

Overview

Introductory Rural English is a unique course for a unique situation. Organizations in rural areas with tourism potential should find these materials useful and relevant to their English language teaching.

Tourism can provide a much needed revenue stream for economically disadvantaged areas; however, it often comes at the detriment of both local culture and the health of the natural environment. All of NATR's vocational training programs strive to make the economic benefits of tourism accessible to affected locals while taking steps to safeguard against its associated negative ecological and cultural impacts. Basic English communication skills are a key part of this vision, enabling locals to communicate with tourists in a productive way.

The Introductory Rural English course is designed for villagers in rural areas of Thailand where tourism is poised to expand. The course aims to give students the basic language to describe their livelihood, family, community, and surrounding environment. Through engaging, interactive, and relevant activities, students with little or no previous exposure to English can develop the skills to communicate with foreigners.

The course consists of approximately 20 contact hours between the teacher and the students, and includes interactive lessons, games, and activities that involve English language practice. Since participants tend to be of mixed ability, the course is designed to benefit students at the absolute beginner to low intermediate skill levels. To maximize student benefit, it is highly recommended that the teacher is TEFL certified or has equivalent teaching experience.

Objectives

The objectives of the IRE course are twofold: the primary purpose is to enable students to communicate in English on a very basic level and, equally important, to instill the self confidence to practice English with native speakers.

Upon completion of this course students should possess the language skills to introduce themselves as well as describe their community, livelihood, family, and surrounding environment. The lessons are designed to give the student maximum speaking practice using the language in real life situations.

Speaking a foreign language is intimidating, and many new students are initially unwilling to speak or participate in activities. The lessons and activities in this book encourage group participation; however, it is incumbent upon the teacher to cultivate a nurturing and supportive learning environment to make this effective. The EFL classroom must encourage learners to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or reprisal—mistakes are a natural part of the learning process.

The teacher should also capitalize on the opportunity to learn from the students. A mutual exchange gives the students a feeling of purpose and elicits more communication from them. When a teacher or a friend attempts to speak to the students in their native language it encourages students to reciprocate. Furthermore, when the teacher makes mistakes learning a language it instills confidence in the learner, as it reminds the students that learning another language is challenging.

Structure and Components

The included lesson plans are based on the most useful English for rural communities in the Andaman region of Thailand. The lessons are focused mostly on speaking and listening. There are some optional tasks with written and reading learning material for the advanced learners in the classroom. The lessons and materials are structured so that each lesson ties into the next. Lesson plans are divided into easy-to-follow stages, and each stage has a recommended teaching time along with the necessary materials. The materials are clearly labeled and are located after each lesson plan. The supplemental materials consist of flash cards, worksheets, and puzzles.

Format

The format of the manual is a black and white or a color spiral-bound A4 booklet. The picture cards can be glued to cardboard or laminated for durability. The picture cards are versatile enough to be used in other lessons in the course. Although the course is intended for the purpose of speaking and listening, there are some worksheets included for higher-level or extremely motivated students. If the students possess no knowledge of the English alphabet the students may answer the worksheets in a phonic description of the English phrases or vocabulary.

Assessment

It is important to assess the students regularly to gauge their progress as well as the effectiveness of the teaching techniques. Included at the back of this book is a spreadsheet to record testing results. The testing format and material is ultimately up to the discretion of the teacher. It is suggested the teacher include a brief recap of previous lessons at the beginning of each new lesson for reinforcement. This will serve as a great warm-up activity and will get the students thinking and ready for new learning.