Supporting Professional Learning

in

Southeast Asian Universities

through

DEPISA

Edited
by
Kevin Laws, Lesley Harbon & Christabel Wescombe

Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia

DEPISA
Monograph no. 5

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DEPISA
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Introduction

Since 2010 Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia (DEPISA) has been dedicated to the continuous improvement of teaching practices through practitioner inquiry. Beginning with 18 members from five universities involved in a project funded by the Australian Government and the University of Sydney DEPISA has grown into a network of over 200 members from more than 20 educational institutions.

DEPISA is a unique organisation. Apart from the initial funding though Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships DEPISA has grown through the support of its members and key universities. There are no membership fees to join DEPISA. There are no conference fees to attend our annual meetings.

It is important to acknowledge the part played by the following universities in providing facilities and other support for our meetings:

Can Tho University, Vietnam
Daegu National University, Peoples' Republic of Korea
National University of Laos, Laos
Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, Thailand
Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand
Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand
Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

DEPISA also acknowledges our members, who either self-fund or seek other funding to provide for travel and accommodation expenses in order to attend meetings.

We believe that the encouragement of practitioner inquiry through action research, learning through action, practitioner-led research and other forms of inquiry assists our members in their professional learning and this, in turn, contributes to the improvement of teaching practices and students' learning.

Monograph no. 5 contains articles representing various forms of practitioner inquiry across a range of disciplines from 30 members from six countries. We are extremely grateful for the support received from Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand for hosting our 12th DEPISA International Conference and publishing Monograph no. 5, and in this way making a valuable contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning across the Asian region.

Kevin Laws
University of Sydney

Lesley Harbon
University of Technology, Sydney

Christabel Wescombe
University of Sydney

July, 2018

DEPISA and Practitioner Inquiry

Kevin Laws
kevin.laws@sydney.edu.au

Sydney School of Education and Social Work,
The University of Sydney

In this paper I wish to review the contents of the four monographs that have been produced by DEPISA. I have chosen to use the term 'practitioner inquiry' when reflecting upon the work of DEPISA members contained in the monographs. We might define 'practitioner inquiry' as intentional inquiry by teachers in schools and universities about their own school/faculty and classroom work. Such a definition captures the variety of practitioner inquiry undertaken by DEPISA members, including 'learning through action', 'action research', the more limited 'classroom action research', 'inquiry into practice', 'practitioner-led research', 'teacher research', 'teacher inquiry' and possibly many other possible terms.

'Practitioner inquiry' allows us to include the many varied forms of inquiry undertaken by members of DEPISA and shared through presentations at annual meetings and in our monographs. In *Inquiry as Stance* Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009) identify the following commonalities of practitioner inquiry:

- The practitioner is the inquirer and the researcher
- The purpose of practitioner inquiry is to improve educational practices
- There is a degree of collaboration among and across participants in the inquiry
- All participants in practitioner inquiry are knowers, learners and researchers
- The practitioners' work site is the focus of the inquiry
- There are blurred boundaries between the practitioner's inquiry and practice
- Practitioner inquiry utilises a variety of data collection and analysis strategies leading to changed educational practices
- Non-traditional notions of validity and generalisability are part of practitioner inquiry
- Practitioner inquiries are made public

(Adapted from Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 39).

What is DEPISA?

DEPISA is a community of practice concerned with improving the educational practices in schools and universities throughout Southeast Asia by contributing to the professional development of members. We do this by encouraging members to participate in professional inquiry/learning through action projects which involves the collection of data at their work site and reflections upon their findings. A platform for them to share their results is provided through presentations at annual meetings and through the publication of the monographs.

In DEPISA we acknowledge both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis. We also acknowledge that many organisational practices in schools and universities can either support, or even hinder, the improvement of educational experiences for students and teachers. We find that members now are not only investigating how a change in a specific aspect of their teaching activities, or the focus on trying out new ways of supporting student learning might bring about better student learning outcomes, but they are conducting inquiries into organisational practices and how these might contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning, as well as developing new approaches to teacher professional development.

Insights into DEPISA

Since we first met in Sydney in November 2010 meetings have been held in Vietnam (twice), Thailand (five times), Indonesia (twice), South Korea, Laos and Sydney (once each). It is interesting to look at the four DEPISA monographs to understand the way we have progressed in terms of contributions, membership, and levels of collaboration.

From Table 1 (below) we can note that there has been an increase in the number of articles that have been published in each monograph. The first monograph contained articles that were produced by individuals and teams from the 18 members from five universities who formed what was to become DEPISA. The articles in later monographs illustrate how DEPISA has grown to include additional individual members and more universities.

Table 1. Publication dates and number of articles in DEPISA monographs

Monograph	Publication date	No. of articles	Sponsoring institutions
Monograph 1	December 2011	12	Can Tho University, Vietnam.
Monograph 2	October 2013	15	Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand.
Monograph 3	December 2014	15	Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia.
Monograph 4	July 2016	25	Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand.

Table 2 shows how additional countries have joined DEPISA and begun to contribute articles to the monographs.

Table 2. Number of papers from members' countries

Monograph	Australia	Indonesia	Thailand	Vietnam	Laos	Malaysia	Korea
Monograph 1	2	4	2	2	2		
Monograph 2	2	2	5	6			
Monograph 3	2	4	4	5			
Monograph 4	2	6	9	6		1	1

One aspect of high quality professional development has been the level of collaboration involved in collective inquiry and writing (OECD, 2017). Table 3 shows how there has been a high level of collaboration in contributing articles for the monograph, while noting at the same time the number of articles written by individuals still predominate.

Table 3. Level of collaborative inquiry and writing

Monograph	Number of authors/paper					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Monograph 1	6		2	2		2
Monograph 2	8	5	2			
Monograph 3	11	1	3			
Monograph 4	16	5	4			

We are aware that DEPISA has facilitated considerable levels of collaboration between and among individuals and institutions. We look forward to future articles produced from collaborative inquiry projects launched between member institutions within countries and across countries.

Table 4. Collaboration across countries

Monograph 1	Vietnam/Australia	2 articles	
Monograph 2	Vietnam/Australia	3 articles	
Monograph 3	Vietnam/Australia	1 article	Vietnam/Australia/Korea, 1 article
Monograph 4	Indonesia/USA	1 article	

Some outcomes from DEPISA practitioner inquiry

As DEPISA is a group focussing on professional development, it is useful to look at the way in which the inquiries conducted by members have become more sophisticated, rigorous and systematic in the type and variety of research questions raised, and the approaches of inquiry adopted.

We can reiterate the purpose of DEPISA in the following way:

> DEPISA is a community of practice concerned with the improvement of teaching and educational management practices leading to better student (and teacher) learning within the context of rapidly changing societies and with the intention of contributing to the reform of educational practices and the betterment of society. This is achieved by contributing to the continuing professional development of members through supporting learning through action projects which involve appropriate approaches to professional inquiry and reflection and sound conclusions based upon evidence.

As part of the professional development role of DEPISA members are encouraged to consider the following questions when undertaking their inquiries:

- Why are you undertaking this inquiry? What is the issue you are investigating? Why?
- For whose benefit are you undertaking this inquiry?
- What do you hope to achieve by undertaking this inquiry?
- Who should be involved in this inquiry? Why should they be involved?
- How have previous published studies informed your inquiry in some way?
- What data are pertinent to your study and what methods will you use to collect it?

- What conclusions did you come to after analysing the data you collected?
- What changes in your practice will you implement based upon your findings?

When I revisited the articles contained in the monographs we have published I identified the following themes:

- A community of practice
- Professional development strategies
- Action research/ Learning through action
- Reflection
- Information computer technology (ICT**)**
- Research issues

Rather than include every article in the reference list I have included, as an appendix, the authors and titles of all articles contained in the monographs.

A community of practice

Wenger (2000, p. 229) defined communities of practice as 'groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact'. He conceptualised communities of practice as social learning systems and as self-organising entities with dynamic boundaries and complex interrelationships. Communities of practice can be formal or informal, and of varying sizes.

In Monograph no. 3, I argued that DEPISA was a community of practice (Laws, Monograph no. 3), and in Monograph no. 4 Lesley Harbon took this further by applying Watson's (2013) frames of transformative participation as a way of looking at what DEPISA has achieved. She also raised issues that are pertinent to our sustainability into the future (Harbon, Monograph no. 4, p. 6).

Trinh Quoc Lap, Kevin Laws and Son Jang-Ho (Monograph no. 3) investigated the concept of an international community of practice and wrote about how attributes of global citizenship were developed through partnership programs involving Vietnam, Australia and Korea. We concluded by identifying those aspects of global citizenship which can be regarded as essential graduate attributes for undergraduate students.

Ilza Mayouni's (Monograph no. 1) article on designing a collaborative-based practicum curriculum illustrated how the involvement of a range of stakeholders contributed to collaborative learning of students as well as developing their pedagogic skills and learning autonomy. The collaborative planning of the program contains many of the elements that identify an active community of practice.

The concept of building a learning team consisting of colleagues from different disciplinary departments and of different ages and levels of experience who worked together to improve teaching and research skills was explored by Nam Nguyen, Binh Vo and Diem Huynh in Monograph no. 2. This team learning experience over a period of nine months led to shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry as well as individual

learning. The study indicates that although a community of practice may not endure for ever while it is functioning much can be achieved.

In a very different type of study Wanpen Waelveerakup and Nongnutch Chowsilpa (Monograph no. 4) wrote about how extra-curricular activities, such as students working as volunteers in hospitals, homes for the elderly and at community centres, led to the development of what they called the 'volunteer spirit', a desirable attribute for those working in service industries. I think of 'volunteer spirit' as an essential part of a community of practice.

A variety of approaches to professional development

Numerous articles have been produced on approaches to professional development. In Monograph no. 1 the team from the National University of Laos and the team from Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand informed us about the challenges in their countries and how they confronted the issues they faced.

In Monograph no. 2, Nam Nguyen and Kevin Laws outlined how the Centre for Professional Development was established and operated in the School of Education at Can Tho University. She gave insights into the type of programs that were offered and the ways in which they were conducted.

Suastini in Monograph no. 1, outlined how a project at the State University Jakarta, used classroom action research as a means of contributing to teachers' professional development. This project was part of a large-scale project which involved classroom research and publication outlined by Ilza Mayouni (Monograph no. 1).

A study illustrating how planning a project to introduce blended learning into classrooms in the Mekong Delta schools was undertaken by Nguyen Thi Van Su and Khuu Quoc Duy (Monograph no. 2). Trinh Quoc Lap and Kevin Laws (Monograph no. 2) wrote of how a School of Education was introduced to the concept of a 'learning community' and what this implied for the work of the School.

At a university level Kittiwan Sinthunava (Monograph no. 3 and no. 4) outlined how she attempted to change work practices by mentoring younger staff members and encouraging them to undertake action research projects. In Vietnam coaching was used to assist teachers in primary and secondary schools to use higher-order questioning strategies in their classrooms (Nam Nguyen, Hoa Le and Kevin Laws (Monograph 1), and Lap Trinh, Chau Ngo and Kevin Laws (Monograph 1).

Nurtati Pranata (Monograph no. 4) wrote about how she used the process of 'dialogue' to bring about changes in the way professional development was encouraged and undertaken in her school in Indonesia. Apinporn Satitpakeekul (Monograph no. 4), in her study in southern Thailand, told us how school-based professional development for teachers was more successful in improving teaching and learning practices than models of professional development used previously.

Action research/learning through action in classrooms, schools and faculties

Many articles utilising a variety of approaches to action research have been undertaken. Some have focused on action learning in a single classroom, while others involved whole schools and faculties.

In 2013 the processes of Learning through Action were introduced as an alternative to action research (Kevin Laws, Monograph no. 2). Lesley Harbon (Monograph no. 2) provided an

outline of how she used a three phase cycle of action research to investigate how she could implement better teaching and learning practices within her class with a small number of students.

Ifan Iskandar and Ratna Dewanti (Monograph no. 4) wrote about conducting classroom action research in Indonesian classrooms. Quyen Phuong Vo, Thi Bich Phuong and Phuong Hoang Yen (Monograph no. 4) undertook a study to identify how English teachers in Vietnam perceived the advantages and issues related to the requirement that they undertake and report on classroom action research each year.

Many studies related to classroom action research which focused on the improvement of specific teaching and learning strategies, although not all reported on more than one cycle.

Some of these studies investigated issues related to reading and writing in English classes, for example:

Shelma Shakira Bhakti (Monograph no. 1)
Sunarsih (Monograph no. 1)
Thuy P. Ho (Monograph no. 4)
Krishandini, Endang Sri Wahyuni and Hesti Sulistyowati (Monograph no. 4)
Chau Ngo, Lap Trinh and Kevin Laws (Monograph no. 3)
Rattana Jangpiboonpong (Monograph no. 2)

Other studies focused on:

Classroom talk: Hanip Pujiati, (Monograph no. 3)
Critical thinking: Le Ngoc Hoa & Trinh Thi Huong (Monograph no. 4); Hathaichanok Buajaroen (Monograph no. 4)
Project-based learning: Chau Ngo (Monograph no. 4); Pimpuspa Chandananasotththi (Monograph no. 4)
Self-learning through assignments: Darin Portangam, (Monograph no. 4)
Lesson study: Chau Ngo, Trinh Quoc Lap and Kevin Laws (Monograph no. 3)

An interesting study into the way in which the requirements of the Thai Qualifications Framework could be linked to developing teaching skills for pre-service teachers was undertaken by Aree Saripa (Monograph no. 2 and no. 4). Apinporn Satitpakeekul (Monograph no. 3 and no. 4) undertook studies on developing teaching skills in early childhood student teachers and physical education teachers through courses she taught.

Confronted with the requirement that nursing students in Thailand must successfully complete a licensure examination before they can work as nurses, Sunattra Taboonpong (Monograph no. 2) outlined how the academic staff in her university prepared trial examinations for student nurses to practice before the final examination.

It is not always possible to change a whole curriculum. However, a study outlined by Thidarat Suebyart (Monograph no. 3) demonstrated how change in the sequencing of the courses in a management program led to improved student outcomes.

