An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and bring positive change when English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

By

Thavone Panmanivong

Student ID: 2196231

Email: panm0001@flinders.edu.au

Supervisor: Dr. Michael Bell

Thesis submitted to Flinders University in partial fulfilment

of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Education - Leadership and Management (18 units)

College of Education, Psychology & Social Work

Adelaide, October 2019

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ABSTRACT

As English is becoming a significant language for communication, education, social affairs and economics in Laos, it is essential to ensure that all lecturers/teachers of English use culturally appropriate methods and strategies to help their students reach desirable outcomes. Previous research has shown that English language teaching and learning outcomes in Laos are less satisfactory compared with other countries in Asia (Xaypanya, Ismail, & Low, 2017).

Previous studies have revealed that learning outcomes in English have been unsatisfactory because of lack of motivation, especially for those who study at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) (Souriyavongsa, Rany, Abidin, & Mei, 2013; Xaypanya et al., 2017). Achieving better outcomes from learning English requires high motivation, aspirations and a positive attitude towards learning (Gardner, 2001). However, it remains challenging to foster student motivation and aspiration due to weaknesses in curriculum design, teaching resources and facilities, and minimising the significance of learning English for their prospective employment.

In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six EFL lecturers from two groups: three lecturers selected as outstanding by the Dean of Education from a public university in Laos, and three Australia Awards Scholars at Flinders University who have taught English at tertiary institutions in Laos. These interviewees provided insights about their experience teaching English and how they dealt with the issues and barriers they faced. They also provided suggestions about how to implement positive change, especially in

relation to collaborative professional development for future improvement in EFL teaching and learning.

The results demonstrate strategies and methods that the lecturers have applied successfully to motivate their students, as well as to enhance learning outcomes in their professional contexts. Working with other lecturers who have the potential and willingness to make positive changes through professional development and are prepared to apply a variety of teaching strategies and methods in their teaching is a key strategy for success in the Laos context. I hope to improve English teaching methods and strategies collaboratively, resulting in an increase in students' English proficiency as a whole.

SIGNED DECLARATION

I certify that this research project entitled "An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and bring positive change when English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic", submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education (Leadership and Management), is my own work. It has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any previously published or written work by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed :

Thavone Panmanivong

Date: 15/10/2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my profound and sincere thanks to the following individuals who extended their invaluable support for the completion of this research. I wish to convey my respectful gratitude to the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) Programme and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia for offering me the great opportunity to study and pursue my dream in a beautiful, liveable, diverse, unique and friendly country, Australia.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Michael Bell, who has encouraged, supported, challenged and provided precious academic guidance throughout the whole process of conducting this research. His support and guidance have been significant for my academic achievement, especially guiding me to the right path in carrying out this research project.

I am indebted to Flinders University and its professional personnel, lecturers and related experts for their excellent support in transferring innovative and advance knowledge, skills and experiences to me. Also, I would like to acknowledge the University for providing modern and excellent facilities and other general supports that embraced me to the new friendly environment during my study, and my thanks also to Judith Lydeamore for her editing expertise.

My great appreciation is expressed to the participants for voluntarily sharing their experiences and views on EFL teaching and learning. This study would not have been accomplished without their participation.

I am deeply grateful to the President of Souphanouvong University, the Dean of the Faculty of Education, and the head of the Language Pedagogy Department and my colleagues for their support, constructive suggestions and encouragement towards the completion of my study and this research. I also would like to thank my friends, especially Nancy Lane, who were my consultants and provided academic help throughout study and conducting this project.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my beloved wife, son, parents and siblings for their spiritual and conscientious support and encouraging me when I faced difficulties through this journey.

The journey is drawing to an end. I have grown considerably and look forward to continuing to use the skills, knowledge and experiences I have gained over the last two years. Thank you everyone – you have all been a part of my great academic success and career endeavours.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

English is a global language which is widely used for communication with native-speakers and non-native speakers nationally and internationally. In the education sector, English is often used as the educational tool for instruction and research, as well as to obtain knowledge, especially in higher education (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Also, English language is used as the medium of economics, as well as for social and political uses (Christison & Murray, 2010).

Consistent with these global trends, English is becoming a significant language for communication, education, social affairs and economics in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Since Laos opened its door to the world in 1994, many international organisations have offered large amounts of official development support (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). The Lao government has also joined a number of worldwide associations, and works collaboratively with other countries. Thus, English language has been increasingly used throughout the nation. Consequently, English has become the first priority foreign language needed in both the public and private sectors (Siphong, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to assist all lecturers and teachers of English to use appropriate methods and strategies to get desirable outcomes (Kounnavongsa, 2015). This research explored the strategies and methods that are currently being applied to address the issue of students being under motivated while learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in Laos. It further investigates the literature on strategies and methods that have been successfully applied in similar contexts

internationally. In addition, it makes suggestions and recommendations for bringing about positive change in the field of EFL teaching in the Lao tertiary context.

Previous studies have revealed that learning outcomes in English have been unsatisfactory because of lack of motivation, especially among those who study at tertiary level in the Lao PDR (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013; Xaypanya et al., 2017). There are many factors that cause students to perform poorly in their EFL learning, such as lack of learning motivation, weakness of learning resources and curriculum design, and lack of teachers of English (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). According to John and Ehow (2011), the problems of EFL learning have often resulted from numerous factors in different environments and circumstances, such as quality of educators, learning resources and facilities, class size, and the awareness of students. Christison and Murray (2010) also observed that poor-performing students do not see the significance of learning English for their future employment with national or multinational organisations where English is required; they treat English as only a school subject that they need to complete.

Achieving better outcomes from learning English requires high motivation, aspirations and a positive attitude towards learning (Gardner, 2001). However, many lecturers and teachers face difficulties in fostering and maintaining student motivation due to the complex root causes of the issue. Gardner (2009) argued that there are two main factors that affect student motivation towards learning a foreign language: the 'educational factor' and the 'social factor'. The educational factor is identified as educational contextual features, including organizational

policy and administration, lecturer ability and curriculum design; while the social factor is identified as student values about the outcomes, such as the benefits, purposes and expectations from learning the language (Gardner, 2009). Motivation has become a major concern for lecturers and teachers of English trying to seek solutions. However, many studies have revealed that teaching methods and strategies, together with the relationship between lecturers/teachers and students, do matter with respect to student motivation towards learning. One example is a study by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008, p. 72) conducted in Korea, which revealed that "the teacher's motivational teaching practice affected student motivation as manifested in the students' classroom behaviour". Hence, to foster students' motivation and learning outcomes, it is essential and valuable for lecturers and teachers of English to comprehensively understand and recognise a variety of appropriate teaching methods.

Background and Context of the Study

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR or Laos) is located in South-east Asia, bordering China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar, and it is classified as a least developed country (LDC) (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Lao PDR is one of the Asian countries in which English has been used and taught as a foreign language and it plays a significant role in current educational development as well as in other sectors (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). From1893-1954, Laos was colonised by French (Kittikhoun, 2009). At that time, the English language was in limited use because French was dominant in official documents, educational institutions, and in business operations (Lewis &

Luangpraseut, 1989). After that, English appeared to again become a significant language in communication during American imperialism from 1955 to 1975. However, English documents and resources were destroyed after Laos gained its independence from America in 1975 because, at that time, it was not recognised that English might become the dominant global language of social engagement, and hence the significance of this language was ignored (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013).

In 1986, the Lao government made some changes in policy in order to enhance the country's development and promote the economy, education and cooperation with other countries (Bouangeune, Sakigawa, & Hirakawa, 2008). Thus, the English language became crucial in carrying out these policies and was prioritised for learning at school. In addition, in 1997, Laos joined the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), so English became the first priority foreign language used for both the public and private sectors (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Consequently, English has been gradually introduced into the educational system and it has become a core topic to learn from starting school through to tertiary education. In primary and secondary schools, English has generally been taught for only two hours per week which is insufficient to build students' English proficiency (Bouangeune et al., 2008). Therefore, many students have not been motivated to study English when they reach tertiary level.

According to Xaypanya et al. (2017) and Souriyavongsa et al. (2013), many of the challenges related to EFL teaching and learning remain unsolved in Lao's tertiary context even though the government has provided support. It is noticeable that the majority of EFL lecturers have graduated from national institutions. Only a

small number of them have opportunities to attend national or international training each year. In addition, most classrooms appear to be crowded, with up to 50 students per class. Furthermore, the facilities and technology are inadequate because there are not computers and projectors provided; the internet is inaccessible in classrooms; and the textbooks are old, irrelevant to the context, and printed in black and white.

Currently there are eleven public tertiary educational institutions in Laos where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), including five universities (National University of Laos, Souphanouvong University, Champasak University, Savanhnakhet University, and University of Health Sciences) and six teacher training colleges. These institutions are run by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES).

Challenges of English as a Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in Laos

Previous research has shown that teaching and learning outcomes in Lao PDR are less satisfactory in comparison with other countries in Asia like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Xaypanya et al., 2017). This could be the result of many factors. One factor is that lecturers and teachers of English in Laos are not well trained; instead, they follow outdated teaching methods that bore students, thus resulting in poor learning outcomes (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Phongsa, Mohamed Ismail, and Low (2018) revealed that many adult EFL learners feel demotivated in English classes because of lack of engagement from their lecturers.

Further, they feel anxiety towards learning English due to peer pressure when they perform poorly.

Lecturers face many issues in teaching and coping with their EFL classes, especially when students are under-motivated (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). From my personal experience, many lecturers and teachers, including myself, face difficulties in engaging students to participate in classroom activities, answer the lecturer's questions and do their homework. To overcome these issues, lecturers use different strategies depending on what they perceive and know. Under-motivation is difficult to resolve for many reasons. For example, strategies and methods used by some lecturers and teachers are limited and inappropriate, and many lecturers lack opportunities or are unwilling to undertake professional development. Although several lecturers and teachers, especially those who graduated from overseas, are effectively motivating their students to be active learners in the classroom, the strategies and methods used by these lecturers are not shared with others. Hence, this study was conducted to: 1) investigate what strategies and methods are used successfully by lecturers of English in the Lao PDR; 2) suggest widely accepted methods identified in the literature to deal with this issue; and 3) propose suggestions and recommendations for bringing positive change in EFL teaching in the tertiary context in Lao PDR.

Research interests

There is no doubt that tertiary level EFL lecturers find teaching very challenging. In many tertiary institutions like the National University of Laos and Champasak University in the southern part of the Lao PDR, the teaching of English

and subsequent learning outcomes are not always satisfactory (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013; Xaypanya et al., 2017). This is also the current situation at Souphanouvong University in the northern part of Lao PDR. Many students who specialise as teachers of English have major deficits in their ability to effectively use the English language in their classes. The reasons for this are complex, so the solutions will be equally complex. Also, because English has recently come to play a significant role in communication, education and business, one of the government's plans is to enhance professional literacy in English for all Lao citizens. Thus, for this plan to become a reality, it is crucial that appropriate methods be implemented by all lecturers of English. Additionally, there is the need for them to determine which globally accepted methods of teaching English are appropriate in the Lao context.

Based on my own experience and observations (I have been an EFL teacher for 7 years), lecturers in my workplace have faced numerous issues and challenges when they teach English. This includes overcrowded classrooms, different levels of student capacity, lack of resources, especially technology, and lack of student motivation, which is exacerbated by the other deficits. Hence, it is beneficial and timely to investigate how EFL lecturers deal with those challenges and what techniques they apply effectively, and to further consider what other methods have been successful internationally.

Hence, the primary purposes of this research were to identify modern, evidence-based teaching methods for English that are ideal given the context of tertiary education in the Lao PDR; and to propose suggestions and

recommendations for making positive change. It is hoped that the findings of this research will assist educational development in Laos.

Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study was to explore teaching strategies and methods that have been and can be successfully applied in tertiary education in Laos to cope with low motivation of EFL learners. In particular, it examined how lecturers instruct and control their classes when students are not engaged in learning, and what strategies and methods they have used effectively to engage students to become active EFL learners in order to achieve satisfactory outcomes. Also, it aimed to carefully introduce concepts that could make a positive change in EFL teaching and learning in the Lao tertiary context. Further, this study aimed to critically investigate the literature to identify successful strategies and methods of teaching English in other countries. Hopefully, the findings can be introduced for consideration by lecturers of English in Laos to deal with the low motivation of EFL learners and to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

Research Questions

Given the context together with the background information of this research topic and its purposes, it is worthwhile exploring what strategies and methods are already successful in dealing with this issue at tertiary level in Lao PDR. The restriction in the variety of these methods calls for exploration of relevant literature to better develop teaching skills and techniques that would increase the ability and flexibility of Lao lecturers in teaching English and bringing positive change. Therefore, this study sought answers to these focussed questions.

1. What are the teaching strategies and methods that are being used and that have contributed to successful outcomes with demotivated learners being taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao PDR?
2. What suggestions are available for teaching strategies and methods that have the potential to bring positive change to the teaching of EFL in the Lao context?

These main questions led to these supplementary questions:

1. What are the reasons that EFL students are demotivated?
2. What are the strategies and methods that are usually used by lecturers to deal with students when they are demotivated while learning?
3. Based on the international literature, what other teaching strategies and methods for learning English as a foreign language can be recommended as being highly appropriate for the Lao context?
4. What should be improved and implemented to foster EFL learners and bring positive change in Laos?

Definitions of key terms

Key terms are defined as follows, based on the purpose of this study.

Teaching strategies – a generalised or specific plan to implement or facilitate a lesson(s) so that students desire and are inspired to learn.

Teaching methods – processes, principles and pedagogy that are used by lecturers/teachers for classroom instruction to enable student learning.

Successful outcomes – desired and satisfactory level of results or performance in student learning.

Positive change – an innovative way of implementing effective initiatives in order to strengthen and contribute to improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Tertiary institutions – postsecondary educational organisations or tertiary education, including public universities and colleges.

Lecturer – a person who teaches or provides instruction to students at a university or college.

Demotivated student – a student who has motivational problems or who loses their motivation to learn because of some challenges and barriers.

Low motivation – an attitude characterised by a minimal level of willingness or enthusiasm to learn, often because of lack of inspiration or encouragement to stimulate learning.

Significance of the study

The issue of students having low motivation in learning English is of obvious concern to the Lao educational system as a whole. The government has set a priority for educational leaders and lecturers to address and seek appropriate solutions (MPI, 2016). More study is required to explore successful pedagogical methods, and to recommend how best to apply them in the Lao context. Hence, this

study responds to the government's plans, with the expectation that it could help elevate the quality of English teaching and learning outcomes.

