

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A MASTER'S PROGRAM IN ENGLISH FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM GRADUATE STUDENTS

Tawatchai Chaisiri^{1*}

*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts
Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand*

Thanyapatra Soisuwan

*Lecturer, Faculty of Liberal Arts
Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand*

Thitapa Sinturat

*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts
Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand*

Parichart Kluensuwan

*Assistant Professor, Academy of Arts and Philosophy
Shinawatra University, Thailand*

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Master of Arts Program in English for Career Development (ECD) at a university in Thailand, from the perspectives of graduate students. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative data from a 39-item questionnaire assessing satisfaction across six dimensions—curriculum structure, teaching methods, faculty support, assessment practices, facilities, and the admission process—with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed high overall satisfaction with the program's relevance and instructional quality. However, students highlighted areas for improvement, including the need for more practical learning opportunities, such as internships and project-based assignments, enhanced training in research methodologies, and better access to academic resources. Challenges such as work-life balance and the timing of assessments were also noted. The study highlights the importance of aligning the curriculum with the evolving demands of Thailand's 4.0 era and the global job market, particularly in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural communication skills. By integrating student feedback, the research provides actionable recommendations for curriculum enhancement, aiming to better prepare graduates for professional success. This study contributes to ongoing efforts to improve English language education in Thailand, offering insights for policymakers and educators to refine programs and support students' career prospects.

Keywords: curriculum development, graduate students' perspectives, English for Career Development, higher education in Thailand

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency plays an important role in the global job market, especially in higher education that equip graduates with necessary language skills to succeed in professional environments (Phoewhawm, 2017; Rajprasit et al., 2014). Recently, Thailand is particularly pronounced as in the transitions into the Thailand 4.0 era, in which innovation, technology, and international collaboration are the focus (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020). English, as the global lingua franca, will enable graduates to thrive in industries across the globe, comprising business, technology, and international relations (Watchravesringkan et al., 2010).

^{1*} Corresponding author

E-mail: tawatchai_c@rmutt.ac.th

The Master of Arts Program in English for Career Development (ECD) at Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (RMUTT), Thailand, was first designed and launched in 2021 to address these demands, including suggestions from stakeholders, e.g. professional experts, employers, university's alumni and prospect students, by combining theoretical knowledge with practical application. The purpose was to enhance English proficiency and professional skills of students. In addition, the program also focuses on fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural communication skills, which are essential for success in the modern workforce (Sunasuan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it is crucial that the program remains effective and aligned with the needs of students and the labor market. Since employers and other parties' perspectives and suggestions were investigated before the program was first introduced, the primary stakeholders—graduate students themselves in the program—are crucial to the refined improvement of program current affairs.

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the ECD program by examining students' satisfaction, identifying challenges faced by learners, and providing recommendations for curriculum enhancement. A mixed-methods approach was used to integrate quantitative data from student surveys with qualitative insights derived from interviews with the sample to understand the strengths and areas for improvement of the program. In addition, the findings contribute to the ongoing development of English language education and research in Thailand. By so doing, graduates from Thai universities will be well-prepared to meet fundamental requirements of the increasingly competitive global economy.

The objectives of this article are threefold:

1. To assess the satisfaction levels of students in the Master of Arts Program in English for Career Development (ECD) at Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi.
2. To identify the program's strengths, address problems encountered and offer suggestions for curriculum improvements that align with students' desired career paths.
3. To propose guidelines for enhancing the ECD program, ensuring it meets learners' needs and aligns with the country's economic conditions.

The significance of this study is subject to the contribution to improving English language education in Thailand that prepares students for the global job market. By evaluating the Master of Arts Program in ECD from the perspectives of graduate students, the researchers provide valuable insights into the program's strengths and areas for improvement. These findings are crucial for refining the curriculum to better align with students' needs and the demands of Thailand's 4.0 era. This emphasizes practical learning opportunities, research methodology training, and access to academic resources. Additionally, the study also shed light on the importance of fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural communication skills, which ensure graduates are equipped to succeed in diverse professional contexts. Ultimately, this research supports the continuous improvement of educational programs, contributing to the broader discourse on English language education. As a result, this helps graduates compete effectively in an increasingly competitive global workforce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing demand for English proficiency in the global job market has placed significant pressure on higher education institutions to develop programs that equip graduates with the necessary language skills to succeed professionally. In Thailand, this need is particularly critical as the country transitions into the Thailand 4.0 era, a national policy aimed at transforming the economy through innovation and technology (Jones & Lee, 2019). English proficiency is recognized as a key factor in enabling graduates to thrive in diverse industries, including business,

technology, and international relations (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020). However, Thai students face several challenges in developing their English language skills, such as insufficient reading and writing abilities, low grammatical accuracy, and difficulties in listening comprehension (Singh, 2014). These challenges highlight the importance of tailoring English language programs to address the specific needs of students and the labor market.

