Building Entrepreneurial Spirited Graduates Towards ASEAN Economic Community 2015 Classroom-Based Model: Reflection of Class Attendance of Fourth-Year Business Writing Students of Bangkok University

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Abstract

ASEAN Economic Community 2015 has been an agenda for Thai people and citizens of all ASEAN nations. To prepare its people for the 'One Vision One Identity One Community' in the year 2015, the Thai government is promoting English programs in the state-run schools and also private schools and colleges. One aspect on which all sectors should focus is discipline and entrepreneurial traits. These characters can be practiced at schools and colleges by students. This research is a classroom-based model of building disciplined students needed by the market when ASEAN becomes one with no barriers on trade, free movement of workforce and capitals. It is conducted with groups of Business Writing students that were taught with motivational techniques to attend class. It is believed that the classroom can be a model for real settings in the workplace where personnel should be prompt at work. Data collected during the semester were analyzed. Statistics reveals a significant percentage of class attendance indicating that teaching techniques performed were effective. A high percentage of class attendance implies highly disciplined students and in turn indicates entrepreneurial traits in them. The research attempts to build graduates imbued with traits favorable in the coming highly competitive open markets in AEC 2015.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Spirit, ASEAN Economic Community, Class Attendance, Motivation, Business Writing

1. Introduction

This research is influenced by ASEAN Economic Community 2015 where barriers on economic activities will be eliminated. There will be no boundary on economic activities by 2015. For this reason, the research is conducted aiming to tailor undergraduate students of business writing to match the mode of the ASEAN slogan 'One Vision One Identity One Community' in the hope to prepare global personnel to fit a highly competitive market among ASEAN countries.

Fact sheet on an 'ASEAN Economic Community by 2015' issued (2008) by the Public Affairs Office of the ASEAN Secretariat notes several aspects students should realize as follows:

- The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) emanates from the ASEAN leaders vision to transform ASEAN into a single market and production base that is highly competitive and fully integrated into the global community by 2015.

- The emphasis is on equitable economic development where all citizens share in the benefits of ASEAN economic integration.
- An AEC Blueprint that sets out the action lines to achieve these goals was adopted by the Heads of State/Government of the ten ASEAN Member States on 20 November in Singapore. It marks a significant milestone in the 40 years of economic cooperation and integration among ASEAN members.
- The economic integration goals will include among others, the elimination of tarrifs, free movement of professionals, freer movement of capital, and a streamlined customs clearance procedure.
- Forging free trade agreement (FTAs) will be a key strategy for ASEAN to gain greater market access into trading partners and to attract investments to ASEAN.
- The AEC compliments the ASEAN Political-Security Community towards establishing the ASEAN Community by 2015.

The frequently asked questions and answers to questions on AEC include:

1. What are the benefits of building AEC?

In general, AEC will increase regional economic prosperity and stability, as well as reduce the development gaps among member states.

2. Is the AEC similar to the EU?

No. While the establishment of ASEAN and EU were driven by security and foreign policy, the EU is an entirely different model of integration from ASEAN, However, there are many specialized policy domains with useful experiences from the EU that ASEAN can pursue.

3. How to achieve AEC?

A single and coherent plan—the AEC Blueprint—was developed to identify the priority measures and actions, wit clear targets and timelines, to be undertaken to establish the AEC 2015.

4. How can I be an active participant of the AEC building process?

Building an AEC is a shared responsibility of every stakeholder in ASEAN. The AEC Coordinating Conference will provide an excellent avenue for enhanced communication and dialogue between stakeholders from the government, business and the peoples of ASEAN.

It is believed that students taking *Business Writing* acknowledge these facts on AEC by 2015. They should be proactive participants in building an AEC to help achieve the committed Blueprints.

According to AEC 2015, professionals to be freely moved are doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, architects, accountants, surveyors and those in service industries. The students of *Business Writing* should be involved in the service industry section.

