Using Local Culture to Develop University Students English Oral Proficiency Skills

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ABSTRACT

 This paper aims to achieve three objectives: to compare students' performance before and after culture-integrated lessons; to investigate the development of students' speaking skills; and to explore students' attitudes toward the teaching model. This quasi-experimental research was conducted with one group who completed a pre- and post-test along with classroom observation and interviews. Participants were 22 students majoring in English in the Faculty of Education, Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University in Thailand. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant improvement between the mean scores of pre- and post-tests (t=-6.59, p=0.00). In the class, students were exposed to wide range of vocabulary, grammar structure and pronunciation correction. The overall attitudes of the participants toward this innovative approach were very positive. Accordingly, Planning, Presentation, Discussion (PPD) is posited to be another technique which can be applied in the teaching of English speaking skills. The main task given to students is presentation which they need to plan in advance. After the presentation, the learning of the target language is focused on discussing the content and language features from the speech. This study implicates that a structured approach such as in PPD is needed to assist students in noticing the forms, content and features of the target language.

KEYWORDS: culture, English speaking skill, low-proficiency students

Introduction

English is considered a lingua franca in many countries as it is a language people around the world use to communicate when meeting interlocutors from different non-Anglophone backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2015). Even within the context of Thailand, often times, there is a need to communicate with foreigners whose native languages may not be English and who do not speak Thai. This situation is different from the past when English was studied partly to accommodate native English speakers in the country. Moreover, English is seen as a tool to attain social, educational, and occupational status. In recent years, Thais have been somewhat frustrated about their English proficiency needs as the ASEAN Economic community was inaugurated joining 10 countries of South East Asia into a more integrated economic block (The nation, 2015).

English has been a compulsory subject for Thai students. It is studied at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (OBEC, 2014). Of the four language skills, speaking seems to be the most problematic for most students and little attention has been paid to it leading to the unfortunate but unavoidable fact that most Thai students are unable to communicate in English by the time they reach university.

Rajabhat universities usually have a negative reputation in Thailand owing to their consistently poor ranking in world university rankings (Webometrics, 2017). According to a survey by Noom-ura (2013), the factors underlying this problem range from student-based issues to assessment, curriculum, and teaching staff problems. Teachers and students are the key stakeholders who play a vital role in this issue. The lack of opportunity for students to speak in classroom stems from problematic teaching methodology. Students' reluctance to study the target language on their own is another problem to be confronted. If both teachers and students were willing to deal with this problem, the situation might improve (Noom-Ura, 2013).

In the last few years, there has been a growing interest among both language teachers and students in intercultural communication (Knapp, 2015; Barker, 2015; Fang & Baker 2017). When asked about their own culture in English, Thai students may have some background knowledge but are unable to express their own cultural knowledge to tourists or others in English. Local culture ought to be explored in the English classroom using materials and media as classroom tools. Thus, interesting material and innovative media can help students enjoy exploring culture through a variety of channels. Above all, the classroom should be interactive. This study, therefore, integrates the notions of cultural awareness and language teaching methodology as means to assist less successful learners of English in overcoming their learning English difficulties.

Research Questions
1) To what extent did the culture-integrated speaking activity affect students' oral proficiency?
2) How did culture and language integrated instruction improve students' English speaking performance?
3) What were students' attitudes towards culture and language-integrated instruction?

Literature review

The discussion on speaking a second language often revolves around the two dimensions of fluency and accuracy. Fluency refers to "the flow of speech without disruptive pauses, restarts and breakdown" (Richards, 2015, p. 426). Accordingly, it is misleading to equate the term "fluency" with the term "speed", seeing that being fluent doesn't require the speaker to speak fast. However, speakers should be able to show ease in speaking.