Numerous methods of teaching English are available, flexible and adaptable in different contexts and situations (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Lecturers may use different methods and strategies depending on their purposes and what they perceive as issues while they are teaching (Harmer, 2008). Therefore, it is beneficial to understand a variety of methods in the field of EFL teaching and learning, with a focus on particular issues that can be adapted to the Lao context. This study integrates widely accepted methods and strategies as recommended options for Lao lecturers to use in their classrooms, to deal especially with the issue of demotivated students. These methods would provide significant guidance for Lao lecturers to use in their classrooms, resulting in the enhancement of their students' English proficiency.

The results of this study might be beneficial not only to the educational sector as a whole, but might also bring benefits to the development of all sectors in Laos. The ability to use the English language is an initial requirement of employment because it is a key factor that contributes to better outcomes of many educational and business organisations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have explored and recommended paradigms for the teaching of English that would help solve the issues and challenges facing EFL lecturers. For decades, different methods and strategies have been designed, implemented and evaluated by reputable scholars, as well as educators, to elevate standards and ensure successful outcomes. However, this is not the case in Laos. The following literature review illustrates the ideal concepts that relate to the teaching and learning of English in various contexts. Further, it illustrates the conceptual frameworks that researchers have indicated can promise more effective results.

Some effective English teaching concepts that are commonly found in the body of literature focused on EFL teaching and learning, especially for the tertiary context, are highlighted next. The focus of the literature is on strategies and methods that have been successfully applied to solve the issue of EFL students having low motivation, as well as characteristics of EFL lecturers or teachers that could lead to positive change in tertiary institutions in Laos.

EFL Learning Environment in the Lao PDR

The Lao PDR is a Southeast Asian country where English is taught as a foreign or second language in schools and tertiary institutions. If comparisons are made with the level of English literacy in other countries like Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia, Lao people have had minimal exposure to teaching and learning English due to the country's prolonged history of French colonisation

(1893 to 1953), and the restrictions placed on teaching and learning foreign languages during the closed-door policy (1975 to 1997) (Xaypanya et al., 2017). Recently the country has strengthened its connections with other countries, and has become a member of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). This status shows that English is becoming a more significant language for communication, social affairs and economics. Also, English has become a significant bridge for Lao professionals to acquire higher education from overseas countries. Thus, the government has prioritised English as part of its curriculum since 1997, and has gradually introduced it to all levels of the educational system from primary schools to tertiary institutions (Kounnavongsa, 2015). Today, English is a compulsory course in the curriculum for primary, middle, and high school students, college or university students.

However, while attempting to achieve a satisfactory level of EFL teaching and learning, many Lao lecturers and teachers are experiencing numerous challenges due to their personal deficits in English itself, as well as in teaching techniques and knowledge. Moreover, Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) revealed that, even though English is taught as a foreign language in the Lao PDR, several factors, including the social and political environment along with cultural differences, are negatively influencing EFL education. In addition, there are no screening criteria to assess if proper methods are being implemented during the teaching of English. The same authors also concluded that there are numerous reasons causing Lao students to perform poorly in EFL learning, such as inappropriate curriculum design, inadequate school resources, lack of skilled lecturers in English and lack of

motivation. This is evident in the poor achievement of the students (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013).

Around the globe, practitioners are choosing and applying a range of different techniques which are dependent on variables such as fundamental circumstances, cultures, levels of English literacy, and social and linguistic challenges (Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, & Ghonsooly, 2016). In the Lao PDR, only a few lecturers use appropriate strategies to deal with the issues and challenges in their particular context. Some issues are effectively addressed, but many remain challenges for lecturers who may never seek to learn different techniques or approaches. Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) revealed that the majority of lecturers in English in the Lao PDR are not adequately prepared or well trained, resulting in inappropriate teaching styles, such as using the Lao language predominantly in English lessons and using methods that do not engage students, and they are inflexible and bound by substandard textbooks. Further, over-crowded classrooms, insufficient teaching and learning resources, different levels of English competency among students in a class, and the low level of English competency of lecturers continue to be key challenges that still require proper attention. Thus, improving EFL lecturer proficiency and teaching skills is becoming a matter of urgency.

In addition, it is perceived that the majority of EFL lecturers and teachers in Laos emphasize grammar-based methods. They teach by focusing on grammar more than communicative activities. The result of a study by S. J. Savignon and Wang (2003) illustrated that Taiwanese EFL learners had negative attitudes toward grammar-based teaching, and positive attitudes toward a communicative

approach. Also, a study by Raman (2017), in Turkey, showed that a grammar-based approach results in student lacking confidence in developing communicative competence and constitutes barriers for the development of communicative skills. This appears to be similar in the Lao context because EFL students in Laos are perceived to have low levels of communicative competence and are demotivated. However, students seem to be more interested and motivated when a communicative method is emphasized.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely accepted as an effective method to develop communicative competence and it was introduced in language education in the early 1970s (Farooq, 2015; S. Savignon, 1972). A study of EFL teaching in Korean middle schools revealed that CLT is effectively used to develop communicative environments, to create motivational activities, to apply student-centred activities, and to promote teaching in communicative ways (Choi, 1999). A study by Zhang (2014) on EFL teachers' perceptions about implementation of CLT in China revealed issues that prevented them from applying CLT, such as limited resources, lack of understanding of CLT, and the time required for preparing and organizing activities because class time is limited. Similarly, in Laos, because it imposes so many demands applying the concepts of CLT remains challenging. Lecturers face difficulties applying CLT including, lack of confidence, low fluency in English, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources (Li, 1998). Thus, to successfully apply a CLT approach, lecturers of English in Laos have to be creative and competent in using English, and have good communication skills. Also, teaching and learning resources and facilities need to be provided, such as computers, projectors and the Internet. As English is of primary importance to the

development of the Lao PDR, it is likewise of primary importance to address problems.

Exploration of Methods for Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Different Contexts

Given the variety of English teaching methods that are available to educators, it is crucial for EFL lecturers to analyse and identify the most appropriate and effective ones to use in each specific situations. Larsen-Freeman (2000, p. 1) proffers the term 'language teaching method', saying that "is important to recognize that methodology links thoughts and actions because teaching is not entirely about just one or the other". She further clarifies that an awareness of the use of teaching theory and context is paramount. For lecturers in language, knowledge about subject matter, like the language and culture, as well as how students learn, is essential. Next, lecturers need to be analytical about what strategies they can employ to assist students to learn well. This awareness can inform lecturers' actions in the classroom to ensure good practice.

Widdowson (1987) went further when he stated that communicative competence requires more than merely mastering grammar and other structures of the language, because some students may understand the rules of language usage but still be unable to apply them in communication. As the main target of learning any language is to communicate, it is worthwhile to create language classrooms that are actually communicative, so students can use English in authentic ways (Gebhard, 2006). Larsen-Freeman (2000) also described 'communicative language teaching' as helping students to develop their

communication competency. By applying this method, the lecturer facilitates communication in the class, and students use language through communicative activities, such as role plays, problem solving tasks and games. Various activities and resources are produced to teach students to think and apply the language in natural and authentic ways. It is widely recognised that EFL students are likely to be more motivated and learn effectively if the lessons and activities are interesting and relevant to the context (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011). Also, a study by Berardo (2006) proved that when authentic materials that are related to the context in communicative language teaching (CLT) are used, students are highly motivated. Gebhard (2006) was more descriptive when he suggested that four interrelated components – namely grammar, discourse, sociocultural factors and strategic competency – should be recognised, interconnected and adjusted by EFL learners and lecturers to develop communicative competence.

Fears about performance and expressing ideas in class might unconsciously result in negative attitudes towards learning. Recent studies have shown that it is common for EFL learners, especially those who lack confidence with their language competency, to experience these fears (Xaypanya et al., 2017). Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggested that a 'community language learning' method might overcome this issue. The demands of this method require that EFL lecturers should understand the relationship between students' feelings, reactions and desire to learn. To overcome students' fears, lecturers should build relationships with their students, become language counsellors and facilitate easier expression by students.

Studies have shown that classroom management is a primary element that challenges EFL lecturers, especially in the Lao PDR (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Gebhard (2006) defined classroom management as the strategies that teachers use to organise and facilitate engagement and learning in classrooms. By managing their classroom, lecturers can manipulate interactions by considering related factors, such as how much they speak, what they say or ask, how they instruct, to what extent they stay on task and how effectively they set up activities. Hence, if the classrooms are overcrowded, teachers or lecturers might face difficulties in effectively managing.

Supporting this claim, Daif-Allah and Alsamani (2013) found that one of the most significant factors affecting Saudi EFL learner motivation was classroom size. Overcrowded classes made it more difficult for EFL lecturers to get students involved in the activities; hence, students had low motivation to learn. According to Gebhard (2006), effective classroom management can create positive, proactive, interactive and conducive classroom environments that provide opportunities for students to use English in natural and meaningful ways.

The Use of Technology in EFL Teaching and Learning

Various studies have revealed that technology has received great attention amongst EFL teachers and learners (Ahmed & Nasser, 2015; Cakir, 2006; Hsu, Hung, & Ching, 2013). Technology and its applications are widely used to facilitate EFL teaching and stimulate student learning; its use can promote effective EFL teaching and learning because it can encourage a collaborative, interactive and innovative learning environment. Many EFL teachers use technology and its

applications to motivate student learning and foster learning outcomes (Ahmed & Nasser, 2015; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009).

Technology is a significant tool that helps students to make meaningful connections with authentic content and communities (Lombardi, 2007). Technology creates learning opportunities and makes learning more effective and innovative. However, the use of technology is more effective if lecturers and teachers have expertise to use technology in meaningful ways in the classroom (Sadik, 2008). Thus, it is essential that lecturers and teachers of English are technologically capable. Based on previous studies, technology can be used as a worthwhile teaching and learning tool to significantly encourage EFL learners to become more engaged and motivated, which can ultimately transform passive students into active and productive ones.

Successful Lecturers and the Necessity for Continued Professional Development

In Asia, the paucity of lecturers' English proficiency has been recognised as a significant characteristic that impedes success (Butler, 2004). Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2011) stated that pedagogically successful teachers are those who are able to critically observe their own and others' teaching thereby identifying the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that can act as a catalyst for improvement. Further, Brookfield (1995) mentioned that successful teachers learn and apply a number of instructional strategies, teach at the right pace, regularly check learners' involvement and understanding, and concentrate on the topic and objectives. Lowman (1996), in his description of exemplary teachers, stated that

they are knowledgeable and have the characteristics of being enthusiastic, caring, creative and capable of stimulating and supporting student learning. Chiang (2003) went further and included five criteria in her sensitising framework, which was based on her study of EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in Taiwan. These criteria are the teacher's prior learning experience; personal teaching styles and extent of teacher education; beliefs about teaching and learning; perceptions of the instructional task and its context; and their theoretical knowledge of Language 2 (L2) and its connections with Language 1 (L1). Furthermore, from a Korean perspective, Park and Lee (2006) investigated the characteristics of effective English teachers by focusing on three specific elements: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills. Their findings illustrate that lecturers seem to rate the significance of English proficiency higher than the other categories, while the majority of students rate pedagogical knowledge as the most important characteristic of EFL lecturers. This shows that lecturers and students prioritise the characteristics of effective English lecturers quite differently.

Being an EFL lecturer is challenging, so numerous talents are required. These include creativity, patience, an attitude of flexibility, cultural awareness and excellent interpersonal communication skills in teaching (Kitaw, 2017). In addition, EFL lecturers need to undertake regular professional development to ensure their knowledge and teaching methods are aligned with contemporary research and accepted practice. Gebhard (2006) showed that, to boost student motivation to speak more English in class, it is important for English teachers to undertake self-development because it results in more dynamic, flexible and

innovative methods of teaching rather than an unengaging 'lockstep' (following the textbook) style.

There are different approaches for EFL teachers to improve their teaching. Gebhard (2006) stated pragmatic guidelines for teacher development as follows:

- Read recognised journal articles and books about the advances made in teaching and learning.
- Read teacher narratives.
- Attend professional conferences regularly.
- Establish a mentoring relationship.
- Collate a teaching portfolio.
- Learn another language.
- Conduct action research.
- Practise self-observation.
- Observe other teachers.
- Talk with other teachers.
- Keep a teacher journal.

In the Lao PDR, numerous opportunities for professional development are provided by stakeholders. These include an annual TESOL conference held in the capital city, Vientiane; the Australian Volunteer Program (AVP); and the English Language Institution (ELI) which provides experts who volunteer to support teaching and learning by conducting workshops, training sessions, co-teaching and establishing long-term mentor relationships; and local organisations, such as @ My Library and Big Brother Mouse in Luang Prabang, that provide opportunities for

both beginner and advanced English language speakers to develop specific skills, such as discussing books in English, making oral presentations or practising conversational English. However, still too many EFL teachers are not self-motivated to develop their professionalism despite numerous opportunities to do so.

Motivation and Foreign Language Learning

It is known that motivation is an essential attribute for successful learning, especially in the foreign language learning process (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004; Spada & Lightbown, 1993). It influences "learners' autonomy, attention, effort, persistence, the frequency of using learning strategies, and their learning achievement" (H. Zhou, 2012, p. 1318). Motivation has been defined in various ways as it represents a variety of concepts. Generally, it is characterised as a "student's willingness or desire to be engaged in or commit effort to completing a task, [which] is an important component of classroom learning that students may self-regulate" (H. Zhou, 2012, p. 1318). Also, Ryan and Deci (2000) highlighted that

> to be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated (p. 54).

Thus, without inspiration, students exhibit low motivation to participate, co-operate and engage in the learning process.

A number of researchers have indicated that individuals attempt to achieve their purposes to satisfy two kinds of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguished between

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in that intrinsic motivation "refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable", while extrinsic motivation "refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" (p. 55). Alshenqeeti (2018) also distinguished two kinds of motivation, defining intrinsic motivation as "doing a task because it is interesting to a person or that a person finds it enjoyable" (p. 2), and extrinsic motivation as "situations where students do something because they expect it to bring about an outcome, such as employment or profitmaking" (p. 2). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could significantly encourage students to engage with and overcome challenges and to learn new skills to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

Highly motivated students are likely to be persistent and active, and will tend to accomplish their goals. In contrast, students who have low motivation appear to be passive and reluctant to learn, so they often fail to achieve the goals (Kubiatko, Hsieh, Ersozlu, & Usak, 2018). The international literature also shows that under-motivated students have a lack of inspiration and impetus towards learning and are likely to be uninterested and non-participatory during lessons and discussions (Cigan, 2014; McFarlane, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Hence, there is a professional responsibility for teachers/lecturers to utilise strategies to foster student motivation.