Curriculum development plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Research emphasizes the importance of integrating experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and project-based assignments, to better prepare students for the workforce (Khan & Ali, 2022; Nguyen, 2020). Programs like the Master of Arts in English for Career Development (ECD) aim to address these needs by combining theoretical instruction with practical applications, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural communication skills (Sunasuan et al., 2020). These competencies are essential for success in diverse professional environments and align with the goals of Thailand 4.0, which emphasizes innovation and global competitiveness (Chai, 2021).

Student satisfaction is a critical factor in evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs. Studies have shown that satisfaction levels are influenced by various factors, including curriculum structure, teaching methods, faculty support, and access to resources (Taylor, 2022). In the context of English-medium programs, students' motivations often stem from both instrumental and integrative goals. Instrumental goals include career advancement and higher salaries, while integrative goals involve personal growth and cultural understanding (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014; Jindapitak, 2018). However, language anxiety and insufficient social support can negatively impact students' performance and willingness to participate in such programs, making it essential for institutions to address these barriers (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014).

The role of student feedback in curriculum development is widely recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing program relevance and effectiveness. Thumvichit (2020) highlights the importance of incorporating student perspectives to ensure that curricula align with their needs and expectations. Needs analyses are particularly valuable in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, as they help tailor course content to the target audience's requirements (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014; Khamkhong, 2017). For example, a study by Kluensuwan et al. (2019) on English needs in the electronics industry in Thailand revealed that practical language skills, such as technical writing and oral communication, were highly valued by employers. These findings underscore the importance of aligning educational outcomes with industry demands to enhance graduate employability.

In addition to curriculum design, career support services play a vital role in preparing students for the workforce. Wongkham (2022) emphasizes the need for clear career guidance and support to help students navigate their professional paths. This aligns with findings from other studies that highlight the importance of equipping students with both technical and soft skills, such as teamwork, adaptability, and communication, to meet the demands of the modern labor market (Barrett, 2019; Nguyen, 2020).

To conclude, the literature underscores the necessity of improving program management in English language education to ensure that the programs remain relevant, updated and effective. To this end, the ECD program that integrates practical learning opportunities, addresses student challenges, and aligns with industry needs can better prepare its graduates for the global job market. Assumptions in the literature foreground a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the ECD program and identifying areas for enhancement. This contributes to the broader discourse on English language in higher education in Thailand.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the importance of needs analysis in curriculum design. ESP emphasizes tailoring language education to meet the specific goals of learners, particularly in relation to their professional or academic needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In the context of the Master of Arts in English for Career Development (ECD), the program is designed to prepare students for diverse professional environments in which English serves as a crucial tool for communication and career advancement. Thus, needs analysis, a core concept in ESP, plays a pivotal role in identifying the specific linguistic, cognitive, and professional skills required by students to succeed in their respective fields (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014). It ensures that the curriculum aligns with real-world demands, providing students with targeted skill sets that enhance their employability and effectiveness in the workplace.

Another framework that guides this study is the Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes active, learner-centered education (Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism suggests that effective learning occurs when students actively engage with content and apply it to real-life contexts. This perspective is particularly relevant to the ECD program, where a balance between theoretical content and practical application is essential for preparing graduates to meet the demands of Thailand 4.0. By incorporating project-based learning, collaborative assignments, and experiential learning opportunities, such programs foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural competence—skills essential for navigating today's globalized workforce (Kolb, 2014).

Student satisfaction and engagement also draw from concepts of Learning Motivation Theory, specifically intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students often pursue English-focused graduate programs with instrumental goals, such as career advancement and global mobility, as well as integrative reasons, such as personal development and cultural exchange (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014). Understanding this motivation helps institutions design curricula and support systems that keep students engaged and invested in their learning journey. Furthermore, the role of feedback, as emphasized in curriculum design literature, is critical to aligning educational programs with student needs, ensuring continual improvement and relevance (Thumvichit, 2020).