Business Writing taught to fourth-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University covers all aspects of writing business people need for business correspondence ranging from

business inquiries to asking for credits, not to mention business e-mails, memorandum and minutes of meeting. Business writing enables learners to prepare business documents effectively. The main objectives of the course are:

- to introduce students to the conventions, formats and styles of business documents and letters of today
- to provide students with the principles of effective business writing
- to help students develop proficiency and confidence in writing effective business letters and documents
- to enable students to apply their knowledge and experience to business writing in the real world settings
- to enforce learning through collaboration by doing group work.

Entrepreneurial spirits are weaved into teaching business writing. At Bangkok University students of all schools are blended with business oriented concepts so that after graduation they are able to join a company with the view that brings progress for the company or they can initiate their own business successfully. As for students of *Business Writing*, they are brewed with the concepts of entrepreneurial spirits that today's employees should possess which include (Hadzima, 2005, pp. 1-2):

Ability to Deal with Risk

An entrepreneur has to operate effectively in an environment filled with risk. The 'right stuff employee' can deal with risk and uncertainty He is able to make progress towards goals and is able to make decisions when lacking one or several critical resources or data.

Results Oriented

'The right stuff employee' is resulted orients; she takes ownership to get the task done. She is a "can do" person who demonstrates common senses in her decision and actions and is able to cut through and resolve problems that divert others. Her business judgment is sound and becomes stronger with each experience, decision or recommendation. While supervisors and managers may disagree with her ultimate recommendation, they usually agree that the alternatives she presents are reasonable for the situation at hand.

Energy

'The right stuff employee' has high levels of enthusiasm and energy; she consistently generates output that is higher than could be reasonably expected. He is fully committed to the organization, its goals and overall success. Not only does he desire to make a contribution to results, he needs to see the results of his contributions quickly, not measured in years.

Growth Potential

'The right stuff employee's reach exceeds her grasp today. Today's 'right stuff employee' is often next year's supervisor and a department manager soon thereafter. She is willing to accept much higher levels of responsibility that is the norm for her position, title, experience level or salary. She acts as a strong role model, trains an coaches others, and soon

begins to assume supervisory responsibilities, again much earlier than would be expected in normal corporate environment.

Team Player

'The right stuff employee' is a true team player, she recognizes how her role contributes to the overall effort and success of the organization. She accepts accountability and ownership for her area of responsibility and expects others on the team to do the same. She also recognizes the roles and contributions of others and applauds their efforts sincerely.

'Multitasking Ability'

'The right stuff employee' is flexible to accept new duties, assignments and responsibilities. He can perform more than one role until the incremental duties and functions assumed can be assigned to co-workers in newly defined roles. He is also willing to dig in and do grunt work tasks which eventually will be performed by lower level employees.

Improvement oriented

'The right stuff employee' is more than willing to challenge in a constructive way existing procedures and systems; to her status quo is temporary. She suggests changes and improvements frequently and encourages others to so also.

'Right stuff employees' are easier to manage in some ways but require a higher level of management involvement in others. Ordinary (average) employees will not produce extraordinary results over time; 'right stuff employees' will generally produce extraordinary results consistently over time. Unfortunately, unless properly motivated, managed and rewarded, 'right stuff employees' could perform at lower levels and only produce ordinary results.

2. Objectives and Rationale for the Study

The mission of the universities and colleges is to build a global community of responsible graduates improving society and environment through the work place. Educational institutions need to prepare students with a solid education to succeed in their careers.

This study aims:

1) To train students to attain high discipline

2) To enable students to interact and communicate with others while gaining a greater understanding through group work

3) To enhance the ability to see connections between class work and real work place setting

4) To develop skills and habits of punctuality

3. Research Questions

This research should address the question below:

- Do class motivation techniques encourage students to attendance class at a high level of 80 percent and above?

4. Literature Review

Student Motivation:

Wlodkowski (1978) asserts that a general pattern of student motivation towards learning often takes the following sequential form—student energy, volition, direction, involvement, and completion. If one area of student motivation breaks down, the entire process may come to a complete halt. One aspect that makes this theory difficult to understand, as well as to apply, is the misleading beliefs related to this concept held by many. There are five of these beliefs (referred to as *motivational misconceptions*, Christophel, 1990, p. 324):

Belief 1: When students are not willing to involve themselves in class activities or assignments, they are unmotivated.