Generally, lacking motivation in English language learning was found in many parts of the world, especially in EFL or ESL contexts. Extrinsic motivation and differences in cultural environments and social contexts in which the target language learning takes place, such as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam,

significantly influence learning outcomes (Hashemi, 2011). Although the English language is considered a significant factor for leading Lao national development, the English proficiency level of students in Laos is still far from satisfactory (Ming, Ling, & Jaafar, 2011).

Students' attitude (motivation) towards EFL learning

A study by (Xaypanya et al., 2017) conducted with EFL students in Laos to explore factors that negatively impacted on their motivation to learn English, found that the motivation of EFL learners towards English remains a challenging issue faced by EFL lecturers in many countries. They noted that student motivation was a significant factor that both positively and negatively affects EFL learners. Kitaw (2017) elucidated that one of the main challenges involved with EFL teaching and learning is students' attitudes towards learning. Further, Yusimah (2014) asserted that students who have high motivation tend to learn more quickly than those who are demotivated, because they are likely to be active and engaged as well as supportive of effective classroom management. However, Ruiz-Funes (2002) (as cited in Kitaw, 2017, p. 36) stated that teachers find it difficult to boost EFL students' motivation when they do not recognise its importance and benefits to themselves and their society. Their negative attitude could demotivate learning and bring difficulties for classroom management.

Y. Zhou (2011) revealed that anxiety also negatively affects students' learning attitude. Some students are not confident about receiving feedback from either teachers or classmates when they feel that they perform poorly in class. This is a barrier for students in showing their learning aptitude and progress, and it also

creates difficulties for lecturers and teachers. Kumaravadivelu (2006) went further by stating that the background of learners, together with the cultural, social, political and educational environment, has an influence on language learning.

In Laos where English is not widely used and its pronunciation and structures are totally different from the mother tongue, it is difficult for lecturers and students to practise and learn it effectively. Xaypanya et al. (2017) found five elements that demotivate Lao students toward their EFL learning in tertiary education. Their findings revealed that general anxiety had a major impact on EFL learners' demotivation. This was followed by numerous difficulties with the language itself, insufficient support, inadequate resources, negative attitudes and an outmoded curriculum. Thus, it is worthwhile for EFL teachers to strategically apply effective teaching techniques and strategies to instil positive attitudes, accompanied by greater motivation, in their students.

A scrutiny of the suggestions of previous research reveals that there are various ways to cultivate EFL students' motivation, and enhance them to be loyal learners. One of these, based on the study by Xaypanya et al. (2017), suggests that it is important to provide opportunities for EFL learners to be exposed to multiple experiences and to practise their English with native speakers online or locally, in their workplace and daily life, such as hotels, restaurants and tourist sightseeing areas. Further, they suggest that proficient support and sufficient resources are essential dimensions to cultivate learning attitudes of EFL learners. In addition, they refer to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which shows that another way to boost EFL learners' motivation is to create an English-speaking

environment they can participate in. For instance, teachers should create communicative approaches where students can talk in pairs or groups. Yet another strategy is to utilise selected electronic devices that students are familiar with and happy to engage with (Kitaw, 2017).

Summary

Regarding the research literature, numerous strategies and methods have been successful in different contexts, and there is no specific strategy or method that fits a particular issue. The literature on the reasons for learners being demotivated deals with various factors, such as lack of teaching and learning resources, the use of outdated methods, an inappropriate curriculum and a low level of English proficiency, as well as other social and environmental factors. These reasons appear to be similar in the Lao context, where students experience low motivation and low learning outcomes.

The international literature highlights various approaches that could be effectively used to deal with different issues and situations. Generally, the use of appropriate activities to promote lifelong learning, cooperation and engagement, the qualifications and characteristics of EFL lecturers, building students' confidence, and appropriate content of lessons could positively influence learning motivation and satisfactory outcomes. Also, these factors could positively contribute to teaching and learning development in Laos.

The research methodology for this study is explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study as its underpinning philosophical perspective. This is followed by the methodological process, including design of the study (research methodology, sample selection, data collection and data analysis), trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations and delimitations of the study. The design was employed to answer the research questions:

1. What are the teaching strategies and methods that are being used and that have contributed to successful outcomes with demotivated learners being taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao PDR?
2. What suggestions are available for teaching strategies and methods that have the potential to bring positive change to the teaching of EFL in the Lao context?

Theoretical Underpinnings

Theoretical underpinnings of a study are best selected on the basis of the kind of question being investigated. The research questions of this study sought understandings of common life situations and the practices within them. Hence, qualitative research and social constructionism were chosen as the theoretical framework for designing this research.

1. Qualitative Research

Based on Punch and Oancea (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding typical life situations, and reflects the life learning, behaviour and practice of individuals, groups, organisations and societies. It is widely accepted that by applying a qualitative approach, I am able to understand and broadly define means of action or naturalistic phenomena in a particular setting by observing or interviewing (Golafshani, 2003; Hoepfl, 1997).

The purpose of this research was to explore the teaching strategies and methods being applied by EFL lecturers in Laos to deal with demotivated or undermotivated students. Also, it explored suggestions and recommendations for bringing positive change in EFL teaching and learning in the Lao context. Thus, a qualitative approach was selected for the research design to provide richer experiences as well as more in-depth understanding of how the lecturers were involved in and handled the phenomenon.

The main focus of this study was to understand cultural and institutional practices, experiences and reactions of individuals from a group of people (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Hence, I focused on the life-worlds of the lecturers to explore and elicit more in-depth explanations of the teaching experiences and concepts of EFL lecturers in Laos.

2. Social Constructionism

The practices and experiences of EFL lecturers that were explored in this research are constructed through the social practices of individuals and their interactions (Gergen, 2009; Jha, 2012). Social constructionism emphasises the

engagement of individuals' knowledge and experience in a context that is constructed by social processes, social activities and their interactions (Jha, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004). Young and Collin (2004, p. 377) argued that social constructionism "covers a range of views from acknowledging how social factors shape interpretations to how the social world is constructed by social processes and relational practices". Jha (2012) asserted that the interaction, connectivity and social processes also influence the construction and strengthening of knowledge by sharing and reflecting one's own concepts and experiences with others.

For social constructionists "knowledge, truth, objectivity or insight are founded within communities of meaning making" (Gergen, 2001, p. 2). Hence, knowledge is socially constructed rather than truth or a fact to be discovered.

This implies the central phenomenon of teaching strategies and methods would be enriched and better understood through the interactions and interpretation of experience sharing. Also, teaching and learning is an active, rather than passive, process of knowledge construction, thus, throughout my interactions with the selected lecturers, they would be able to share their experiences, concepts and ideas related to the improvement of EFL teaching and learning in the Lao context. Consequently, I would receive richer information to answer the research questions through this interaction.

Design of the Study

The subsequent sections explain the choice of research method, as well as the processes of selecting the sample, collecting the data and analysing the data.

1. Research Methodology

This qualitative study applied two methodologies: literature review and semi-structured interviews.

Initially, a literature-based methodology was used to explore well accepted strategies and methods that have been applied successfully in other contexts and that could be relevant and adaptable to the Lao context. By making a comparison between the lecturers' experiences and concepts and the international literature, I could draw conclusions and implications to respond to the research questions. Based on Comerasamy (2012), a literature-based methodology is designed for a research project where the existing literature is the population to which I need to go for sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethics. The first three of these aspects are covered under the heading of Data Collection in Section 3 below.

Subsequently, the teaching experiences of individuals can be identified and described from telling stories of teaching, so the interview method was used to collect the data. "The interview is the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research. It is a very good way of exploring people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 182). Also, according to (Seidman, 2013, p. 9), the interview technique can often be used when a researcher has "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience". Interviewing within a qualitative study can be successful through establishing a trusting relationship between the researcher and interviewees, to persuade them

to express their experience or stories thoroughly (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the interview approach was appropriate and chosen for this study.

To get rich and in-depth understandings of experience from the participants in the research context, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Based on Punch and Oancea (2014, p. 184), semi-structured interviews "are guided by a set of questions and prompts for discussion, but have in-built flexibility to adapt to particular respondents and situations". Thus, semi-structured interviews were suitable to use with lecturers who were identified as being able to use appropriate methods to engage students in learning English as a foreign language. In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed the lecturers and I to have informal, comprehensive and thorough conversations.

2. Selecting participants

This study focused on two areas of tertiary education in Laos. The first focus was the Faculty of Education of the university selected for this study. The English Program is a significant part of the curriculum in the Department of Language Pedagogy of the faculty. The faculty employs more than fifteen lecturers to teach English to students who are undertaking courses to become teachers in different specialised fields, such as English Language, Lao Language and Literacy, Politics, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. The second focus was EFL lecturers who are experienced in teaching English at tertiary institutions in Laos and who are currently pursuing their education in Australia.

Creswell (2012) asserted that purposeful sampling helps researchers to intentionally select participants who can best understand the phenomenon and

provide accurate and related information. Hence, this research used purposeful sampling to intentionally select sites and participants to collect in-depth information in order to explore the central phenomenon related to this study (Creswell, 2012).

In conducting this study, six participants were chosen purposefully from two areas. To ensure that I obtained accurate and appropriate information to answer the research questions, two main criteria were considered in the sample selection process. Firstly, the participants should have a minimum of three years and preferably longer teaching experience in EFL. Secondly, they should have successfully applied teaching methods and strategies to deal with demotivated learners. Gender was not considered, so the selected participants could be either male or female.

For the first group, three participants were selected from among fifteen lecturers in English who were currently working at a university in Laos. These interviewees were recommended by the head of the Department within the Faculty. With respect to their rights, the participants were voluntary participants in this study. I told them the research topic and the purposes of the research, and then asked if they wanted to volunteer as a participant.

For the second group, three interviewees were selected from among six lecturers who had taught English in tertiary intuitions in Laos, and who were currently students at a university within Australia. The length of their work experience was an additional criterion for selection among this group. These lecturers (interviewees) were considered as having sufficient teaching experience

and high English competency levels and abilities because they had been selected as successful candidates for the Australia Awards Scholarships.

There were several reasons I chose two groups of participants. Firstly, I aimed to understand teaching experiences and concepts for improving and making change from different institutions. Secondly, the participants from the second group, those who were currently studying in Australia, were identified as being qualified because they were selected through a competitive process as Australia Awardees. Thus, they could provide insightful and effective suggestions and recommendations after learning in Australia.

The general background profile and qualifications of the participants are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 0.1. Participants' profile and qualifications

Participants' Code	**Educational Qualifications**	**Professional Development Experience (Joined/attended workshops and training)**
A	Studying Master's Degree	- Annual Lao TESOL Conference - Short course in Academic English - Diploma of Community Development
B	Studying Master's Degree	- Annual Cambodia TESOL Conference - Annual Lao TESOL Conference - Short course in Academic English - Academic Communication Training - ESL Methodology and Spoken English
C	Studying Master's Degree	- Annual Lao TESOL Conference - ASEAN Eco-leader Project

		- Teaching Workshop - ASEAN University Students Conference
D	Master's Degree	- Training course on using the Internet in education - Annual Lao TESOL Conference - Education for sustainable development - The international conference on education development - Education for Sustainable Development - Seminar on Education for All (EFA) - Regional Workshop on Sustainability Begins with the Teacher: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) - Japan-ASEAN International Symposium on Education 2018
E	Master's Degree	- Soft Skills Curriculum Training - Teacher Training Outreach Program - Education for Sustainable Development - Inclusive Education Training - Access to Quality Education - Training course on using the Internet in education
F	Master's Degree	- Training course on using the Internet in education - Annual Lao TESOL Conference

Table 3.1 shows that all the participants were qualified and experienced. They had all completed or were enrolled in higher degree courses. All lecturers had

experience studying or participating in workshops or training overseas with international educational organisations. It appears that all the participants had been willing to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Thus, they could be assumed to have the potential to deal with students who have low motivation or are demotivated, as well as to bring concepts of positive change to their institutions.

3. Data Gathering

Firstly, for the literature-based method, the main resources were identified from well-documented and most cited books, articles, journals, and annual and official reports. I focused on the studies conducted in EFL and ESL contexts, and relevant to the English language. The time frame included studies that were conducted from 1995 to 2019. The search terms were identified by using relevant key terms, such as EFL or ESL teaching strategies or EFL or ESL teaching methods, successful characteristics of EFL teachers/lecturers, successful learning outcomes, tertiary education/institutions, demotivated students and low motivation.

The research terms were used mostly to search data bases Google Scholar and ProQuest through Flinders University's library search. Using these databases, especially ProQuest, I could identify which resources were well-documented and most cited by using advanced search and searching for peer reviewed articles. Further, by using these databases, I was able to identify which articles and books were reliable and matched the criteria for evaluating sources. The selected resources were evaluated by their suitability and currency. Also, studies that were

referenced in other articles were used and these were acknowledged by using APA 6th edition referencing style.

The data were gathered from two groups of participants. Interviews with the first group of three participants, who were currently teaching English in Laos, were undertaken by phone calls (using Messenger). Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewees were informed by a letter explaining the purpose of the study and provided with consent forms for them to return if they agreed to be in the study. I acknowledged that there are benefits and limitations of using telephone to conduct interviews. Due to the limitations of time and budget, I have to choose undertaking this way. The second group of interviews was completed face-to-face with the three participants who were lecturers of English in Laos, and were currently studying at the Master's level in the field of education in Australia. It is observable that face-to-face interviews allow opportunities for both interviewee and interviewer to have more in-depth conversations.

The interviews took between 40 minutes to 60 minutes for each person, and the conversation was recorded for later transcription. All participants were asked similar questions in Lao language because using their native language could make it easier to communicate complex ideas and allow for the free flow of the interview without concern for language expression or accuracy. The interview questions were piloted and refined. The majority of interview questions were in an open-ended format because this type of question gave opportunities for participants to express their thoughts, opinions and perspectives freely (Creswell, 2012). Also, by using this type of interview, I had more chance to get the details of

the interviewees' experience (Seidman, 2013). Thus, I could collect information broadly and thoroughly.

4. Data Analysis

I followed a three-main-component data analysis, as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), namely data reduction, data displays, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Firstly, I transcribed the recordings in the Lao language, the language that was used for the interviews, and then translated the Lao transcriptions into English. After that, the transcriptions of the recorded interviews were coded in order to reduce irrelevant information, and then categorised into themes.