Richards (2015) also describes the notion of accuracy as the correct usage of syntax, phonetics, phonology and semantics. In other words, EFL learners need to display good control of target English grammar, for example, verb tenses, subject and verb agreement. Moreover, speakers must be aware of the sound features of the language since they need to produce clear sounds and accurate pronunciation to be understood. Another important aspect of fluency is having access to an appropriate mental lexicon which is a component of linguistic competence that plays a crucial role in communication (Fromkin et al., 2014).

One of the most popular classroom activities used to develop oral skills is presentations. Presentations are a type of public talk in which the presenter expresses information to an audience. For this task, students are required to prepare or write a script before giving the presentation (Harmer, 2015). This might be able to relieve their anxiety in speaking a foreign language.

"Culture involves learned and shared behaviors, norms, values and material objects. It encompasses what people create to express values, attitudes and norms" (Beamer and Varner, 2011, p. 5). People should be aware of these aspects of culture. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, p. 5) posited three features of cultural awareness: "awareness of one's own culturally induced behavior, awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others, and ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint."

In order to accomplish successful communication, interlocutors need to know much more than the target language syntax, lexis and phonology. Sociocultural competence is one more component that needs to be considered in ELT. Cultural awareness is "a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication" (Baker, 2011, p. 65). Learners are aware of norms, beliefs and behaviors of their own culture. Nowadays, the theory of cultural awareness rejects the monolingual native speaker as the ideal model. A number of cultures must be understood to negotiate successfully through communication. Baker (2011) postulated six steps to apply intercultural awareness in classroom teaching. First, exploring local culture emphasizes national cultural groupings whether they be religious or ethnic groups. Secondly, language learning materials need to be explored. For instance, local or imported textbooks can be examined to find a variety of cultural features present. The third step is exploring traditional media and arts through English. English can be learned from viewing film, television shows, listening to radio programs, reading newspapers, literature, and magazines. Fourthly, exploring electronic media through English includes navigating the internet, email, chat rooms and instant messaging. Next, cultural informants, for example, foreign English teachers and local teachers who have experience of intercultural communication can share important cultural information with students. Lastly, face-to-face intercultural communication is often done with non-local English teachers to reflect what they have learned in the class.

The effects of economic and cultural globalization are among the strongest reasons why culture should be integrated into language instruction. Native English speakers, British, American, Australian and Canadian, for example, are not considered the owners of the language anymore because people around the world, including those in the expanding circle of English users, depend on English as a medium for contact with people outside of their own culture (Kachru, 1990). Culture and language have some shared dimensions as language can demonstrate underlying cultural assumptions. Studying native speakers' norms and cultures may appear to be impractical and unrealistic to some. It is consequently advisable that students deal with familiar and indigenous features of their local setting in order to promote their language learning experience in English.

A large body of literature has examined various approaches to EFL speaking instruction. Boonkit (2009) carried out a study on speaking skills development in Thailand. The subjects were 18 students from the Faculty of Arts, Silapakorn University. A task-based approach was the major

treatment technique. The results revealed that the students gained more confidence and creativity when performing tasks based on the findings from the interviews. In addition, speaking performance was improved along the course as students prepared before class. Still, they had some common and inevitable errors in language use, including word stress, the final consonant sounds of English, and verb tenses. Finally, the study implicates that a task-based approach is applicable for EFL pedagogy.

Somdee and Suppasetseree (2013) also conducted a quasi-experimental study on English speaking skills. Digital storytelling was the principle activity. Fifty Suranaree undergraduate students participated in the 10-week study. Students had to give an oral presentation in groups of either 3, 4 or 5 students for 10 minutes. They told a story in their own words. The findings showed that the students' post-test score was substantially higher than the pre-test score. The researchers claimed that their speaking skills had improved because the activity allowed them to rehearse to tell the story.