Reflection upon practice

An important element in action research and learning through action, and in all professional inquiry is reflection. Most of the inquiries referred to in the monographs involved some sort of reflection. It is worthwhile separating a number of articles which focused on reflection per-se as a way of considering how reflective skills can be developed in teachers, and their students.

Kevin Laws (Monograph no. 4) wrote about different forms of reflection and how each might be developed. A group from Can Tho (Nam Nguyen, Binh Vo and Diem Huynh, Monograph no. 3 and Nam Nguyen, Binh and Huong Trinh, Monograph no. 4) investigated how reflection could be used to assist pre-service teachers during microteaching and the practicum. What was learned in these studies could be adopted to provide strategies for anyone working in professional areas.

ICT and learning materials

Reference has already been made to planning a blended learning project, but a number of studies have focussed upon specific elements of ICT and teaching materials in general (Darmahusni, 2015).

Mai Xuan Le and Lesley Harbon (Monograph no. 2) investigated the use of ICT in English language teaching in Vietnam. Anchalee Mankong and Chutamas Krachangri (Monograph no. 3) undertook a study of e-learning. Shelma Shakira Bhakti and Patrick J. Capuano (Monograph no. 4) used web-based strategies with students in English language classes. Tran Thi Thanh Quyen (Monograph no. 4) wrote about her use of podcasts. Suriaty bt Md Arof and Shuhaila bt Hurmuzan studied how montage could be used in educational video production (Monograph no. 4).

Research issues

From all of the papers published in the four monographs it is obvious that many different approaches to practitioner inquiry have been adopted. An analysis of these approaches indicates that members have developed knowledge and expertise in using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Many have adopted qualitative approaches for the first time. These are most appropriate to use in studies of professional inquiry which often involves the collection of data from a small number of participants.

In a study of Masters' research projects undertaken by Tranh Thanh Ai (Monograph no. 3) what he termed 'an aberrant tendency' was identified in these projects. By this he meant that many of the projects did not use 'scientific' approaches to research in an appropriate way. His conception of research focused upon a positivist approach. The project by Ifan Iskandar (Monograph no. 3) in Indonesia which studied the teaching of research skills through workshops and field projects also adopted a positivist approach.

From these studies it seems that it is appropriate to provide workshops on a range of data collection and analysis strategies for DEPISA members and to assist them to understand when it is appropriate to use each strategy.

Concluding comments

In reflecting upon the contents of the DEPISA monographs I have attempted to identify some major themes that emerged from the practitioner inquiries. In the previous section I listed some of the articles that I though focused upon a key concept of DEPISA: *Communities of Practice*.

- Many DEPISA members are involved in the continuing professional development of colleagues and other teachers as part of their work, so I included *Approaches to Professional Developmen*t as another category.

- The category containing the most articles was *Action Research and Learning through Action*. This category included studies ranging from inquiries in single classrooms to

others which study multiple classrooms, and to others in which whole schools and faculties were involved.

- Given the importance of *Reflection* in all types of practitioner inquiry I gave this a separate category.
- *ICT and Learning Materials* could have been incorporated in other categories, but in acknowledging that this is an important growing field in educational settings I established a separate category for inquiries into this area.
- The final category I named *Research Issues*. The articles in this section focused on one particular approach to research. I advocated that practitioner inquiry needs to adopt alternative approaches. I hope that some members will inquire into this in the future.

If you undertook the same task that I set myself I am sure you would have come up with either a different categorisation, or if you accepted my categorisation you would have placed different studies in some of the categories. I think this illustrates how in undertaking practitioner inquiry as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) wrote we are all 'knowers, learners and researchers'.

All of the studies also illustrate aspects of the other features of practitioner inquiry listed earlier in this presentation. In all instances the inquirer was the practitioner focusing their study on their work or their work place with the intention of improving practice. Many of the studies illustrate different levels of collaboration. They indicate the wide variety of approaches that can be applied to practitioner inquiry and show why non-traditional notions of validity and generalisability are part of such an inquiry.

As each article was based upon a presentation at a DEPISA meeting and was then developed into a written document to be included in a monograph we can say that each has been made public.

It was my intention in this overview to alert you to the wide range of studies undertaken by DEPISA members, and to encourage you to re-read and reflect upon the studies of others. For example, many of the issues investigated by our nursing colleagues have relevance to teacher educators, and vice versa. The studies which focus upon reflection have relevance to all of us. With some adaptation useful findings may be able to be applied in different settings and to different groups of students and practitioners.

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APPENDIX

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Lap Trinh, Chau Ngo & Kevin Laws, The impact of coaching on in-service teachers'professionalism in developing and using evaluative questions in Vietnamese secondary education, 86-107

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Changing Schools: Undertaking Action Research

(Edited version of a keynote address at the 11th DEPISA Conference, Daegu, Korea, August 2017).

John Buchanan
john.buchanan@uts.edu.au
University of Technology Sydney, Australia

I'd like to start by inviting you to picture what you see as action research. Can you think of three adjectives to describe it, or three or four of its salient features? Perhaps jot them down. I'll hum some thinking music while you do that.

We'll probably return to that theme a few times during this session. In passing, I'll mention that action research is not a new concept; it can be traced back to Lewin (1946).

I'll share some of my responses with you. Action research essentially comprises four components: planning, acting, observing, and evaluating/reflecting. Here is a visual representation of the cycle, or, rather, the helix (Figure 1). Each iteration should take you to an epicenter, a place 'above' the previous one, in terms of informed future decision-making and planning, acting and reviewing/observing.

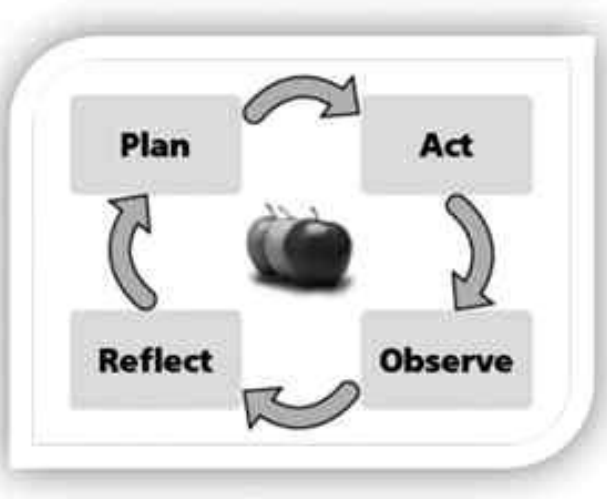

Figure 1. (Ontario Association for Mathematics Education, 2012).

Goal contexts might be individual, team, institutional, or national/regional (Piggott-Irvine, 2015, p. 35).

- Develop clear goals (reflect), or "get better acquainted with the problem" (Popper, 1972, p. 260, cited in McAteer, 2013, p. 27). Goal contexts might be individual; team, institutional, or national/regional (Piggott-Irvine, 2015, p. 35); adequately prepare.
- Develop appropriate methods (plan).
- Put research plan into action (act).

- Observe & collect results (observe).
- Reflectively critique results (reflect), or what McAteer, (2013, p. 62) refers to as, "conversing with data" (repeat step 1); redesign methods (step 2); put new development plan into action (step 3). Ultimately, disseminate the results.

This process is summarised by McNiff (2017) as follows:

> *review our current practice, identify an aspect that we want to investigate, imagine a way forward, try it out, and take stock of what happens. We modify what we are doing in the light of what we have found…monitor what we do…review and evaluate the modified action.*

But perhaps we're jumping the gun here. The cycle might start at almost any point, except, perhaps, acting, in the absence of observing, planning and/or reflecting.

As with outcomes-based teaching, it may be best to 'begin at the end'. With outcomes-based teaching, you begin with the intended outcome, and plan your way to get there. To use an analogy, I sometimes set my GPS for a destination north of Sydney. And then I drive south, just to mess with its head. That may sound at least needy if not absurd, but I think it's easy to do something similar with our teaching and our improvement planning. We state an endpoint, but then proceed in a different direction. In the days before GPSs, my father, when he was giving directions, would inevitably conclude by saying "…and if you start seeing pyramids, you've probably gone too far". It was a very poor 'dad-joke', but he was right. If you're seeing pyramids, you're probably not in Daegu, or Seoul, or … With apologies to Laozi (n.d), 'a journey of 1000 *li* begins with a single step [my addition here] *in the right direction'.*

So, perhaps think of something in your practice, and/or your institution's practice (or more broadly), that would benefit from improvement. Or start with a goal you (along with others?) would like to achieve. How might you develop an action research process (plan, do, review, improve, for simplicity's sake, UTS, 2017) to address that issue?

I'll let you ponder again and modify if you want the words you chose to describe or explain action research, before sharing some of my own.

One feature of action research that I appreciate is that it blurs the lines between:
teacher and learner, and between teaching and research.

Hughes and MacNaughton (2000, p. 253) assert that knowledge "is plural and local", opening the way for multiple viewpoints and areas of expertise to emerge. According to Wright (2015, p. 79) "Situated learning involves participation in communities of practice, in which members learn essential skills, standards and behaviours as participants in these communities". One minor caveat with regard to this goal, is that it might be too normative. Maybe a balance needs to be sought between consensus and dissensus (Hughes & MacNaughton, (2000). Care might need to be taken, however, to avoid what Hargreaves (2001, p. 1481) refers to as "contrived collegiality".

Relational leadership "entails sharing ideas through group dialogue, which aims to build consensus to reach a collective decision" (Wright, 2015, p. 72). Again, though, might consensus be too normative? These dynamics are worth pondering as you prepare teams (and yourself) for your action research. Piggott-Irvine (2015, pp. 24-26) also makes some insightful

and useful perceptions about human nature in such endeavours and relationships, observing that we need to mean (to have significance) and to have meaning (to find significance). We seek certainty (predictable patterns), autonomy, relatedness, fairness.

Returning to the theme of boundary-blurring, action research combines elements of: research (it generates new knowledge); learning (it generates new knowledge); and practice (it informs, and is informed by, current practice). According to Wright, (2015, p. 48), a "pedagogy of praxis framework connects critical reflection about student researchers' own social conditions with collective action to transform those conditions" (Wright, 2015, p. 4
Action research also has resonances with double- and triple-loop learning (Debategraph, n.d.). The teacher or researcher, 'returns to the scene of the crime' as it were.

The New South Wales DET (NSW, Department of Education and Training, 2010) outlines differences between formal and action research, according to criteria such as: training needed, goals, and application of results (p. 1). Personally, I think the division might be a little too dichotomous. Action research is characterised as being: integrated, reflective, flexible, active, relevant, cyclical, focused, collaborative, planned and learning (p. 2).

Here are some of the descriptors I've come up with, in regard to action research.

Action research is:

- context-responsive (an example of situated learning); collaborative (democratic).
- critically reflexive/reflective (it 'questions the answers', Buchanan, 2007); evidence-informed.
- action-oriented.
- improvement-aimed (LaBoskey, 2004).
- Whitehead and McNiff (2011) refer to it as "living theory".
- Efron and David (2013, p. 7) use the terms: constructivist, situational, practical, systematic and cyclical.
- Action research entails (Baumfield, Hall & Wall, 2013, pp. 5-6): intention (agency and impetus); process: (tools (and their use) and analysis); and audience (professional voice and a critical community).
- I would add that it's self-actualising, in that it helps the person or organisation grow or morph into its best or a better self.

So, having danced across some descriptions, let's look at some definitions:

> Sagor (2000, in Sagor & Williams, 2017, p. 1) defines action research as "a disciplined process of enquiry conducted by and for those taking the action". They add that "the primary reason for engaging in action is to assist the actor in improving his or her actions".
>
> In this, action research shares features with self-study (Laboskey & T. Russell, 2004).
>
> Dick (2000) defines action research as "a family of research methodologies which pursue action and research outcomes at the same time". Action research sets out "to address unprecedented, complex and 'wicked' problems collaboratively and effectively" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015a, p. 3).

Zuber-Skerritt adds that action research resonates with: phenomenology; grounded theory; complexity theory; and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Experiential learning theory is an "iterative process of action and reflection on and in action" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 2).

According to Wright (2015, p. 48) "the *pedagogy of practice* framework describes the experiential, participatory teaching and learning approach, which connected an analysis of community issues with action to address these issues."

Action research also aligns with hope theory (Synder, 2002). Synder defines hope as, "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (p. 249).

While I find 'hope theory' somewhat unscientific, I do warm to its optimistic predisposition. PALAR (Participatory Action Research and Action Learning) is affective, cognitive and social (Fletcher, 2015, p. 67). It depends on critical reflection, which, in turn, is emancipatory and transformational (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015b, p. 82). Action research is also inquiry-based.

Other researchers have outlined action research in terms of what it achieves:

Campbell and McNamara (2010) observe that it "crosses the boundaries between theory and practice where it creates praxis, the synthesis of theory and practice".

Regarding research and practice/ action, McAteer (2013, p. 47) notes that it "reframes the relationships between these dyadic pairs as dialogic rather than impositional". It facilitates, and is facilitated by, knowledge exchange (Edwards, 2011). McAteer, (2013) contends that action research is not "research **on** practice, but research **as** practice, and practice **as** research" (p. 48, emphasis in original).

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2011), action research sets about, "trying to live in the direction of [our] educational values (p. 22). I really like that metaphor of 'living in the direction of our educational values'. It takes me back to my earlier Laozi misquote.

Action research is transformative. It produces "transgressive knowledge that helps individuals, who reside far away from the community where the research takes place, develop new ways of seeing, new modes of critical consciousness" (Kincheloe, 2009, p. 111). I also love the notion of 'transgressive knowledge'. Knowledge that trespasses on our comfort, gets under our skin, treads on our toes and thereby makes us jump. It thereby contributes to "theoretical evolution" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 21), or perhaps even revolution. It is also value-laden and morally committed (p. 27). In action research, the researcher is integral to the practice and the research "rather than a contaminant" (p. 50). McNiff and Whitehead (2011) describe action research as a 'renewable resource' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011); it's (re)generative, sustainable and ecological in nature.