As this was a small-scale research project, a manual data approach to analysis was used. I read the transcriptions, reduced, organised and coded, then divided the information into themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2012). I used an open-coding process for establishing themes. The findings presented in Chapter 4 answer research question number 1; and the findings discussed in Chapter 5 about making change, along with those based on the international literature, answer research question number 2. After the analysis, I interpreted the data by making comparisons with the literature or with previous studies; how I consequently made sense of the findings are found in the Discussion and Conclusion chapters.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Holloway (1997, p. 160) emphasised that "… qualitative research is trustworthy when it reflects the reality and the ideas of the participants". To assess the trustworthiness of information from the participants, this research focused on

four primary elements of trustworthiness as suggested by Holloway (1997), namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the validity of the data, from which readers are able to reflect on the setting of the phenomenon, and draw references and connect the findings to other similar settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study established credibility by ensuring that the participants' words were quoted directly and in whole paragraphs so as to represent the contextual richness of their experiences. References to historical, socio-economic and cultural features allowed the findings to be located in the contemporary Laos landscape (Holloway, 1997; Pitney & Parker, 2009).

Dependability in this study refers to the reliability, consistency and appropriateness of conducting the research processes (Holloway, 1997; Pitney & Parker, 2009). To ensure that this was achieved, I have described the research methods, including data collection, analysis and interpretation, and maintained an audit trail (Kielhofner, as cited in Krefting, 1991). Also, to minimise bias, I sent both the Lao and English version of the transcript of the interview to the participants individually. They were invited to add more information, or omit information that they do not want to share, and to reply in order to confirm their agreement about the use of information.

Confirmability was established to ensure that the data and findings could be trusted (Krefting, 1991). This study ensured confirmability through careful participant checking, seeking advice, and the use of critical friends as well as assistance from the research supervisor.

Transferability refers to the application of the research findings in other similar settings or situations (Holloway, 1997). Thus, the study, its purposes and its usefulness have been clearly described for readers to directly apply or adapt to use in their professional settings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for this project was acquired from the Flinders University Research Ethics Committee (Project Number: 8212). A letter to the Head of the Language Pedagogy Department and the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Souphanouvong University, asking for permission to collect the data was handed in and signed (Appendix 6). The consent forms were distributed to every participant and signed before conducting the interviews (Appendix 4). All the participants were informed, prior to agreeing to participate, that the information collected was anonymous and that their confidentiality would be protected (Appendices 2 and 3). Also, all the sources cited in this research were acknowledged appropriately by using the APA referencing style.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Even though this study was thoroughly prepared, inevitably there were limitations due to timeframe and budget restrictions. Firstly, the focus of this study explored only successful strategies and methods that are being applied by some lecturers to deal with low motivation of EFL learners at tertiary level in Laos. Secondly, the interviewees chosen were limited to only six lecturers. Not including other lecturers from these institutions, nor lecturers from other tertiary educational institutions, meant it was not possible to discover all the appropriate

strategies and methods which might be useful for others. Thirdly, despite the fact that knowing the root causes of an issue can help to effectively address it, in this study the root causes and reasons for the issue could only begin to be explored, rather than being identified in depth.

The delimitations of this study should also be noted. As has been acknowledged, the methods used in EFL teaching and learning are broad. However, this study focused only on the methods and strategies that have been used to deal with the issue of EFL learners having low motivation, as well as suggestions and recommendations for bringing positive change to tertiary institutions in Laos. Further, the scope of this study targeted only the tertiary level (universities and colleges). Issues other than these were beyond the scope of the study.

Summary

The theoretical underpinning of the research methodology and the processes of research design, sample selection, data collection and data analysis in order to answer the research questions posed have been outlined. The results of the study are highlighted and explored clearly in Chapters 4 and 5. Specifically, Chapter 5 includes discussion and comparison with the literature.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS ABOUT EXPERIENCES AND CONCEPTS OF LECTURER TEACHING

This chapter presents the results of the data that emerged from six interviews during the data collection process (as discussed in Chapter 3). The data were organised into themes connecting the participants' experiences and concepts. Throughout the process of analysing the data, two major themes and subthemes emerged as clear answers to the first research question. The major themes include experience with low student motivation, and strategies and methods to address demotivated students.

Experience with low student motivation

All the participants in this study were experienced in teaching students who had low motivation toward learning. They identified examples of behaviours and reactions of students who were demotivated or had low motivation. Specifically, Table 4.1 below demonstrates experiences in student low motivation noticed by each participant.

Table 4.1 shows that all the participants had experiences with students having low motivation or who were demotivated. Most of the students noticed by the lecturers as having low motivation or being demotivated became passive learners. The students showed their reluctance to study. They were unwilling to share their ideas in the classroom and preferred to be inactive, rather than participating and engaging in classroom activities.

Table 0.1. Experience with student motivation

Experience with low student motivation	Participant
There are times in class when it's very difficult to get students to participate in classroom activities. … students don't answer my questions, are slow to participate in class, are tired and do not listen to lecturers or cannot remember what the lecturers have taught.	A
When students were demotivated, they were not active, and they didn't participate in the classroom activities. … They did not try very hard when I gave them some tasks to do, and they kept quiet when I asked them questions.	B
Students who have low motivation or are demotivated can be noticed through their behaviour and reaction. They do not engage and participate while learning. They avoid answering the lecturer's questions.	C
They are not active while listening to the lecturer. Further, they do not participate and engage in group work activities … They rely on other active learners' ideas. Moreover, they often do not do their homework, they come to class late and they do not answer the lecturer's questions.	D
They become passive learners. For example, when I assigned some tasks, they did not do them; either they could not finish; or just finished with very simple responses. … Further, they were not active in answering questions or sharing ideas; and they seemed not to have a willingness to engage and participate in classroom activities. While the lecturers were explaining the lesson, they did not concentrate.	E
Some of them looked sleepy. … When I asked them to work in a group, some of them did not participate, instead, they relied on their friends.	F

Strategies and methods to address demotivation among students

The strategies and methods used to deal with demotivated EFL learners at tertiary level in Laos vary. The lecturers indicated that they implemented different strategies and techniques to address the issues, depending on the particular causes or factors identified by the lecturers. The results of the EFL lecturer interviews are presented according to three major themes and their sub themes in relation to fostering student motivation. These are: teaching methods and content, the use of technology and teaching materials to facilitate teaching and learning, and increasing environmental and social distractions.

1. Teaching methods and content

What follows are the strategies and techniques to deal with the students demotivated by 1. teaching methods; 2. lesson and teaching content; 3. ways lecturers increased students' awareness; 4. ways to enhance willingness and enthusiasm; and 5. having an open mindset and relaxed atmosphere.

1.1. Teaching methods

The use of outdated teaching methods and techniques is one of the major factors demotivating EFL students, according to participants. All the participants mentioned that the majority of EFL lecturers in their organisation still limited themselves to applying only traditional methods, with the emphasis on learning grammar and translating from English to Lao. The interviewed lecturers considered this method to be an outdated approach in this era. One participant was clear: *"Outdated teaching strategies and methods, together with boring lessons, become student demotivators" (B).* Another added that "*the majority of the lecturers*

are still limited to applying only traditional methods in their teaching. So, teaching and learning are boring" (E). Another participant asserted that *"the lecturers play the role of controlling the class, rather than facilitating it" (C).* This resulted in a tense atmosphere in class. Hence, teaching and learning became boring and regimented, and students were further demotivated.

All the participating lecturers agreed that applying different innovative strategies and methods could foster student motivation. Five participants said that when they noticed their students were demotivated or passive, they changed the activity to be more fun and interactive to encourage student involvement. For instance, one said, "*I try to do something different to change their reaction. I usually change the activities to be more fun and interactive" (C).* One mentioned: *"If I notice that students are getting tired, bored and demotivated, I switch to different activities, such as organising them into groups and having conversations or discussions or playing games" (A).* Another participant proclaimed that *"the lecturers of English should have a commitment to teaching or consider teaching as their first passion; they should lead using humour or comedy, in order to make the students enjoy their studies" (D).* It appears that if lecturers follow only the same teaching sequences and methods, the students get bored easily. In contrast, lecturers noted that different activities and methods help learners remain motivated.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method and its components were mentioned during the interviews as one way dealing with demotivated learners. One lecturer who is currently pursuing his education in South Australia recommended:

> *"I think Communicative Language Teaching method, which offers opportunities for students to engage and participate in activities, is the most productive and successful method in EFL teaching and learning these days. … I try to encourage students to speak as much as possible by giving a platform for them to share their experiences and welcome their ideas" (B).*

In addition, activities that promote and encourage student participation and interaction, which are the components of CLT, were mentioned by the same participant:

> "*Collaborative learning, such as group work or project-based learning or teaching should be emphasised and implemented in the English classroom. However, the lecturers have to adapt the task to match the levels of student competency" (B)*.

There is a problem with different levels of students' English competence within one classroom. One participant, currently in Australia, mentioned during the interviews that *"learning autonomy is also another option. … In this approach, the lecturer needs to put more effort to organise and provide appropriate tasks for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels" (C).* Another lecturer provided a second strategy to deal with demotivated learners when they have different levels of English competence:

> *"Another strategy is peer support. This technique would help students to assist and learn from each other. The lecturer may assign high-*

competence students to sit with low-competence students, or those with high motivation to sit with those with low motivation. By doing this, the student would have opportunities to talk, participate, discuss and exchange their learning experience. For example, they might have a chance to share their learning styles, such as how many hours they talk, listen and write in English per day to enhance and practise. This might be able to help those who are lazy or demotivated to change their learning behaviour to be similar to excellent students because they would like to be like their friends. This is called friends help friends" (E).

In the findings above, all lecturers mentioned some approaches that fit under the general umbrella of CLT. Whilst the lecturers currently studying in Australia were the clearest advocates of CLT methods, the lecturers in Laos were clearly using these methods in their classrooms and indicated they had been successful. Those methods are listed in Figure 4.1 below, starting from the most recommended approach to the least recommended one.

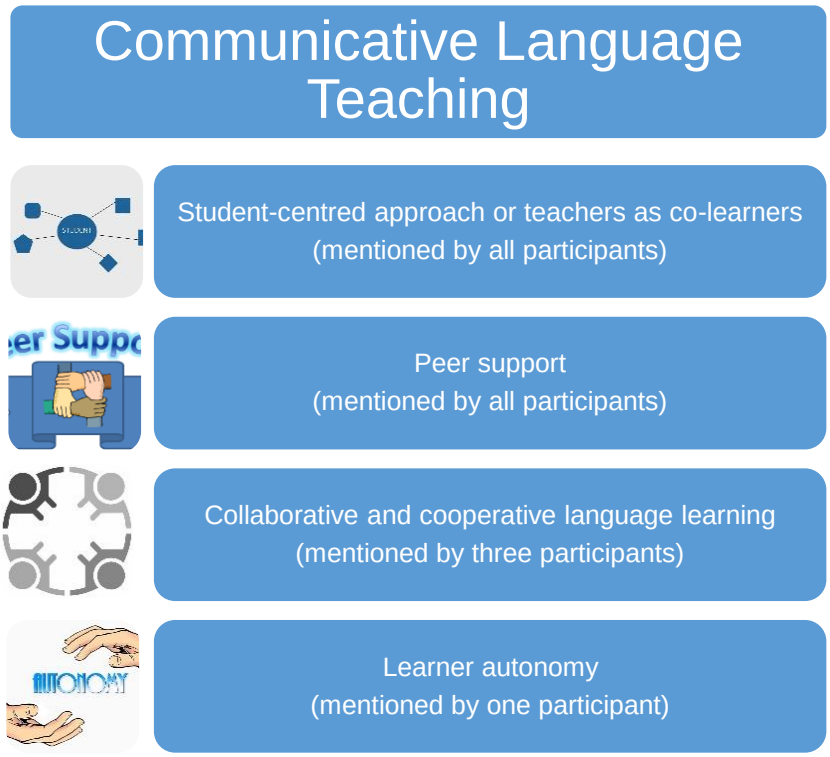


Figure 0.1. Elements of CLT mentioned by the participants

As indicated in Figure 4.1, the lecturers highlighted that a student-centred approach or teachers as co-learners is an effective method to enhance students' motivation. This approach provides opportunities for the students to participate and engage the most, and to learn from each other through a wide range of activities especially in classes where students have different levels of competence. At the same time, collaborative and cooperative language learning approaches were promoted. This approach is associated with peer support which is called *"friends help friends" (E).* If the students are demotivated because the lesson or task is too difficult for low level competence or too easy for high level competence, this method can assist student progress.

1.2. Lesson and Teaching Content

In the Lao context, irrelevant and uninteresting content offered in the prescribed textbooks was another demotivating factor. One interviewee said, *"most EFL lecturers in my organisation rely on the textbooks; they emphasise textbook-based teaching, which often leads to students' boredom" (B)*. Participants A and B asserted that their textbooks were old and printed in black and white. Also, Participant C mentioned that

> *"the content of the lessons that we used to teach do not suit students in our context. Most of the readings are about other countries, especially from a Western context which do not suit students' needs because they are not relevant to their daily life".*

Participant F added that *"irrelevant content, together with ineffective preparation of teaching aids, could contribute to students having lower motivation".*

To deal with this issue, lecturer D said *"effective preparation of lesson plans and teaching aids could constitute interesting and relevant content to meet students' interest"*. Participant F said that *"a well-prepared teaching sequence could make the lesson more interesting, challenging and fun"*. Also, Participant B highlighted that lecturers need to add up-to-date lessons or information and apply more innovative teaching strategies. He said, *"to make the lesson more interesting, challenging and fun, the lecturers should always find something new and up-to-date to add in the lesson and use different teaching strategies"*. Another participant recommended:

> *"The lecturer should always seek and apply appropriate methods to match the availability in our context. For instance, taking students on excursions and using games to facilitate teaching and learning could be activities to shift from boring tasks" (C)*.

Additionally, Participant F proclaimed that creation of attractive teaching aids, such as flashcards, pictures or the use of videos to assist teaching, could encourage students to learn effectively.

To add to this, lecturer D claimed that the lecturers of English should prioritise teaching as their first passion, and should have a commitment to teach and assist students to learn and achieve their goals. Further, the lecturers should be able to lead with humour and comedy to make students enjoy and relax while studying. One added:

> *"I have to think how to make my teaching inspire and motivate learners, and how to encourage my students to participate equally and actively in classroom activities. Also, I have to think how to design the activities that suit student levels. To do that, I have to be able to identify the level of student competency so, when I assign them tasks and give homework, they could match student ability. … Thus, to adapt the lessons and tasks to match students' interests and their levels of competence would enhance and encourage students' participation and motivation" (E).*

Another lecturer stated:

> *"If students are demotivated because either they lack the ability or knowledge to complete an activity or because they are not confident about their ability or knowledge to complete an activity, I usually go back and spend more time either on the material or the instructions or both to better prepare them for the activity. If it's an actual pattern, such as with low-level students who think they'll always be bad at English, I try to pull low-level students out for a special class after hours. This class will be more aligned to their level so can help get them [get] caught up to the rest of their classmates. We've seen huge success with a number of students because once they're doing activities that match their ability, and then over time I can see their improvement, they are more motivated because they see the connection between their actions and their level of English" (A).*

This shows that the lecturers are able to identify the factors that demotivated their students and reflect on the teaching content, methods and teaching sequences to help demotivated and low-competence learners.