More recently, Manarung (2015) performed classroom action research on speaking skills by using reading contextual internet-based instructional material. The research was done in two cycles. The participants were 29 Indonesian students. In cycle 1, the participants were assigned to give an oral presentation on a particular topic available on the internet such as a journal article or a popular post and discuss the issue in class after a presentation. The results of the first cycle showed that 55 percent of the students passed the test criteria (75 marks). In cycle 2, un-prescribed by the teacher, the students were allowed to choose internet-based materials on their own. Every group member had to read the selected topic individually beforehand. Similarly, the students' performance in the second cycle was considerably better than the first one, that is, 86 percent of the class passed the test. The author underlined suggested that reading and speaking should be integrated as a guide for classroom discussion and presentation.

Tabrizi and Nasiri (2011) studied the effect of a task-based activity on speaking ability in EFL learners. Sixty Iranian students were assigned to experimental or control groups. Students in the experimental group experienced the Communicative Language Teaching method, for example, information-gap tasks. On the contrary, the control group principally practiced memorization, repetition, and blank-filling exercises. Accordingly, the control group's average scores were 14.03 in pre-test and 13.2 in post-test, while the experimental group's scores were 13.9 and 16.5 respectively. As observed by the researcher, the experimental students improved as they had a greater tendency to negotiate meaning when doing the tasks.

In the literature, there are several examples of culture-integrated English instruction. Suwannoppharat and Chinokul (2015) studied English communication ability through a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course. The research participants comprised 24 international students in the Prince of Songkla University in the south of Thailand. They integrated the 4 Cs framework of Coyle et al. (2010) which are culture, content, communication, and cognition. The results indicated that after receiving the teaching treatment, the subjects post-test performance (mean = 12.63) was noticeably better than pre-test (mean = 7.42). According to the in-depth interview and questionnaire, students had a positive attitude toward the cultural content and in-class activities. It is concluded that learners should learn content and language together.

Kanoksilapatham (2015) investigated integrated instruction of global English and local culture. Thirty-eight students in the fourth grade class at the Khok Kham temple school were selected. She employed a five-week instructional phase in which students had an opportunity to practice English in a tour guide simulation, with a group pretest and posttest method. The results revealed that students achieved significantly higher scores in the post test at the average of 7.97 marks compared to 3.03 marks in the pretest. In addition, students expressed that they were motivated and had positive attitudes toward the English language.

It is obvious that researchers around the world tend to use task-based and presentation techniques in EFL speaking class. In Thailand, one of the above mentioned studies had integrated local culture into the lesson (Kanoksilapatham, 2015). However, a challenging and neglected area in the field of English language teaching is the incorporation of culture in speaking activities.

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky's social constructivist tenet is a popular learning theory used in the English language teaching industry. It refers to the interdependence between individual and social processes in learning and development (Palincsar, 1998). In language learning, a number of scholars concur with the zone of proximal development (ZPD) construct. There is always a gap between the ability of a child or a learner when they perform on their own and when they have assistance from a More Knowledgeable Other or MKO (Palincsar, 1998). Thus, whenever learners obtain assistance from a teacher or more skilled peer, they will accomplish optimum development. ZPD together with cultural knowledge has been integrated into a theoretical framework for the present study.

