit well with the new role in this approach of learning.

The Project-based Learning Approach can be developed by employing the learner-centered approach using learners' background knowledge and experiences and their linguistic knowledge as a starting point for further development. It also emphasizes a cooperative effort between the teacher and learners, characterized by ongoing dialogues to determine the project topics, project objectives, and the specific outcomes. Working cooperatively with peers, learners will be enabled to achieve the goals of the project as well as their own development in terms of language proficiency, working skills, and strategies for learning.

In conclusion, the discussion above explains how the Project-based Learning Approach can enhance learners' oral communication ability. With all of the factors, conditions, and processes involved in the Project-based Learning Approach, learners are assumed to have better chances of successfully improving their oral communication ability.

## **Project Work**

### **Definition of project work**

A variety of terms such as 'project work' (Fried-Booth, 1986), 'project-based learning' (Peterson & Myer, 1995), 'project approach' (Diffily, 1996), and 'project-based instruction' (Nunan, 2004) are used to refer to a pedagogical technique in language learning and teaching developed from the Project-based Learning Approach. As the language teaching profession has long been developed, many linguists, language educators, researchers, and scholars have used different terms to explain the similar concepts in this area of study. For example, Brown (1994) prefers the term 'pedagogy' to 'method' as the first term suggests the dynamic interplay between teachers, learners, and instructional materials during the process of teaching and learning, while the second implies a static set of procedures (Richards & Renandya, 2002). This is because more theories have been explored and investigated to suit the new situations of learning including in the area of language learning and teaching.

Many language educators have defined this language pedagogical technique differently. Fried-Booth (1986), one of the most well-known experts in this field, explains that 'project work' refers to a language learning method that helps bridge the gap between the language that learners are taught and the language they in fact acquire. Project work requires the cooperation among learners as a motivating factor focusing on interpersonal relationships and on the involvement and development of the individual. Haines (1989), another language educator who investigates how to utilize project work in a language classroom, explains that project work refers to multi-skill activities which focus on a theme of interest rather than specific language tasks. In project work, learners work together to achieve a common purpose and a concrete outcome (e.g. a brochure, a written report, a bulletin board display, a video, an article for a school newspaper, etc.). He also points out that project work is an

approach of learning which complements mainstream methods and which can be used with almost all levels, ages, and abilities of learners. From his point of view, project work is a method of learning that can be attached to any syllabi to maximize learners' capacity of learning in every subject. However, it seems that more investigation is needed to find out whether this instruction can be used as an individual course to better learners' ability in the area of language learning, particularly in the development of oral communication skills.

In brief, project work is a language learning instruction whose principles are based on the Project-based Learning Approach. In this study, project work refers to the highly motivating instructional model that intends to engage learners in authentic and real-world tasks to improve their English oral communication ability. The series of group activities or tasks involve language and content learning through planning, researching, analyzing and synthesizing data, and presenting the final product. To collect the data, learners are expected to interact with the sources of information orally, as well as meaningfully, including interviewing some English speaker tourists, surveying some foreigners' opinions, and contacting and inviting native speakers as guest speakers at a seminar. The oral performance projects will be selected as the means to report learners' final products.

### **Characteristics of project work**

Although the concepts of the 'project work' or 'project-based instruction' (PBI) that have been described by Fried-Booth, (1986), Haines (1989), Sheppard and Stoller (1995), Eyring (1997), and Moss and Van-Duzer (1998) share a number of similarities in terms of the approaches of learning that underlie this instruction and in terms of the development of an individual learner, the procedures of conducting projects might be slightly different. However, among these perspectives, project work shares the following characteristics:

1. Project work is learner-centered. As it focuses on content learning rather than on a specific language target, learners will have a significant voice in selecting the content areas or topics of interest and the nature of the projects that they do. To do so, learners will have more motivation, more responsibility, and more active engagement in their learning.

2. Project work is also learner-centered because learners are actively engaged in 'doing' things rather than in 'learning about' something. Learners are required to produce a product, presentation, or performance. The teacher plays a role in offering support and guidance throughout the process. In doing so, learners will play a major role in the learning process, while the teacher's roles are reduced to those of facilitators or supports.

3. Project work is cooperative rather than competitive since, most of the time, learners work in small groups to complete a project. They discuss, share ideas and resources, help one another collect and analyze the information gathered from many sources, and finally prepare for the presentation of the final product. All these processes require cooperation among learners to complete the tasks and to reach the goals of the project.

4. Project work requires multiple stages of development to be successful in producing a final product. The collections of the sequenced and integrated tasks are added up to a final project which can be in a written form or in an oral mode, e.g. an oral presentation, a role-play, a report, a stage performance, a poster, etc.

5. Project work provides learners with the opportunities to practice the four language skills in real-life situations and real-world tasks. The real goal of project work in language education is to create authentic contexts for language learners to achieve comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output by interacting and communicating with each other, as well as with the speakers of the target language with information, documents, or texts in English in real-life situations. These situations are unlike the pedagogical ones designed to create the opportunities for learners to practice the target language in the classrooms. On the other hand, these authentic situations arise along the process of developing a project as learners have to use or to contact the authentic language for the real purposes of communication, e.g. in the first stage of doing a project when the learners discuss and select the topic of interest that all learners agree upon.

6. Project work is not only motivating but also empowering and challenging. As learners take control of their own learning, they are able to work not only inside the classroom but also outside. They can spend their free time working over the periods scheduled at school. Furthermore, learners are given an authentic scenario, placed within it, and then allowed to determine the path out. The value of this type of environment results in building learners' self-confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy,

as well as in improving their language skills, content learning, and cognitive knowledge.

### **Types of projects**

As mentioned earlier, although the concepts of project work which are described by many language educators share a lot of similarities, project work can take on diverse configurations (Stoller, 1997). The curricular objectives, course expectations, learners' proficiency levels, learners' interests, or availability of materials can be the causes for the differences among the projects. Moreover, projects can differ in data collection techniques and sources of information. Stoller classifies projects in terms of data collection techniques and sources of information into five types:

1. Research projects necessitate the gathering of information through library research;
2. Text projects involve encounters with texts;
3. Correspondence projects require communication with individuals to solicit information;
4. Survey projects entail creating a survey instrument and then collecting and analyzing data from informants; and
5. Encounter projects result in face-to-face contact with guest speakers or individuals outside the classroom.