I would add the following descriptors to action research:

> 'insider' research; practitioner-centred research; participant-centred research. It is also 'subject'-centred research, not in terms of curricular subjects, but in the same way that certain pedagogies set out to be student-centred. The subject here refers to the person, organisation or system central to the research. And I accept that 'subject' can be a rather clinical, impersonal term, and one that doesn't really capture the intended egalitarian relationship between the researcher and 'researched'.

In terms of some further reading, Zuber-Skerritt (2015b) refers to the CRASP model (critical reflection; research into practice; accountability; self-evaluation; professional learning), p. 121), while Piggott-Irvine (2015, p. 7) outlines the FAR Model (Focused Action Research) Reflect, plan act. FAR "encourages shift in depth, lift in challenge, and collaboration" (Piggott-Irvine, 2015, p. 57).

I'd like you to return now to the 'problems' (or areas for improvement) that you identified earlier.

I have here some questions that might serve as stepping stones for developing a response:

- What is the 'problem'?
- What makes me say so?
- What kind of improvement do I want (and how will I know 'when I get there' – think back to my father's helpful pyramids directions, earlier)?
- How might I go about addressing the issue?
- What evidence will I (not) gather, then analyse, and how and why?
- Who might be my partners, and what might I/they do?
- What barriers might I meet (and what might I do in response)?
- Whom do I tell, and how?

Alternatively, you might ask:

- What is my concern?
- Why am I concerned?
- How do I show the situation as it is and how I would like it to develop?
- What can I do about it? What will I do about it?
- How do I test the validity of my claims to knowledge?
- What barriers might I meet (and my responses)?
- How do I check that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate? How will I know I've 'got there'?
- How do I modify my ideas and practices in light of the evaluation? (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 9)

As an aside, (how) might this work as a teaching/learning approach: your students as (Participatory) Action Researchers? Participatory Action Research, according to Kincheloe,

> *Is devoted to a mode of socio-political/educational research that is aware of the assumptions that shape its purpose and designs, devoted to the ending of human*

> *suffering, focused on consequences of its implementation, and conscious of the epistemological tenets that inform it.*
>
> (2009, p. 107).

I have some leads for further reading and search terms I can share with you later, but I'll finish now with some amuse-esprits. We won't have time to do more than browse at these, but I hope they might absorb your thoughts momentarily, as they did mine.

- Reflection without action is dead? (with apologies to St James (Bible 2:21)).
- The unexamined life is not worth living (apology to Socrates - who almost certainly wasn't referring to basic skills testing).

I also have some search terms, including authors' names, that you might find useful as starting points. I've also included, some highlights of Joe Kincheloe's (2009) defence of action research. Kincheloe writes in a beautifully poetical way about action research. The only caveat I would include is that he perhaps overstates at times enmity and conspiracy against (good) teaching and qualitative research. You be the judge.

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The Introduction of Human-Animal-Nature-Bond Education and its Implications for the Socialization of Children

Jang-Ho Son
jhson@dnue.ac.kr
Daegu National University of Education, Korea

Abstract

Animals in many societies are often described as members of the family. Human-Animal-Nature-Bond (Interaction) Education is a key issue of character education for children (Son, 2017). This present study emphasizes the understanding of the critical period of socialization for dogs, cats and children, because it is first step for Human-Animal-Nature-Bond (HANB) Education.

We, as educators, understand the importance of research of animal behavior, human behavior and socialization especially during the sensitive early years in building the human-animal nature bond. This will be key for the ultimate success of bond-centered practice throughout the world.

Children's brains develop dramatically from birth during the first 9 to 10 years as do the brains of puppies and kittens in the first 3 to 4 months. The science of honoring humans, animals and nature as one as promoted in Human-Animal Nature-Bond (HANB) education is very important in the 21st century.

Introduction

Purpose and necessity of research

Industrialization, urbanization, and informatization in our modern society have widened the scope of people`s activities and caused a flood of information that allows easy access to a wide variety of knowledge. This has been an opportunity to provide people with the conveniences of life, and in turn has resulted in the severance and isolation of human relationships (Lee and Seo, 1984). These changes have also been seen in children and have been transformed into self-centered tendencies in which selfish or isolated behavior is intensified rather than cooperative human relationships with others (Jin, et al., 1989).

Aristotle called the human being a social animal because people live and influence each other through healthy relationships with others. In other words, people can acquire the necessary skills and qualities that can be adapted to society for relation formation. (Lee and Seo, 1984). Grace et al (2014) suggested that formation of relationships through communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (4Cs) is important in education. It is also possible to define a person as pro-social. Communication and collaboration are important factors that have a decisive influence on pro-social behavior (Rosen et al., 1980).

On the other hand, when emphasizing the importance of preserving the environment in environmental education, it is important to establish a healthy relationship among living things. This is based on the simple truth that it becomes difficult for humans who are sustained by

living things to live if animals and plants cannot live in the earth`s natural environment (Son, 2016; Son, 2017).

There are similarities between the psychological phenomena experienced in human relationships and the psychological phenomena appearing in human-animal-plant relationships. Son et al (2015) defined human-animal-nature interactions as the Human-Animal-Nature-Bond (HANB). In the process of human, animal, and nature coexistence HANB can be interpreted as a term having an integrated meaning that scientifically explains the effects on the human mind and body. This can be traced back to the integration of studies in zoology, brain science, education, and medicine (psychiatry) in the US and Europe in the 1970s.

Therefore, in this study investigation into the effects of the human-animal-nature bond (HANB) on the socialization of children was carried out. This study also sought to develop desirable future directions for HANB.

Methods of research

In this study, the relationships between human-animal bond, human-animal interaction, animal-assisted activity, animal-assisted education, and animal-assisted therapy were investigated, and then these relationships were put in the framework of HANB.

In addition, through analysis of various factors that may affect the formation of sociality, various published studies have shown that HANB can positively influence social formation. In the case of domestic papers, searches were carried out through the academic research information service (http://www.riss.kr/index.do). In the case of foreign papers, the Google Scholar search site was utilized (http://scholar.google.co.kr).

Understanding of HANB

1) *Related theories*

The Human-Animal Bond (HAB) is a term that was created by recognizing the mental and physical benefits that human beings and animals can obtain in the process of direct and indirect interaction with each other. It can be said that it was created due to the desire of people to obtain health and well-being.

The following theories assist in an understanding of HAB:

- Attachment Theory: It is the oldest theory in history and can be defined as a social association that usually appears in mother-child relationships (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991).
- Social support theory: Companion animals are social and emotional which helps them adapt to the needs of their caregivers (Bryant, 1990).
- Bio philia (the bio philia hypothesis): Being instinctively attracted to nature (animals, plants, natural landscapes) (Kellert, 2005).

2) *Benefits of animals to humans*

It is not yet clear how interactions with animals are beneficial to people. However, it is said that people can improve mental and physical effects through direct communication with animals, or this interaction can indirectly promote their interpersonal relationships (Case, 2008). Some research has also found that tensions are relaxed as people interact with

companion animals (Virués-Ortega, and Buela-Casal, 2006). Sensory stimulation occurs when people have a positive relationship with animals, and there is stimulation of the oxytocin system which is associated with sexual arousal and maternal behavior, promoting social interaction, reducing stress, and increasing thresholds for pain (Beetz et al., 2012).

The effects of activities with animals are largely divided into psychological effects, physiological effects, and social effects.

Table 1. Linkage with animal assisted activities and human development

Human development	**Contents**
Physical development	Includes changes in growth that occur in the body. • External changes such as height, weight, etc. • Internal changes in muscles, brain, endocrine and sensory organs. • Physical health status such as ability to walk, run, etc.
Cognitive development	Includes processes of mental change associated with thinking and problem solving. • Recognition ability. • Memory and reasoning ability. • Intelligence, creativity and imagination ability. • Language development ability.
Psychosocial development	Includes personality and interpersonal skills • Ability to secure self-concept. • Emotional and social development ability. • Social behavior ability. • Post-traumatic stress recovery.

3) *Animal assisted activity (AAA) and Animal assisted education (AAE)*

Animal Assisted Activities occur when animals interact positively with human life. In other words, it can be interpreted as meaning that the opportunity of life, motivation, education, relaxation and recreation can be obtained through animals. There are also programs that use animals in the education field. This is known as Animal Assisted Education.

Selection criteria for suitable animals in HANB Education

Animals used in Animal Assisted Activities vary according to the situation.

- Animals easy to nurture e.g. turtles, tropical fish, birds, hamsters, rabbits etc.;
- Animals which make contact with people easily e.g. guinea pigs, rabbits, sheep, cats, dogs, etc.;
- Animals which communicate with people and their emotions easily e.g. cats, dogs, horses etc.;
- Animals used to increase exercise effect for people e.g. dogs, horses, etc.

There are data on animals which are mainly used for Animal assisted activities (AAA) contained in Table 2.

Table 2. Selection of animals used for animal assisted activities

	Easy to nurture	Make contact with people	Communicate with people	Exercise effect on people	Gives people pleasure
Turtles	A	D	C	D	C
Tropical fish	A	D	C	D	C
Birds	A	B	C	D	C
Hamsters	A	C	C	C	C
Rabbits	A	A	B	C	C
Guinea pigs	A	A	C	C	C
Sheep	C	A	B	B	C
Cats	B	A	A	B	A
Dogs	B	A	A	A	A
Horses	C	B	A	A	A

(Code: A, Very good; B, good; C, normal; D, bad). (Choi & Son, 2016).

Socialization and HANB

Socialization can be formed through the interaction of living things, and it is important that socialization is formed from childhood. The lack of socialization may lead to the formation of inadequate social skills, which may lead to a vicious cycle of potential mental health problems, delinquencies, and even suicide (Son and Son, 2017). Children grow up through the process of personal growth during which they are influenced by the people who they come in contact with in their surroundings. Through this process, they learn social skills that can help them adapt to society and live together with others. In the self-centered existence, children gradually find out about 'me' in relation to others, acknowledge others in interactions, and learn interaction patterns by experiencing conflicts.

Sociality cannot be developed in nature but rather in an environment that can develop social skills (Lee and Seo, 1984). Social skills can be developed when understanding the social context and through interaction with others in the context of a given situation. This ability is very important to individual happiness and success. This could lead to the development of group participation skills (Kang, 2007).

Although many researchers have reported on educational activities which help form socialization and increase social skills, it is especially sympathy between living things through natural experiences which has a very significant effect on the formation of socialization (Son and Son, 2017).

Conclusion and suggestions

Importance of HANB education

People have relationships with animals in various forms. This is important for sustainable life through healthy relationships with nature (Park, 2015). It means that people and animals do not

give or receive one-sided help, but rather give and receive help on par with each other. Animals have been used as food resources, means of agricultural activity, objects of faith, or transportation for early human societies. As time passed it was recognized that as an animal, human beings are nourished through their interactions with other animals for enjoyment and assistance. At the same time, the relationship between human beings and animals evolved into a mutually symbiotic relationship (Bang et al., 2009). Thus, animals have a great place in human society in the form of pets or companion animals, and 'friendship' or 'love' between people and animals does not differ from affection between people (Aaron and Anne 2002).

However, the establishment of HANB-related activities in the education field can start with 'giving them [i.e. students] the appreciation for the importance, beauty, and relationships between human, and animals and nature' (Son et al., 2015). To achieve this goal, there will be a need to develop HANB-related activities in education from a young age.

HANB education and social enhancement effect

The Human-Animal Interaction meeting (Bustad, 2013), held at Washington State University in October 2013, emphasized the importance of education and welfare regarding people, animals, and nature, and that these should be more deeply understood through education. This emphasizes the importance of the preservation of the natural environment and the practical training to help keep a safe and peaceful earth society.

HANB-related activities are expected to become 'practical education that values people, animals and nature' for children who will be responsible for future society (Son et al., 2013).

On the other hand, Mussen and Eisemberg (1977) defined the interaction as genuine altruism and pro-social behavior because it is an act of giving benefit to another person or group without expecting compensation.

In Piaget's (1932) cognitive theory, children perceive animals as peers, and through experiences with animals, they will learn how to respect and care for life and create a sound personality that respects animals and respects others. Therefore, activities that can be included in the HANB category may be those which are effective in enhancing understanding and self-esteem of other people (Garrity et al., 1989).

In addition, it is expected that HANB-related activities, which include interaction with people in nature and interaction with animals, will have a positive effect on the mental and physical aspects of people including an increase of sociality (Choi and Son, 2016).

Interdisciplinary collaboration for HANB education

People learn from animals that 'they promote responsibility and awareness of other beings' and 'they accept us without prejudice'. This means that many animals around us can have a positive impact on human society (Gurney, 2011).

American Indians say that in the great nature, heaven and earth are like father and mother, and that heaven and earth not only provide rest for all things, but also that all things in this earth are related to each other as a family (Ahn and Kim, 1998). This suggests that nature can lead to the union of living things. To pollute nature has the same meaning as to damage one`s own body. Therefore, to sustain everything in the natural environment surrounding us should be the same as keeping our bodies healthy. As a result, if we want to create a healthy society we can conclude that such a society must be preceded by strong ties between people, animals and the environment (Son, 2016).

HANB suggests that a strong union of organisms is needed to sustain our social health, however HANB can be accomplished through interdisciplinary collaboration of diverse academic theories such as zoology, botany, ecology, and education.

The establishment and use of HANB-related activities in the school curriculum is expected to have a positive impact on the development of humanity and social competence. Therefore, the science of honoring humans, animals and nature as one as promoted in Human-Animal-Nature-Bond (HANB) education is very important in the 21st century.

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Peer Mentoring for Professional Development

Kittiwan Sinthunava
kittiwan@pnru.ac.th

Faculty of Management Science,
Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

The challenges of increasing research productivity and using modern technology in classrooms, as well as the higher standards of key performance indexes from the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) in Thailand have become very difficult for academic staff to achieve.

This study aims to explore the problems and challenges that academic staff face by using action research to explore peer mentoring for professional development, to understand how academic staff may overcome their problems.