This paper proposes a Planning, Presentation and Discussion method (PPD) as a simple approach to teach English speaking skills. In the first stage, the teacher generates a theme for presentations for students who then plan the topic with group members. Students are assigned to assist each other in their preparations. In the second stage, students give a presentation. The teacher or their team members may help presenters if they struggle. In the last stage, classmates and the teacher ask questions. The teacher finishes the presentation by pointing out the mistakes students committed. The cycle is repeated in the next task.
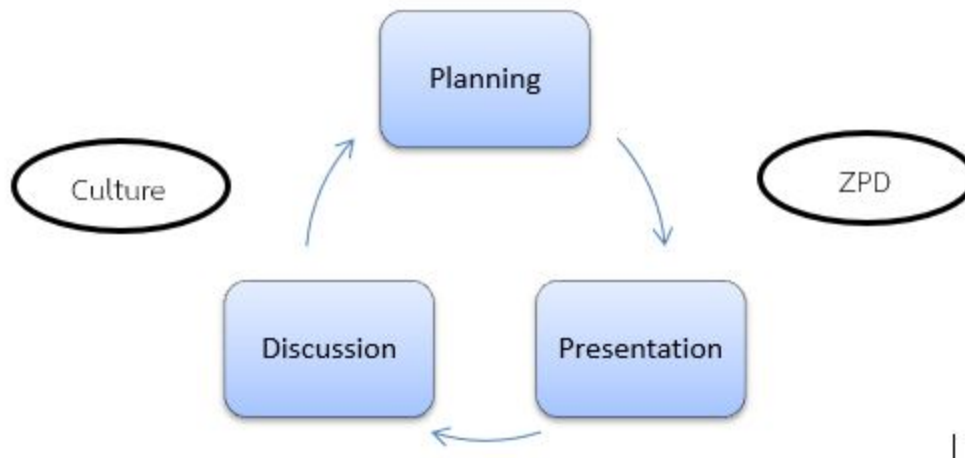
Figure 1. PPD Framework

Participants

Selected by a convenience sampling method, the participants were 22 English major students in the Faculty of Education enrolled in the College English Skills Preparation course which is a non-credit foundation subject for first-year students. At the beginning of the semester, all students take the Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University test of English Proficiency (VRU-TEP). The students whose scores are below 60 must enroll in this course (VRU, 2017). The objective of the course is to develop students' four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There were 23 students on the enrollment list but one student who passed the VRU-TEP decided not to participate in the course. The final number of students was 22 consisting of 2 males and 20 females aged between 18 and 19 from the population of 51 first-year students majoring in English at the Faculty of Education. The score distribution of VRU-TEP is illustrated below:

Table 2. Score distribution

Score	Number of students
Higher than 50	2
40-49	6
30-39	7
20-29	5
10-19	2

The majority of the participants were found to be at the elementary to pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. The textbook used in the course is Breakthrough 1 which is equivalent to the A2 level of the CEFR.

Research Instruments

    a) Pre-test and post-test

A pretest was administered during the second class in the form of a semi-structured interview with students. The questions were related to students' personal information and cultural knowledge. Students were required to answer in English. The interviewer was allowed to ask follow-up questions if necessary.

    b) Power Point presentation

Students were assigned the theme for their presentation by the teacher. Nevertheless, they were allowed to choose their own topic related to the given theme according to the group's interest. They were allowed to retrieve the information from the internet or other reliable sources to include in their PowerPoint.

    c) Interview protocol

At the end of the course, the student participants were interviewed concerning the effectiveness of the instruction, their satisfaction with the teaching method, and their English skills development. A professional voice recorder was used in all processes of the study to capture and record students' work including, interviews, pre and posttest, and presentation.

Procedure

The experiment was held in the second semester of the 2016 academic year. The course lasted 17 weeks. The pretest was administered in the second week while the posttest was carried out in the last week of the semester. Throughout the course, students received both normal instruction and the treatment material as follows.

Table 3. Lesson Plan

Week	Contents	Week	Contents
1	Introduction & VRU-TEP	10	Unit 9
2	Unit 1 & pretest	11	Task 3
3	Unit 2	12	Unit 10
4	Unit 3 & Task1	13	Unit 11
5	Unit 4	14	Task 4
6	Unit 5 & Task 2	15	Unit 12
7	Unit 6	16	Posttest
8	Midterm exam	17	Final exam

The students had one to two weeks to prepare their English presentations. The first topic concerned Thai food. The second concerned tourist attractions in Thailand. The third topic was about Thai festivals and traditions. The last topic was about King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Classmates were encouraged to ask questions after the presentations. Finally, the teacher commented on the content and language of each presentation.