Projects may also differ in the ways that information is reported. Stoller divides the projects in terms of how the information is reported into the following three groups:

1. Production projects involve the creation of bulletin-board displays, videos, radio programs, poster sessions, brochures, travel itineraries, or the written reports;
2. Performance projects can be stage debates, oral presentations, theatrical performances, food fairs, or fashion shows; and
3. Organizational projects entail the planning or formation of a club, conversation tables, or conversation-partner programs.

As the overall objective of this English oral communication course was to improve learners' oral communication, the design of projects in terms of the method to collect data and the means to present learners' final product was extremely

important as these two conditions led to the amount of opportunities that learners would have to contact and use the target language in the authentic situations. Therefore, the types of the project in terms of the data collection techniques and sources of information that would best provide learners with the opportunities to use the target language to collect data were the encounter projects, the survey projects, and the correspondence projects. Besides, the performance projects would be selected as the means to report the learners' final products.

In conclusion, the encounter projects, the survey projects, and the correspondence projects would be used in this study as they allow learners to interact with the sources of information orally and meaningfully as learners deal with the comprehensible input and produce the comprehensible output in the real-life situations. The more the learners communicate in the target language, the better oral communication they should master. As suggested by Swain (1985), besides the comprehensible input, learners must have opportunities to produce the language if they are to become fluent speakers. Moreover, Shumin (1997) emphasizes that effective interactive activities should be manipulative, meaningful, and communicative, involving learners in using English for a variety of communicative purposes. These three methods to collect data provide the effective, interactive, and authentic activities that allow learners to communicate purposefully. With these kinds of data collection activities, learners' oral communication is expected to improve accordingly.

In presenting a final performance project, learners have to practice oral presentation skills, voice projection, pronunciation, organization of ideas, as well as body language, e.g. eye contact. Besides, they have to try to hypothesize the questions they would be asked after their presentation (Stoller, 1997). To do so, learners will improve their oral communication accurately and fluently. In addition, Shumin (1997) suggests the four characters of the effective oral communication activities that they should be based on authentic or naturalistic source materials, enable learners to manipulate and practice specific features of the language, allow learners to rehearse communicative skills they need in the real world, and activate psycholinguistic processes of learning. The learners who engage in doing projects and practice for the final performance projects will therefore have a chance to practice all of these four characters of the activities that lead to the improvement of their oral

communication ability. Therefore, the performance project was used in this study as the method of presenting the final products.

### **Steps in developing a project**

As mentioned in the previous section, project work needs multiple stages of development in producing the final product or end product. While Fried-Booth (1986) proposes eight steps to develop a project in a language classroom, Stoller (1997) suggests ten steps. The two procedures are similar in terms of the main activities, e.g. the discussion for the theme or topic of the project or the preparation for the language needed for subsequent steps. However, Stoller includes the last step which is the learners' evaluation of their project that is not mentioned in Fried-Booth's. This step of the process is considered important as it is worthwhile to ask learners to evaluate their peer and reflect on the experience they have gained. Learners can reflect on the language, the problems, the content, the steps, and the effectiveness of their learning and their product. Learners can be asked how they might do differently the next time or what suggestions they have for future project work endeavors. It is believed that through these reflective activities, learners will realize how much they have learned. Besides, the teacher benefits from learners' insights regarding the development of the future classroom projects.

In Stoller's proposed steps in developing a project, the steps in which the instructor prepares his or her learners for the language that will be used in the subsequent steps is included. This is to assure that the learners will be well-equipped with the necessary skills they need to develop further regardless of the limitation of the language. However, preparing learners for the language demands seems to be not so easy if different groups of learners possess a variety of language needs. However, it is worth noting that this did not seem to be a problem for the English oral communication course developed in this study as the students who attended this course had already practiced the language and the skills in the three foundation English courses which provided them with the linguistic knowledge, specifically grammatical structures, and trained them on the functional languages, such as inviting people for a special occasion, giving directions, and asking for help. The problem they had were mainly concerned with how to deliver an effective oral presentation. However, when other problems arose during the process of developing a project, the