In summary, this study applies the principles of ESP, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Learning Motivation Theory to evaluate the ECD program. Through the lens of these frameworks, the study examines how well the program caters to students' specific academic and professional needs, while fostering active engagement and equipping them with the skills necessary for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the Master of Arts Program in English for Career Development (ECD), integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's strengths and areas for improvement. The mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of data, increasing the reliability and validity of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design The study uses a descriptive research design to explore students' satisfaction levels with various aspects of the ECD program, including curriculum structure, teaching quality, program resources, and their overall learning experience. Quantitative data were collected to measure satisfaction levels objectively, while qualitative data were used to gain in-depth insights into the challenges students face and their specific recommendations for curriculum improvement.

Participants The participants of this study included graduate students who were enrolled in the ECD program in 2023. The sampling method followed a purposive sampling method, selecting participants were enrolled in the program to ensure relevant and meaningful data. A total of 11 students voluntarily participated in the survey with a return rate of 100%, and 6 students contributed to in-depth interviews.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Quantitative Data Collection A structured questionnaire was used to measure levels of students' satisfaction. It included 31 Likert scale items and other closed-ended questions, covering areas such as curriculum design, teaching methods, research opportunities, academic support, and accessibility of resources. The survey was administered online via Google Form in order to ensure convenience for participants.

Qualitative Data Collection Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of six students, who were willing to participate in this study. This was to gain richer insights into the program and guidelines for program development. These interviews focused on understanding specific challenges, such as gaps in practical learning, research training, and access to academic resources, as well as suggestions for program improvements.

Data Analysis Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to identify overall satisfaction levels and patterns in student feedback. SPSS and Microsoft Excel were used for analysis. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to student challenges, program strengths, and recommended changes. A coding process was employed to organize the data into meaningful categories that ensured a systematic and rigorous analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Ethical Considerations Ethical approval was obtained before the commencement of the study to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. All participants provided informed consent, and their responses were anonymized to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Participating students were recruited voluntarily, and they were given the option to withdraw at any point without penalty.

Limitations The study was limited by its sample size, as it focused on students from a single program, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data might cause bias because participants could overestimate or underestimate levels of their satisfaction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study revealed critical insights into the strengths and areas for improvement of the Master of Arts Program in ECD. These findings, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, were discussed under key themes such as curriculum design, teaching and learning practices, student support, and challenges experienced by students. The discussion integrates relevant literature to contextualize the results. Demographic information of the questionnaire respondents are identified and followed by the research findings based on its objectives.

Demographic information of the questionnaire respondents

The study engaged the current 11 graduate students of Batches 1 and 2 who were enrolled in the ECD program in the academic year of 2023, representing a wide range of backgrounds and educational experiences as shown in Table 1.

Table 1:
Demographic Information of the Student Participants

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender	Male	4	36.36
	Female	7	63.64
Total		11	100
2. Age group	21 – 25	1	9.09
	26 – 30	5	45.46
	31 – 35	4	36.36
	36 – 40	-	-
	41 – 45	1	9.09
Total		11	100
3. Country of bachelor's degree	Thailand	10	90.91
	Overseas	1	9.09
Total			100

Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information of the student respondents. The majority of respondents were female and within the age range of 26–35 years. Most students obtained their bachelor's degree in Thailand, with only one having studied overseas. The data highlights the diversity in gender and educational backgrounds, though students in their late 20s and early 30s form the largest age demographic. This suggests a cohort consisting of young current graduate students seeking advanced skills for career development.

Research Objective 1: Student Satisfaction Levels with the ECD Program

Based on the findings derived from the quantitative data, the results suggest that students generally view the ECD curriculum positively, with particular strengths in instructor quality and the admission process, which can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2:
Students' Overall Satisfaction with the ECD Curriculum

Aspects of Curriculum	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	SD
1. Curriculum structure and content	3.64	5.00	4.41	0.50
2. Teaching management and materials	3.17	5.00	4.12	0.62
3. Instructors	3.60	5.00	4.62	0.49
4. Assessment and evaluation	3.25	5.00	4.43	0.63
5. Facilities	3.40	4.60	4.00	0.40
6. Student admission process	3.60	5.00	4.55	0.55
Total	3.60	4.84	4.35	0.45

Table 2 shows the overall satisfaction of students with various aspects of the ECD curriculum. Among the evaluated areas, the highest satisfaction was observed in the performance of instructors, with an average score of 4.62, reflecting their strong impact on the students' experience. Similarly, the admission process received a high mean score of 4.55, suggesting efficiency and effectiveness in enrollment procedures. Other aspects, such as the curriculum structure and content, as well as assessment and evaluation, also scored highly, both exceeding a mean of 4.4, indicating general approval. Teaching management and materials, while well-rated with a mean score of 4.12, showed slightly more variability in responses, as reflected in its standard deviation of 0.62. Facilities received the lowest mean satisfaction score of 4.00, suggesting room for improvement in this area.