Introduction

Ng (2012) and Yariv (2009) suggested that mentoring is more than a method for helping someone to perform their work at a higher level. It is a broader process that sees one's skills improve through greater understanding and their willingness to learn. This includes changes in their behavior, and encouraging their continuous professional growth (Tolhurst, 2010). Jones and Brown (2011) suggested that it is possible to identify three mentoring models: the traditional model (Sriwichai, Meksamoot, Chakpitak, Dahal & Jengjalean, 2014), the reciprocal model (Harris, Freeman & Aerni, 2009), and emergent models (Bokeno, 2007). In this study elements of each kind of model have been utilised.

Five participants who volunteered to join the peer mentoring program were selected from the five different faculties at Phranakhon Rajabhat University. Each participant was assigned a mentor. In-depth interviews, combined with written reflective diaries kept by mentors, mentees, as well as research, and group discussions provided data for this study.

The mentoring program continued for six months, utilizing the four steps of action research to determine whether the participants increased their research productivity and their use of modern technology in their classrooms. The data were analysed to identify the patterns and themes. By using a triangulation technique, the similarities and differences of the three mentoring methods were identified.

The findings will be later applied to strengthening the peer mentoring for professional development program at Phranakhon Rajabhat University and to support academic staff to increase their capability and achieve successful careers.

The significance of this study

It is obvious that every university wants to increase the number of academic positions to meet the standards of the OHEC. Many workshops and training programs are provided to support and encourage academic staff to gain higher academic positions (Morley, 2014).

The major focus of this study was to examine the practice of peer mentoring at PNRU as a means to support and maintain the personal values and performance of academics. The new challenges of higher education institutions in Thailand have been increasing in order to meet the same standards as other universities within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Currently, students can transfer their credits of study and choose to work after their graduation in any ASEAN country (Paryono, 2011).

It can be said that the wider the opportunity for everyone who belongs to an ASEAN country, the higher the quality of requirements that are needed for a university to achieve and maintain financial stability in the new environment (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015). This study will focus on supporting academic staff who had previously participated in training programs at the university for many years but who had failed to achieve higher academic positions.

The results from this study will provide the university administrators with information about some of the challenges confronting academic staff. It will also create a peer mentoring model that can be motivating for academic staff who have been left behind, to now gain more success in their careers.

There are two major objectives of this study:

- Firstly, to understand the current situation of academic staff who want to achieve higher academic positions;
- Secondly, to understand how to implement the peer mentoring model to support and encourage academic staff to effectively achieve professional development.

Literature review

There are many research articles from around the world that have focused on the mentoring concept to support and promote professional development. Most of them are using qualitative methodology and action research as an approach (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015).

The mentoring concept for professional development can be seen in many research papers. Stanulis and Ames' (2009) study was based on professional development in mentor groups. There has been growing interest in opportunities that on-line mentoring courses offer (McCracy & Mazur,2010, Sinclair, 2003). Moreover, there are many studies that use combinations of short courses, workshops and sustained support in internships while conducting the mentoring process (Koballa et al., 2010).

Providing the right strategy for professional development has been an important issue for university administrators (Tang & Choi, 2005). There is no doubt that the mentoring system and the organizing of mentoring workshops have become important tools to increase a university's standards (Jones & Brown, 2011). Academic staff are key to success for a university because to maintain the reputation of the university and to attract qualified new students it is essential that the academic staff are of the highest quality (Hemmings, Hill & Sharp, 2013).

However, when considering the development of professional skills through implementing peer mentoring, it is necessary to clearly define the term peer mentoring before progressing with further discussion.

Although for more than 40 years there have been many research papers conducted on this topic, there is still not an agreed upon definition of the term 'mentoring' or any single theoretical concept of mentoring that has been accepted worldwide (Jones & Brown, 2011).

When searching for mentoring models that have been implemented at university level, two major mentoring models were discovered:

- The first, the 'traditional model of mentoring', explains the relationship between an experienced mentor who holds a higher academic position and a younger less experienced person, who is acknowledged as a protégé (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Harvey et al., 2009; Higgins & Kram, 2001). The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is hierarchical and it is assumed that knowledge flows from the mentor to mentee (Jones & Brown, 2011). This is a rather common practical way at the tertiary level where the advanced wisdom and skills of senior faculty staff are passed on to a younger academic staff member who is assigned to them (D'Abate & Eddy, 2008).

- The second, 'the reciprocal model of mentoring', which has gained in popularity in the last decade (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Jones & Brown, 2011; Ragins & Kram, 2007) is a non-hierarchical approach.

The problem of using the traditional model of mentoring arises with the willingness to exchange the knowledge and benefits between the mentor and the mentee. It can be seen that the top-down relationship between the mentor and the mentee has caused the benefits to be uni-directional, flowing to the protégé alone. This is because the higher power academic staff members, who are always providing support and sharing their expertise with the younger member, have the feeling that they have been investing their time and their effort to support the protégé to achieve their goals and career outcome without gaining anything in return (Bell-Ellison & Dedrick, 2008; Harris, Freeman & Aerni, 2009).

The inequality of power and the amount of dedication required in the traditional model of mentoring has delayed the mentoring process and sometimes both participants have not found any positive outcomes by remaining in the traditional mentor relationship (Allen, 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Haggard et al, 2011).

The advantages of using the reciprocal model of mentoring have been mentioned in many research papers. For example, the idea of a top-down relationship has been removed and the one-way benefits can become bi-dimensional (Allen, 2007; Pololi & Knight, 2005).

The reciprocal model recognizes the mutual relationship between the mentor and the mentee and illustrates how both parties can work collaboratively for the benefits of all the stakeholders (Harris, Freeman & Aerni, 2009). The advantages of the mentee being in an equal relationship with the mentor allows the mentee the freedom to make their own decisions. The mentee can choose what is good for them and the mentor is shown the respect and privacy by the mentee (Harris, Freeman & Aerni, 2009). Moreover, the benefits for the mentor by helping the mentee

to achieve desired career-outcomes and psycho-social wellbeing can be seen both in their inner mindfulness and within the friendly workplace environment (Jacobi, 1991; Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Langer, 2010).

Theoretical framework of the study

This study is an example of the peer mentoring model, within the wider framework of the action research cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, 1988b).

There are four steps to develop the peer mentoring model in this study.

- **Step 1 is Plan.** The researcher had to prepare the information and design the appropriate peer mentoring model. This step of 'plan' included an understanding of environmental factors and an analysis of the participants' behavior, in order to design the appropriate plan for the professional development of individuals.

- **Step 2 is Act.** During this step, the researcher has to make sure that everything that had been written on 'plan' was completed properly and correctly. If there were any mistakes because of the researcher being unable to transfer the 'plan' into 'act' or due to incorrect practices, the researcher had to report those issues or limitations in the reflective journal and bring that information to the next meeting so as to discuss this again with the participants.

- **Step 3 is Observe.** It was very important to observe the changes in the participants' behavior after implementing the planning into action. The key success factors of conducting action research are the abilities of the researcher to not only observe the behavior of the participants, but also to understand those behaviors. Every step of the peer mentoring process is based on the understanding between the mentor and the mentee. It is often recognized as a slow process, with the interaction creating a special relationship which may require an adjustment of mentoring techniques so to support the encouragement of the mentee to progress forward and achieve their goals. The step of 'observe' needs to be practiced both from the outside by the researcher and from within by the participants.

- **Step 4 is Reflect.** This step is very significant because it is through reflection that feedback occurs to improve mentoring in order to provide better support and encourage academic staff in the right direction. Each academic staff member has individual characteristics which they can call on to their advantage. Moreover, the needs and motivation by which these can be used to develop can vary significantly between staff. The 'reflect' step can help the researcher to understand the priority of each individual and adjust the 'plan' so to start over again and try out the four steps in a modified way. Reflection provides for participants to check and recheck their progress, until the model has been implemented successfully. Without the 'reflect' step, the researcher cannot fully develop the appropriate plan and will bring that plan into practice.

During the four steps of plan, act, observe, and reflect it may be found that there are other factors that cause problems which are out of the control of the researcher. These may include a lack of financial support to run the peer mentoring workshop, the life style choices of the participants that slowed down their improvement and created a negative attitude, and the low motivation of some participants to develop themselves.

Methodology

A qualitative research method and a case study approach was used to collect data. The five mentees in this study were recruited from all faculties in the university. They were linked to a mentor. The consent forms were signed by each of the participants and the PNRU ethics committee approved the study in 2017.

After each participant was individually interviewed by the researcher the transcripts of the in-depth interview were sent back to each participant to verify the correctness and understanding of the researcher's interpretation before conducting the analysis process. After each participant approved their transcripts coding took place in three steps: open coding; categorization; and abstraction (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

As well as the interviews each participant was observed by the researcher and was required to maintain a reflective journal. Both the participant and the researcher reflected and discussed how the observed behavior had changed during the six months of the study and each participant recorded those changes in the writing journal. The criteria for the writing journal were set after consideration by the researcher and the mentors, who had been providing support and were involved in the peer mentoring system.

The data from each in-depth interview and the reflective writing journal was integrated through a careful reading procedure, followed by an inductive review of the results. The research questions were highlighted to discover the key metaphors, ideas, concepts and were coded as emerging themes. Thereafter, a more systematic coding and categorization method was conducted. Data from each case study were compared for similarities and differences. To validate the analysis process, the researcher analyzed all the data separately, first by using the transcripts that had been rechecked with the participants, and then, by discussing the codes and the categories.

Results and discussion

Data obtained from the in-depth interview, the follow-up correspondence between mentor and mentee, document analysis, and filed observations both from the researcher's reflective journal and the five participants reflective journals resulted in five collective case studies (Hemmings, Kay, Sharp & Taylor, 2012; Lim & Barnes, 2005; Sekiguti, 2004; Sharp, Hemmings, Kay & Callinan, 2012; Stake, 2005). Using case studies for examining a phenomenon has been widely adopted in higher education contexts (Lim & Barnes, 2005). The results identified the following three themes: partnership commitment; university mentoring context; and the theory in practice. These were found after the preceding steps of a content analysis, and the integration of results.

The data show that the five participants had already taken part in the training workshops for academics at the university to their full capacity, especially Anthony, who had taken his time to attend the three workshops in one year. This had caused him some frustration as he was unable to achieve an academic position, no matter how many times he tried. Anthony had been

working at the university for more than 10 years and had been focusing on achieving the higher academic position since the day he started working. However, with a high work load, including both teaching and administrative requirements every week, he found himself feeling exhausted when returning home. He was unable to feel positive about getting started and participating in additional academic work to achieve higher academic positions.

The situation of Anthony is similar to many of the faculty members at PNRU, including the other participants in this study. They have a number of responsibilities, including having to taken care of their family members and the responsibilities assigned to them by the university, before paying attention to their career achievement. When considering their gender and age, it appears that they are facing similar issues. It does not matter whether they are male or female, aged below 35 or over 50 years, each of the five participants were unable to achieve higher academic positions. This was because different faculties and different administrative positions could not provide appropriate opportunities to develop their careers.

The themes which emerged through the in-depth interview, observations, and the writing of the reflective journals showed that the journey to become a successful academic is a very personal process. Three themes were identified: partnership commitment; university mentoring context; and theory in practice. These themes play significant roles in developing the peer mentoring model that influences the motivation and capacity of the academic achievement.

Partnership commitment

Three participants indicated that the partnership commitment between the mentor and the mentee was very important for successfully developing the peer mentoring model. The other two participants also recognized the importance of the quality of the partnership. All of the participants reported that a reciprocal relationship is better for supporting the peer mentoring process than a top-down relationship. The higher power and authority of the mentor in this workplace environment might be a good tool for encouraging the mentee to follow orders. However, it might not be the best action for maintaining the long-term process of professional development and positive attitudes towards the mentor, including the creation of a sustainable friendly environment at the university.

It is important that the mentor and mentee feel that they are partners who will encourage each other to learn and share their experiences. This was considered the most effective way for developing career outcomes. The willingness of the mentor and the mentee to work as a team towards their desired academic positions provided understanding and trust.

The mentor reported that the partnership and commitment of the mentee had motivated them to provide more support and to feel very proud of themselves for helping the mentee to achieve their goals. When the mentor had given their suggestions to the mentee, they found that it is not only the mentee who benefited from their suggestions. It was found that the mentor, who had given these suggestions had also learnt from the journey of the mentee's career growth.

University mentoring context

The second theme from the results was based on the university's policies and the concept of mentoring that had been implemented during the peer mentoring process. Four participants

reported that this theme was ‘very important’, and only Anthony noted university support and the mentoring context as ‘important’.

The reflective writing journal of the participants confirmed that the university’s support for workshop training and professional development opportunities are very significant factors for the success of their academic careers. Success will not happen unless the university provides relevant support such as financial funding to organize training workshops, a policy to reduce the teaching load and administrative work of those who want to write textbooks and teaching documents, and also establishes research funding and scholarships for academic staff to conduct research and publish articles.

All these supports are very important in the process of professional development. Most of the universities in Thailand have already provided these supports including PNRU. However, without the mentoring concept to motivate academic staff to access these university supports, it might not be as beneficial to academic staff as was expected by the university. The context of mentoring is working with individual academic staff members that have unique characteristics and experience different life-styles. Mentoring can be designed to adjust to their different demographics and personal requirements. The peer mentoring model that had been implemented in this study was a useful model for the university to consider as a highlight along with other university supporting policies.

Theory in practice

All five participants ‘strongly agreed’ that the success of developing a peer mentoring model to support higher academic positions was dependent on the theory in practice of the peer mentoring model.

Before starting each of the cycles of the peer mentoring model, the researcher was required to bring feedback from the five participants to a meeting with their mentors. The role of the mentor, who was involved in the action research cycles was to discuss and analyze the findings with the five participants again, so to determine the best plan for achieving their goals. To adjust a plan for the next phase of the peer mentoring model, the researcher found that each of the participants experienced different difficulties when following the plan.