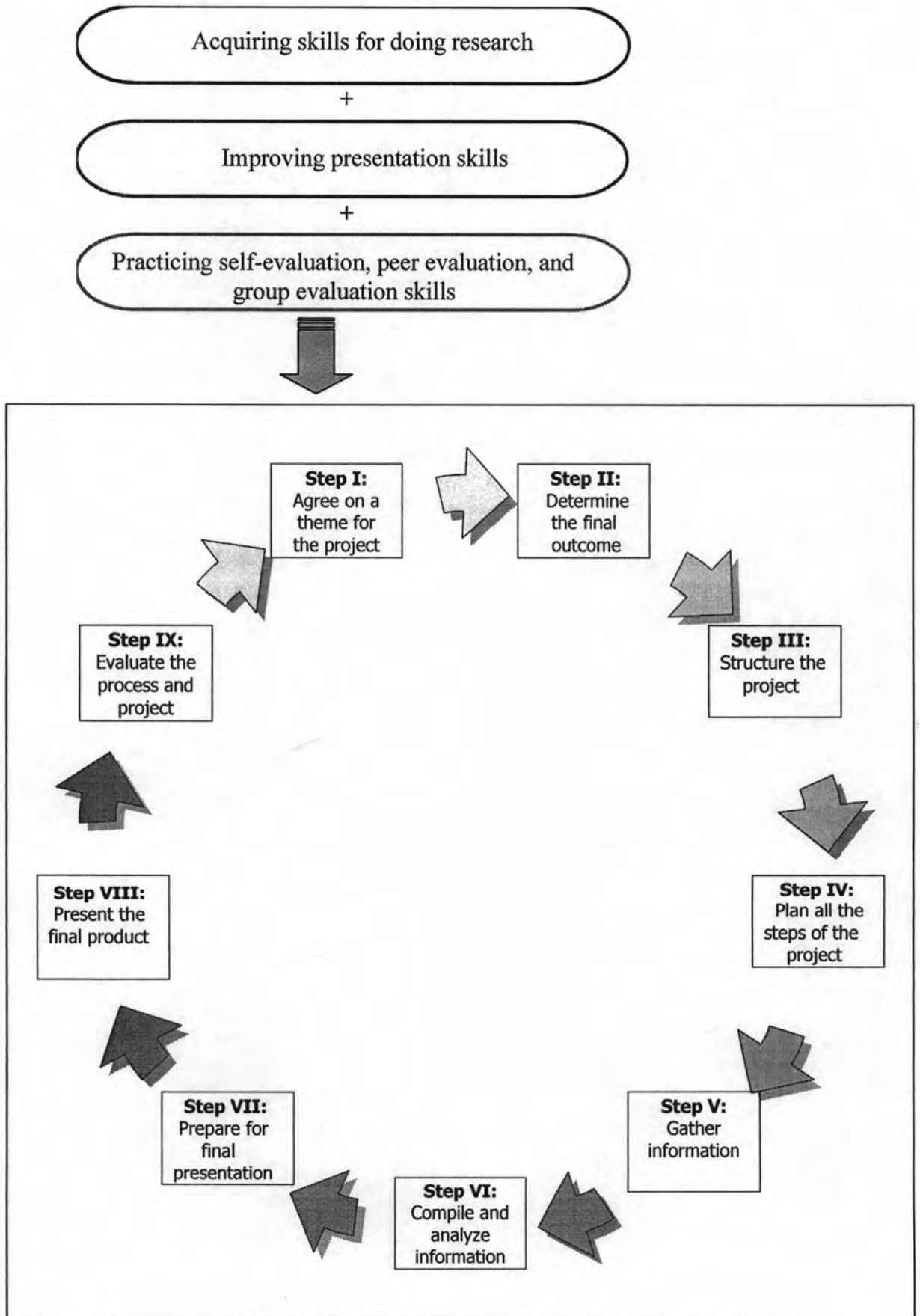
teacher could give support as needed. The steps involved in the development of a project proposed by Stoller (1997) and Fried-Booth (1986) are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Stoller's steps in developing a project (1997)	Fried-Booth's steps in developing a project (1986)
<div data-bbox="283 584 683 667" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step I:</b> Agree on a theme for the project</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 692 683 775" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step II:</b> Determine the final outcome</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 813 683 896" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step III:</b> Structure the project</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 913 683 1032" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step IV:</b> Prepare learners for the language demands of Step V</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1059 683 1160" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step V:</b> Gather information</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1184 683 1303" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step VI:</b> Prepare learners for the language demands of Step VII</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1330 683 1449" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step VII:</b> Compile and analyze information</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1476 683 1594" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step VIII:</b> Prepare learners for the language demands of Step IX</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1621 683 1722" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step IX:</b> Present the final product</p> </div> <div data-bbox="283 1749 683 1832" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Step X:</b> Evaluate the project</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="840 584 1315 696" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>1. The stimulus</b> Learners having an initial discussion of topics</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 730 1315 882" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>2. The definition of the project objectives</b> Learners defining objectives of the project</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 916 1315 1016" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>3. Practice of language skills</b> Learners discussing, reading, or writing</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 1050 1315 1182" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>4. The design of written materials</b> Learners designing the format of the written materials</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 1216 1315 1339" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>5. Group activities</b> Learners working together in small groups</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 1373 1315 1496" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>6. Collecting information</b> Learners gathering information inside and outside the classroom</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 1529 1315 1675" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>7. Organization of materials</b> Learners developing the end-product and organizing information</p> </div> <div data-bbox="840 1709 1315 1809" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>8. Final presentation</b> Learners presenting of the end-product</p> </div>

**Figure 1: A comparison of the steps in developing a project as proposed by Stoller (1997) and Fried-Booth (1986)**

In this study, the English oral communication course was developed based on the Project-based Learning Approach with an aim to improve learners' oral communication skill. The course was offered to KU students who had already practiced the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the intermediate level in the three required foundation English courses and who preferred to develop their oral communication skills as they may lack the opportunities to practice their known linguistic knowledge in real-life situations. This English oral communication course may suit these learners' needs well since project work can function as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real-life situations outside of class (Fried-Booth, 1997).

In the present study, the students who took the English oral communication course developed based on the Project-based Learning Approach were provided with the opportunities to recycle their known knowledge gained from the English classrooms for use in the real-world situations. Besides, they practiced the skills that were necessary for doing projects. The instruction was composed of two phases. In the first phase, students' were equipped with the tools that were necessary for searching for information, the knowledge of how to evaluate themselves, and the preparation for language requirements. Then, students learned how to develop a project in small groups in the second phase. The project work process which was developed based on the ideas suggested by Fried-Booth (1986) and Stoller (1997) is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: The project work process adapted from Stoller (1997) and Fried-Booth (1986)**

During the first phase, students learned how to use online-dictionary websites effectively as well as how to search for information from the high potential computer networks as these skills were necessary for them in seeking for the information or knowledge they needed to do their projects. This study aimed at improving learners' oral communication skills, and they had to present their final products in the oral mode. Thus, the skills that the students needed in this stage were good presentation skills which were a component of the oral communication ability. To prepare students for this presentation, the workshop that provided them with a series of tasks to practice delivering an effective presentation was arranged. As they practiced these skills, they learned how to evaluate and to reflect on their own performances so that they could improve themselves in all dimensions that were required to complete a project. To be more specific, they practiced how to evaluate themselves, their peers, and the group process of learning and the end product.

In the second phase, students learned the nine steps of developing a project: agreeing on a theme for the project, determining the final outcome, structuring the project, planning all the steps of the project in details, gathering information, compiling and analyzing information, preparing for final presentation, presenting the final product, and evaluating the process and project. The framework presented above was only the guideline used in developing the course and the students' abilities. The necessity and the intensity of practicing any skills depended upon the students' needs which had been made clear in the needs analysis conducted earlier. The description of the nine steps is presented in the following section.