In addition, lecturer E said that often students were demotivated from long, lessons that were either too difficult or too easy. He suggested that an important strategy to fight demotivation in students is to have a good lesson. He stated: *"Don't plan to teach too much: Many times, the students have gotten overwhelmed and unmotivated to learn when I planned to teach them too much".* The same participant added:

> *"Plan the lesson at the right level for the students: If the lesson is too easy or too difficult, I think that this can cause some students to be unmotivated. For example, sometimes when I teach, my high-level students do not seem very interested or motivated. Maybe they finish an activity really quickly because it's easy for them, and then they don't want to take the time to focus in class anymore because it's too easy for them. Thus, they are demotivated" (E).*

These comments imply that the lecturers in English should always be well prepared and use inspiring lesson plans and teaching sequences to motivate EFL learners. To achieve this, lecturers need to be qualified in and have opportunities to access high quality professional development to be able to implement the lessons, for instance by attending TESOL conferences to learn how to create different kinds of activities and to implement a "Learner Autonomy" approach.

1.3. Student awareness

Students' low awareness of the significance of learning English is a considerable demotivating factor noticed by the lecturers. Participant D said some students do not even know the reasons why or for what purpose they are studying English. The factors mentioned during the interviews related to a lack of student awareness of the purpose for studying English, and that therefore demotivated EFL learners, are listed in Table 2.

Table 0.2. Internal demotivating factors related to student awareness mentioned by Participants A, B and E

Internal demotivating factors related to student awareness	
1	*the student does not realize the importance of learning English*
2	*the student isn't interested in English and didn't choose to study English*
3	*the student doesn't want a future job that is related to English and/or education*
4	*the student has extremely low confidence and thinks that they'll always be bad at English*
5	*the student has so many regular concerns outside the classroom that are more important than study*

Table 4.2 demonstrates five internal demotivating factors mentioned by the participants A, B and E, starting from the most mentioned through to the least mentioned. These responses suggest that a major factor that causes students to have low motivation in learning English is lack of realising the significance of learning the language.

Participant E said,

> *"some students know the significance of learning English, such as I asked the students 'what are the benefits of learning English?' They know the answer, but in the reality, they are not inspired; and they do not study hard or attempt to get what they said".*

Also, lecturer D mentioned that *"the students do not have clear aims and goals for their studies and their future careers".* He further noted that *"the students who have*

clear goals and aims for their studies are more active and have higher motivation than those who do not".

When asked about strategies to address these demotivating factors, the strategy of modelling was mentioned by participants C, D and E. One lecturer said:

> *"I attempt to motivate my students to be enthusiastic and eager leaners by showing histories of successful English learners from the local area as models. ... This modelling would be significant inspiration, and can motivate them to learn" (C).*

Similarly, lecturer E highlighted that "*the demonstration of successful people resulting from learning English as models or idols would allow the students to recognise the significance of learning English."*

A second strategy suggested by participants D and E was raising the need for and significance of learning the English language in relation to the labour market, professions and further education. One lecturer asserted:

> *"the lecturers should remind their students about the benefits of learning English and advise them that learning English requires learners to be patient. They need to learn from various sources, use different strategies and take extra courses if they are convenient" (D).*

These comments imply that the progress and performance of successful people could be used as a role model to inspire and motivate some students with low motivation to learn. Lecturers could use local models who are well-known to students and/or the lecturer and who could be significant in motivating students

to become active, passionate and patient learners. Providing knowledge of the uses and importance of English language at present and in the future could be another way to motivate student to learn. Hence, it appears these strategies are motivating and could be used to inspire students.

1.4. Student willingness and enthusiasm

The lack of opportunities to use English in their daily life outside of class was another demotivating factor mentioned during the interviews (participants B and E). This resulted in passive learners who lacked willingness to learn. "*Many students just wait to absorb knowledge from their teachers or lecturers, instead of being active on self-studies and learning from friends" (C).* Thus, "*the students were not eager and willing to find strategies that could help them to learn effectively" (E)*. In addition, lecturer C asserted that some students were not interested in learning English because they did not know when they could use it. Hence, they were not inspired to deal with difficulties while learning because English was not used or seemed useless outside of class.

Asked about the strategies to deal with these issues, one lecturer (Participant B) declared that EFL lecturers should try to open a platform to provide opportunities for students to speak in English as much as possible. Further, Participant F suggested that lecturers should provide suggestions to students as to how to use their English outside class. For instance, they could speak English with their friends or go to the tourist sites and speak English with the tourists. In addition, one strategy provided by lecturer E to enhance student motivation and learning outcomes was teaching students how to properly and

clearly plan for their future studies and future professions and to seek opportunities for self-practice:

> *"I think the students should know how to plan for their studies as well as their future properly. … For instance, they should know how to plan for the kind of work they can apply for and the level of English competency they should have after they graduate. The students do not know how to make a long-term and a short-term plan, so the lecturers should teach them how to plan and take action to achieve their goals" (E).*

In addition, lecturer E stated that being fair and consistent in testing and grading could boost students' motivation and willingness to study:

> *"In testing, teachers need to test the same things that they teach. Otherwise, once students see that what they are studying is not important for the test, they may become unmotivated to study. In addition, teachers need to be fair in grading. In grading homework, teachers should only grade for things that they have taught students in class".*

1.5. Having an open mindset and relaxed atmosphere

A fixed mindset is another demotivating factor that was mentioned during the interviews. Participant E pointed out that "*some students who have a low level of English competence often have low motivation because of having a fixed mindset and thinking negatively*".

In addition, Lecturer A stated that *"preference for specific lecturers means that some students do not want to study with lecturers that they do not like or who apply teaching styles that they do not enjoy"*. This could demotivate EFL learners.

One lecturer highlighted that increasing students' confidence and believing in their ability would make students feel motivated and engaged in the classes. Participant E stated: *"I think the students should be strong on their own. The lecturers should teach them to feel confident and believe in their ability".*

Lecturer E also added that giving encouragement is a significant strategy to keep students motivated and to fight demotivation:

> *"English language teachers need to encourage students to believe that learning English is not impossible. If teachers always tell students that they are bad at English and that they will never learn, students will become unmotivated to learn. English language teachers need to encourage students when they make progress (even small progress); tell them that English takes a lot of time and diligence to learn and that making mistakes along the way is normal; and correct them, but do so gently".*

It appears that lecturers need to persuade students to change their ways of thinking, and show evidence that intelligence and knowledge are changeable and can be developed and improved through processes of learning (Braten & Stromso, 2005; Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011).

Another strategy is building a friendly relationship between the lecturer and students before starting a new lesson. One lecturer indicated that

> "*at the beginning of the class, the lecturers should build friendly relationships between the lecturer and students and students themselves to make them feel comfortable and welcome. It would be better to avoid stepping directly into the lesson; instead, try to warm up by having a conversation about the news of the day, the weather or the benefits of learning English" (D).*

Another lecturer also provided a strategy to help students feel less anxious and more comfortable in learning a new lesson: *"at the beginning of the class, lecturers should warm up and make students feel comfortable, welcome and ready to start the new lesson" (B).*

In addition, one lecturer provided a technique to inspire and motivate students to learn. He asserted that:

> *"I think the lecturers should often have conversations with their students to encourage them or provide inspiration to them. After we taught, we could ask the students to check their understanding. If they can answer, we can give them a score to motivate them. The lecturers should try to create a variety of activities to promote students' engagement, so that they could have a chance to help each other. Once they are involved, they would have high motivation" (F).*

Thus, it seems beneficial to start the class with friendly conversations with students or among students to build relationships and make the students feel comfortable, welcome and ready to start a new lesson. This could help students to reduce levels of anxiety and shyness.

2. The use of technology and other teaching aids to facilitate teaching and learning

Insufficient use of technology and teaching materials, together with classroom facilities, are other factors that affect learning motivation. One lecturer said

> *"these (the use of technology and teaching material) could be reasons for the students having low motivation. For example, sometimes there are not enough projectors or it is not convenient to use. There is only one projector in our department." (F).*

Another lecturer also mentioned the deficit of technology and inconvenience of classroom facilities that affected students' learning motivation by asserting that

> *"the deficit of teaching and learning facilities, materials, resources and technology have negative impacts on student motivation. In our context, and especially in my institution, we use long tables and benches in the classrooms, so it is difficult to organise activities and groupwork. The environment, such as crowded classrooms together with the shortage of facilities, such as air conditioners, fans, and*

> *technology such as computers, projectors and the internet, lead to lack of student motivation and low learning outcomes" (C).*

The use of technology, teaching materials and the facilities are external factors, which are often outside the control of the lecturers, and this comment indicates that classroom facilities, such as tables and benches, are barriers to implementing CLT.

From the interviews, the lecturers seem to use technology for two purposes. Initially, technology is an effective tool to facilitate teaching and learning. It can be used to teach new vocabulary, explain new lessons and improve listening skills in effective and modern ways. One lecturer mentioned, "*I use technology as teaching aids or resources, for instance the use of YouTube or App for improving listening skills or explaining new lessons" (D).* Another lecturer contended that "*it is easy to use an LCD to show images of difficult vocabulary and then have discussions or do activities about the images" (A).* The second purpose is that the lecturers usually use technology for their professional development, in order to explore new teaching techniques and methods to adapt in their own teaching. One lecturer said:

> *"I often explore new teaching techniques on the Internet. Once I find a new interesting technique, I try to use it in class as a new option for students. I try to avoid using the same techniques over time; instead, I try to always use new approaches to gain students' interest" (C).*

Another lecturer said technology is used to improve their teaching skills as well as to access scholarships for professional development:

> *"To improve knowledge and skills about teaching is an effective use of technology. The technology provides us a lot of convenience in accessing famous online sources from language learning organisations, such as Cambridge University. … The lecturers can use technology to access scholarships for professional development for example, Fulbright, AAS, ANZ and YSEALI scholarships" (D).*

Hence, technology is used by some lecturers to facilitate teaching and learning in innovative ways; and it is also used by lecturers for their professional development to improve their teaching skills and methods. However, literature shows that the use of technology would be more beneficial and useful if lecturers had expertise to use technology in more effective way in their classrooms (Sadik, 2008); this implies that EFL lecturers should be technologically capable.

3. Increasing environmental and social distractions

The surrounding environment and social factors are other uncontrollable external demotivating reasons that affect EFL students in learning. The environment, such as unpleasant weather, together with inconvenient classroom facilities, could demotivate students in their learning. One lecturer mentioned:

> *"Some temporary demotivators that I have noticed might be that it's hot or the students are tired, that they have other concerns that they're thinking about during class that day, or that they weren't prepared well enough for the activity of the day" (A).*

Another lecturer asserted that inconvenient classroom facilities together with an unfavourable environment, such as unpleasant weather, could be a significant demotivator. He stated that

> *"the environment and classroom facilities are also factors that establish low motivation for example, on days that the weather is very hot and there is no fan or air-conditioning, the students become terribly demotivated" (D).*

For social factors, differences in social class and influence from seniors were mentioned as other demotivators during the interviews. A lecturer stated that *"being from a low-income family is a reason for students having low motivation" (C).* Another lecturer also mentioned that students who come from low-income families have to work harder outside of class which results in negative effects on their learning performance. Participant F stated:

> *"Because the students come from different places and different social classes, those who come from low-income families have to find part-time jobs. Some of them have to spend a lot of time working, so when they come to class, they feel sleepy".*

In addition, some students were demotivated by their seniors' behavioural practice. As one lecturer pointed out:

> *"The last one is a social factor. The seniors or alumni who often drink, party and go out show them that they could pass the exam even though they did not study hard" (P.D).*

Only one lecturer mentioned that shifting to a short extra activity or playing a quick game was a successful strategy to deal with these external demotivating factors. Participant A stated:

> *"If students are demotivated on a hot day or they're physically tired, I try to do either a short extra activity to get them moving or I incorporate physical movement into the current activity. For example, we might play a quick game of Simon Says or I'll have students stand and form lines or circles when doing a speaking activity instead of sitting at their desks".*

Hence, this could be a technique that could also be applied when students are demotivated because of other issues.

Conclusion

The data provide a variety of significant teaching techniques and methods being applied by EFL lecturers that help foster learning motivation and performance. The analysis of data assists in answering the research question: "What are the teaching strategies and methods that are being used and that have contributed to successful outcomes to deal with demotivated learners being taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao PDR?" Suggestions and recommendations to bring about positive change, as well as barriers to implementing innovative teaching techniques, are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTS FOR IMPROVING TEACHING QUALITY: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores in depth the suggestions and recommendations for improving teaching quality and for bringing positive change in the Lao context. The discussion highlights implications and connections between the perceptions of the interviewees and the professional literature in order to make a positive contribution to teaching and learning English in tertiary education in Laos. This chapter also investigates the challenges and barriers to implementing a variety of innovative teaching strategies.

Suggestions and recommendations for bringing positive change in the Lao context

The suggestions and recommendations for bringing positive change in EFL teaching and learning in Lao tertiary education are organised into six themes, namely professional development and accessibility, teaching methods and facilitators, classroom facilities and technology, providing support, lecturers' characteristics, and curriculum and standardisation. Each of these is discussed individually below.

1. Professional Development and Accessibility

The results showed that all participants agreed that ongoing professional development could be a crucial step in constituting positive change in EFL teaching and learning in Laos. Thus, it is essential for EFL lecturers to always seek

opportunities for improving their professional skills. Specifically, lecturer A stated that "*the most important thing is taking every opportunity for professional development, and always reading to keep myself-up-to-date".* Interviewee C also highlighted that "*the lecturers should always seek opportunities for professional development to develop their profession. Currently, modern technology provides a convenient way to learn and develop our knowledge and skills".* This matches a suggestion provided by Richards and Farrell (2005) that ongoing professional development can assist EFL lecturers to become familiar with current and innovative resources and methodologies for teaching, instead of continuing to use outdated ones. Also, Karabenick and Noda (2004) claimed that professional development is a crucial factor in improving teaching approaches, as well as in staying up to date with the latest skills and knowledge in the field. However, a study on the need for ongoing professional development conducted in Turkey showed that while Turkish university-level EFL instructors viewed professional development as an important factor for improving their profession professionally, they did not consider the recent growth opportunities to be applicable in their teaching approach (Çelik, Bayraktar-Çepni, & İlyas, 2013). Similar to the Lao tertiary context, some EFL lecturers do not take opportunities for professional development even though they recognise that it may be beneficial for them and their teaching. This was seen when one lecturer asserted that *"some lecturers are reluctant and unwilling to attend workshops or training, even though it is free of charge" (F).* In contrast, lecturer B claimed that

> *"some lecturers are eager to develop their profession by seeking opportunities for going to conferences and continuing their education,*

> *but it is difficult for them to apply for scholarships. The facilities, such as technology, the Internet and textbooks, are inadequate for lecturers and students to use for their study".*

EFL lecturers should be curious and willing to take every opportunity to improve their knowledge and profession in order to be a qualified lecturer. However, like the Turkish lecturers, they were unclear on how the learning from this professional development could be applied in low-technology, crowded, hot, poorly resourced learning environments. Similarly, in the Lao context, teaching strategies and concepts gained from professional development may be of little value because of limited resources, and a lack of teaching and learning facilities and technology.