A wonderful plan is not useful if the researcher cannot transfer the plan into practice. During the peer mentoring process, the researcher had observed the five participants and the peer mentoring process to ensure all were moving in the right direction and following the plan. Further, it depended on the university environment and specific circumstances for the plan to be successfully put into action.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how to develop a peer mentoring model, so to support academic staff to achieve higher academic positions. The results showed that there are three important factors to encourage academic staff to continue their professional development.

- The first factor is the strong relationship between the mentor and the mentee, who work together in a partnership. This includes their strong commitment to support each other and the desire to achieve their goals. The mentor and the mentee must develop the

mutual benefits whilst maintaining a positive attitude, and believe that by helping each other, both will benefit from their actions.

- The second factor is the university policy and the mentoring context. The university has played an important role to create the environment of learning and sharing. By providing the important resources and funding to facilitate the peer mentoring program, both the mentor and mentee will be able to follow their career growth and participate in the peer mentoring program more efficiently.

- The final factor is the implementation of theory and bringing the theory into practice.

The concept of peer mentoring can be successfully achieved by a continuous improvement plan provided by the action research cycle. It is important that the peer mentoring coordinator, who has organized the peer mentoring program reviews these factors and brings all the feedback from the previous cycle into the following meetings to adjust and improve the next cycle. As the environment changes all the time, it is appropriate for the peer mentoring model to adapt to the new environment and become suitable for the next cycle.

Moreover, the peer mentoring model has been designed to serve the needs of the individual academic staff. It is important to identify the differences in their backgrounds, motivations, characteristics, and needs of both the mentor and mentee. It cannot be assumed that 'one size fits all' in the development of the peer mentoring program model.

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Professional Development: Reflective Stories of Teacher Educators at the School of Education, Can Tho University, Vietnam

Nam Nguyen
nhnam@ctu.edu.vn
Binh Vo
vhbinh@ctu.edu.vn
Thao Tran
tnhthao@ctu.edu.vn
Yen Nguyen
nhyen@ctu.edu.vn

School of Education, Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

Reflection is not popular in Vietnam since it is not well understood. Thus, it has not been seen as a tool for professional development (PD) and is not often mentioned in Vietnam Teachers Standards. We have experienced the benefits of reflection and now wish to encourage teacher-educators (TEs) in Can Tho University (CTU), to understand the opportunities reflection can offer in their PD.

Reflection, especially its impact on the PD of teachers, has captured the attention of a growing number of researchers (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Moon, 2001; Marland, 2006; Watton, Collings & Moon, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al, 2017). According to Clement and Vanderberghe (2000) PD can be successful only when there are meaningful interactions among teachers themselves as well as between teachers, administrators, and other community members. In order to help each other to develop professionaly, a team of four TEs of different ages and with a variety of teaching experiences have been conducting several research projects involving reflection.

In this paper, we will be telling our reflective stories from our last co-research on Microteaching. The research questions were:

1. What teaching skills did TEs learn from this last action research?
2. What research skills did TEs learn?

Data including within-group emails, reflective stories of the four TEs were collected for qualitative analysis. The findings indicated positive impacts and development in group members' teaching and research skills.

Literature review

Professional development of educators

Continuing PD is essential for educators in higher education. They are currently practising under considerable constraint and pressure as a result of both social trends and students'

increasing demands for up-to-date skills and knowledge. The expertise and knowledge they gained through their studies, however, is insufficient to prepare them for these changes and demands (Brancato, 2003; McGuire & Williams, 2001).

With regard to TEs, Smith (2003) posited that their PD comes from three primary motives: improving the profession, teacher education; maintaining interest in the profession, to grow personally and professionally; advancing within the profession, promotion (p. 203). Darling-Hammond et al, (2017) identify seven characteristics of effective PD, which are: (1) it is content focused; (2) it incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory; (3) it supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts; (4) it uses of models and modeling of effective practice; (5) it provides coaching and expert support; (6) it offers opportunities for feedback and reflection; and (7) it is of a sustained duration (p. 4). Obviously, learning to teach becomes a lifelong obligation of all educators.

Educating learners to be critical thinkers and practitioners dominates the priority of education programs worldwide. No matter where we are teaching, high school or university, all teachers need to possess and demonstrate critical thinking in order to model a good example for their students to follow (Rowland, 2001). Teaching offers teachers excellent opportunities to not only put theories into practice, but also to confirm and adjust the assumptions of the effectiveness of their currently adopted teaching approaches.

In contrast, without being critical, teaching may be a simple way of routine practice based on teachers' increased experience over time. This habit hinders them from trying something different to better satisfy learners' expectations. Thus, learning needs to happen daily based on critical considerations and judgement. In order to ensure success of ongoing professional learning, teaching should be integrated with researching so as to constitute a core competence of teachers (Brew, 2003).

Reflection

Improving teaching practice is the ultimate goal of all dedicated and responsible teachers. To achieve that goal, teachers are in an urgent need of becoming reflective practitioners (Cowan, 2006; Ross et al., 1993; Schön, 1983). Reflection has been seen as a powerful tool in effective PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The concept of reflection has increased in popularity in education along with various interpretations of its meanings (Ottesen, 2007). The acknowledged importance of reflection gives rise to its increasing implications in PD programs for teachers (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The origin of reflection can be attributed to the statement of Dewey (1933), in which it is defined as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). In educational settings, a concise yet thorough definition of reflection by Marland (2007) claims that:

> *Reflection is the process of deliberately, systematically and rigorously examining one's teaching plans and actions to arrive at new ways of understanding oneself, students and classroom events and of building more effective models of practice for enhancing student learning*.
>
> (p. 109).

A holistic review by Hatton and Smith (1995) summarises two main categories of reflection. The first one by Van Manen (1977), is based on the focus of the reflection, categorized into three types: technical, practical and critical reflection. The second category is based on the timing when reflection occurs. Schon (1983) proposed two types of reflection: reflection-in action and reflection-on action. Despite differences in the classification, reflection is much emphasised on its values as a tool for effective teaching. Without reflection, more teaching practice results in more experience, but experience alone is insufficient for teacher PD (Beatty, 2000; Loughran, 2002).

Another vital aspect of reflection is that it is neither opposing to nor independent of collaboration, conversation and community. Rather, these factors always engage to promote reflective thinking and action (Lyons, 2010; Rodgers, 2002).

In summary, a large body of literature and empirical research confirms the enormous contributions of reflection to continuing PD of educators in higher education. PD - as a long-term process, puts educators into the position of active learners (see Villegas-Reimers, 2003). To learn effectively and deeply requires both individual reflective practice and external supports mainly from meaningful interactions with other colleagues in collaborative inquiry or learning community (Marton & Booth, 1997; Moon, 2004).

The interplay between these internal and external factors sets up a common framework for professional learning. Within this framework, PD can be achieved in different dimensions of knowledge, skills or attitudes and at different levels of depth. These variations can be accounted for individual differences mostly in the ability of self-directed learning (Day & Gu, 2007; Ehrman et al, 2003; Eraut, 2000; Kwakman, 2003). However, until recently, very little research on this topic has been conducted. This study attempts to shed light on such an underlying process of PD from a case study of a group of four TEs at CTU, Vietnam.

Research implementation

Four TEs, coded as A, B, C and D in a group of Principles and Methods of Teaching Vietnamese Literature and Linguistics, participated in this study. The teaching and research experience varied significantly within the group.

- TE A can be considered as a senior lecturer and the team leader as she has been practising as a teacher educator for thirty-four years, providing substantial support to other group members.
- TEs B and C respectively have six and ten years practical experience in teacher training. TE B also has experience in research.
- TE D can be seen as a novice since she spent 8 years teaching in a high school in the Mekong Delta before working for CTU in 2014.

This story of our involvement with reflection is based on our experiences from 2015 to 2016. From August to December 2015, the research group conducted a research project focusing on, *Enhancing Pre-service Teachers' Skills in Observation, Feedback and Reflection during Micro teaching Practice - A Case Study at the School of Education, Can Tho University, Vietnam.* In January 2016, the group decided to look back on what we had experienced in that research and conducted a follow-up research by writing reflective stories (see Appendix) on what we did and learnt. In order to write them, we again examined all internal emails that we exchanged,

drafts of observational and reflective sheets that we had designed in 2015, and notes of each member taken in the group meetings. We also learnt methods to write a complete reflection, such as ways to describe events; analyse and then learn the lessons from them.

The stories presented in this research were highly selective as a result of many group meetings and consultations to focus on reflective writing about the events and lessons most relevant and meaningful to the PD of each participant. According to Schon (1983), there are two types of reflection: reflection-in action and reflection-on action. Our reflection is the second type.

Data collection

A collection of reflective stories written by four participants was utilised as a primary source of evidence. The united structure of these stories was based on the application of the five-stage cycle advanced by Kolb (1984) and then revised by Gibbs (1988) (see Moon, 2004, 2006; Watton, Collings, & Moon, 2011), which entails description, feeling, evaluation, analysis and conclusion to deepen reflection.

Data analysis

The present study was exclusively designed to investigate the underlying process of PD of four TEs who were also co-authors of this research. The reflective stories based on Gibbs (1988) model has already provided an analytical framework for our data analysis. In addition, to create an overall picture of PD in our group, we matched the reflective stories with the same themes together and generalised several shared values or themes across all these stories.
Reflective stories of four TEs focus on two main professional skills. They are teaching skills and research skills.

1. Teaching skills

Looking back the to the period in which we conducted the research, from August to December 2015, allows us to believe that the journey was a worthy experience.

Our group agreed to improve pre-service teachers'(PTs) skills in providing feedback, and to develop their observational and reflective skills in the micro-teaching course. PTs were divided into 6 groups. B, C and D, each instructed 2 groups.

The process of microteaching was organised into four steps.

- Firstly, TEs introduced the format of microteaching, the functions and the usage of observational and reflective checklists, recording microteaching, giving feedback.
- Secondly, PTs organised microteaching in their own group; their teaching was recorded while the other PTs observed and filled in the observational checklist. TEs randomly participated in some lectures.
- Thirdly, every PT reviewed his/her lecture video in order to fill in the reflective checklist. They also reviewed their groupmates' videos to revise the observational checklists.
- In the final step, each TE organised discussion meetings for PTs to share their opinions together about the video clips, ask questions to encourage PTs' refection and comments. TEs joined their colleagues' discussion meetings to assist each other in guiding PTs on how to reflect and give feedback. After three months of microteaching, TEs had achieved various experiences which are presented in their reflective stories.

TE B felt sastified because he let his PTs have more opportunities to learn in a cyclical process of planning, doing, rethinking, adjusting and redoing as reflective practitioners. For TE C, she realised that after being trained, PTs would know how to record, give feedback, and reflect on their. Watching microteaching via videos helped them review activities which they might miss in the real classroom teaching. Significantly, when PTs watched their own videos, they could play various roles such as observers or students. Therefore, those PTs were able to evaluate their teaching more effectively.

C used to be a teacher in a High school. Microteaching subject was the first subject she taught in CTU. Therefore, she felt a little bit nervous. Our group helped her to overcome her worries by discussing what needed to be done in Microteaching. She was also invited to attend B and C's classes. After observing colleagues' classes, she learnt how to use questions to make PTs think about their own teaching. She felt happy because her PTs were able to think critically, sharpened their persuasive, reasoning, and communicative skills.

Nevertheless, all PTs' reflections were the level of "surface" reflection. At the beginning of the course B wrote that PTs 'were better at describing what they experienced rather than analysing and explaining how and why they did". Also, C presented "most PTs were concerned about auxiliary aspects like their classmates appearance, voice, handwriting on the board in several first classes". She felt that PTs tended tobe interested in peripheral issues instead of the main issues which related to their professional background knowledge. Similar to B and C, D stated her PTs "did not focus much on important issues like the instructed question system, or the relevance among teaching objectives, the content, and teaching methods".

The reason was the "overdose" of the reflection oriented sheet given to our PTs. Our aim was to guide them to focus their reflection on some key points that must be seen as general advice or suggestions. They must be able to choose and then get more insights into the specific and most critical issues in their own lessons – that being critical thinking. However, many of them exploited the reflection-oriented sheet as an all-inclusive or "magic" tool. They exaggerated that the tool already incorporated a set of fixed rules necessary for excellent teaching. Thus, they simplified teaching as a kind of science rather than a very much creative occupation.

B felt particularly concerned that such mindset of his PTs might drive them to a habitual practice of thinking and teaching that completely contradicts to reflective practice. C supposed that PTs expressed their uncritical attitude when observing their friends' lessons and their lack of critical thinking skills. Similarly, B was aware that only using the reflection-oriented sheet was insufficient to develop reflective capacity of the PTs. They did not critically consider that they were teaching in a simulated condition with their peers acting as learners who could give correct answers very quickly despite the lack of their instructions or their ambiguous questions, unlike what was likely to occur in a real classroom.

Likewise, along with the observation checklist, C and D noticed that TEs should have given more guidance or made more questions to orient and foster PTs to think deeply about their classmates' lessons. Before the discussion meeting, C sent PTs an email to give them some instructions on important issues on which they need to observe and reflect. In addition, she devised a number of questions to encourage PTs to give evidences of their comments or to give feedback to others' opinions in discussion classes.

After two meetings, PTs paid more attention to crucial matters like lesson aims, contents, question systems. Then, they understood how to observe and give feedback correctly and

effectively without TE's specific supports. Meanwhile, D gave her PTs clear-cut instructions and used more questions to make students think on their own rather than directly give them comments.

Each TE, from their own experiencies, learnt valuable lessons for the next classes. In order to help PTs to analyse and explain deeper how and why they did certain actions, B planned to use a scaffolding approach by analysing some lessons as exemplars for PTs, and then encouraged them to do this independently. The second activity was aimed at helping his PTs to be able to assess when variations or creativity could make for more successful teaching. Furthermore, B realised that building up a collaborative environment for reflective practice should be considered essential.

More importantly, to achieve a deep level of reflection required a lot of personal attempts and a kind of a "natural mind" of critical thinking and reasoning. There was always a relationship between nature and nurture here.