Although students may not be motivated to learn, they are usually motivated to do something. If that motivation is not directed towards learning, it is likely to be directed towards disruptive behaviors.

Belief 2: Teachers motivates students.

Although no one person can claim sole responsibility for motivating another person, teachers can make learning attractive and stimulating, provide opportunities and incentives, allow for development, and match students interests.

Belief 3: Since students must learn in order to survive, making them learn is more important than their motivation to learn.

If learning is associated with coercion, it can become a generally aversive stimulus, one that students will go out of their way to avoid. Forced learning today may result in no learning tomorrow.

Belief 4: Threats can facilitate students motivation to learn.

Using threats only stimulates students to become frightened and resentful of the threats and the person using them. The long term outcome is student avoidance of the teacher and the subject matter.

Belief 5: Learning automatically improves with increased student motivation.

Although there is no conclusive evidence to support such a claim, motivation appears to be an important element that can enhance students' desire to learn. Motivation is not a panacea for instruction, but it may provide a foundation for effective instruction.

Motivational Techniques:

Teachers as classroom managers are usually aware of effective teaching techniques to motivate students to attend class and learn. Academic materials may sometimes be boring but are important for students to know. In this case, it is necessary that teachers motivate students to gain knowledge proposed. There are several techniques to get students motivated to learn. Here are some (http://www.smarteaching.org):

1. *Encourage internal motivation*

While some students may need a great deal of motivation from you, your ultimate goal is to get them to motivate themselves. Encourage students to provide their own motivation for getting things done rather than relying on you to motivate them.

2. *Prepare students to learn*

Before you begin teaching, make sure that students have been prepared and are in appropriate mood to sit down and learn. Those who feel uncomfortable for any reason will feel much less motivated to pay attention.

3. *Create realistic goals*

While it might be nice to imagine a class full of straight A students, the reality is that some students just may not be able to meet that high of expectation, at least not at first. Create goals that are attainable for your students so that they won't feel overwhelmed and feel like they can succeed.

4. *Ensure students are aware of their responsibility*

As the teacher, a big part of responsibility for students' learning falls on you. But students need to be aware that they will only take away from class what they put into it, and that a certain amount of responsibility falls onto their shoulders as well.

5. *Change the style and content*

Students not respond to your lessons? Try changing them up. Sometimes all it takes is a little variety to make more interesting things more interesting to students.

6. *Make students reaction and involvement essential parts of the learning process*

Don't just lecture at your students, make their opinions and feelings on the subject important as well. This will keep them engaged and involved and motivate them to put more effort into learning.

7. *Use group cooperative goals to maximize students involvement and sharing*

Students may be more motivated to work if you allow them to work together. Working with their friends and classmates can be more fun and can help them get more excited about projects and topics they otherwise wouldn't enjoy.

8. *Plan assignments and exercises that are neither too easy nor too difficult*

One way to kill motivation in students is to give them assignments that are well below or above their abilities. Works should be challenging but no so much so that students feel defeated.

9. *Explain the purpose behind the assignments*

You may find that students are reluctant to do work that they feel is pointless or that won't ever have relevance to their lives. Explain to them the reason why they need to do the assignments and learn the topics at hand to give them more incentive to work hard.

10. *Explore the connection between lessons*

Capitalize on the interest that students have had in past lessons by relating new topics to older ones. This also helps students see how topics fit together and gives them an overall picture of the subject.

Besides, teachers may spark student interest by focusing on the importance of the subject, telling story, using visual aids and so on.

Teacher Immediacy:

'Immediacy' refers to actions or words that encourage a feeling of physical or psychological closeness between people. Teachers who use such behaviors tend to create positive attitudes and enhance motivation in their students which in turn leads to better learning. This is because people are naturally drawn to people whom they like and who like them. Students usually want to learn more and are more open to different learning experiences when they perceive that their teacher is interested in them and likes them (Bhavsar, 2008)

The two kinds of immediacy behaviors that effective teachers become aware of are non-verbal immediacy behaviors and verbal immediacy behaviors.