Data analysis

Pre and post tests were assessed with the same rubric. Rating criteria comprised content, fluency, vocabulary, and language control (grammar and pronunciation). Each component carried a weight of 2.5 marks, so the total was 10 marks. The post-test was parallel to the pretest. Following this, the pretest and posttest were analyzed by a descriptive and paired samples dependent t-test to investigate the significance of the treatment. Content analysis was utilized to examine the qualitative data including interviews and Power Point presentation.

Results and discussion

Research question 1: What effects did the culture-integrated speaking activity have on students' oral proficiency?

To be able to answer this question, pre and post tests were analyzed. As for the pre-test, firstly the students provided personal information. Secondly, topics concerning cultural aspects were randomly selected for inquiry, for instance: "What is the definition of culture?", "Can you give an example of culture in your province?", and "What is the most important aspect of Thai culture in your opinion?". It was found that the mean score of the pretest was 4.43, while the posttest mean was 6.38. This revealed the highly significant improvement of the participants (t = -6.594, p = 0.000) as seen in table 4.

Table 4. A comparison between the mean scores of the pretest and posttest

test	N	Mean	S.D.	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
pretest	22	4.3609	1.2666	21	-6.594	.000
posttest	22	6.3864	1.3708			

To illustrate, the students who received the lowest score of 2.5 in the pretest performed better in the posttest. For example, student number 6 couldn't express her thoughts in English and used several Thai phrases to answer the question in the pretest; nonetheless, in the posttest she answered everything in English as follows:

> *Interviewer: what is the definition of culture?*
>
> *Student 6: culture is characteristics and knowledges of particular group of people, way of life. Group people have different culture.*
>
> *Interviewer: What is the most important Thai culture for you?*
>
> *Student 6: pay respect to others because pay respect to adult and old age has important for Thai very much.*

> *Interviewer: If a tourist ask you for a recommendation to travel, where would you recommend?*
>
> *Student 6: Wat Phanancherng near my home and have beautiful Luang Por Toh.*

This student might not have answered the questions with correct English syntax but she received a high score for cultural content and fluency while speaking.

Another student who obtained a full score in the posttest compared to 6.5 in the pretest was student number 7. She received the high score since she answered the question thoroughly and controlled her language use very well.

> *Interviewer: what is the definition of culture?*
>
> *Student 7: Culture is like the thing we do for a long time. We think it's good and told our children, our boys, our girls that you have to do that. In every country, there are different cultures. And, you have to adapt, in other country, you have to be like them and act like you are native.*
>
> *Interviewer: In your opinion, what is the most distinctive Thai culture?*
>
> *Student 7: For me, it's food. For my group, we presented about Nam Prik Pla Too. First, use chilli. You grill it or just bake, it's ok. And mix it in the bowl with some salt, some fish sauce, Pla Too fish. You have to season it for a little.*

Again, there were a few syntactic errors in her speech. However, this was considered acceptable in spoken English. She also showed that she had language awareness, especially with respect to plural forms of nouns and past tense which Thai learners of English often neglect.

The majority of the class had better scores in the posttest compared to the pretest. Out of 22 students, only one showed no progress, getting 5 marks in both pre and post-tests. A potential explanation for this student's poor marks in the pre-test was that he was from a rural home and non-urban dwelling students obtain unsystematic English curriculum compared to those in the city. The findings corroborated the recent experiments conducted by Suwannoppharat and Cinokul (2015) and Kanoksilapatham (2015) that students can develop their English skills when performing tasks related to culture and some specific content.

Research question 2: How did culture and language integrated instruction improve the students' speaking performances?

Power Point slides and recordings of student presentations were used to investigate language use, teacher's comments and teaching approach of the class. As for the first presentation about Thai food, students learned a wide range of vocabulary regarding well-known Thai dishes such as Tom Yam Kung (spicy shrimp soup), green papaya salad, fried rice, egg in brown sauce and shrimp paste. First of all, students had to know the term "ingredients" and other materials, for example, kaffir lime leaf, galangal, lemon glass, string bean, radish, garlic, chilli, soy sauce, tofu,

palm sugar, teaspoon, tablespoon, mortar and pestle. They also encountered many verbs used in making food such as boil, squeeze lime, debone, stir, pound, mince, season, marinate and crush. Most common phonological errors included the mispronunciation of the word "lime juice" and the past tense morpheme 'ed' as in the word "concentrated".