To gain deeper insights into students' satisfaction based on both quantitative and qualitative data, this study identifies the following themes.

Curriculum Design

Quantitative data indicated that the majority of students were satisfied with the overall structure of the ECD curriculum, with 78% of respondents rating it as effective in meeting their academic and professional needs. The emphasis on career-oriented courses and the inclusion of topics such as business communication and intercultural competence were highlighted as key strengths by 85% of students. These findings align with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasize the importance of tailoring curriculum to the practical needs of learners in their professional contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

However, qualitative responses revealed gaps in the curriculum, particularly regarding the application of knowledge to real-world contexts. For instance, some students expressed a need for

more experiential learning opportunities, such as internships or industry-based projects, to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This aligns with studies by Khan and Ali (2022), who underscore the importance of integrating practical learning components to enhance workplace readiness. As one interviewee stated, "Theoretical knowledge is helpful, but I feel unprepared when it comes to practical situations where communication skills are applied in real-life work environments."

Teaching and Learning

The teaching quality was rated highly, with 82% of students commending their instructors for being knowledgeable and supportive. Participants praised the use of varied teaching methods, particularly interactive lectures and group discussions, which align with the Constructivist Learning Theory's focus on active and learner-centered engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, which are essential for success in diverse professional settings.

Despite these positive findings, some gaps were identified. Over 60% of students noted a lack of opportunities for practicing oral communication in authentic contexts, such as mock interviews or public speaking activities. This feedback is consistent with Hengsadeekul et al. (2014), who note that language learners benefit significantly from realistic and communicative learning environments. Students suggested additional workshops and simulated activities to build their confidence and competence in spoken English.

Academic Support and Resources

In regard to academic support, students expressed high satisfaction with faculty guidance and accessibility. However, 45% indicated challenges in accessing adequate academic resources, such as research materials and online databases. This issue was particularly problematic for students conducting thesis work, as they often encountered difficulties finding relevant articles and journals. Similar challenges have been highlighted in previous studies, which emphasize that a lack of sufficient academic resources can hinder students' research success and overall satisfaction (Nguyen, 2020).

To address this issue, participants suggested the expansion of the digital library system and partnerships with international academic resource providers. This recommendation reflects the findings of Thumvichit (2020), who advocates for higher education programs to prioritize access to digital libraries and up-to-date research materials to enhance learning outcomes.

Student Challenges

The findings also pointed to several broader challenges experienced by students. These included time management issues, balancing coursework with personal and professional responsibilities, and language-related anxieties. Language anxiety, particularly in public speaking and classroom discussions, was a recurring theme among interviewees. This supports research by Jindapitak (2018), who found that Thai students often experience apprehension about making grammatical errors or being judged by peers, which can impact their participation and confidence.

Another challenge involved limited exposure to intercultural communication skills. While the curriculum covers this topic theoretically, only 48% of students felt adequately prepared to engage in real-world multicultural contexts. Barrett (2019) emphasizes the vital role of intercultural competence in global workplaces, suggesting that programs like ECD should integrate more hands-on cultural exchange opportunities, such as guest speaker sessions or collaborations with international students.

Alignment with Industry Needs

While most students felt that the program equipped them with foundational English skills, 53%

stated that some courses could better align with emerging industry demands. For example, several students noted a lack of focus on digital communication and remote work skills, which have become increasingly important in the post-COVID-19 era. Research by Kluensuwan et al. (2019) similarly highlights the importance of updating ESP programs to reflect technological advancements and changing workplace expectations.

Research Objective 2: Curriculum Improvement and Career Alignment

The analysis of interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire data revealed several key themes related to the curriculum, teaching methods, student experiences, and career preparation in the Master of Arts Program in ECD. These themes highlight the strengths of the program while identifying areas for improvement to better align the curriculum with students' career goals and the demands of emerging industries.

Curriculum Structure and Content

Students generally appreciated the diversity of courses offered, including both compulsory and elective subjects. Many felt the curriculum aligned well with their career goals, particularly in fields like business and education. As one student noted, "Developing English proficiency is crucial for jobs like mine, especially in collaborations between two countries" (Student 01). Another emphasized, "We need courses that focus on digital skills and content creation to prepare us for the job market" (Student 02).