The problems in C's class was that PTs in group 2 recorded the lectures from a fixed corner, so viewers could not observe any learning activities or learners' attitudes except teachers' speech and note-taking on the board. As a result, she planned to have PTs watch some of those videos to gain experiences in recording activity in the next semesters.

D thought in the next semesters, she will provide a very detailed microteaching syllabus for PTs before their teaching. She also planned to adjust the observation table layout and self-evaluation rubric so it is easier for PTs to follow these forms.

In conclusion, different PTs had various stories although they were in the same class. Similarly, TEs had diverse experiences and observe ability, so their levels of reflection varied. Nonetheless, they all had realised the problems in their classes. Then, they figured out the solutions and made plans for next semester. Above all, they identified their downside and strong points in their teaching methods, and they desired to improve their teaching quality.

2. Researching skills

By participating in this research project the research members, especially C and D, learnt a great deal on how to undertake research.

When discussing the research topic, we all realised that the PTs' performance in micro-teaching had not been good. They did not know how to give feebback effectively, their observation skills were not good. As a result, our research team were motivated to conduct research on the topic, Enhancing Pre-service Teachers' Skills in Observation, Feedback and Reflection during Microteaching Practice.

For D, the most significant lesson was choosing the research topic. Previously, she did not know how to identify one, now she understood that research topics are not odd, they can emerge from daily teaching activities, and such research help to improve teaching and learning quality.

At the beginning stage of the research, we raised three research questions. However, when we discussed how we might analyse the data, B worried about the question "How do PTs apply what they learnt from observing their peers' teaching to their teaching?". TE A was aware that there was an issue in our research design because we did not test PTs' teaching competencies before they took part in the study. Therefore, we could not determine their progress at the

conclusion of the study. Because of this we revised our research questions. For A, her lesson was that the research should be designed very carefully before commencing. C and D learnt the valuable lesson that research questions are not strange, but they come from the real situations in classes.

In terms of collecting data, A required C and D to design observation and reflection checklists, giving feedback strategies guidance and interview questions because she thought it was a good opportunity for two novice members to practice and improve their research skills. They felt embarrassed because they did not know how to design the checklists.

A and B sent them references on observational checklists and giving feedback. After several drafts with many comments of A and B, the checklists and guidance had been completed. C and D realised that their interview goals were not clear and the questions that were designed were irrelevant to the goals. Then, A and B recommended some criteria to orient them to design a high quality questionnaire. They also advised the two novices to develop a table that consisted of the goals and the questions for each goal. C understood that it is better to present both the questions and objectives in parallel.

After receiving much assistance and feedback from A and B, the final version was logical and suitable. D was able to understand the process of interview question design: first set the aims for the questionnaire, then list the information that was needed to provide the data, and finally frame the questions, in accordance with the aims. She wrote “This experience will be a helping hand in my future encounter of similar work”. A realised that when asking the novices to do something they have not done before, it’s crucial to give them specific instruction and support them.

During the period when we were analysing the data, C and D were confused because of huge amounts of data developed from PTs’ revised lesson plans, observation checklists, reflection checklists, discussion minutes, and interviewing minutes. A and B formed a table in order to fill in raw data of PTs’ reflective sheet and interview information and shared it to C and D.

One week later, C designed another table to help every member to codify the information in PTs’ observation checklists. A felt very happy since she could witness the progress of her junior members in researching. In fact, C did not only receive others’ support but also gave her partners a hand. The lesson A had learnt is that when giving the novices chances, trusting and fostering them, they can produce something very effective. For C, it was the first time she conducted a research. With A’s guidance she learnt how to analyse the changes in PTs’ reflective sheets from the first to the last one by highlighting and sorting out differentt types of information, then gathered them together. She wrote this process allows me to identify changing in PTs’ mind, their progress. Meanwhile, a valuable lesson for D is that the statistics and data analysis need to be honest.

When doing the study some questions came up in B's mind. One of them was that “the impacts of using the reflective oriented sheet in conjunction with scaffolding as a means to develop reflective capacity for my PTs very interesting and will be something I will research in the future”.

While implementing the research, the group could point to the new orientation of upcoming research. While the novice members had learnt how to carry out a research topic, the experienced ones determined forthcoming research topics.

Teaching quality depends partially on TEs' reflective and reseach competencies. TEs need to learn how to do research and how to write reflective stories. We had many meetings to discuss materials on microteaching, research and reflection. When A read drafts of checklists, interview questions, observational and reflective guides and reflective stories, A usually asked two novices constructive questions, such as: "is it reasonable?" "I wonder..., is it better?" "If, why...". Those questions gave them more thoughts and self-assess their products.

Discussion

The stories of PD of the four TEs at CTU in the last two years support some characteristics of PD that Darling-Hammond et al (2017) identified:

First, the PD was content focused, concentrating on improving group members' teaching and researching ability.

Second, collaboration, in a job-embedded context, can lead to more effective professional learning. C wrote "Our team made efforts and assisted each other to complete the mission during doing research time. We suppose that thanks to this cooperation, we can create a learning community, as well as improve researching and teaching skills".

The third character is the sustained duration of the project. The TEs, A and B, had started to cooperate in researching in 2012. Then, in 2015 and 2016, C and D joined in our group. In 2017, the cooperation of A, C and D as co-authors was maintained. Consequently, their researching and teaching skills have been developing.

The PD process of TEs comes from three motives as Smith (2003) mentioned. The first motive is improving the profession which in this case was illustrated by each member's progress of teaching and reseach skills. The second motive is maintaining interest in the profession, to grow personally and professionally. All members are eager to improve their PD and are willing to receive others' constructive feedback, and polite comments, such as "Thanks for your hard work"; "Please read and give me your feedbacks on my...". Progress in TEs teaching and research provides evidence for the third motive.

D pointed out the reasons for the team's successful co-working: We were willing to contribute to the improvement of the PD of each member and were trusting and respectfull towards each other. We worked with an open-mind, and emphasised collaboration and open communication.

One of the most useful tools for PD that was used is reflection. Everyone had the opportunity to consider "actively, persistent and carefully" working stages that Dewey (1933) had mentioned. Each reflective story demonstrates how each member was able to acquire a new skill that benefited their teaching through their learning of the organisation of microteaching as well as conducting research. In the same way, each TE has different feelings, evaluating, analysing based on their own viewpoints, their richness of experiences and their thoughtfulness. Therefore, they had learnt various lessons for teaching and researching in the future. Reflection of our research team is not only a personal activity, but also features "collaboration, conversation and community" (Lyons, 2010; Rodgers, 2002).

Conclusion

Our research, again, indicates that reflection and a learning team are powerful tools in effective PD (Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M, 2017). Reflection is the tool which helped us look back over what we did in 2015. Therefore, we can analyse and evaluate our experiences for future missions. The similarities among the four stories are the lessons of teaching and research skills.

Our PD process is proof for "individual reflective practice and external supports" (Marton & Booth, 1997; Moon, 2004). We built up a learning community based on inquiry and research in the practice of teaching. The foundation for this learning team is based on the support, sharing, trust, critical thinking and respect for each other and the reflective capacity of each. These characteristics are representative of a professional learning community (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Tinto, 2003, Darling-Hammond, 2017).

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APPENDIX

TE A's reflective story

I have been working as a teacher educator for 34 years. In comparison with the 3 TEs in our Literacy Teaching section, I'm a senior and have more teaching and research experience. Since I am going to retire soon, I wanted to build a learning team for supporting each other to develop professionally. Therefore, since 2012, I and B have published several articles together. In 2015, I invited two new members, C and D, to the team. I felt very happy because all members were willing to do a research together, as it meant that they were eager to learn and improve their PD. I have learnt two lessons from the process of working with this team.

The first lesson is TEs' PD on research. In the discussion about what research topic we could focus on, all members shared the concern of our research topic to be pre-service teachers' (PTs') low microteaching expertise. Thus, we decided, Enhancing Pre-service Teachers' Skills in Observation, Feedback and Reflection during Microteaching Practice: A Case Study at the School of Education, Can Tho University, Vietnam. Initially, we formulated three research questions. One of the questions, actually the third question, was "How do PTs use what they have learn from peer teaching observations to their teaching?"

At the stage of discussing how to collect data for the research, B asked me "How to find out the answer for this question?". It helped me to realise our fault in the research design. We did not test student's teaching competencies before the experiment, so we could not prove their progress after the experiment. I have learnt that we had to design research very carefully before the experiment. In addition, PTs' teaching quality depends on many factors such as their schema, transformation learning, etc. not only on their observational and reflective capacity.

I required C and D to design observation sheets, reflection checklists, feedback strategies guidance and interview questions. I thought that as they were novices it was a good chance for improving their research skill. At that time, I thought these jobs were not too challenging but later, I realised that they were confused and their first drafts were bad. More specifically, the interview aims were not clear, and the questions were irrelevant to the aims. So I talked to them about the steps to design interview questions. B and I sent them some references on how to reflect, gave them feedback and checklists, and provided them with much feedback on their drafts.

After three revisions, the final results were very good. So my lesson learnt is when asking the novices to do something they have never done before it is crucial to give them specific instructions and support them.

In order to help C and D to analyse the data of their groups, I and B made a table for synthesizing the data on PTs' reflective sheets and from interview transcripts. Then we sent them to C and D to fill in their PTs' data. One week later, C sent us a table to fill in draw data on PT's observation guide. I felt very happy because of C's progress in the research. It meant C did not only receive others' support but also supported others. I have learnt another lesson: It is worth trusting novices and giving them chances for learning and gaining experience.

The second lesson is TEs' PD in reflective capacity. When I read drafts of checklists, interview questions, observational and reflective guides that C and D designed, I usually asked them: "Should we…; is it reasonable?"; "I wonder.."; "Is it better if…; why?" instead of giving direct

feedback on their drafts. Those questions were good because of gave the novices more thoughts and chances to self-assess their products. When I visited their classes, I was happy that C and D used those same questions to give feedback to their PTs in order to encourage them to reflect on their teaching. I plan to instruct my colleagues and students how to use reflective questions.

For the last two years, our team had been co-working very well. The first reason is that each member was willing to improve their teaching and had an open-mind. They understood that knowledge has no boundary. Secondly, was our trust and respect toward each other. There was no discrimination between senior and junior, experienced or inexperienced members.
Lastly, is our collaboration and communication. Encouraging and collaborative phrases like: "Thanks for your hard work"; "We will try together…"; "I hope..."; "Please read and give me your feedback on my..." were used frequently by each member in meetings and within group emails.

In summary, supporting, sharing, trusting, critical thinking and respecting each other are the foundations for a learning team. One member of our team, B, now, studies in Holland, and C, will study for a PhD in Holland soon. I strongly believe that what they have learnt in the last two years is useful for them. Now, I'm building a new research team with 5 members and I believe these lessons will help our new team do a better research.

TE B's reflective story

In 2015, I started to re-organise my microteaching course with the ultimate goal to develop the reflective capacity of my PTs. I perceived that the course organisation I had repeatedly used over three consecutive years, since 2012, was much grading-oriented, therefore left very little or no room for my PTs to learn from critically reviewing their own lessons. To remedy this situation, my colleagues (those involved in this research) and I discussed and agreed to design a reflection-oriented sheet (RoS) and to renew the microteaching course requirements.

We designed the RoS based on the Faculty classroom observation form formulated by Central Piedmont Community College (2010). Through group meetings and email discussions, we acknowledged that this form chiefly functioned as a checklist that probably resulted in forming a reflective practice habit, but mostly at a surface level. Thus, we agreed to include analytic questions, aimed at eliciting further clarification from PTs, thus activating more critical thinking for deeper reflection. Besides, my PTs were required to practice teaching two times with video recordings in their preferred group. They were required to review their own lessons and fill in the reflection form before the feedback meeting with the whole class. I occasionally came to scrutinise their practice in small groups and to give advice when necessary.

"The good, the bad and the ugly" emerged as I assessed the results from my experimenting. 'The good' was to some degree my success in providing more opportunities to my students to learn in a cyclical process of planning, doing, rethinking, adjusting and redoing as reflective practitioners. Also, they felt less stressed when practicing in their favourite group without the presence of their teacher.

"The bad" for me as a practitioner became more apparent when I compared the results with my goal. To deepen the reflectivity of my PTs, the RoS contained a number of questions for more in-depth thinking. Contrary to my expectation, my students did not focus on these questions to analyse and explain how and why they did something. Instead, most of them exploited the sheet

as a checklist that helped them to better describe what they did or not do in their classes - shallow reflection.

"The ugly" was related the side effects of the RoS on my PTs as a result of their "overdose" of the requirements of each domain in the sheet. For instance, simply the presence of groupwork in a lesson led to effective teaching. This did not apply to all PTs, but many of them standing on one extreme side exaggerated the function of the RoS as an all-inclusive or "magic" tool that comprises a set of fixed rules to follow strictly. Consequently, they tended to focus on seperate points to judge a lesson in a "scientific" manner while erroneously ignoring the whole picture of a lesson with flexibility and creativity which accounts for the artistry of teaching. I wondered whether this shortcoming should be merely claimed for my PTs' misconception of the purpose of the RoS, or whether limitation related to the fact that the RoS that requires further improvements. My thinking was of both these possibilities.

From my awareness of "the good, the bad and the ugly" in my changes, I came up with some questions for further inquiry.

First, central to my concern is what additional approaches I should take to promote my students' reflection to a deeper level. Scaffolding seems to be suitable in this case. I propose that I will do an analysis of some of their lessons first to help my students to be more experienced in choosing the most relevant points in their lessons for reflective thinking before having them do this independently. I also find that the impact of using the RoS in conjunction with scaffolding as a means to develop reflective capacity for my PTs is very interesting, and could be an area in which I can conduct future research.

Second, the purpose of utilising the RoS should be clarified more to PTs to prevent them from adopting it as a checklist or a "magic tool". More importantly, I should help my PTs to be able to assess when variations or creativity can make for successful teaching, rather than just sticking to the lesson plan.

Third, another question arising from my implementation of the RoS in microteaching practice is how much different learning styles of my PTs affect their learning from reflective practice. Some of them can make adjustments during their teaching, whilst others learn more at the end, mostly from identifying the errors of their own practice.