In the second task, the students practiced a presentation about tourist attractions in Thailand. Most chose their hometown as examples, for instance, Chachoengsao, Phuket, Nakon Ratchasima, Surat Thani, and Chiang Mai. More difficult vocabulary was presented as the content in this part was deeper. Vocabulary related to the places and their history were presented; for example, tributary state, pagoda, statue, Buddha image, make merit, stencil, commemorate, accession to the throne, intricate symbolism, millennial, legions of pilgrims, floating market, peninsula, scenic, basin, plateaus. Pronunciation instruction was also addressed. For example, when students talked about food in their province, they were reminded that the word recipe has three syllables. Pronunciation of some easy words was still mispronounced; for instance, 56 was pronounced "fivety-six", "largest" was pronounced with a hard /g/ sound. For difficult vocabulary, the teacher offered explanation as to how to guess the meaning of words and morphemes from context such as in the word "countless". Alternatively, the teacher could wait until students finished the presentation to add comments. Some students made some mistakes stemming from poor preparation. For example, on the PP slide of one group was written: "Check out the boats operated by these two famous companies" but they didn't provide the names of the companies, as they just copied it from a website without looking further. In addition, transfer effects from the L1 were common as in the sentence "when you go to Nakon Ratchasima, do not **falseness**." This incorrect use of the word "falseness" is derived from the direct mistranslation from Thai to English of the word to "miss" due to polysemy.

Next, regarding presentations on Thai festivals, students discussed the Thai New Year or "Songkran" festival, Loy krathong, Maka puja day, Sart Thai day, and the Phi ta khon festival. The highlighted vocabulary here included throwing water, soaked, raucous, sermons, solemn, purify, the emerald Buddha, candlelit procession, and joss-sticks. A few students were unable to answer questions related to meanings of difficult words. To exemplify, the teacher provided contextual clues and introduced some morphological concepts so as to portray the meaning of the following phrases: almighty water fight, auspicious time, appeasing the spirits, benefactor. It must be admitted that some phonological aspects posed problems in this vocabulary; for instance, "summarized" was pronounced as "summary"; written was pronounced as "write-ten"; enthusiasm was pronounced as "en-tas-sium"; wrapped was pronounced with two syllables. On the sentence level, students were not able to sort out the structure of this long sentence: "People believed that if they did not offer krayasart to monks, their dead relatives would have nothing to eat and thus they would be condemned." In this instance, the teacher asked the students what they were referring to, which a student said "the ghost". This response suggests insufficient preparation on the part of the student before class.

In the last task, the teacher wanted this young generation to be aware of what King Rama 9 (Bhumibol Adulyadej) did for the Thai subjects. Students selected the topics about his majesty's ability in sports, art, music, rainmaking, and the chai pattana aerator device. The key vocabulary presented included patent, insufficient, artificial rain, agriculture, profound, considerable, drought, dinghy, ecstatic, skiing, swimming, shooting, mini golf, mini car racing, tennis, and

gliding. Again, some vocabulary was mispronounced, for instance, since was articulated as "science.", "His Majesty King Bhumibhol Adulyadej is indeed a music composer." This sentence should have used the past tense as the late king had already passed away.

With regard to social constructivism theory, teachers and more advanced classmates might act as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) to assist slow students to attain language development (Bunyakarte, 2010). The teacher was always able to guide students' for pronunciation of expressions used in their presentations. Consequently, students demonstrated better use of signposts along the course, namely greetings, introducing group members, leading in to the topic, moving on to the next part, finishing the presentation and inviting questions from the floor. Alptekin (2002) proposed that cultural content needs to emanate from familiar and indigenous features of the local setting as it will trigger students' interest. Nevertheless, much attention is still needed on students' language use including: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Even though they are English majors, they did not have a solid linguistic background knowledge.