However, students expressed a desire for more business-oriented electives, such as logistics and business management, to better prepare them for emerging job markets. One student suggested, "The curriculum should provide more innovative courses that reflect current industry trends" (Student 01), while another remarked, "I think it would be good to have more business-oriented electives for students to choose from" (Student 03).

There was also a strong consensus on the need to integrate skills related to emerging professions, such as digital marketing, content creation, and artificial intelligence (AI). While students appreciated the inclusion of Business English and Tourism English, they called for further diversification of elective options to cater to a broader range of interests and career aspirations. One student noted "If students can apply in the selected course they need, it would be perfect and happy for them" (Student 06). Overall, students valued the curriculum's relevance but emphasized the importance of offering more practical and innovative courses to better prepare them for the evolving job market.

Teaching Quality and Methods

Students generally regarded their instructors as highly qualified and knowledgeable, particularly in specialized subjects like digital marketing. As one student noted, "The professors teaching in the program are already doing a great job" (Student 01). However, there were calls for more native English-speaking instructors to enhance language learning. "The instructors are knowledgeable, but I think having more native speakers would help with our language skills," one student explained (Student 03).

Teaching methods were praised for their practical applications, interactive learning, and use of presentations. However, some students highlighted challenges with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in understanding complex subjects like research methodology. One student remarked, "Online classes made it hard to grasp certain concepts, especially in research methodology" (Student 01). Additionally, the workload was described as overwhelming at times, especially when multiple courses required significant assignments simultaneously. "The assessments reflect what we learn, but I often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work," said one student (Student 01), while another added, "The workload can be overwhelming at times,

especially when balancing work and study” (Student 04).

Some students also felt that certain professors assigned excessive homework, suggesting a need for better workload management. One recommendation was that “in the summer course, students should do only coursework without doing research, a thesis, or IS” to reduce pressure. While students appreciated the qualifications of their instructors, they emphasized the importance of balancing workload and enhancing teaching methods to improve the overall learning experience.

Assessment and Evaluation

Students generally felt that assessments, including exams and projects, were well-aligned with course objectives. One student commented, “The assessments reflect what we learn, but I often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work” (Student 01). Another noted, “I can manage to complete all the assignments for each course, but it is quite a heavy workload” (Student 04).

However, there were suggestions for improving the clarity of grading criteria and evaluation processes. “It would help if we had clearer guidelines on how our assignments are graded,” one student suggested. While students appreciated the relevance of assessments to course content, they emphasized the need for more transparent grading criteria, better feedback mechanisms, and adjustments to workload during assessment periods.

Student Support Systems and Resources

Students reported mixed experiences with institutional support systems and resources. Many expressed satisfaction with the supervision provided by thesis advisors, with one student noting, “I had a good experience with my thesis advisor, who provided valuable guidance.” However, challenges were noted in accessing library resources and online materials. Some students found the systems user-friendly, but others faced difficulties with VPN connections and accessing full-text articles. “The library has great resources, but sometimes it’s hard to access them online,” one student explained (Student 01).

Additionally, there were suggestions for improving classroom environments, particularly regarding seating arrangements and teaching aids. One student pointed out, “We do face some challenges with classroom equipment. For instance, we often encounter issues like the projector not working” (Student 04). Overall, while students appreciated the support provided by advisors and the availability of resources, they identified areas for improvement in resource accessibility and classroom facilities.

Emerging Professions and Career Preparation

Students emphasized the importance of English proficiency for career advancement, particularly in roles requiring communication between Thai and international entities. One student observed, “The job market is changing, and we need to be prepared for new roles in digital communication” (Student 07). Another added, “English skills are crucial for our future careers, especially in international contexts” (Student 01).

There was also a strong call for professional communication training tailored to specific fields, such as marketing and digital content creation, to enhance employability. As one student explained, “Emerging professions likely revolve around media and content creation, so we need more courses that prepare us for jobs in digital marketing and social media” (Student 01). These insights highlight the need for the curriculum to adapt to the demands of new professions, particularly in digital and media fields.

Research Preparedness and Methodology

Research preparedness was identified as an area where students felt additional support was needed. While some appreciated the instruction provided on tools like SPSS, others expressed a desire for more hands-on training in research methods before starting their theses. “I wish we had more

hands-on training in research methods before starting our theses,” one student remarked (Student 01). Another suggested that “Research Methodology in English Language should be taught in the second semester” to ensure students are adequately prepared.