Non-verbal immediacy behaviors include (Bhavsar, 2008; Rocca, 2007):

- Moving around the classroom while teaching
- Smiling at the class while teaching
- Eye contact / Looking at the class while teaching
- Open hand and arm gestures while talking to the class
- Using vocal variety (non-monotone) when talking to the class
- Nodding and using facial expressions that denote careful listening
- Leaning towards students
- Face-to-face body position (as opposed to side-to-face)
- Looking very little at board or notes while talking to the class
- Removing barriers between self and students
- Using appropriate touch when dealing with students
- Having relaxed body posture while talking to the class
- Spending time with students before and after class
- Professional but more casual dress, appropriate to the context
  (or more professional dress initially to increase credibility, then more casual dress throughout the semester)

Verbal immediacy behaviors include:

- Friendly, courteous greetings
- Using of inclusive pronouns (we, us, our)
- Calling on students by name
- Providing feedback
- Asking questions
- Providing praise
- Using humor appropriately
- Allowing for small talk and out of class conversations

According to Rocca (2007), teacher immediacy is *positively correlated* with:

a. Student affect and affective learning even in large classes

b. Student cognitive learning

c. Perceived instructor competence, caring and trustworthiness

d. Positive student evaluations

c. Student state motivation

f. Interpersonal interaction (all 3 forms: task, physical, and social interactions)

g. Perceived teacher assertiveness and responsiveness

h. Student attendance and participation

i. Out-of-class communication between professors and students

Several researches on communication in the classroom have focused on teacher control strategies toward nonverbal immediacy and affective learning. In these studies teachers are viewed as classroom managers using, among other strategies, prompts, motivational messages, structured transitions, positive questions techniques and other available strategies to encourage students' staying on-task. Immediate teachers are viewed by students as being more positive and effective, which, in turn, leads to increased affect towards the instructor and the course itself. These studies point toward immediacy expressiveness as a potentially significant factor in improving instructional effectiveness (Christophel, 1990).

5. Material and Methodology

5.1 Terms and Concepts

The course in *Business Writing* is designed in accordance with Thailand Qualification Framework (TQF), lesson plan for higher education that fosters *collaboration* or group work and enhances learning together with building *discipline* for students. The course entrusts students with the knowledge of *business ethics.*

Collaboration means co-work to share ideas and material for the sake of business success. Students should possess sharing merit to succeed in business. Collaboration was performed by students during the course.

By discipline, students with high entrepreneurship character traits should meet class attendance to the maximum of 85 percent and on time attendance should be the maximum of 75 percent of class attendance.

By discipline, students with entrepreneurial spirit should value time and come to class early. By discipline, lateness or tardiness shows a low level of entrepreneurship.

However, variables acceptable among business in big cities that affect tardiness include traffic and distance from workplace. These factors may affect classroom environments as well.

As for attendance, factors that could affect participation include sickness which may visit seasonally. As such, a few sick leaves are acceptable during the semester.

Generally speaking, business ethics include responsibility. Business calls for personnel with accountable characters to produce quality service and improve customer service in the market.

5.2 Procedures

This research was carried out with students in *Business Writing* from two sections (Section 7241=39 and Section 7244 = 36) comprising 75 fourth year students (Section 7241= 39, Section 7244 = 36) majoring in English with different minors. The subject was administered in the second semester when some students started looking for a job. At the mid point of the session some had jobs and were expected to miss some class meetings.

Grading criteria stated in the course syllabus of *Business Writing* covered the following:

Mid-Term Examination	40%
Final Examination	40%
Class Attendance	10%
Assignments	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

The grading system was designed in this manner so that students were not dependent on classroom activities—low scores on class attendance (10%) and assignments (10%). They could pass the course by doing examinations. Scores on class attendance and assignments seemed small compared with those allotted for mid-term and final examinations.

Textbooks and references were provided so that students could review lessons on their own. Lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations during the class, assignments and practice exercises were not uploaded for repeating learning experiences though the University provides online support site for student access at all time after class.