Research question 3: What were the students' attitudes towards culture and language-integrated instruction?

At the end of the semester, student participants were interviewed. Two major questions were emphasized in the interview. They were, "What do you think about learning about culture?", and "Do you think presentations in class help you improve your English?". Most students had positive comments as illustrated below.

> *Student 3: it improve my English skill because we speak a lot of English. We will know sufficient vocab and practice English.*
> *We use it in daily life if we do mistake it's not good for me if we live in Thailand.*
>
> *Student 6: (it) improve speaking and listening, improve myself, ask question to teacher (about) new vocabulary. I prepare to reading script and understand to new vocabulary.*
>
> *Student 7: this is my first class??? cultural in English (it's a) good thing to study Thai culture in English. We can know more about Thai culture in other ('s) opinion (because) some information we can't find in Thai. Sure. Exactly. We get more experience (and) opportunity to show our opinion, knowledge, skill and improve it. It helps a lot. You speak more, you get more. I know more vocabulary from study Thai culture in English. ???Some old words that I forget like agriculture is farming.*
>
> *Student 9: (in Thai) it's important because culture is used to communicate and express our identity.*
> *I'm more confident. Use the correct language, improve my personality. When I did mistakes, the teacher will suggest and correct if there are any pronunciation mistake. I'm not afraid if the teacher correct me. It's a good thing. I can apply the way we use materials when I teach to make the lesson more interesting. I learn the*

content and arrange the sentences. I'm impressed with the presentation about King Rama 9. He is versatile such as sports, art and invention.

Additional comments are listed as follows:

Not only does this method help them in language learning but also instills good habits in learning and accountability among learners as some students asserted that *"It fosters my patience, discipline and responsibility." And "Group work helps me develop (myself)."*

Another student commented, *"Teacher gave me an opportunity to speak in class."* It is common knowledge that in schools, class size is large with up to approximately 50 students in one class. In such circumstances, it is difficult for teachers to design activities that can activate all learners.

In addition, the presentation was able to assist the students in improving self-confidence, which is especially important for Thai students who tend to be passive and shy and are often afraid to speak English in the class. Still, the availability of slides and a script may help low-proficiency students to be more confident. As for the teacher's role, we should remain friendly and provide a relaxed atmosphere. One of the renowned second language acquisition ideas propounded by Krashen (1982) (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) is an affective filter hypothesis which attempts to explain language learners' feelings and attitudes in learning a language. If the learner feels intimidated, it will be a barrier to the learning process.

Contrary to expectation, one student expressed a negative opinion on cultural learning. She reported (in Thai) "It is not important. We study it just because to have to know it." She perceived that she could not apply this knowledge to her real life.

Pedagogical implications

Based on the findings, some important implications for solving oral communication problems were deduced. Before introducing the idea of intercultural communication, the teacher may focus on students' own cultural perspectives rather than understanding other cultures. In so doing, integration of culture and the English language is obligatory. In their everyday life, students are surrounded by the local. Moreover, students can relate what they have learned to their real lives. Thus, when designing cultural content, the teacher must be able to explain why the selected material is valuable for students (Sercu, 2002). For example, Shrestha (2016) integrated local culture in English lessons in order to promote nationalism and preserve the culture.

Authentic materials have a tremendous effect on communication. Material created for the classroom is rarely seen in daily life (Oura, 2008). Students can bring their own materials from a real world context such as websites, newspapers, YouTube videos and songs. The benefit of authentic texts is that the language is not simplified as in textbooks but may not be too difficult as in standardized tests. Research carried out by Ciornei and Dina (2015) with 90 Romanian participant found that the most useful authentic texts were newspaper/magazine articles, interviews, songs, documentaries, and shows respectively. In the present study, the students mainly searched the internet for information and tried to comprehend what they were planning to present by themselves.