### **How project work enhances oral communication ability**

As it is known that project-based instruction or project work requires multiple stages of development to succeed in producing a final product, the collection of the sequenced and integrated tasks which are classified into nine steps will then be added up to a final product. Through these nine steps of developing a project used in the present study, students were provided with the opportunity to improve their language skills, content learning, and cognitive knowledge, particularly their oral communication. The nine steps of developing a project were as follows:

### **1. Agreeing on a theme for the project**

From the needs analysis that was conducted before developing this English oral communication course, students were asked to choose five topics that they were interested in the most. These five topics were introduced to the students, and all of them had discussed and chosen the topic for in-depth investigation. In doing so, students had a chance to create a sense of shared perspectives and commitment. While shaping the topic for the project together, the teacher was able to bring in the reading texts, videos, discussions, presentations, or other materials so that the students had enough resources to talk about and to brainstorm. By pooling resources, information, ideas, and relevant experiences, students were able to narrow the scope of the debate and finally select the theme or topic that was of special interest to the class and that could be researched further. In this stage, students discussed, negotiated for a better result, explained, and convinced their peers as well as the teacher, and they might read, watch, and listen to audio-visual aids if there was any.

### **2. Determining the final outcome**

Selecting a topic is the first stage of project work. In other words, it is the starting point. Then, the second step is to entail defining an end product or the final outcome which will be in the form of a performance project. In the present study, this meant students again discussed, negotiated for a better result, explained, and convinced their peers as well as the teacher what the end product would look like. Before making a decision, students and the teacher considered the nature of the project, its objectives, and the most appropriate means to collect the data. Students could make their selection from a variety of options, e.g. doing a survey or interviewing people, and finally they would come up with the selection of the end product. In brief, in this stage, students discussed, negotiated for a better choice, explained, and convinced their peers as well as the teacher about the final outcome of the project.

### **3. Structuring the project**

After determining the topic and the final product; that is, after the students chose what to do, then they had to go on describing the 'body' of the project or defining how to continue the project step by step. This was done in small groups or with the whole class. At this stage, students considered the following questions: "What information is needed to complete the project?," "How can that information be obtained?," "How will the information be gathered, compiled, and analyzed?," and "What time line will learners follow to get from the starting point to the end point?" Again, students discussed, brainstormed, negotiated, and drew a conclusion. They might need to take notes and make a schedule to describe what and how to do the rest of the project briefly.

### **4. Planning all the steps of the project in details**

After the students completed the rough draft and scheduled the time, they had to describe all the work clearly in details. Then, each of the students would be assigned the roles and responsibilities depending on his or her willingness and potential to do the task that he or she was keen on. Students discussed, brainstormed, negotiated, made decision, as well as described the work in details.

### **5. Gathering information**

Students then went on to gathering information and organizing it so that the others on their team could make use and make sense of it. What they had to do most at this stage was exploring and searching for the useful information, and they would then go on gathering the information or data by means of a face-to-face contact with people, doing surveys, interviewing, and communicating by using the target language. At this stage, it can be said that the students used the language in the real-world contexts and real-life situations.

## **6. Compiling and analyzing information**

After successfully gathering the information, the students in this study had to digest, analyze, and categorize the information. Then, they would determine what and how to present their final performance product. At this stage, the students interacted within their group to process and summarize the information. With the assistance of a variety of organizational techniques, they prepared the visual aids that helped clarify the information that they wanted to deliver to the audience.

## **7. Preparing for final presentation**

At this point in the development of the project, students had to rehearse for their final oral presentation. They practiced oral presentation skills, voice projection, pronunciation, organization of ideas, as well as body language including eye contact. They had to try to anticipate the questions that their classmates might ask them after their presentation, and they might try to answer those questions in advance. To do so, the students improved their oral communication accurately and fluently as they would receive feedback from their teacher and their peers. This helped them reflect on their own performance, and they would improve themselves for the final presentation. The students also worked to finalize visual displays and to make sure they were grammatically correct and easily interpretable by the audience.

## **8. Presenting the final product**

When they reached this stage, the students were now ready to present the final outcome of their projects. Their friends and the teacher would be the audience and would evaluate their performance including giving suggestions for further improvement.

## **9. Evaluating the process and project**

As the students and the teacher viewed the presentation of the final product and evaluated their friends, the students were encouraged to evaluate themselves. They could reflect on the language that they had mastered to complete the project, the

language that was problematic, the content that they had learned about, the steps that they had followed to complete the project, and the effectiveness of their final product. The students were also asked how they might perform differently the next time or what suggestions they had for future project work. Through these reflective activities, the students realized how much they had learned, how well they were able to improve, and how they would improve their own and their peers' performance the next time around.

It is generally believed that the stages when learners generate greater negotiation of meaning at various junctures, stages 1-4, will result in the oral language development. As learners engage in negotiation both in the whole class discussion and in small groups, they will receive comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output and explore the new hypothesis or take risks in producing the language from their previously known linguistic knowledge. In doing so, the learners master the oral communication ability (Skehan, 1998).

In addition, according to the principle of cooperative learning, a group of learners should contain heterogeneous mixed abilities. With this arrangement, high-proficiency learners will help low-proficiency ones to learn cooperatively, and they will develop further together. This is also in line with the concept of scaffolding previously discussed that the more able learners can assist the weaker ones in the learning process. The concept of cooperative learning and scaffolding can be seen in all the nine steps of developing a project. This means that the learners will improve their oral communication by working cooperatively with their peers, especially in small groups, when more proficient learners can help less proficient learners carry on their work along every stage of doing the project.

Scaffolding in this study focused on how the tasks would be organized and how learners would be arranged in a fixed small group according to their oral ability levels to facilitate learners' language learning. A series of scaffolding tasks would be designed to practice learners' oral presentation skills starting from the easy to the more complicated ones. The students also received oral feedbacks so that they would be able to see their weaknesses and strengths. Therefore, most of the feedbacks would be positive, while some of the negative feedbacks would be pointed out so that the students would realize their weaknesses for further improvement.

A series of tasks would be given to learners, starting from the easy task in the first stage to develop their self-confidence and oral communication ability in the



whole class discussions. Then, learners would participate in a more serious small group discussion. Later on, they would have the opportunities to interact with the English speakers in the real-world situations to collect the data.

The other type of scaffolding is the method to arrange mix-ability students in their working group according to the levels of learners' oral ability. The sociocultural theory of learning is associated with Vygotsky's ideas about learning in a social context and the construct of Zone of Proximal Development that is used to explain the difference between the level of independence problem solving performance of the low ability students and the more capable peers. Each study group was composed of one low oral ability learner, two average oral ability learners, and one high oral ability learner. The goal of such an arrangement was to create the opportunities for the low oral ability students to learn from the guidance of the more capable peers.