Participant D provided a suggestion on how professional development could be pursued and how it is important to teaching and learning:

> *"The lecturers of English should always seek opportunities for professional development in order to update teaching techniques and methods. … For professional development, the lecturers could acquire this from both inside and outside of the organisation. Inside of the organisation, the lecturers could learn from each other by sharing their teaching experience, observing other lecturers' teaching and joining co-teaching both in the faculty and other faculties. This would help the lecturers to learn and accept new techniques to institute positive change. Outside of the organisation, the lecturers should seek opportunities to apply for scholarships to attend workshops and*

conferences, both in the country and overseas. These would open opportunities for the lecturers to improve their skills and knowledge, and to learn new teaching techniques from different contexts to adapt and use in our context".

The same interviewee argued:

"Significantly, the lecturers should accept change and be willing to improve teaching techniques to match the current circumstances. … During the semester break, at least a workshop should be organised for the lecturers who have new ideas or learn something new from overseas to make a contribution to the organisation. The lecturers should build always by reading and listening".

Participant C also asserted that "in-house professional development" should be promoted:

"I think there should be a platform for the lecturers to share their teaching experience and techniques at least two times per year. Another suggestion is that the lecturers who teach the same or similar topic should gather to share their teaching techniques and learn from each other. If the lecturers have good techniques and can plan the lessons very well, the students would enjoy them and be motivated. … The lecturers should often have meetings and a discussion forum as a platform for sharing teaching experiences and techniques, in order to bring the most benefits and achieve a high level of outcomes for

> *students. Teach because you want to see students' success, not because it's your duty".*

Also, lecturer F agreed:

> *"The lecturers should always seek opportunities for learning new knowledge to improve teaching techniques. … For professional development, often, there are professors who volunteer to organise workshops for training teaching techniques for the EFL lecturers in our Faculty. … Training or workshops should be organised regularly to provide opportunities for the lecturers to exchange their teaching experiences and learn new skills and techniques from each other".*

Lecturer B asserted that

> *"the lecturers should share teaching experiences with their colleagues and discuss which techniques work well and which do not work well in the context, and what should be adapted and improved".*

Additionally, to be ready and prepared to accept and implement positive change, participants C and D highlighted that EFL lecturers should always keep finding opportunities to improve their profession by reading and listening to academic and professional sources to explore and find what other people have done successfully, in order to adapt and try to use it in the Lao context.

The international literature indicates that effective professional development is a crucial and essential component in improving and promoting teaching practice as well as student learning (Burns, 2012; Greene, 2015).

Specifically, DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) suggested that professional learning communities (PLC) provide valuable opportunities for practical and sustained improvement to support teaching. In addition, a study by Bills, Cook, and Giles (2015) recommended that in-house professional development or a PLC should be promoted as a platform for lecturers and teachers to share and develop their professional knowledge and skills. In-house professional development or a PLC could provide worthwhile opportunities for lecturers and teachers to make contributions after learning something new from overseas education, workshops or training, as well as from their teaching experience. Hence, seeking opportunities for professional development, as well as promoting a platform for professional development, would allow EFL lecturers and teachers to stay up-to-date as well as to learn new methods and strategies to improve their teaching and to make positive change.

Nonetheless, some challenges related to professional development need to be considered. One barrier is lecturers' mindsets. Lecturer C, who is currently studying in Australia, stated that

> *"A significant challenge is changing the lecturers' fixed mindset. Some lecturers are not willing to change their behaviour to improve themselves – for example, some lecturers do not like reading, but they do not try to read to build their habit of reading".*

Also, lecturer B who is pursuing his education in Australia highlighted that

> *"Some lecturers and leaders are not willing to accept changes and new concepts, so it is difficult if a lecturer wants to introduce something that is new to them or convince them to accept it".*

It appears that a fixed mindset, teachers' resistance, and fear of change are roadblocks to making change in Lao education.

Another barrier is that lecturers in Laos still lack the ability and are not qualified to access international scholarships for professional development. Lecturer D said, "many *lecturers are not qualified to apply for scholarships for professional development because of a low level of English competency" (D).*

Also, platforms for professional development are still limited in Lao educational organisations. Lecturer B asserted:

> *"once I found new techniques or useful sources for teaching English, I tried them first. If it worked well in our context, I shared it with my colleagues unofficially, but I have never shared and discussed officially because I have no opportunity, and we do not have a proper platform for this kind of distribution".*

However, a platform for professional development could be very beneficial for all lecturers to share their experience and make innovation happen, in order to improve their profession and professionalism.

2. Teaching Methods and Facilitators

Implementing and applying appropriate, innovative and effective teaching methods was another important theme recommended by the participants to make

positive changes in teaching and learning English in the Lao context. Four participants suggested that EFL lecturers apply techniques and approaches that fall under the concept of communicative language teaching (CLT), which encourages communication, cooperation and lifelong learning. These concepts match the ideas provided by Jacobs and Farrell (2003) which summarised the emergence of a paradigm shift of implementing positive and sustainable changes in language teaching and learning. Specifically, lecturer B mentioned that

> *"EFL lecturers should emphasise communicative teaching in order to encourage students to speak. … The lecturers teach students as normal, including grammar and vocabulary, but emphasise communication, such as an open platform for students to participate, talk, discuss and practise with peers"*.

Lecturer A also highlighted one element that fits the CLT approach. She said, *"I think EFL lecturers should emphasise group study to promote cooperative learning".* A study by Alfares (2017) conducted with EFL students in Saudi Arabia demonstrated that working in groups or pairs allowed students to institute productive activities, and to share their knowledge and experience; it also fostered learning motivation, as well as enhancing the learning process.

Additionally, lecturer F pointed out another component of CLT, emphasising that *"EFL lecturers should try to apply a student-centred learning method to promote students' participation and involvement, so that the students would have more chance to think and learn both independently and cooperatively".* He further advised that

> *"EFL lecturers should teach and train their students to be active learners; and to be aware of self- directed learning, because only learning from the classroom might not be enough. … We should suggest that students actively practise and seek opportunities to speak, read, listen and write in English. … Students can go to seek assistance and practice with native speakers who are volunteers at the campus to practise their speaking or ask what they don't understand. …".*

Participant C went further and asserted that lecturers should

> *"encourage students to emphasise self-study and to be confident in sharing their ideas. It should begin with the lecturers accepting students' ideas reasonably; students' ideas should be welcomed and valued"*.

The international literature suggests that CLT is one of the most well-accepted, effective and dominant methods for EFL teaching and learning (Brown, 2000). The CLT approach "emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centred learning, task-based activities, and communication for real-world, meaningful purposes" (Brown, 2000, p. 322). A study by Wong (2012) concluded that language instructors agreed that the implementation of CLT in language teaching and learning was the best way to assist learners to achieve communicative competence. Also, a study by Al Asmari (2015) conducted in a university EFL context highlighted that CLT was one of the most successful and influential methods enabling students to achieve communicative competence. However, the same study also pointed out that EFL lecturers face challenges in implementing

CLT due to lack of CLT training, restrictions in accessing CLT resources, and the low proficiency of students.

One strategy mentioned in the findings (Chapter 4) was learner autonomy. It is considered to be a component related to CLT (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). Even though this method is considered to be an important and successful concept in the field of language learning (Ünal, Çeliköz, & Sari, 2017), it might be difficult to implement this approach in the Lao context due to the learning culture, facilities and crowded classroom (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Also, the success of learner autonomy could depend on the level of student proficiency (Ünal et al., 2017). It seems that students in the Lao context tend to rely too much on teachers/lecturers' teaching. It is problematic when the lecturers want to promote learners in self-directed learning. Also, many tertiary institutions in Laos still lack learning facilities and resources, such as books, computers, internet and learning space. In addition, classrooms in some organisations are crowded. These factors result in difficulties in promoting this kind of approach. Lecturers and students should be provided essential training in how to promote learner autonomy, and sufficient teaching and learning facilities, resources, learning spaces and technology should be provided to promote this approach.

However, CLT is known to only a minority of EFL lecturers and teachers in tertiary education in Laos, and it appears that many lecturers and teachers still lack an understanding of CLT and its broad concepts. Thus, due to the difficulties in the practice, it is only partially implemented, and by a minority of the lecturers. However, CLT could be the most effective approach for bringing about positive

learning outcomes in EFL teaching and learning in the Lao context. Further, this approach could be utilised to deal with demotivated students because it promotes student engagement, as well as communication, collaboration and lifelong learning.

In addition, to make positive change, the participants indicated that EFL lecturers should be well prepared for applying a range of teaching techniques and methods to enhance students' learning and motivation. Lecturer B mentioned that

> *"First of all, the lecturers should have sufficient knowledge about the topics that they teach. Furthermore, they should know plenty of teaching techniques and methods – for example, how to enhance student engagement and motivation, and how to transfer knowledge to students effectively".*

Furthermore, lecturer E highlighted that EFL lecturers should be well-prepared to apply various techniques and methods to teach in different circumstances, as well as to promote inclusive learning:

> *"… it is the duty of the lecturers to find a strategy to help every student achieve in every circumstance, not just one or two of them. Hence, it is essential for the lecturers to find out new and effective techniques to assist the students. … The techniques of teaching English for each skill, such as grammar, writing, listening and reading, are different. So, the lecturers should prepare a variety of teaching techniques for different skills and topics. For example, when you want to teach students vocabulary, what activities will you use? Will you use pictures or any*

materials inside or outside of the classroom to assist your teaching? There is not a fixed method or technique that fits all. So, it depends on the situation and classroom facilities, as well as student attitudes".

Also, EFL lecturers should select and use appropriate and effective sources to support and facilitate teaching and learning. As lecturer A said, *"to improve the four major skills associated with English acquisition - reading, writing, listening and speaking, – well selected resources and learning facilities/equipment are essential".* Lecturer E claimed that EFL lecturers could use authentic resources to assist their teaching. He stated that *"for preparing teaching aids or materials, I have mentioned that the lecturer could use things that are available inside or outside of the classroom".* A study by Peacock (1997) demonstrated that the use of authentic resources, such as magazines, brochures and videos, can increase learning motivation in the short-term, while artificial materials such as immages are more interesting for students. Hence, the use of a combination of authentic and artificial materials would be more beneficial for learners.

Lecturer B suggested that,

"importantly, the lecturers should choose the sources that are related to the purposes of the lesson. The exam should be based on what the lecturers have taught, and it should evaluate students' understanding, instead of just testing their memorising".

The literature shows that if the content of lessons and activities in the target language is interesting and relevant to the context and real life, students are more

motivated and willing to learn effectively (Bahous et al., 2011). Thus, once EFL lecturers choose teaching and learning sources, it is important to ensure that they are relevant to the content of lessons and the context. For examination and assessment, lecturers should focus on students' understanding and application of the target language, because the main purpose of learning a language is to use it in communication internationally.

3. Classroom Facilities and Technology

Asked about making positive change in teaching and learning English in the Lao context, the participants suggested that classroom facilities and technology used for facilitating teaching and learning need to be improved and adequately provided for. Lecturer A mentioned that

> *"the institution should have sufficient up-to-date technology and the Internet for both lecturers and students to use and facilitate their teaching and learning. … If there are computers, the Internet, CDs or DVDs, and spaces for students to have both individual and group study, this could prove to be very attractive to students".*

Another lecturer also said that *"the organisation should provide more technology and resources to assist teaching and learning and promote innovative and modern teaching and learning styles" (F).*

Technology and teaching materials are essential and beneficial when teaching English, especially visual aids. Lecturer B suggested that *"if the lecturers*

would like to teach students what they do not know or experience, the lecturers should demonstrate them by showing pictures or videos on YouTube".

Technology has been well accepted as an essential component in EFL teaching and learning because of its abundant potential benefits. The international literature demonstrates that EFL lecturers in numerous countries have adopted the use of technology in effective and innovative ways, both in their teaching and in their students' learning (Thorne et al., 2009). The literature also demonstrates that in facilitating foreign language teaching and learning, the use of technology such as videos and audio recordings and games results in better learning outcomes (Ahmed & Nasser, 2015; Cakir, 2006). Hence, based on the literature and the participants' suggestions, it is recommended that technology should be promoted and used to facilitate EFL teaching and learning in the Lao context.

Nonetheless, there are several challenges faced by EFL lecturers using technology in the Laos context. One participant mentioned that *"using technology can be a restriction for some lecturers who do not have knowledge and skills about using technology, social media and apps" (C).* Lecturer D asserted that *"only a minority of lecturers of English in my context use extra resources and technology in teaching, such as flashcards, projectors and tapes".* Also, lecturer A pointed out that *"EFL lecturers still face some barriers because of the lack of Internet access in teaching/learning facilities".* Additionally, lecturer F said that it was not convenient to use technology in his context:

> "*The majority of lecturers have not used technology in their teaching because it is not convenient for them, and there is insufficient technology … for them to use".*

Thus, the implications that can be drawn from these comments are that the lecturers should develop their technology literacy and master the use of it. Also, the organisation should provide essential technology for lecturers and students in order to boost the quality of teaching and learning.

In addition, difficulties in creating effective and attractive teaching materials to promote students' learning remain a challenge. Lecturer C stated that *"school facilities together with teaching materials are not convenient".* Also, lecturer A mentioned

> *"It is difficult to create a variety of teaching aids or attractive resources. Lecturers teach by following the prescribed textbook only. … Currently, there are only out-dated books and textbooks in our library, so students are not interested in using them. Also, there is an extremely narrow range of choice to explore".*

A study by Xaypanya et al. (2017) commented that lacking course materials was one demotivator affecting attitudes of EFL learners in the Lao tertiary context. Also, Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) highlighted that EFL reading materials are not always available to support teaching and learning. Thus, these challenges become demotivators as well as restrictions in bringing about positive change.