Error correction is considered a crucial component in class. To achieve this, assigning group work is a good option for classroom activities. Peers can help to prepare presentations, select reliable content, and answer questions from the floor if a group member begins to struggle. Questions from the class seem to be beneficial. During and after the presentation, the teacher has to illustrate and point out the mistakes that have occurred in the presentation so as to improve students' accuracy. Harmer (2013) outlined 6 possible ways to give feedback: 1) asking the student to repeat, 2) echoing a student's incorrect utterance with questioning intonation, 3) telling the student that there is an error in their produced language, 4) using facial expressions or gestures to signal that the mistake occurs, 5) hinting by telling what kind of error has been committed, for example plural and tense, and lastly 6) reformulating the sentence that students intended to say, correctly.

The proposed PPD model answers all of the aforementioned requirements. Teachers should consider incorporation of cultural and authentic material in their classroom. Moreover, designing a task with group work is a crucial way to engage weaker students. When learners make mistakes, instructors ought to find the proper mode to provide feedback.

Conclusions and recommendations

The present study has investigated the impacts of culture and language-integrated teaching. The results show that after receiving the treatment, participants' speaking skills improved. They also learned various language features such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Almost every student in the class in this study felt that this kind of teaching was effective for enhancing their performance. Given that the focus of this research was on merely one selected class, it might not be generalized to all Thai university students. Furthermore, future research is recommended to elucidate the effectiveness of this approach by experimenting with both control and experimental groups. This work has highlighted that the PPD model has the potential to improve EFL students' oral proficiency by three practical steps which are planning, presenting and discussing. The students can learn English by preparing tasks in the planning stage, gain confidence and fluency during presentation, and receive constructive feedback in the discussion.

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Strengthening Project-Based Learning with Genre Checkpoints

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ABSTRACT

Project-based learning (PBL) is a learner-centered approach that integrates all the language skills as students work on addressing a particular question, issue, or problem. PBL combines academic knowledge with real-world applications, developing both language and content knowledge. For English language learners, PBL offers benefits related to English language development, motivation and engagement, critical thinking, and academic content knowledge. Despite the advantages, there have been some criticisms of PBL in terms of a lack of structure during the preparation phase and a disproportionate focus on summative assessment compared to formative assessment. In this paper, I discuss an action research project aimed at addressing these two concerns that have been raised regarding PBL. This action research took place in a university-level ESL class in Hawaii, where students were introduced to genre awareness checkpoints. A genre awareness checkpoint is a point during the preparation phase of a project where students are introduced to a relevant academic genre, investigating its move structure and linguistic features in a structured mini-lesson. Students are then required to produce the genre in order to move through the checkpoint and continue with a project. In this action research project, the implementation of genre checkpoints in PBL did not only help to add structure and opportunities for formative assessment in PBL, but also offered the added benefit of supporting students' developing genre awareness.

KEYWORDS: Project-based learning, genre awareness, action research

Introduction

In this paper, I discuss an action research project aimed at addressing two concerns that have been raised regarding PBL. The intervention in this action research project involved incorporating genre awareness checkpoints into the preparation phase of a project in a university English for academic purposes (EAP) bridge course at a private university in Hawaii. The majority of students in the course were from Asia (Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and China), and most planned to continue as degree-seeking students upon completion of either one or two semesters in the university bridge program, of which this course was a part. The 14-week course met three days per week, for 50 minutes each day.

The EAP course focused on developing students' academic language skills and study skills needed for studying at the university level. The course also aimed to develop students' understanding of cultural norms and expectations in U.S. higher education. One of the specific stated objectives in the course was the development of genre awareness. However, an explicit focus on developing genre awareness never seemed to extend into the project work that was required as the midterm assessment portion of the course. The midterm assessment was a multimedia presentation project.