TE C's reflective story

Looking back to June 2015 until February 2016 when we conducted the previous research, I believe that journey was a worthwhile experience. I am proud of our research team because everyone has strong points I can learn from. We worked hard on our project and assisted each other to complete the research. Thanks to this cooperation, we can create a learning community as well as improving our researching and teaching skills.

Research skills

The reason we conducted the last study is that our PTs usually focus on fringe issues more than crucial issues when they comment on their classmates' microteaching lessons. I learnt that research questions come from common circumstances. If reflecting on my teaching, I can explore research topics, then, I can advance my teaching quality in return.

When D and I designed the major collecting data tools, we initially felt embarrassed. A and B introduced sample checklists to us. They also listed some criteria for conducting an interview and advised us to identify the interview's aims. Finally, we completed these tasks with our teammates' assistance.

After applying these tools, we realised although these tools were quite good, they could be better, the repeated issues needed to be eliminated, the issues important identified should follow the lesson process.

While I attempted to classify the information from the tools we devised I began to realise there were huge amounts of various kinds of data. From the checklists, I made one table to synthesize the group different opinions and another table to evaluate data.

Interviews with PTs were conducted by two researchers. One person asked the questions and the other typed the answers. Therefore, we did not miss any important information. We also assisted each other to clarify the PTs' answers through asking auxiliary questions.

I knew there were two essential steps to approach research data to exploit value of data. If I had stopped at the first step, I would not have detected the appropriate conclusions.

When writing the abstract and resulting discussion, I was given support from my colleagues. For example, B sent me his sample discussion to illustrate the way he analysed the data. I appreciated my team's asistance which improved my academic writing skills.

Teaching skills

In 2015, when being asking to record their lectures, fill in the checklists, and share the videos via Google Drive, PTs expressed dissatisfaction because (1) they did not have a professional recording device; (2) their own official schedules were too different to arrange meetings; (3) they preferred to give feedback right after microteaching; and (4) they thought the checklists were complicated.

Nonetheless, after being trained, PTs understood how to record, give feedback and reflect. Watching video clips helped them review activities which they might have missed while observing the lessons initially. Significantly, when PTs watched their own teaching videos, they could play various roles such as observers or students. Thus, those PTs were able to evaluate their lessons more objectively.

Thanks to the PTs responses, I determined that it is necessary to instruct PTs more clearly. I will use the completed checklists to instruct the PTs in the following next semesters, and encourage them have greater responsibility for their tasks.

We all, my PTs as well as me, learned much about videoing lessons. Group 1 changed the position of the camera to present different angles of the classroom. However, Group 2 fixed the camera in one place, so viewers could only observe teachers' talking and note-making on the board, but could not observe what the learners were doing during learning activities or what their body-language might have indicated about the learners' attitudes. After the first discussion, I suggested the Group 2 learn from Group 1, and film the learners' notebooks and discussions. In next semesters, my PTs will watch some of those videos to gain experience in recording activity.

I learned much about the quality of class discussion. In early class discussions most PTs were concerned with less important aspects such as appearance, voice, hand writing on the board. I felt that PTs tended to care with peripheral issues instead of the major issues which related to their professional background knowledge. PTs performance indicated they lacked critical thinking skills. Thus, I developed questions to assist them think critically. Before discussion, I sent PTs an email to instruct them on the important issues they needed to observe and reflect upon. Additionally, I encouraged PTs to provide evidence for their comments. After two classes, PTs paid greater attention to crucial matters like lesson aims, content, and questioning. Next time, I will give more detailed guidance to PTs, especially in the early classes.

In some early discussion classes every lesson was discussed separately. This approach took much time, and similar issues arose in many lessons. Therefore, I decided to reorganized discussion classes. In each session, a group of lessons having a similar topic were discussed together. Consequently, this allowed PTs to develop skill in making comparisons.
Reflection is a valuable tool which helps me to learn from my research and teaching activities, then develop professionally.

TE D's reflective story

At the end of 2014, I was appointed to a teaching position at Can Tho university, after 10 years of teaching in a high school in the Mekong Delta. In my first semester 2015, I was tasked with teaching the microteaching course for the PTs and became a member of the research team on, Enhancing Pre-service Teachers' Skills in Observation, Feedback and Reflection during Microteaching Practice. In this paper, I would like to recap my experience during the research process as well the lessons that I had learned from it.

Primarily, I was able to learn a lot about how to do proper research. The first thing I learned was how to choose a research topic. I only realised this after a group discussion, since I had no previous experience regarding the matter, and that the general research idea can stem from the practice of teaching.
Secondly, C and I were tasked with designing the Reflective and Observational guidelines, and the Interview questionnaire for PTs' participating in the research.

Before completing this task, C and I had to read several critical references relevant to our research. Afterwards, I cited some extracts in the research but often forgot make a note of their sources. It was owing to A's comments that I realised that citing the sources is a must, as it is one of the standard regulations on ethics in scientific research. Thanks to this, I developed a habit of citing the sources whenever I cite an extract. I also felt more confident in my English reading comprehension skill. I believed this experience would prepare me better for the similar upcoming research works.

During the microteaching course, PTs had to use the observation and self - reflection forms to reflect on themselves and comment on each other's teaching. However, some PTs complained that some of these criteria in the guidelines should be adjusted, either because they were repetitive or arranged unclearly, making it hard for the PTs to follow.

In a later semester, I planned to adjust: (1) the observation and self – reflection guide lists in accordance with the teaching process during (before, while and after class), which would make things easier for PTs to follow, hence provide a better evaluation; (2) adding more criteria relating to learners/teachers' ability, self – evaluation skills.

I was able to gain a wealth of experience when handling the design of the interview questionnaire, which was a relatively new task for C and me. As a matter of fact, I found this to be the most interesting task of the research. However, we did not identify the interview objective beforehand, resulting in some of the questions being inconsistent, lacking coherence and not even sticking to the research aim.

From this situation, I learned a valuable lesson: that is to always set a specific objective for interviews, then build up the questions in ways to meet that objective. I also learnt this to be the proper way to avoid coming up with questions that collect unnecessary data from the research subjects.

When analysing the data, I had to watch 56 video recordings of 28 PTs, as well as study their observation and self - reflection forms. It was thanks to A's instruction that C and I were able to group the data together and organize them in chronological order, together with highlighting crucial data to simplify the analysing process. This allowed me to observe PTs' changes during the course more closely. From this, I had learnt more about how to analyse data.

Last but not least, I learned many things about teaching skills. Regardless of my experience working with high-school teachers and students, teaching microteaching was still a bit stressful at first as there is a big difference between teaching itself and instructing other people to teach. Given that I had attended B and C's classes, I was then able to learn how to organise a class effectively regarding strategies for making groups, giving feedback, and discussion.

Having observed B's and C's class, I found that my class was less energetic and active during discussions, coupled with PTs' feedback being out of focus on key issues such as the way the teacher asked questions, or the relevance between objectives, content and teaching methods. The main reason behind this was PTs did not watch the teaching video clips of their classmates before attending the discussion, resulting in not having enough ideas to make constructive comments to their peers. Furthermore, some others were focusing only on the minor issues, such as: bad handwriting; teachers losing their temper… rather than the effectiveness of organizing group discussions for students or raising thought-provoking questions, etc.

Then I realised that measures must be taken to manage PTs' preparation on watching each other's clips, to get them to concentrate more on the crucial criteria when evaluating each other's teaching session likewise, then compliment PTs when they make constructive and helpful comments.

Additionally, I learnt that I should give clear-cut instructions at the beginning of the course and using questions to guide and encourage PTs to think more critically during self-reflection process.

Upon the completion of my research, I had learnt the methods of organizing a research group, looking for references and data analysis from A, B and C. In addition, I began to properly appreciate and learned a valuable lesson about the importance of cooperation and support among the group members. Most importantly, I feel respected even though I am just a newcomer in this field. In the near future, hopefully, I would like to continue to carrying out more research with the research team as well as on my own.

Effects of Portfolio Assessment on Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Competence: A Study in Can Tho, Vietnam

Le Ngoc Hoa
lnhoa@ctu.edu.vn

School of Education,
Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

The use of summative assessment methods revealed limitations in encouraging pre-service primary teachers (PsTs) to become deeply involved in their professional training. It has been suggested that the use of portfolios as a learner-centered assessment approach can stimulate PsTs' professional competence.

A study of applying portfolio assessment on a class of 83 pre-service primary teachers within the Micro-teaching course of Primary Science Education was carried out.

The results showed that the portfolio-based assessment definitely improved PsTs' professional competencies in terms of Pedagogical Behavior, Professional Knowledge and Skills.

Introduction

In the primary-school pre-service teacher education program at Can Tho University (CTU) for many years, traditional assessment, characterized by the periodic examinations based on paper and pencil tests, standardized tests, and question-and-answer activities, have been widely used. This approach, however, fails to capture all elements of PsTs' performance. The traditional methods measure learners' capacity to reproduce specific knowledge and focus on lower-level skills rather than applying knowledge to real-life contexts and developing higher-level skills (Cohen, 2001). Traditional assessments hinder students from deep and meaningful learning (Charvade, 2012).

Within the context of the credit-based education program of CTU, the amount of time spent on-class learning has decreased and students are encouraged to self-study outside the classroom. To improve the quality of teacher education, CTU lecturers have been required to introduce innovations in assessment so that they can manage the students' learning and training process.

In the age of constructivism, alternative assessment methods are encouraged to offer the learners cognitive and affective feedback. One of the innovations is portfolio assessment which has been extensively used since the mid 1980s. A portfolio is a performance-based assessment method that collects examples of students' work. This is not a new approach because painters, artists, writers, models and photographers have exhibited their vocational and acquired skills through portfolios for many years (Zollman & Jones, 1994).

In recent years, in the field of teacher education, portfolios have been utilized for similar purposes, as an assessment instrument and as a part of activities of PsTs to monitor their own progress and take responsibility for meeting learning goals. By documenting growth over time through a systematic collection of work samples, portfolios encourage PsTs to be deeply involved in and control the process of their professional training. As one of its inherent

functions, portfolios offer learners opportunities for reflection, redirection, and confirmation of their own learning effort (O' Malley & Pierce, 1996).

Aim of study

This descriptive study aimed to use portfolio-based assessment with PsTs' to increase professional competence within the Primary Science Education program. The use of a portfolio was introduced to monitor the students' progress in terms of professional knowledge and skills and pedagogical behaviors.

Literature review

Portfolio assessment in teacher education

Assessment is generally seen as an inherent component of the teaching and learning process. Assessment refers to gathering information and making judgments about a learners' competence in a specific field (Chapelle and Brindley, 2002; Collins & O'Biren, 2003; Crooks, 2001).

The introduction of portfolio assessment makes a shift from summative assessment (product-oriented assessment) to formative assessment (process-oriented assessment) that purposely collects students' work to assess students' efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas over time.

Portfolio-based assessment uses authentic evidence of students' learning processes (Hosseini & Ghabanchi, 2014). According to Yasin et al. (2012), a portfolio is a collection of documents and other tangible proof to show that one has gone through the process of learning. It also provides evidence of a development process, such as professional development.

In the field of teacher education, the professional teaching portfolio is considered a flexible, concise, and authentic way of evaluating individual teaching competencies (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). There are a variety of approaches to portfolio-based assessment in teacher education.

A number of aspects seem to define the context for portfolio use:

1. In constructivist theories of self-regulated learning it is an appropriate way of documenting the individual learning progress over time and across different learning environments (van den Boom, Paas, & van Merrienboer, 2007);
2. Recognition of individualized learning in a self-reflexive and self-regulated mode considers a portfolio as providing opportunities for individuals to reflect on learning goals and strategies through reflective writings (Imhof & Picard, 2009);
3. Portfolios can be seen as an attempt to account for both aspects of the teacher's personality and competencies (Campbell, Cignetti, Melenyzer, Nettles, & Wyman, 2004; Zeichner & Wray, 2001).

Campbell et al. (2004) define the professional teaching portfolio as 'an organized, goal-driven documentation of professional growth and achieved competence in the complex act called teaching'. In spite of much encouragement to use portfolio assessment, research on portfolios has been limited. Two issues which need to be clarified in this study are the appropriate components to be incorporated into a portfolio, and which teachers' professional competencies would be importantly affected by this portfolio process.

Pre-service teachers' professional competence defined in a science micro-teaching course

An important question related to the use of portfolios is 'Which competencies are necessary for a teacher to be effective in her/his work?' Competence, is not to be viewed as composed of discrete skills (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, 2005). What is important is to determine the influences of multiple factors to understanding competence (Christensen 1996).

Liakopoulou (2011) defined a 'good teacher' as one who possesses a wide range of qualifications including the union of Personality Traits and Pedagogical Skills and Knowledge. In terms of Personality Traits related to the professional role of a teacher, studies have shown that the traits such as appearance, a sense of humor, a sense of fairness, patience, enthusiasm, creativity, all contribute to the effectiveness of teachers (Malikow, 2005).

In relation to Pedagogical Knowledge and Understanding many studies identified knowledge of curriculum and subject matter, knowledge of teaching methodology, and knowledge of learners.

Pedagogical Skills were defined as consisting of setting realistic objectives, providing incentives to pupils for learning, applying various teaching methods, selecting participative forms of teaching, testing and creating didactic material, presenting information in a clear manner, maximizing teaching time through establishing learning routines, motivating pupils, monitoring and evaluating their progress, setting evaluation criteria, and providing feedback (Anderson 2004).

Within the subject Micro-teaching for Science Education professional competencies are illustrated in Table 1. These were determined by a group of lecturers in the Primary Education Department of CTU who have responsibility for science micro-teaching.