In summary, project work instruction offer learners with the opportunities to learn from the scaffolding tasks that help them increase their self-confidence, linguistic and non-linguistic abilities, as well as their oral communication ability. It also creates the possibilities that mix-ability learners are able to learn from each other which promotes not only their oral ability but also their working skills.

### **Research on project work**

Studies have been conducted to explore how project work impacts the classroom and how learners develop projects in many subject areas including language learning. A large number of research studies employed a qualitative research methodology which consists of records written by teachers who have attempted to implement various aspects of project work within their classrooms. It is noteworthy that a large number of qualitative studies also concern how project-based learning affects learners' motivation, whereas more recent research explores use of other forms of instructional media such as a computer to develop learners' proficiency through projects.

With and through projects, learners do all kinds of communication, socially and academically. L. Hosie (1999) studied how language would be used in context with a project. With Lego blocks, she set out to conduct a communication activity called 'Tall Towers' to see if communication and descriptive word usage would improve if learners were actively involved in a project. The activity combined

communication, public speaking, and architecture into a building activity. The learners were learning without knowing they were learning. Without forcing the use of the target language, the Tall Towers allowed the language to develop naturally, and students showed an increased confidence in describing what they did by speaking aloud and journalizing. The research findings suggested that learners' oral skill was developed naturally.

Based on this research, it can be assumed that learners' oral communication will develop if the activity is designed appropriately to elicit their real-life communicative language. In the aforementioned study, the students tried to construct their 'Tall Towers' while working cooperatively, interacting with their peers, and preparing for their presentation. In the process, they had a chance to develop their oral communication. The findings led to the conclusion that students had more confidence and willingness to interact in the target language, and they were more fluent as a result.

Dhieb-Henia (1999) investigated science students' fluency through project work and explored the guidelines for designing project work in an ESP context. The simulated situation was set up and advertised in the faculty's scientific magazine that a competition for the best project for research on a biology subject of the year was being organized and the best proposal was supposed to be selected by a special committee. After viewing the advertisement, students worked in small groups to design their proposals and to prepare for their oral presentation. Before the final presentation, students needed to think, exchange ideas, negotiate, write, correct, and record the first presentation with a camera. Then, they viewed this videotaped playback and commented on their own and other students' performance. Later, they reflected on what they had learned from the comments and improved their presentation for the final presentation day. The finding was that project work provided more positive than negative results on learners' oral proficiency.

This is just one of the examples of research on project work activities, with which the researcher was able to prove that the design of the project task was a key to learners' success in improving their oral proficiency. With well-prepared lessons and support when in need, students enjoyed learning to use the language rather than to memorize language rules. The process in which students videotaped their presentation and played what was recorded for their own evaluation and their peers' evaluation helped them reflect on their own performance and give suggestions to others for

improvement. Such findings yield support to the conclusion that learners can improve not only the fluency of the oral communication ability but also the accuracy of the language with project work.

Furthermore, project work is a learning method which is effective for developing not only learners' language but also many content areas of instruction such as science or geography. It also works efficiently when accompanied with modern technology and equipment like computers.

For example, Gu (2002) studied how web-based project learning affected English foreign language learners. This study addressed the question of whether web-based project learning can enhance EFL learners' motivation, improve their learning performance, and initiate their active roles in electronic literacy development in a Chinese EFL context. A case study of a cross-cultural collaborative online writing project conducted in the fall semester of 1999 between 20 Chinese students at Suzhou University and 28 American students at Southern Polytechnic State University of Georgia formed the basis for discussion. Supported by descriptive data, the researcher concluded that web-based learning projects did have potential in motivating EFL learners and brought about positive learning effects. The students' performances on writing were very successful as seen from the number of words written in the reports. The results of this study also showed that students had positive perceptions of their web-based project work experience.

Besides, previous studies seem to highlight an important finding that learners' language skills including their oral skill are developed when they work cooperatively in small groups to achieve the group goal, as evidenced in the 'Tall Tower' project and the five projects conducted in Thailand by Sudrung (2004), or when they negotiate for meaning inside and outside the classroom environment as seen in the biology project proposal and in the study of Kavaliauskiene (2004) which explored the most suitable content-based instructional approach that promoted learners' language competence through thematically organized tasks.

As mentioned earlier, some research studies in the Thai context which investigated the effectiveness of the project work instruction on Thai EFL learners indicated that the students were able to improve their English proficiency through the interaction tasks by working cooperatively in groups. For example, Sudrung (2004) studied the effectiveness of the project-based curriculum to enhance English language skills of upper secondary school students. It was revealed that the students' English

abilities increased significantly. Another research study was recently conducted by Naknoi (2007) to investigate the effect of project work learning on high school students' English communication. The findings showed that the students' English communication ability increased after learning by using project work. Both of the studies lend support to the claim that project work provides the learners with opportunities to interact with their peers and English speakers to accomplish a series of tasks in the real-life situations.

In addition, most of the aforementioned studies suggest that project work is one of the language instructions which enable learners to develop their language proficiency by using their linguistic knowledge to communicate in the real-life communication or discussion and in the simulated situations which are close to their real-world situations. Project work therefore yields support to the belief that effective communication and cooperative learning during the activities foster learners' English oral communication ability. However, a few research studies on project work have been carried out in the Thai context, and the one that conducted by Sudrung (2004) and Naknoi (2007) reviewed above placed their focus on the students in high schools. The needs of the language learners may vary according to their academic levels and environments. Besides, the main objective of these studies was to explore the project activities that promoted the students' language proficiency including their oral proficiency. However, an attempt to develop an oral communication course by using project work based on the Project-based Learning Approach to specifically enhance undergraduate students' oral communication skills has not been established. The present study, therefore, emerged to fill this gap by trying to define the learners' needs and lacks. Then the information derived from this needs assessment was used to develop an English oral communication course, design the instructional materials, set language goals and objectives, and construct the assessment measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of the course to ensure improvement in the learners' oral communication ability.