The course intended to focus on teamwork which required many or almost all students for each class meeting. Collaboration during coursework was one of the main focuses of this research. The classroom should be set similar to a modern workplace. Work teams are a good example of modern workplace practices that require a flexible educated workforce. Interpersonal skills are more important than before (Dewey, 2007). In their research, Stevens and Campion (1994) found social skills the most important skills for work teams. Social skills enable work teams to work with others in solving problems, to communicate and manage and resolve conflicts. To acquire social skills, students formed a group of 3-4 and collaborated in the class.

The research started on the 4th week of the semester when students had enough knowledge necessary for letter writing. Collection of data took 8 weeks.

Attendance rules for this research specified that one class meeting valued one point and those who skipped classes would tolerate one point, one point deducted on class attendance score. Tardiness or late arrival could affect attendance score by ¼ point each class meeting.

Assignments were given in class only and were to be finished in class as well. Those who could not attend class could finish those assignments on their own. The rule stated that

assignments finished outside the classroom were subject to score deduction by two points from the real score. Each individual paper counted 10 points.

Motivation was practiced. A4 paper with a stamp 'Business Writing' provided as a reward for students coming on time (punctual students) as recommended in Sleigh and Ritzer (2001) to focus on rewarding good attendance. As well Ledman and Kamuche (2003) indicated the use of rewards and punishment together would be more effective in improving student attendance.

Students were informed that the course required punctuality. Tardiness of 20 minutes after the class started was counted as late and students would be given a paper without a stamp and the paper would be graded with one point deducted from the real score.

Immediacy was practiced with the teacher approaching every student or each work team during class assignments. The teacher provided each student with a piece of paper by himself. It was said that immediacy enhances motivation in students which leads to better learning (Bhavsar, 2008).

Class attendance was observed strictly. The teacher had the students sign up for class attendance individually.

Collaboration was the main focus when doing class assignments. The students were required to work in group to brain storm. However, each student had to finish the assignment on the piece of paper provided individually. The students earned sharing merit through collaboration.

5.3 Hypothesis:

With all the motivational techniques practiced, this research sets an assumption that real class attendance should be above 80 percent of the total semester class attendance and on time class attendance should be above 70 percent of the real attendance.

6. Results and Discussion

After eight weeks of class meetings, data collected for statistic analysis looks as follows:

Section 7241: Total attendance (39 x 8) = 312 times
Attendance (on time + late)   = 271 times
On time attendance   = 243 times

Section 7244: Total attendance (36 x 8) = 288 times
Attendance (on time + late)   = 257 times
On time attendance   = 214 times