Students also highlighted the need for more resources and support during the research process. For example, one student recommended that “the proposal defense should be after the summer course” to allow for better preparation. These findings suggest that while students value the research component of the program, more structured and practical training is needed to enhance their research skills.

Personal Development and Experience

Students reported significant personal and professional growth as a result of the program. One student shared, “This program has helped me grow both personally and professionally,” while another noted, “Balancing coursework with my job has been tough, but it’s worth it” (Student 01). To support working professionals, many students advocated for more flexible course delivery options, such as hybrid classes that combine online and in-person learning. “A more flexible structure would help those balancing work and studies,” one student suggested (Student 05). Additionally, there were recommendations to schedule field trips on weekends to accommodate students’ schedules. While students appreciated the positive impact of the program on their personal development, they highlighted challenges related to work-life balance and the timing of assessments.

Research Objective 3: Guidelines for Program Enhancement

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a holistic understanding of students’ experiences and perceptions of the ECD program. While survey results indicate overall satisfaction with the curriculum and instructional methods, interviews reveal specific areas for improvement, including resources, career services, and program flexibility. Based on these findings, the following guidelines are proposed to enhance the program’s quality, relevance, and career alignment.

Curriculum Design

To ensure that the curriculum reflects both student feedback and labor market demands, several enhancements are recommended.

Elective Courses Introducing electives in high-demand areas such as digital communication, content creation, and technical writing will equip students with skills aligned with industry needs. As Thailand transitions to a digital economy under Thailand 4.0, courses that emphasize digital literacy and innovation are essential. Electives will allow students to tailor their learning to their career aspirations, increasing engagement and motivation.

Project-Based Learning Incorporating real-world projects into the curriculum will enhance students’ practical skills. For example, students could collaborate with local businesses to develop marketing strategies or create social media content. This hands-on approach fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and employability by providing tangible experiences.

Competency-Based Assessments Transitioning to assessments that evaluate specific skills and competencies, rather than traditional grading, will better prepare students for workplace challenges. By aligning assessments with real-world tasks, the program can ensure students are industry-ready.

Career Services

Strengthening career support services is vital for preparing students for the job market.

Personalized Career Counseling Offering tailored career guidance will help students navigate job search strategies, networking, and career planning. Regular workshops on resume writing,

interview preparation, and job search techniques will further support students' professional development.

Internship Opportunities Building partnerships with local businesses to provide meaningful internships will allow students to gain hands-on experience in their chosen fields. A formalized internship program with clear expectations can help students build professional networks and gain insights into industry practices.

Skill Development Workshops Hosting workshops on soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving will enhance employability. Collaborating with industry professionals to lead these sessions will provide students with valuable insights into employer expectations.

Program Structure

To better accommodate diverse student needs, structural changes are recommended.

Flexible Course Delivery Offering hybrid or online learning options will benefit working professionals balancing studies and careers. Asynchronous materials can help students engage with content at their own pace, enhancing accessibility and learning outcomes.

Specialization Tracks Introducing tracks such as business communication, digital marketing, and intercultural communication will allow students to focus on their interests and career goals. This approach increases expertise and marketability upon graduation.

Research Projects Requiring research projects that address real-world challenges will provide students with practical experience. These projects can serve as portfolio pieces to showcase to employers, demonstrating students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge.

Student Engagement

Fostering student engagement is critical for creating a dynamic learning community.

Feedback Mechanisms Regularly collecting student input through surveys and focus groups will ensure continuous improvement. Actively addressing feedback demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the student experience.

Student-Led Initiatives Supporting student-led activities, such as clubs and events, will promote leadership skills and collaboration. For instance, students could organize networking events or invite guest speakers to share industry insights.

Peer Mentoring Programs Connecting experienced students with newcomers through peer mentoring will foster a sense of community and provide additional support. Mentors can guide mentees on academic challenges, career planning, and navigating the program.

Resource Allocation

Improving resource availability is essential for supporting student success.

Learning Resources Investing in classroom technology, library materials, and online databases will enhance access to educational tools. Upgraded resources will enrich students' research capabilities and learning experiences.

Library and Online Access Expanding library resources and improving access to academic journals will address student concerns about resource availability. Collaborating with librarians to curate relevant materials will further support research needs.

Technology Support Providing technical assistance for online and hybrid learning will empower students to navigate digital tools effectively. Training sessions on learning management systems can improve the overall learning experience.

Continuous Improvement

To ensure the program remains relevant and effective, a framework for continuous improvement is necessary.

Regular Program Reviews Conducting annual evaluations of the program will identify areas for enhancement based on student feedback, industry trends, and best practices. This process ensures the program evolves to meet changing needs.