4. Providing Support

One compelling suggestion for enhancing student motivation and bringing positive change is that tertiary institutions should have a student support centre or program of pastoral care. Lecturer D stated that it would be very worthwhile

> *"to enhance student motivation by providing student support or pastoral care. When it is noticed that some students are demotivated or have low motivation, the lecturer should convince the student to consult [with the student support centre] or consult with the student individually to find an effective solution. If the students say they cannot learn English effectively, ask them how many hours they spend on their studies per day or how they practise reading, listening, writing and speaking" (D).*

With such a service, students who are demotivated or facing difficulties could seek assistance easily. If those who are faced with challenges consult with the lecturer or use counselling, they would be able to find more effective solutions to the issues. Also, the same participant mentioned that having frequent conversations with their students in groups or individually could be an effective way for a lecturer to find out students' issues, and to help provide effective solutions to encourage and inspire them to learn. Hence, lecturers may need to interact more closely with their students to find out the reasons why the students are demotivated or have low motivation. By doing this, lecturers could provide effective solutions and useful suggestions.

Providing support for students in need of assistance and advice to ensure that they know how to handle challenges could be an essential part of tertiary educational institutions (Stewart, Goodson, Miertschin, Norwood, & Ezell, 2013). Support offers a significant ladder for students to achieve their goals. When it comes to education, support can be related to emotional, physical, academic or spiritual issues. A study by Arifin (2018) demonstrated that student support results in a significant contribution to students' persistence in order to enhance their success. Sajiene and Tamuliene (2012) also highlighted that student support fulfils students' emotional, academic and social needs as a requirement for successful academic performance. Hence, through a lack of support, emotional encouragement or advice, students could be obstructed by roadblocks in furthering their education.

5. Lecturers' Characteristics

One significant theme mentioned by the participants was the characteristics of EFL lecturers. These characteristics influence students' achievement because they guide students to successful knowledge acquisition. Al-Seghayer (2017) highlighted that successful EFL lecturers and teachers require several underlying and interacting constructs, such as cognitive knowledge, content knowledge, English language proficiency and personality traits. A study by Baytur and Razı (2015), from the perspective of Turkish learners, indicated that effective EFL teachers display both pedagogical and personal qualities, including being friendly, enthusiastic about technological development, having accurate pronunciation and effective classroom management skills. A study by Salahshour and Hajizadeh (2013), from the perception of Iranian EFL students, highlighted that a successful

and effective EFL teacher should be interested in his/her job, have a sense of responsibility towards his/her job, and be enthusiastic, lively, self-confident and punctual. From the results of the interview, lecturer A claimed, *"I think an EFL lecturer should be creative, and well-prepared to use different activities when students are demotivated".* Also, lecturer D contended that

> "*some lecturers are so reluctant to develop themselves: for example, they even avoid joining workshops that are organised on the campus. They should be open-minded and prepared to accept change in order to develop themselves as well as their organisation".*

In addition, lecturer F proclaimed that the lecturers should be punctual. He stated: *"the lecturers should come to class on time and regularly".* Thus, to improve the quality of EFL teaching and learning, it is necessary to recognise and improve the quality of EFL lecturers and teachers. EFL lecturers in the Lao context should have sufficient knowledge of the subject matter, be familiar with a variety of teaching methods, and be well-organised, creative and friendly, as well as being active and enthusiastic about developing their profession.

Also, as already stated in Chapter 4, EFL lecturers should be qualified to implement interesting, challenging and fun activities, and to use the context to improve engagement and promote lifelong learning. These qualifications relate to five strategies suggested by Astuti (2016) that can foster learning motivation, including selecting learning resources and activities, showing the usefulness of English, providing a supportive classroom atmosphere, giving effective feedback, and modelling appropriate behaviour in their classrooms. Additionally, focussing

on the context of learning is one of the strategies to motivate students' learning. Evidence provided in a study by Alarbai (2016) indicated that learning cultural context is significant; for instance, learning vocabulary that is related to the context would have more potential to gain students' interest because students will have opportunities to use it in their daily lives.

Another characteristic of EFL lecturers/teachers mentioned in the findings was prioritising teaching as their first passion. A study by Al-Seghayer (2017) suggested that successful EFL lecturers/teachers bring their personal passions, interests and strengths into their teaching to inspire both themselves and their students. Also, Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) indicated that EFL lecturers/teachers who have high levels of passion, interest and patience can significantly help students to build self-confidence and motivation.

However, even though some EFL lecturers and leaders in Lao tertiary institutions are qualified to apply effective strategies to deal with issues as well as to attempt to bring positive change, it appears that they still face many challenges, one of which is that English is not widely used outside of classes. Thus, students put less effort into their learning (Xaypanya et al., 2017). Lecturer A stated:

> *"I think the most difficult group of students to motivate are those who didn't choose to study English and don't want to use English and/or teach in the future. I do try to point out the many advantages of English and encourage them to still work hard, but in reality, if they think they'll never need to use any English that can be very demotivating".*

There is a clear indication that context and behaviour influence teaching and learning performance.

6. Curriculum and Resources

Another suggestion to bring about positive change made by participants was that the English curriculum should be improved: *"the curriculum should be up-to-date or adaptable" (B).* Lecturer F suggested that *"the curriculum needs to be improved to suit levels of student competence".* Also, lecturer E said,

> *"the leaders and lecturers should choose a curriculum that is of high quality, one that has textbooks with teacher and student guides, workbooks and an answer key. … The curriculum should have clear aims – what the students are expected to learn, and at which level. … The curriculum should be adaptable, and suit the context and students' competence".*

International literature suggests that effective EFL curriculum could bring numerous benefits to learners. In Laos, because there are not specific and actual comments or guidelines to provide the criteria of an effective curriculum, it may vary according to different perspectives. Participants perceived that, in the Lao context, the curriculum should be up-to-date and adaptable to suit the level of students' proficiency, as well as the needs of current society. Also, it should be easy and convenient for lecturers and teachers to find materials and sources to support and facilitate teaching and learning. Alshuaifan (2009) stated that ESL or EFL educators and leaders said that major goals and curriculum should be able to fulfil the personal, academic and social needs of the learners. Also, Taylor (1983)

recommended that EFL syllabus design and curriculum content should emphasise communicative-based approaches rather than focusing on highly structured and grammar-based approaches, as well as be aware of and understand the context, especially the culture of students. If the curriculum is adaptable, it then depends on the ability and accessibility of lecturers and teachers. A study by Al-Gaeed (1984) highlighted that highly qualified teachers could introduce supplementary relevant materials to the curriculum in order to facilitate teaching effectively.

However, some barriers can occur regarding context, culture and resources. One participant said, *"the first challenge is sometimes successful teaching methods from other contexts are not effectively applicable in our context because of the differences of learning culture in our context and the lack of materials" (B).* He further added that *"some lecturers know effective teaching techniques, but they did not use them because they are concerned about not completing the prescribed textbook.* Lecturer E also added that

> *"we do not have a budget for buying or creating teaching materials. This becomes a challenge for preparing teaching materials. The different levels of English competence of the students that I mentioned earlier also becomes a challenge because the lecturers have difficulties in adapting their lessons to match the students' levels".*

This is in agreement with Alshuaifan (2009), who stated that providing poor and insufficient resources for EFL teachers/lecturers to facilitate teaching and learning could result in reliance on outdated traditional approaches of teaching. It appears that adaptable and appropriate curriculum, sufficient resources, qualified

lecturers/teachers and learning culture are associated with and are considered to be integral components of enhancing learning outcomes as well as bringing positive change.

The above comments match the most well-known concepts associated with Vygotsky's scientific production, which is called zone of proximal development. One of the concepts describes teaching in a diverse and disadvantaged context that cooperative engagement and interaction on tasks and activities between highly competent learners and less competent learners could result in better performance (Chaiklin, 2003). Therefore, collaboration and cooperation could be an effective teaching technique in diverse classrooms. One common concept of the zone of proximal development suggests that the cooperative engagement and interaction on the tasks and activities between highly competent learners and less competent learners result in better performance of the tasks given. Hence, cooperation and collaboration could be one of the effective strategies for overcoming this issue in diverse classrooms.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to explore the experiences of teaching EFL and applying strategies and methods to deal with learners who have low motivation or who have been demotivated, with a view to making positive contributions to the field of EFL teaching and learning. EFL lecturers had similar experiences in teaching students with low motivation. Students who had low motivation or were demotivated exhibited reluctance and unwillingness to learn, participate in and engage with classroom activities. Thus, they became passive learners. The perceived causes and factors that demotivated EFL learners were investigated because some of the strategies and methods used to address this are relevant in this study.

The lecturers in this study demonstrated that they applied different strategies and methods to deal with students who were demotivated or who exhibited low motivation. Mostly it appeared that the lecturers used different techniques and strategies to organise and facilitate activities to gain students' interest and engagement. They made the content of lessons and related activities interesting, up-to-date and relevant to the context. This strategy could be applied more widely when students are demotivated or have low motivation because they think the lessons and activities seem boring, perhaps because the lessons are normally taught in a very traditional way.

Another effective strategy is that lecturers could enhance students' interest and inspire them to learn by convincing students to recognise the significance of learning English, and using modelling (stories of successful people) to increase students' efforts, desires and aspirations. This strategy would be most beneficial when students are demotivated because they are not aware of the benefits of learning English and are unwilling to learn because they have unclear aims.

In addition, one strategy highlighted was building students' habits of being active and confident learners, as well as having a growth mindset. This strategy could be accomplished by convincing students to believe in their potential and ability to learn effectively. Also, lecturers should adjust and adapt the lesson to suit the levels of students' proficiency and ability. This strategy could best be used when students are demotivated because they think English is too difficult to learn.

One more strategy is to build a friendly relationship with students to make them feel comfortable and involved. This strategy could assist students to feel secure and confident to talk, discuss, ask and share information in class; and to consult with others when they face an issue.

The international literature highlights technology as being a well-accepted and effective teaching and learning platform to facilitate EFL teaching and learning. The use of technology can result in better learning outcomes. Also, it can be used to promote innovative and lifelong learning as well as to motivate students to learn in an effective way. This study also found that technology could be used to create interesting and attractive activities in order to foster student motivation and enhance learning outcomes.

Lastly, leaders, lecturers and parents can play a significant role in dealing with students who have low motivation or are demotivated because of external factors. The surrounding environment, including teaching and learning facilities, the weather and social background factors such as family status, influence student learning motivation. To decrease these de-motivators, it would be beneficial for these people to serve as role models, work collaboratively, and have a positive influence on students.

Whilst the issue of, and strategies and methods to deal with, EFL students having low motivation and being demotivated have been well documented internationally, to date a study on this issue and its solutions has been lacking in Laos. However, the international literature from similar contexts has been found to support the research findings, which could therefore be adapted and used in the Lao context to contribute to better learning outcomes.

Also, the international literature provides effective and useful strategies to deal with the issues. One suggested method is CLT. It is a well-accepted approach to promote interaction, collaboration, innovation, engagement and lifelong learning in EFL teaching. This method has been applied internationally, and is applicable and adaptable to the Lao context. Also, the literature outlines the qualities and characteristics of successful EFL lecturers, which could serve as indicators and a baseline for EFL lecturers in Laos. Thus, the international literature, together with the findings of this study, can shed light on the issue and function as a practical guide for EFL lecturers and teachers in Laos, and the

findings could have significant implications for empowering EFL lecturers and teachers in Laos to become more qualified and successful in teaching.

One compelling suggestion and recommendation that this study highlights is professional development. Opinions from the study participants and the international literature are in agreement that EFL lecturers should always seek opportunities for professional development internationally and nationally to develop their profession and bring positive change. In-house professional development or a professional development community could be one effective way for EFL lecturers to broaden their knowledge and skills, as well as contribute to their organisation. Without professional development, lecturers have limited knowledge and skills, and do not stay up to date.

In addition, to make positive change, EFL lecturers should be well-prepared to accept change. Further, they should be competent and have sufficient knowledge about the field of education so they can apply innovative and appropriate activities in their teaching. Through the process of professional development, lecturers have the chance to learn different strategies and techniques for teaching, and hence they can become more innovative, successful and qualified as lecturers.

Also, to implement positive change, the organisations should provide essential classroom facilities, as well as teaching and learning materials and resources, for both lecturers and students to access. The facilities, materials and resources would allow lecturers to easily adapt and implement new strategies and methods in teaching.

As Laos is classified as a least developed country, it is inevitable that challenges and barriers could restrict the application of innovative and modern teaching strategies and methods in EFL teaching and learning and be a constraint in implementing and bringing positive change to Lao tertiary education.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the six lecturers in this study, together with the international literature selected, the following recommendations are made in order to enhance EFL teaching and learning quality, as well as to bring positive change to tertiary institutions in Laos. Specifically, the recommendations could be applied to deal with students who have low motivation or who have been demotivated. To make them clearer and more effective, the recommendations are made separately for each party involved and authorised in the process of teaching and learning, and in implementing positive change.

To EFL lecturers, especially those who are teaching at tertiary level in Laos, there are several important recommendations to enhance their teaching ability to become more successful:

- EFL lecturers should always seek every opportunity for professional development to help them keep their knowledge up-to-date and to learn a variety of teaching strategies and methods. Lecturers should learn how to take advantage of and use technology to facilitate their teaching and student learning and to design lessons and learning activities that are more effective, innovative and appealing to students.

- EFL lecturers should be passionate about and committed to teaching. Successful EFL lecturers and teachers should be able to teach everything with zeal even though the content of the lessons might not be of particular interest to students, thus the lecturers' attitude would be contagious, so that students would also enjoy learning with enthusiasm.
- EFL lecturers should have appropriate characteristics of being an effective and qualified lecturer, including being enthusiastic, caring, creative and capable of stimulating and supporting student learning.
- EFL lecturers should have a genuine and friendly relationship with students. Having good relationships with students would make the students feel that the lecturers are caring, which could create a positive impact on students' motivation, attitude and behaviour. Consequently, students would feel comfortable and confident to learn, be engaged in and participate in class, and share their problems.
- EFL lecturers should understand and accept a student's cultural background. If every student is openly welcomed and their differences are accepted, they are more apt to make friends and feel more comfortable to engage more in conversation and activities. Therefore, the opportunities to use English and enhance their skills are increased.
- EFL lecturers should always improve their English competency and be expert in the field of teaching. Lecturers can improve themselves by self-learning, and attending training and workshops. Thus, they can plan and design their lessons and activities appropriately and effectively, so as to be better able to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

- EFL lecturers should have an in-depth understanding of the individual needs of students. This would help lecturers to design their lessons to suit levels of student English proficiency. Also, it is helpful to understand students' issues and assess students' educational history, so the lecturer can find the most appropriate and effective solutions.
- EFL lecturers should encourage students to practise and use English as much as possible in their daily lives, both inside and outside the classroom.
- EFL lecturers should always convince the students about and increase their awareness of the significance of learning English in order to foster their motivation. Also, lecturers should make students feel that they can learn if they are passionate about it, and show evidence that intelligence and knowledge are changeable and can be improved (Braten & Stromso, 2005; Bruning et al., 2011).