Total attendance (312 + 288)   = 600 times

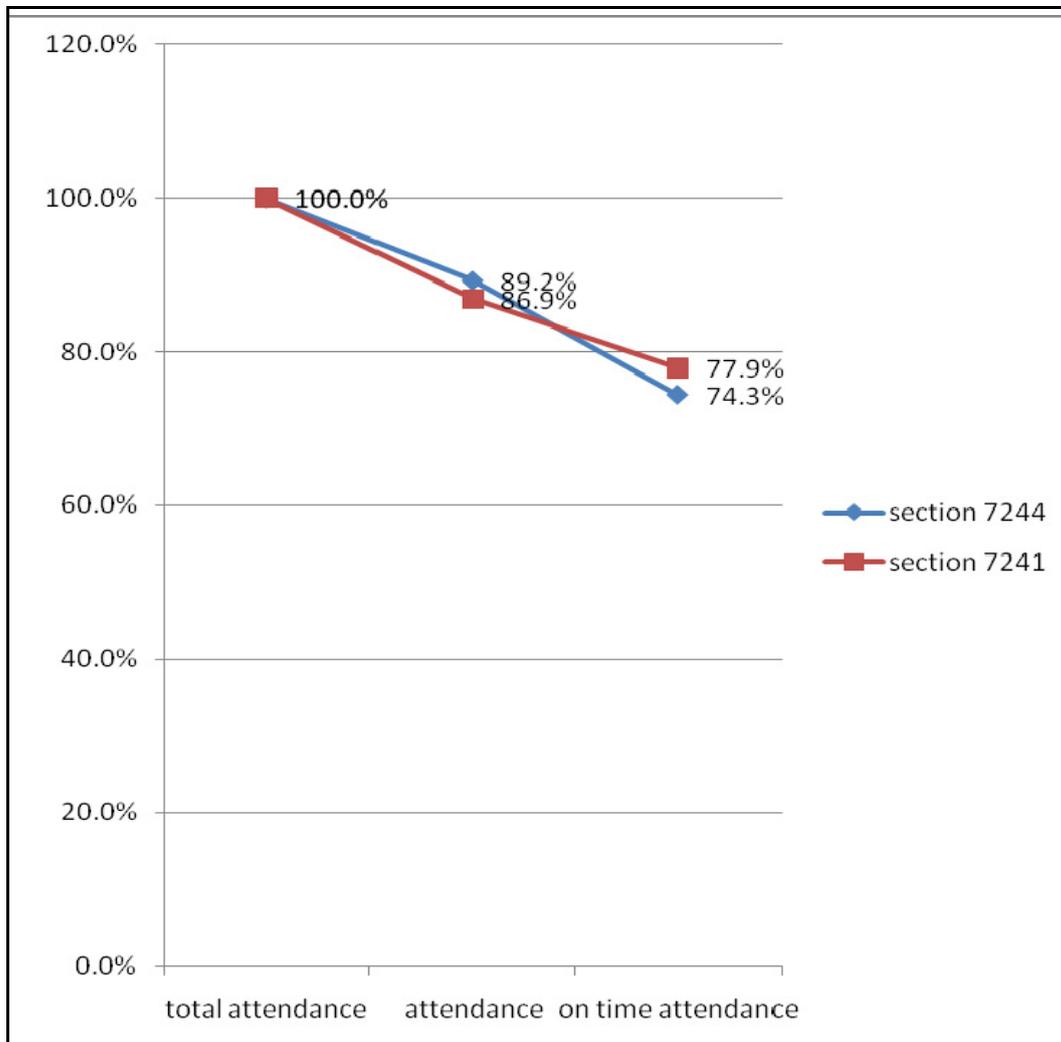Class attendance can be converted in form of statistics shown in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2.**

Figure 1: A cross sectional statistics showing class attendance of 8 weeks.

The figure shows high percentage of class attendance of both sections with section 7244 a bit higher than Section 7241 at 89.20% to 86.90%). Class attendance of *Business Writing* students goes above the postulation of 80 percent and up. The statistics shows that class attendance is above that required by the school policy which specifies that undergraduate students attend class at least 80% of the total mass. As for on time attendance, it is interesting to know that the figures show high percentage of punctuality in both sections.
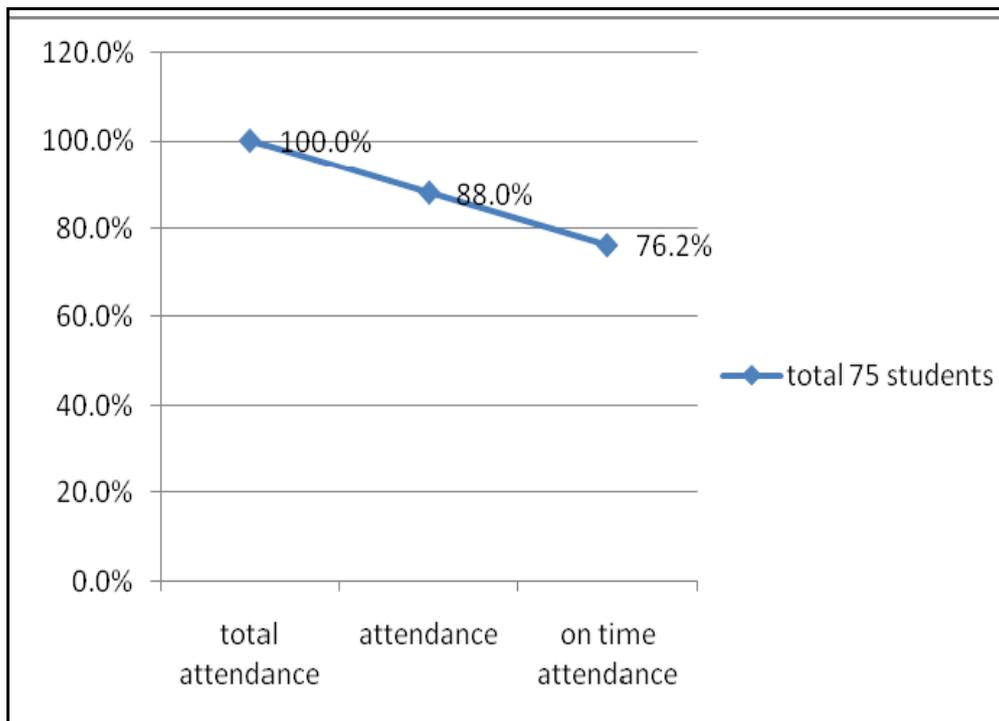
Figure 2: The statistics showing class attendance of both sections totaling 75 students.