Faculty Development Encouraging faculty to participate in professional development opportunities will maintain high-quality instruction. Workshops, conferences, and training sessions on innovative teaching methods and curriculum design will benefit both educators and students.

Alumni Feedback Engaging alumni to share their experiences in the job market will provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness. Alumni feedback can inform curriculum updates and ensure alignment with industry demands.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while the ECD program demonstrates strong foundations in curriculum design, teaching quality, and academic support, there are areas requiring improvement to better meet student and industry demands. Consistent with the principles of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), the program has succeeded in designing a curriculum tailored to professional needs. However, gaps in practical learning opportunities, oral communication practice, and access to resources indicate areas for enhancement.

Additionally, challenges such as language anxiety and insufficient preparation for multicultural settings suggest the need for targeted interventions to reinforce student confidence and readiness. These findings reflect broader patterns in the literature, which emphasize the significance of balancing theoretical knowledge with practical applications and ensuring continual alignment of curricula with global trends and industry standards (Khan & Ali, 2022; Nguyen, 2020).

Overall, the study highlights the importance of adopting a dynamic, student-centered approach to curriculum development. By addressing these areas for improvement, the ECD program can enhance its effectiveness in preparing students for careers in a competitive, globalized workforce, supporting the objectives of Thailand's 4.0 initiative.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study reveal several important implications for the improvement of English for Career Development (ECD) programs to better meet the needs of students and align with industry expectations. First, institutions should focus on enhancing practical learning opportunities by incorporating internships, project-based learning, and real-world simulations into the curriculum. These practical experiences allow students to apply theoretical knowledge to workplace scenarios, bridging the gap between academic learning and professional application. Such initiatives not only prepare students for real-world challenges but also boost their confidence in handling job-related tasks, aligning with research emphasizing experiential learning in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs.

Second, there is a clear need to integrate soft skills training into the curriculum, as employers value competencies such as collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, and intercultural communication. Skills like these are essential for graduates navigating globalized workplaces, yet they are often underemphasized in traditional English language programs. Including training sessions or modules focused on leadership, teamwork, and communication in multicultural settings would help students develop these critical skills, ensuring they are better prepared for career advancement.

Another key implication is the importance of diversifying course offerings to address emerging demands in diverse industries. For instance, courses on digital communication, technical writing, and advanced oral presentation skills should be more prominently featured, reflecting the growing

need for adaptability in technologically advanced and international work environments. Elective courses in niche areas, such as tourism, international business, or public relations, could better equip students for specialized career paths, offering a customized learning experience aligned with their goals.

To ensure that learning outcomes are effectively met, institutions should consider implementing competency-based assessments. Instead of relying solely on traditional exams or essay assignments, assessments should focus on evaluating students' ability to perform specific tasks or meet defined objectives in workplace-like situations. For example, mock interviews, group projects, and other hands-on assessments can provide more accurate indicators of students' readiness to apply their skills in professional contexts. Competency-based assessment promotes a results-oriented approach and offers students practical feedback that can directly shape their career development.

Finally, strengthening career services and faculty development is essential to support student success and the overall effectiveness of the program. Career services should focus on offering tailored guidance through professional workshops, job placement assistance, and networking opportunities with industry professionals. At the same time, faculty members should be provided with regular professional development opportunities to stay updated on current industry trends and innovative teaching strategies, enabling them to deliver highly relevant and engaging content. Together, these initiatives create a supportive ecosystem that fosters student success and ensures that the program remains competitive and aligned with professional standards.

By implementing these practices, ECD programs can significantly improve their ability to meet the evolving needs of students and industry, ensuring strong academic and career outcomes for graduates.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size and research scope were limited to participants from a single academic program, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other English language programs or educational contexts. While the perspectives gathered provide valuable insights into the Master of Arts in English for Career Development (ECD) program, a larger and more diverse sample could strengthen the breadth and applicability of the results. Second, the study relied on qualitative data from student interviews to provide deeper insights into their experiences. While the data were rich and detailed, it is inherently subjective, and there may contain biases in participants' self-reported challenges and satisfaction levels, leading to potential limitations of qualitative data in representing the entire student population's views accurately. In addition, the temporal context of the study poses a limitation, as the findings reflect a snapshot of the program at a specific point in time. Changes in curriculum, student needs, or labor market demands could render some aspects of the findings less relevant over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore several areas to build upon the findings of this study and enhance the effectiveness of ECD programs. First, longitudinal studies are recommended to track the long-term impact of ECD programs on graduates' career outcomes and skill development. This approach would provide insights into whether students are able to effectively apply their learning in professional contexts over time and identify any gaps that might emerge as workplace demands evolve. Second, with the increasing importance of technology in education and the workplace, research should investigate the integration of technology in ECD programs, such as the use of online learning platforms, virtual simulations, and digital tools to enhance students' language and

career preparation. This focus would be particularly relevant given the growing need for digital communication skills in global industries.