The experiences, suggestions and recommendations of the lecturers interviewed, together with the international literature selected, have resulted in several persuasive recommendations to the leaders in tertiary institutions in Laos. The recommendations are:

- Leaders should create and promote platforms for professional development. In-house professional development and professional development communities should be constituted and promoted. Platforms would be a place to promote creativity, where everyone within the organisation can be involved, and discuss and share their opinions. For instance, training and workshops that are hosted by and for leaders and

lecturers within the organisation should be arranged at least two times per year. This would allow opportunities for those who have completed higher degrees, undertaken workshops or training, or had other experiences overseas to make contributions to the organisation.

- Leaders should allow and promote informal gatherings during tea breaks or lunch time as a platform for leaders and lecturers to share their experiences and challenges. In this way, everyone can help and contribute to developing their profession, as well as the organisation. This is one effective way of promoting professional development as well as saving expense.
- Institutions should provide sufficient and up-to-date technology, facilities, resources and materials to support and facilitate teaching and learning so that the lecturers can use them to implement innovative and attractive teaching strategies and methods, and to improve the quality of teaching and learning for both lecturers and students. If the technology, facilities, resources and materials are insufficient and outdated, professional development could be worthless because lecturers would not be able to implement innovative and attractive teaching activities.
- The curriculum, specifically the content and activities, should be adaptable to suit the context and the needs of students and society. Also, the curriculum should have clear aims and objectives and these should be made known to lecturers.

Implications for further research

Literature on documented teaching and learning strategies and methods is still limited in Laos. The absence of both qualitative and quantitative information on this phenomenon requires more research. As this was a small-scale study, the research sample represented only six EFL lecturers from four tertiary institutions. Thus, I suggest that large-scale studies on the same topic should be conducted to provide a more in-depth and richer understanding of the experiences, teaching strategies and methods of EFL lecturers and teachers, and include other tertiary institutions, as well as high schools and secondary schools in Laos.

This study has only explored teaching strategies and methods that help to deal with demotivated EFL learners and those who have low motivation. The strategies and methods that can help deal successfully with other specific issues and challenges, such as social and cultural barriers, and different levels of proficiency, need to be explored.

The root causes of issues and challenges of teaching and learning English in tertiary education in Laos were not able to be explored in-depth in this study. It is recommended that they should be carefully investigated because the root causes can help lecturers and teachers find effective and appropriate approaches to the issues and challenges.

Significantly, improving and conducting research is in line with tertiary institutions as well as government's plan to improve the quality of education in Laos. The Lao government has prioritized building research capacities as one key strategy for higher education institutions to implement in order to achieve high-

quality research and to closely integrate this into regional and international development. Assoc. Prof. Dr Somchan said at the meeting "Lao, Malaysian universities partner to strengthen social research" that

> "Research design and practical know-how are critical to academics' professional development. But knowing how to conduct research is not enough. It is imperative that researchers, academics and faculty members can manage, disseminate, sustain and apply research findings for purposes such as policy articulation and social improvement. Research findings should be used to improve teaching and learning activities. Conducting and disseminating research findings is crucial for institutions to improve a higher quality of education and increase international visibility for both academics and institutions."

Closing reflection

The results of this study have helped me to reflect on my teaching experiences as an EFL lecturer. Also, they have provoked me to critically examine the issues that are currently occurring and the strategies and methods that could contribute to successful outcomes. The results have further provided concepts for bringing positive change in teaching and learning English in the Lao context. Therefore, not only have I learned from and been inspired by the experiences, suggestions and recommendations made by the selected lecturers, but I have also been inspired to ensure that the results of this study are adopted and implemented widely by leaders and lecturers, including myself.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Certification of an accurate translation (From English version to Lao and from Lao to English)

Flinders UNIVERSITY
College of Education, Psychology & Social Work

Mr. Ketsana Xayasarn

Master of Engineering, Environmental engineering and Management

Master of International Development

I, Mr. Ketsana Xayasarn, declare that I understand the English language and the Lao language well, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I hereby certify that all the documents are accurate translations.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Ketsana Xayasarn

Flinders University

Appendix 2 – Letter of Introduction

22 October 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter is to introduce Thavone Panmanivong who is a Masters of Education student in the Department/Discipline/School at Flinders University. Thavone Panmanivong will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

He is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of English Language Teachers experiences in Laos.

He would like to invite you to assist with this project by agreeing to be involved in an interview. No more than 45-60 minutes on one occasion would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Please be clear that while he will try to keep your identity anonymous and your statements confidential in those publications, because there are a low number of potential participants there is some likelihood that you may be identifiable. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since he intends to make an audio recording of the interview, he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by e-mail Michael.bell@flinders.edu.au

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 8212). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 3 – Information sheet

22 October 2018

INFORMATION SHEET

Interviews

Title: An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and bring positive change when English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Researcher

Thavone Panmanivong

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Flinders University

Tel: +61 8 8201 2266

Supervisor

Dr Michael Bell

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Flinders University

Tel: +61 8 8201 2266

Description of the study

This study is part of the project titled: An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and might bring about positive change when English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This project will investigate pedagogical practices and experiences of student motivation of Lao English Language teachers. This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Purpose of the study

This project aims to find out the pedagogical practices and experiences of student motivation of Lao English Language teachers.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with a researcher who will ask you a few questions regarding your experiences of teaching English in Laos. Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will take about 45-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file, and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your experiences will contribute to ideas about how we can support your effectiveness as a teacher of English.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous. Any identifying information will be removed, and your comments will not be linked directly to you. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to relevant researchers.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

I don't anticipate that there will be any discomfort during the interview. If any emotional discomfort is experienced please contact the Head of Language Pedagogy Department on +856 20 286 22286 or email: souliya_su@yahoo.com for support / counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at panm0001@flinders.edu.au

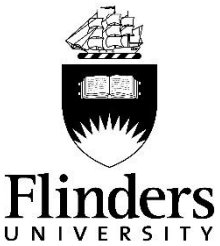
How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via email.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8212). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on (08) 8201 2035, or by email to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 4 – Consent form for participation in research



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

(Interview)

An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and bring positive change when English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

I …….

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the …… for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.

2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.

4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.

5. I understand that:

- I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
- Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and can decline to answer particular questions.
- The information gained in this study will be published as explained, and my participation will be anonymous and confidential.
- While the information gained in this study will be confidential and published as explained, on the basis that the interview will be undertaken in my place of employment, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

I may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties

Participant's name……

Participant's signature……**Date**……..

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name……

Researcher's signature……**Date**……..

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Item 8 as appropriate.

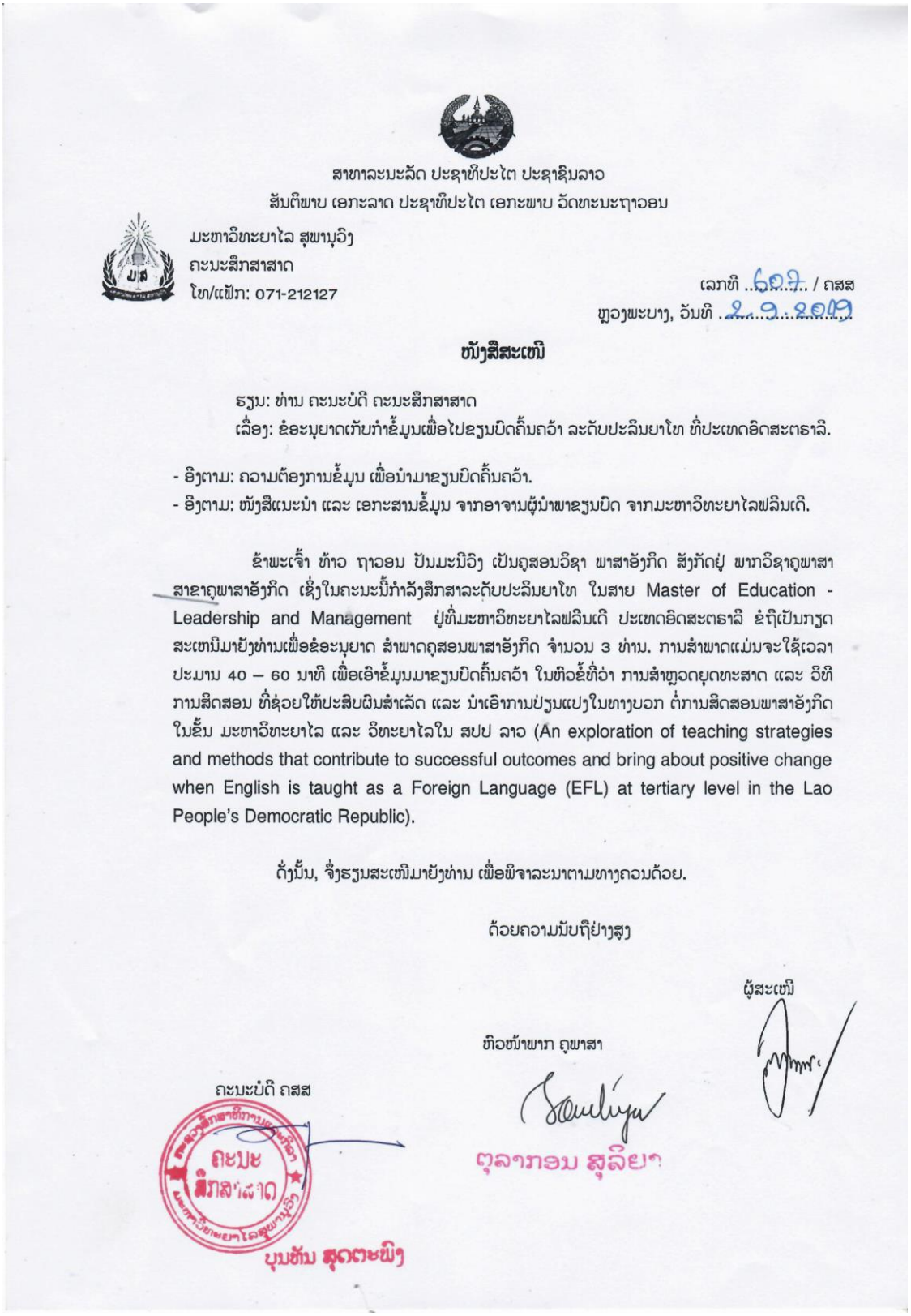
This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 8212). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project please contact the Executive Officer on (08) 8201-3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 5 – Semi-structured interview questions

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Experiences in student low motivation
    a) What are your experiences with students who exhibit low levels of motivation when they are learning English?
2. Causes/factors that demotivated students
    a) Based on your teaching experience, what are the major reasons that your students are demotivated?
3. Strategies and methods to deal with demotivated students
    - ❖ What are the strategies and methods that you usually use to deal with students when they are demotivated while learning?
    - ❖ Have you ever used technology to facilitate your teaching and learning? If not, explain why? If Yes, what technologies did you use and how successful were they? How often do you use technology in your classroom?
4. Suggestions and recommendations
    a) What teaching methods/strategies are there that you think have the potential to bring positive change to the teaching of EFL in your organisation as well as Laos?
    b) What are the challenges of and barriers to applying a variety of or more innovative teaching techniques?

Appendix 6 – A Letter of Agreement for Collecting Data (Lao)



ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ
ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ເອກະພາບ ວັດທະນະຖາວອນ

ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລ ສຸພານຸວົງ
ຄະນະສຶກສາສາດ
ໂທ/ແຟັກ: 071-212127

ເລກທີ ..609.. / ຄສສ
ຫຼວງພະບາງ, ວັນທີ ..2..9..2019

ໜັງສືສະເໜີ

ຮຽນ: ທ່ານ ຄະນະບໍດີ ຄະນະສຶກສາສາດ
ເລື່ອງ: ຂໍອະນຸຍາດເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນເພື່ອໄປຂຽນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ລະດັບປະລິນຍາໂທ ທີ່ປະເທດອິດສະຕຣາລີ.

- ອີງຕາມ: ຄວາມຕ້ອງການຂໍ້ມູນ ເພື່ອນຳມາຂຽນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ.
- ອີງຕາມ: ໜັງສືແນະນຳ ແລະ ເອກະສານຂໍ້ມູນ ຈາກອາຈານຜູ້ນຳພາຂຽນບົດ ຈາກມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລຟລິນເດີ.

ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ທ້າວ ຖາວອນ ປັນມະນີວົງ ເປັນຄູສອນວິຊາ ພາສາອັງກິດ ສັງກັດຢູ່ ພາກວິຊາຄູພາສາ ສາຂາຄູພາສາອັງກິດ ເຊິ່ງໃນຄະນະນີ້ກຳລັງສຶກສາລະດັບປະລິນຍາໂທ ໃນສາຍ Master of Education - Leadership and Management ຢູ່ທີ່ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລຟລິນເດີ ປະເທດອິດສະຕຣາລີ ຂໍຖືເປັນກຽດ ສະເໜີມາຍັງທ່ານເພື່ອຂໍອະນຸຍາດ ສຳພາດຄູສອນພາສາອັງກິດ ຈຳນວນ 3 ທ່ານ. ການສຳພາດແມ່ນຈະໃຊ້ເວລາ ປະມານ 40 – 60 ນາທີ ເພື່ອເອົາຂໍ້ມູນມາຂຽນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າ ໃນຫົວຂໍ້ທີ່ວ່າ ການສຳຫຼວດຍຸດທະສາດ ແລະ ວິທີ ການສິດສອນ ທີ່ຊ່ວຍໃຫ້ປະສົບຜົນສຳເລັດ ແລະ ນຳເອົາການປ່ຽນແປງໃນທາງບວກ ຕໍ່ການສິດສອນພາສາອັງກິດ ໃນຂັ້ນ ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລ ແລະ ວິທະຍາໄລໃນ ສປປ ລາວ (An exploration of teaching strategies and methods that contribute to successful outcomes and bring about positive change when English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at tertiary level in the Lao People's Democratic Republic).

ດັ່ງນັ້ນ, ຈຶ່ງຮຽນສະເໜີມາຍັງທ່ານ ເພື່ອພິຈາລະນາຕາມທາງຄວນດ້ວຍ.

ດ້ວຍຄວາມນັບຖືຢ່າງສູງ

ຜູ້ສະເໜີ

ຫົວໜ້າພາກ ຄູພາສາ

ຄະນະບໍດີ ຄສສ

ຕຸລາກອນ ສຸລິຍາ

ບຸນທັນ ສຸດຕະພິງ

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