The statistics in **Figure 2.** show a high percentage of overall real class attendance of the two sections while on time attendance (punctuality) looks satisfactory.

Considering the percentage of class attendance total 75 students, it is evident that 88% is statistically significant when compared with the research hypothesis. This very high class attendance is certainly associated with classroom motivation techniques performed during the session.

The assumption regarding punctual attendance is set at 70 percent of class attendance and it turns out up to 76.20 percent. This significant statistic indicates that the techniques employed to promote class attendance are effective, considering variables which impede fourth-year students' class attendance in the second semester such as traffic jams, flood, illness, job applications, part time jobs which take students away from class. The research takes into consideration these factors as priority.

Considering the overall statistics, it is assumed that students taking course 'Business Writing' are highly disciplined students. After graduation, these personnel will perform well with business ethics in mind to foster economy of their organizations. Such courses as 'Business Writing' designed within the Thailand Qualification Framework, help more or less with building entrepreneurially spirited graduates to go into the competitive marketplaces such as those in AEC 2015.

7. Conclusion

AEC 2015 has stirred government sectors as well as private business sectors to adjust themselves to the mode of no barriers on trade among ASEAN countries in 2015. There will be free movement of labor within ASEAN nations. Personnel for AEC 2015 should possess entrepreneurial characteristics. To help build favorable graduates to fit into a highly competitive market in ASEAN countries, colleges and universities should design teaching plans in accordance with the Thailand Qualification Framework (TQF), focusing on discipline of students besides their academic excellence. A classroom-based model to attain entrepreneurship for students can be realized through course work with teachers having lesson plans and class activities explicitly drawn. Motivational techniques to promote learning are then practiced. The 'Business Writing' course is a teaching approach where the author tries to enhance learning together with discipline. Students are trained to have entrepreneurial traits business need—entrepreneurship expressed in terms of class attendance. This research aims to measure students' entrepreneurial spirit through class participation. Data were collected weekly and the whole research observation took 8 weeks. Statistical analysis reveals that the material and methodology employed to encourage students to participate are effective. Two groups of students used as subjects in the experiment attended class at a very high percentage. They met class attendance above the presumption which was 80 percent despite variables at risk for missing class. Effective teaching techniques may come in different form. Among them is immediacy which was tried in this research. All in all, AEC 2015 is near. Competitive markets need disciplined personnel to fit the job. The course in the 'Business Writing' taught at Bangkok University attempted to build the right graduates that fit the competitive working environments of the markets of AEC 2015.

9. Limitations

One source of weakness in this study which could have affected the measurements of entrepreneurial spirit traits is that entrepreneurial spirits are abstract quality which is not possible to be assessed by high frequency of class attendance alone. There should be other instruments to measure these important properties which are essential for business of today. Therefore, this research can be considered only primary and may be used as a base for further investigations.

10. Recommendations for Further Research

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further study. How discipline and entrepreneurial spirit traits can be evaluated concretely need practical instruments to measure. One question unanswered is 'Does high discipline correlate with high entrepreneurial spirit traits? Does high frequency of class attendance express high entrepreneurial traits?

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