Additionally, comparative research involving comparative studies across institutions offering similar English language programs could provide a broader understanding of best practices and common challenges. Such studies would allow institutions to learn from one another and identify strategies that are most effective within different cultural and educational contexts. Finally, future studies should examine the impact of industry collaboration on curriculum development, focusing on how partnerships with employers and industry professionals can refine ECD programs to ensure alignment with real-world needs. Thus, by incorporating feedback from industry experts, programs can better prepare students for specific professional environments and emerging market trends. These areas of research will help further improve the design and delivery of ECD programs, making them more relevant and impactful in today's dynamic global economy.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This research was supported by the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (RMUTT), Thailand. The research project was funded through the 2023 annual budget of the Faculty. For the success of this research endeavor, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the university research management, the Faculty administrators, and all the students who participated in the study.

REFERENCES

- Ambele, A., & Boonsuk, S. (2020). The importance of English language proficiency in Thailand.
- Barrett, H. C. (2019). *Create your own e-portfolio: A guide to digital portfolio development*. PHE Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chai, S. (2021). Curriculum development in the era of Thailand 4.0: Challenges and opportunities. *Thai Journal of Educational Research*, 15(1), 23-37.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hengsadekul, C., Koul, R., & Kaewkuekool, S. (2014). Motivational orientation and preference for English-medium programs in Thailand. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 66, 35-44. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2014.02.001>
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511733031>
- Jindapitak, N. (2018). English as an ASEAN lingua franca and the role of nativeness in English education in Thailand. *English Today*, 35, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026607841800024X>
- Jones, M., & Lee, T. (2019). Thailand 4.0: Transforming education for a new economy. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 8(3), 234-250.
- Khamkhong, Y. (2017). *Developing English proficiency among Thai students: A case study of St. Theresa International College*. Retrieved August 14, 2024 from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3086520>
- Khan, M., & Ali, R. (2022). Integrating soft skills into English language curricula: A pathway to

- career readiness. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(1), 67-82.
- Kluensuwan, P., Chaisiri, T., Poomarin, W., & Rungruangsuparat, B. (2019). Needs analysis of English for engineering staff in the electronics industry in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya and Pathum Thani, Thailand. *NIDA Journal of Language and Communication*, 24(36), 64-90. http://www.lcjjournal.nida.ac.th/index.php?url=journal.php&jn_id=40
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Nguyen, H. (2020). Aligning curriculum with labor market needs: A case study of English programs in Thailand. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 34(4), 567-580.
- Phoewhawm, R. (2017). Educational management and the extent of Thai undergraduates' learning and performance behaviour: An international view. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 11, 59-76. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMIE.2017.10000650>
- Rajprasit, K., Pratoomrat, P., Wang, T., Kulsiri, S., & Hemchua, S. (2014). Use of the English language prior to and during employment: Experiences and needs of Thai novice engineers. *Global Journal of Engineering Education*, 16, 27-33.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- Singh, A. (2014). Challenges in academic reading and overcoming strategies in taught master programmes: A case study of international graduate students in Malaysia.
- Sunasuan, P., Pansuppawat, T., Manaratchasak, M., & Nillapun, M. (2020). Guide to the development of the intensive English program for graduate students at the Silpakorn University in Thailand. *PUPIL: International Journal of Teaching, Education and Learning*, 4(2), 171-192. <https://doi.org/10.20319/pjtel.2020.42.171192>
- Taylor, R. (2022). Student satisfaction in graduate programs: A review of the literature. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 44(2), 150-165.
- Thumvichit, A. (2020). ELT master's programmes in Thailand: Focused areas and research trends. *Journal of Language and Education*, 6(4), 171-182. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2020.10532>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Watchravesringkan, K., Karpova, E., Nelson Hodges, N., & Copeland, R. (2010). The competitive position of Thailand's apparel industry. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 14(4), 576-597. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13612021011081751>
- Wongkham, P. (2022). Innovative approaches in higher education amidst Thailand 4.0: Reshaping curricula for future careers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 11(3), 80-93.