### **Needs analysis**

A review of existing research studies highlights the significance of curriculum development to encourage the development of students' oral communication abilities. However, before curriculum development can take place, a survey of the students'

needs is deemed crucial to ensure the effectiveness of the newly developed curriculum. The importance of defining learners' needs is explained below.

### **Definition of needs and needs analysis**

To develop an English language course, the designer often starts with determining the specific needs of learners known as learners' needs analysis. Brown (1995) defines the term 'needs analysis' as a tool designed to identify what a particular group of individuals lacks. When planning a language program or curriculum, needs analysis is deemed a crucial first step.

Richards (2001) explains that needs are often described in terms of a linguistic deficiency which highlights the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do. On the other hand, Nation (2000) posits that needs analysis can play a major role in determining the content of courses, particularly for language items. It can be used to set language goals, and it is useful to decide the basis for the contents of the course. Both Richards and Nation agree that needs determine what linguistic elements and language skills learners already know and possess as well as what they need and lack. Richards emphasizes that a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learner' needs, and he suggests the means to collect the needs data. He points out that needs can be attained from interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.

Needs should be collected from not only the target group of learners but also the stakeholders who can provide the information useful in meeting the purposes of the needs analysis (Richards, 2001). For example, to prepare an English for a Specific Purpose course for undergraduate students studying in the Faculty of Engineer, it is necessary to specify the needs of the students themselves and stakeholders. After graduation, the graduates will either enter the work force industry or continue their further education. Therefore, the stakeholders will be teachers in the Faculties of Engineering, employers who hire the graduates, and the graduates who have already completed their learning and entered the workplace. This is because the teachers know what academic knowledge necessary for their students' further education is and what English skills their students should have for their future careers. The employers will indicate their needs toward their prospective employees' English proficiency. The

graduates who are now working can reveal their needs for the English language skills and knowledge necessary for their present careers.

In summary, needs analysis is defined as the identification of language elements and language skills that learners already know and what they think they need to know. Needs analysis is conducted to set language goals, course objectives, expected outcomes of the course, instructional activities, and evaluation.

### **Research on needs analysis and needs analysis for oral communication courses**

The surveys of needs have been conducted in different areas at many educational institutions to provide informed suggestions necessary in designing English language programs.

Pholsward (1989) conducted an assessment of English language needs in computer science using structured interviews to collect data from 22 subjects in managerial positions and three subjects in non-managerial positions. Twelve subjects chose listening and speaking as the most needed skills, another twelve chose reading, and the only subject chose writing. In terms of level of language proficiency, most subjects stated that they were not satisfied with their skills in speaking, listening, and writing, while their reading skill was quite functional. Most importantly, the study findings indicated the mismatch in language teaching as most subjects thought there was a discrepancy between the university language curriculum and language requirements on the job. They mentioned that the curriculum at the university was geared towards grammar study and practice in reading and writing in general content, whereas speaking activities were very minimal. The information derived from this needs analysis shed light on the skills the subjects had, the skills they lacked, and the skills they needed. Such information may result in the redesign of the language courses for the computer-science students, possibly with development of learners' listening and speaking skills as one of the main objectives of the new course.

In another study, Jiranapakul (1996) investigated the language needs for communication of Thai engineers. The instrument used was an interview protocol, and data were collected from 21 operational engineers and 21 managerial engineers of 21 sampled companies selected from the directory of 1,000 top companies in the country. The results of the study revealed that in both operational engineers and

managerial engineers' views, English is an important tool for communication and a crucial factor in doing the job well and in career advancement. Most operational engineers and managerial engineers perceived that their reading skills were better than listening, speaking, and writing skills, respectively. It was also found that the operational engineers needed listening and speaking training courses the most, whereas the managerial engineers needed writing and speaking courses the most. The study revealed the differences between the English needs of these two study groups as the former generally used English for communication orally with their colleague and the administrators, while the latter needed English for report writing and reading.

While Pholsaward (1989) and Jiranapakul (1996) conducted a needs analysis in an actual workplace, other researchers chose to carry out their investigations of needs in an academic setting. For instance, Sukompa (1998) surveyed current needs and problems of English language for use in the tourism industry in Thailand at Rajamangala Institute of Technology to determine contents, methods, and duration of the course entitled "Technical English for Tourism." The result revealed that the students regarded translation as the most important skill, followed by reading, listening, speaking, and writing. They believed that native teachers of English were greatly needed as well.

Furthermore, Naruenatwatana (2001) investigated the needs of medical students in the use of academic English at Rangsit University. The findings revealed positive opinions of all three groups of subjects: the medical students, the English teachers, and the subject teachers on the needs of using academic English and the specific English courses tailored for medical students. All four skills were greatly needed, but reading was considered the most important. As most of the medical text books and research studies were written in English, reading was seen as the most important skill for the medical students to gain their academic knowledge. Therefore, the three groups of subjects revealed that the English needs of the medical students concerned practicing all of the four skills, particularly reading, for their academic English course.

While the aforementioned studies shed light on the needs of various groups of individuals in academic and professional settings, it is worth noting here that in most cases need analyses are conducted as a prerequisite for curriculum development. In other words, before a language course or curriculum can be developed, it is of paramount importance that a need analysis be carried out to ensure that the developed

course or curriculum will best serve the needs of the learners. In one instance, Supatakulrat and Wasanasomsithi (2005) developed an English course for engineers in Saraburi Province, an industrial province in the center of Thailand, based on the results from the needs analysis conducted with male workers who had experience working in the industrial and mechanical fields for less than five years by using a direct observation, questionnaire, and interview. In another instance, Vasavakul (2006) developed and evaluated an ESP course to enhance English oral communication of the customer-services staff in international banks by translating the actual learners' needs gathered in a needs analysis into course development.

In a foreign setting, Luna (2005) studied the process in designing an English for Occupational Purposes curriculum for ESL culinary arts students in a public community college in California by conducting a needs analysis. In order to assess the needs of a diverse group of potential students who were non-native English speakers studying culinary arts at Cerritos College in California, two methods of data collection were implemented, observation and investigation by using five questions with the students in the preliminary courses required for Culinary Arts Chef's Training. Through her academic research and personal experience in this field, the needs analysis revealed that the target group's predominant need was in verbal comprehension. Speaking and listening were the most important skills needed, followed by reading and writing skills. The researcher explains that culinary art is a hands-on or tactile learning field, and oral communication is essential and should be emphasized in a hands-on field such as this.

From the related research reviewed above, it can be concluded that in the field of education, needs analysis is a crucial tool for teachers, instructors, and course designers who wish to meet the special needs of learners. Needs analysis is therefore important for course design and course development. It is the first step of the specification of a syllabus and can lead to the goals, objectives, outcomes, and instruction of English courses. Moreover, the research revealed the idea that needs analysis can be carried out for academic purposes, occupational purposes, as well as training purposes. The research also suggests the tools for gathering the information, which are questionnaires, interview protocols, direct observations, etc.

In this study, the focus of curriculum development was in the field of applied linguistics known as language curriculum development. The implications from the previous research suggest that the KU students' needs analysis needed to be carried



out to define these students' needs of certain language skills or knowledge, their present language abilities and skills, and the learning situations that they preferred. The results derived from this needs analysis were then used with the integration of the concept of the Project-based Learning Approach to specify the goals, objectives, teaching materials, and the assessment of the students' achievement of the English oral communication course. The needs were in five areas: the opinion of KU students towards the importance of English language skills in the personal, academic, and professional domains; their present English knowledge and skills; their needs for English knowledge and skills and the other skills that would support them in learning English; their oral communication needs in particular; and the topics of their interest.

### **Curriculum Development**

Language curriculum development often starts with determining how syllabus design can address the specific needs and wants of learners who are frequently seen as the best judges of their own needs and wants. This is because they know what they can and cannot do with the target language and what language skills are most essential to them.

#### **Definition of curriculum development**

In order to develop a curriculum, it is of paramount importance to first understand what a curriculum is. Rodgers (1989) explains that *curriculum* is all the activities in which learners engage under the auspices of the school which include not only what learners learn but also how they learn it, how teachers help them learn, with what supporting materials, styles, and methods of assessment and with what kind of facilities. Richards (2001) defines the term '*curriculum studies*' as a very broad field of inquiry which deals with what happens in schools and other educational institutes, the planning of instruction, and the study of how curriculum plans are implemented. He also explains the term *curriculum* in a school context as the whole body of knowledge which learners acquire in school.

To Richards, '*curriculum development*' refers to the range of planning and implementation processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum. He emphasizes that the processes should focus on needs analysis, situational analysis,

planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching materials, providing for effective teaching, and evaluation. Furthermore, Richards points out that a course which will be successful must be developed to address a specific set of needs and to cover a given set of objectives. The starting point for Richards in developing a curriculum is by conducting a needs analysis and then translating those needs into course objectives, contents, teaching materials, and evaluation. This process seems to be similar to what Graves (1996) proposes. She defines the seven stages for developing the curriculum that are conducting needs assessment, determining goals and objectives, conceptualizing contents, selecting and developing materials and activities, organizing contents and activities, designing evaluation, and considering resources and constraints.

In this study, the term '*curriculum*' refers to the knowledge or what the learners should learn, how they learn it, and how to assess their learning. Curriculum development is a series of activities that describe the principles of the curriculum, the goals and objectives of the curriculum, what and how the instruction should be constructed and implemented, and the evaluation process. This series of curriculum activities provides a framework that helps teachers deliver effective learning situations and helps learners learn effectively

In developing a curriculum, the theories that are the basic ideas that lead to the application of a curriculum for teaching should be first conceptualized. The principle used in this research is the Project-based Learning Approach developed on the theories of social constructivism, the cooperative learning approach, and the learner-centered approach. The theories, the conceptualization, and the application of the Project-based Learning Approach are analyzed and presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Theories, conceptualization, and application of the Project-based Learning Approach**

Theories	Concepts	Applications
<p>1. Social Constructivism described by Kim (2001)</p>	<p>There are four general perspectives to facilitate learning within a framework of social constructivism.</p> <p>1. Cognitive tools perspective: learners should engage in the social learning activities that involve hands-on project-based methods and utilization of discipline-based cognitive tools.</p> <p>2. Idea-based social constructivism: this concept sets education priority on important concepts that help learners expand their vision and become important foundations for learners' thinking.</p> <p>3. Pragmatic or Emergent Approach: the implementation of social constructivism in class should be emergent as the need arises.</p>	<p>1. Project-based learning method will be used as the instruction in the classroom, and learners will work in groups to produce products and impose meaning on them through the social learning process.</p> <p>2. Learners need learning skills, e.g. dictionary skills, researching skills, basic skills for developing a project, presentation skills, self-evaluation, and peer-evaluation in order to develop their own knowledge and skills. The nine stages of project-based learning process will be imposed to the learners. (See Figure 2)</p> <p>3. Learners' needs analysis should be conducted to explore what language skills and language elements learners already know and what they need to develop, and under what circumstances and environments that learners prefer.</p>

**Table 1: Theories, conceptualization, and application of the Project-based Learning Approach (continued)**

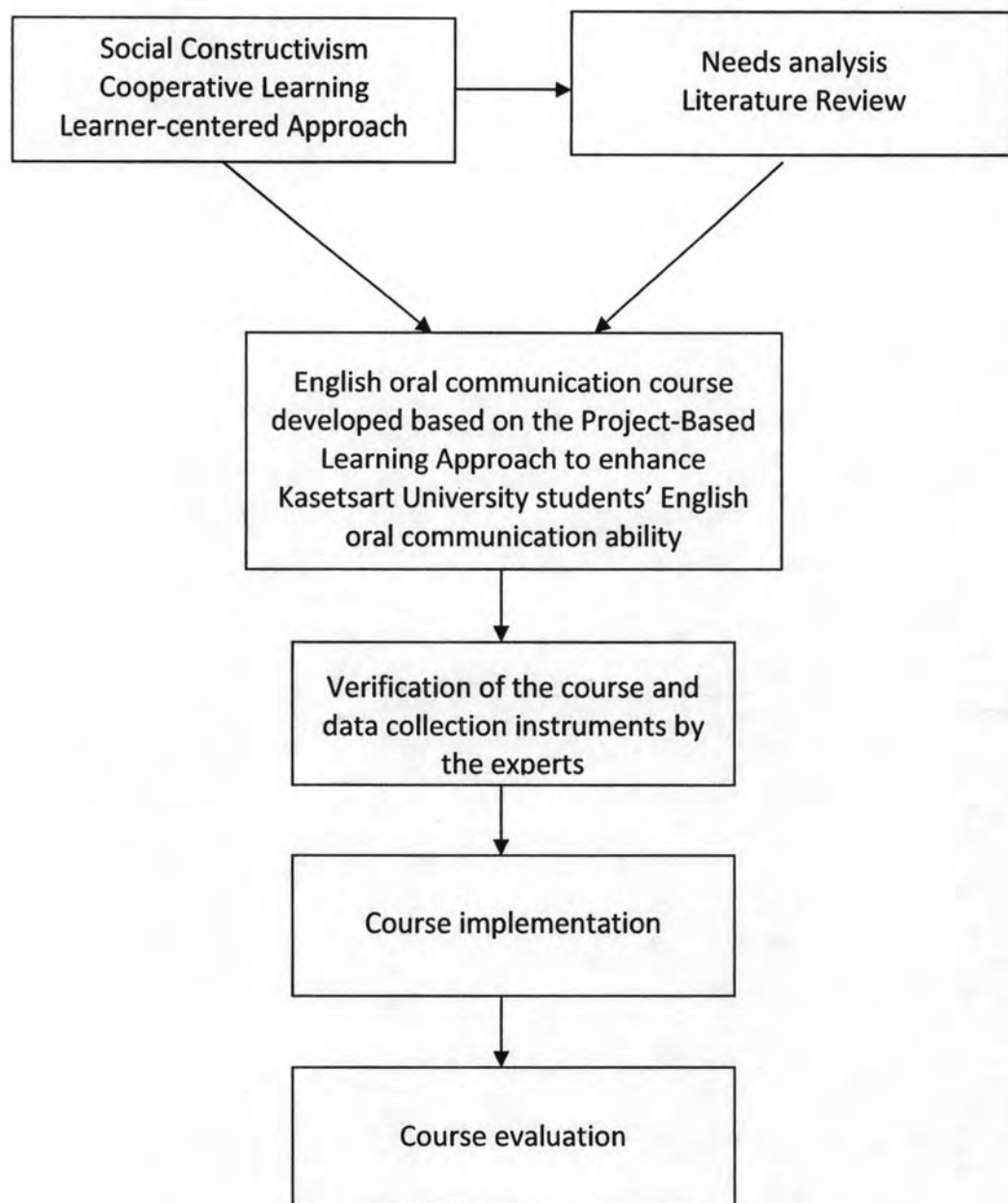
Theories	Concepts	Applications
	<p>4. Transactional or situated cognitive perspectives: this perspective focuses on the relationship between the people and their environment.</p>	<p>4. Learning should not take place in isolation from the environment; therefore, the environment and the social relationships among group members help learners construct their own knowledge or learning from others.</p>
<p>2. Cooperative Learning by Johnson &amp; Johnson (1989) and Oxford (1990)</p>	<p>Cooperative learning refers to the process when learners work together to accomplish shared goals. Cooperation can take place in both small and large groups; cooperation refers primarily to small groups of learners working together. Cooperative learning and cooperative learning methods require learners to develop teamwork skills and to see individual learning as essentially related to the success of group learning.</p>	<p>1. Peer interaction, discussion, and negotiation in the classroom and among group members are required to develop the projects. This leads to the development of language proficiency.</p> <p>2. Peer evaluation helps learners improve their own learning and their language proficiency; therefore, the activity of viewing their peers' presentation and discussion for further development will be employed to help learners learn to improve their language accuracy and their future projects.</p>
<p>3. Learner-centered Approach by Nunan (1988) and Jurmo (1989)</p>	<p>Learners are closely involved in the decision-making process and have considerable control of and responsibility for activities.</p>	<p>The nine steps of developing a project will be used to help learners work on their project successfully and be responsible for their own learning. (See Figure 2)</p>

## **Development of a project-based course to enhance oral communication ability**

In the present study, the information derived from the needs analysis could be categorized into five areas: the importance of English language skills of KU students in the personal, academic, and professional domains; their present English knowledge and skills; their needs for English knowledge, skills, and the other skills that would support them in learning English; their oral communication needs; and the topics of their interest. Such information was analyzed and translated into the goals and the objectives of the English oral communication course developed based on the Project-based Learning Approach. Project work was the type of instruction employed to provide the students with more opportunities to use and practice oral communication in the target language in the real-life contexts and real-world situations so as to enable them to improve their oral communication purposefully. The design of the activities was based on the project work procedures which are mentioned in the following section. The instruction was composed of two phases. In the first phase, the students were equipped with the tools that were necessary for searching for information, the knowledge of how to evaluate themselves, and the preparation for the required language skills. Then, the students learned how to develop projects in small groups in the second phase. The process presented here was only the guideline for developing the course and the students. The necessity and the intensity of practicing any skills depended upon the students' specific needs. The topics that the students discussed and chose for developing the projects were the five topics that they were interested in the most. Furthermore, the development of the oral tests was based on the objectives that were derived from the needs analysis.

There were seven steps involved in translating needs into course development in the present study. These included conducting the needs analysis, analyzing the data obtained from the needs analysis to determine the students' needs, developing the learning and teaching objectives for the oral communication course, identifying and sequencing tasks to be included in the course, developing appropriate classroom materials and tasks, validating the course, and assessing and evaluating the students' performance.

The following figure depicts the conceptual framework of the study which aimed at developing an English oral communication course based on the Project-based Learning Approach to promote language learners' oral communication ability.



**Figure 3: The conceptual framework of the development of an English oral communication course (Adapted from Sunthornwatanasiri, 2000)**

## Summary

The literature review presented above has shed light on prominent theories underlying the development of an English oral communication course to promote language learners' oral communication ability. It also discusses a body of existing research on factors influencing development of oral communication ability as well as implementation of project work in language instruction. It can be seen that the Project-based Learning Approach, with project work instruction, is a method of language teaching that can be used as a tool to enhance learners' oral communication ability as it provides learners with opportunities to be exposed to the target language, interact meaningfully with the native and non-native English speakers in real-life situations, give presentations on final products of projects, and increase learners' both language and working skills through cooperative learning. The next chapter presents the research methodology of the present study.