Table 1. Professional competencies required in the micro-teaching course in Primary Science Education

Dimensions	Professional competence
A. Professional Behavior	PsTs are able to: 1. Be fully aware of the subject's importance in developing their professional competence, that motivate them to study with *responsible* attitudes; 2. Express the manner of *cooperation* through involvement in discussion, sharing and evaluating mutually; 3. Raising the ability of *self-reflection* on professional progress through each phase of the portfolio; 4. Be able to *manage time and workload* during the subject conducted.
B. Professional Knowledge	PsTs will develop knowledge and understanding of: 5. *The curriculum and textbook developments*, including planning, implementation and evaluation; 6. Teaching components including *subject objectives, contents, teaching and learning methodologies, learning form, assessment methodologies* for Science in the primary education program; 7. *How to use technology effectively*, both to aid pupil's learning and to support their professional activities.
C. Professional Skills	PsTs are capable of: 8. *Setting appropriate learning objectives/outcomes/intentions* in knowledge, skills acquisition and progression, taking account of what pupils know, understand and can do; 9. *Planning and evaluating lessons* that enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs to meet learning objectives/outcomes/intentions; 10. *Using a various range of teaching strategies, teaching forms and resources* that enable learning to take place and which maintain pace within lessons and over time; 11. *Training in pedagogical manners* including effective communication with pupils, appropriate volume, write and decorate the class board in a logical and sensible manner; 12. Focus on *assessment for learning* by monitoring pupils' progress and selecting from a range of *assessment strategies* to evaluate pupils' learning.

Methodology

In the first two years of their program students study basic courses in education, educational psychology and social sciences, and focus on teaching methods that include the Science micro-teaching course. The traditional final written exams continue to be used as tools for the evaluation of PsTs' professional progress. Eighty-three PsTs (71 females and 12 males) participated in this study.

The study posed two research questions:

1. What is the impact of portfolio assessment on the pre-service teachers' professional competencies?

2. What lessons are learned from the application of portfolio assessment in the Can Tho University context?

Research instruments

A qualitative methodology was applied in this study. Three main data sources were employed: classroom observations; students' reflections through questionnaire and interviews; and post-lesson discussions involving the lecturer and students. Each of the data sources is described in detail below:

- Classroom observations were considered to provide visible findings on the improvements in the professional knowledge/skills and pedagogical behavior of the student teachers. Video and voice recordings were utilized for all of the observed lessons.
- Student teachers made self-reflections on their video after their teaching through feedback based on the reflective questions contained on Google Form.
- Post-lesson discussions with the lecturer and among students stimulated a positive and collaborated attitude to professional development. These were opportunities for students to make mutual assessments and support for changes in their activities and approaches that occurred in the classroom practice.

Establishment of the process of portfolio assessment

The procedure of portfolio-based assessment is determined in the framework as follows:

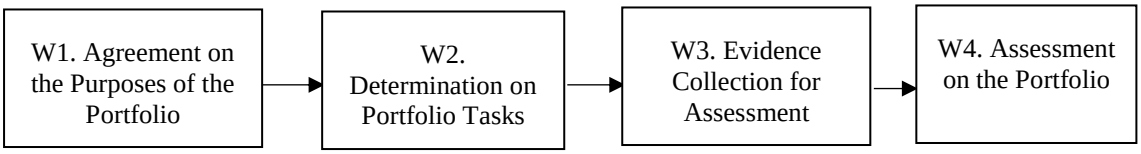

Figure 1. The procedure of portfolio-based assessment

Work 1. Agreement on the purposes of the portfolio

The instructor and the students discussed and negotiated the purposes of the portfolio assessment (Pollari, 2000) because the purposes would direct the portfolio tasks. The purposes were finally decided to assess PsTs' progress in the Science Micro-teaching in terms of Pedagogical Behaviors, Professional Knowledge and Understanding and Professional Skills as described in the evaluative scale of the syllabus. Once the purposes were agreed on, the instructor made it clear to every student what they were expected to do, how they were to do what was expected, why and for which purpose.

Work 2. Determination of portfolio tasks

The specific portfolio tasks were determined by the instructor and PsTs to identify learners' progress.

Work 3. Evidence collection for assessment through all three phases of teaching practice

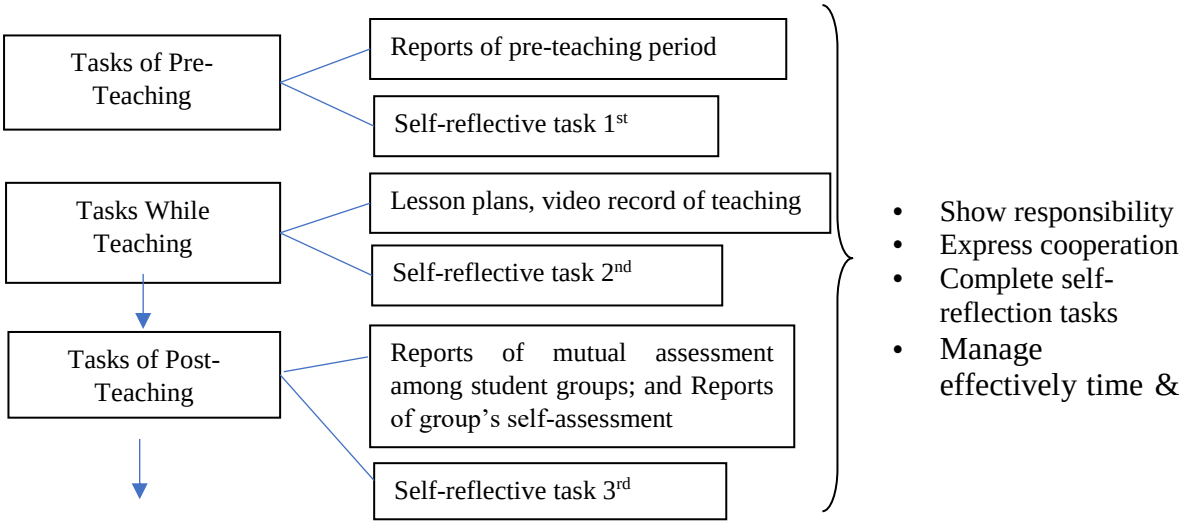

Figure 2. The evidences for portfolio assessment

Table 2. Detailed tasks of students during portfolio assessment

Tasks	The students	The instructor
Tasks of Pre-Teaching	• Made groups, suggested lessons, composed common lesson plans and practice teaching with involvement of other groups; made reports describing the process of teaching practice (noted strengths and weaknesses in teaching of each member of group).	• Contributed the ideas on the draft lesson plans; confirmed reports of teaching practice.
	• Made the first self-reflection by answering the question on Google Form: *Which strengths and weaknesses were recognized in your professional competencies through conducting portfolio tasks?*	• Gave feedback to the PsTs' first self-reflection.
Tasks while Teaching	• In turn, every member of group carried out each "excerpt" of the group's lesson plan; • Recorded video of the whole group teaching; • Other students of other groups observed, noted and gave ideas on teaching presentations; • Discussed and shared with the lecturer and students.	• Observed, noted, chaired discussion and sharing among students; gave feedback on student group teaching.
	• Made the second self-reflection on the Google Form through the question: *After completing the portfolio tasks, what were the improvements of your professional competence?*	• Gave feedback on the students' second self-reflection.
Tasks Post-Teaching	• Finished the third self-reflection on the Google Form by answering the question: *What were your issues in portfolio-based assessment?*	• Contributed feedback on the students' third self-reflection.

Table 2 describes in a detailed way the students' tasks and the instructor's corresponding feedback during portfolio assessment.

Work 4: Assessment of the portfolio

The final assessment included students' self-assessment (30%), mutual assessment among student groups (30%), and the instructor's final evaluation on the whole student's performance (40%). The grade-based assessment would automatically be transferred into an alphabet-based assessment system.

Results

The improvement of the pre-service teachers' professional competencies

Evidence of improvement of pre-service teachers' professional competencies was mainly collected from the second self-reflection that was described on the Google form:

After completing the portfolio tasks, what were the improvements in your professional competence?

The student teachers made an overall review on the progress of their professional competencies that were observed through three aspects and described by 12 dimensions (see Table 1).

The basis for students to give their self-assessment was:

- The comparison with their first-reflection *(Which strengths and weaknesses were recognized in your professional competencies through conducting portfolio tasks?).*
- Their videos that recorded the whole process of their official teaching.
- The lecturer's feedback notes that provided support for their self-reflection. The synthesis from these anchors provided the lecturer as well as the researcher with the evidence of the development in pre-service teachers' professional competence.

In respect of Pedagogical Behavior, the highest percentage of PsTs (88%) was made up by responsible attitude as opposed to the lowest (58%) one of 'manage time and workload'.

These results were consistent with previous findings:

- Keeping a portfolio increases students' responsible attitude.
- Keeping a portfolio requires responsibility because in the whole process of the portfolio assessment, PsTs shared the decision-making with the lecturer in the phases of determining the portfolio purposes, specific tasks, and criteria for assessment. When each portfolio was completed, each PsTs also took individual responsibility in self-assessment and mutual-assessment.

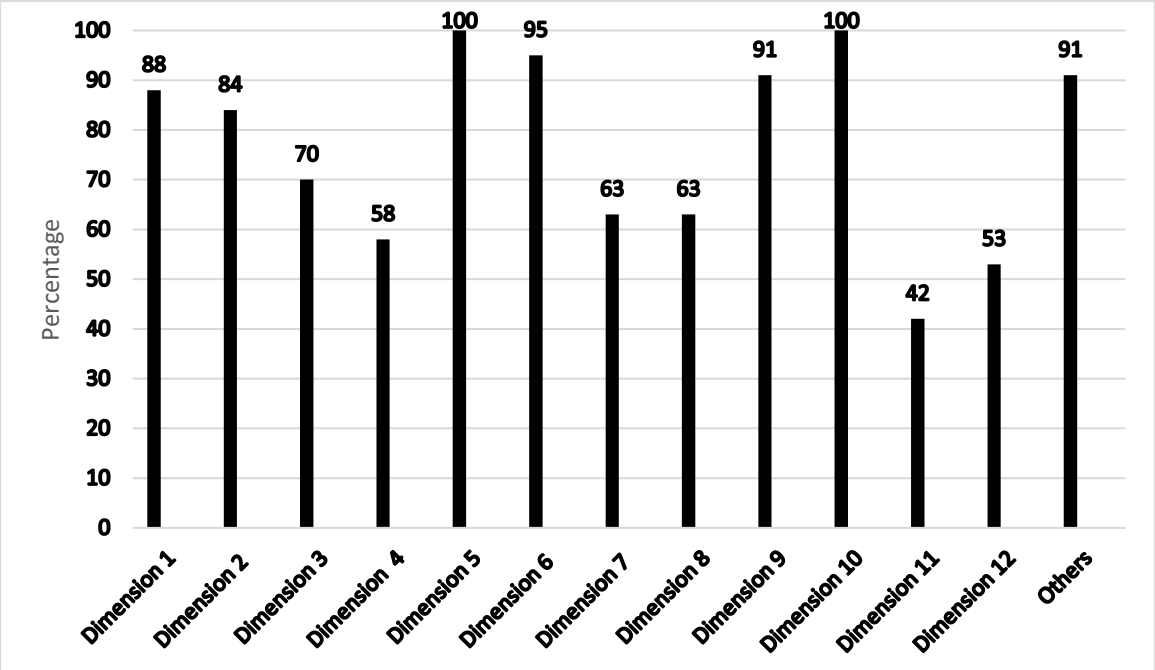

Figure 3. The progress of PsTs' professional competencies (See Table 1 for description of each dimension).

In addition, the requirement of group work contributed to building cooperation among students and helped them recognize the power of cooperation. In the process of portfolio assessment, PsTs were required to cooperate in groups for teaching practice and professional support in

Pre-teaching. They also shared work in the Official Teaching phase and shared and had discussions in groups in the Post-Teaching phase.

Furthermore, students' self-reflection was one of the most important competencies that was established through the portfolio assessment process in this study. The periodic self-reflective tasks relevant to the three teaching practice phases helped students become aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses (Delett et al, 2001). The students gained a better understanding and developed skills required for the course. They also developed learners' autonomy (Alabdelwahab, 2002; Lo, 2010). As a result they trained themselves to be more capable in self-direction.

Periodic self-reflection tasks and divided tasks of the portfolio assessment form were expected to help students to manage time and workload. The result from students' self-reflection showed that 58% of students' confirmation was given on this dimension. For further improvement in this area to occur, a weekly-schedule with detailed work should be made clear as the commitment between the instructor and PsTs.

Reviewing Professional Knowledge and Skills, the most impressive percentages fell on Dimension 5 and Dimension 10 with 100% of PsTs' confirmation.

Mastering curriculum and textbook information is one prerequisite condition for further professional development of any teacher in Vietnam. All PsTs recognized their progress in 'using a various range of teaching strategies and teaching forms'. The course of Science Teaching is characterized by requiring PsTs with knowledge and skills of using teaching methodologies and forms. The portfolio assessment required them to design, adjust and practice their lesson plans many times. After completing this course it was seen that the PsTs' competence in using flexible and various teaching methodologies was improved.

Most of PsTs self-assessed their improvement in Teaching Components and Planning and Evaluating Lessons due to the process of portfolio assessment. Group work during lesson composition, teaching practice and mutual assessment among groups brought opportunities to grasp competencies. Especially through the PsTs' self-reflection, the Others Dimension competencies developed by the PsTs included 'confidence in teaching and communication; confidence in expressing personal ideas and opinions; foreseeing and knowing how to deal with situations in class; improvement in asking good questions; controlling emotions; and becoming more enthusiastic about their careers as a primary teacher'.

Low percentages were obtained in Dimension 11 (Assessment Strategies) and Dimension 12 (Use of Technology). The assessment skill plays an important part in deciding the quality of teaching and learning. Timely and useful assessment strongly encourages pupils' progress in learning. In the same way, the quality of teaching is also seen in the teachers' competence of technology use.

Some of the self-reflections were described and coded as follows:

> *After the time period of teaching practice in groups and in class, I improved my communication skills, especially I can give a speech in a fluent and gentle way. Some weeks before, I cannot even speak fluently in front of other group members. I also improved my hand-writing, on the board and on notebooks. As a primary school teacher, one of my targets was creating good-look hand-writing (coded into Dimension 11-see Table 1).*
>
> (Student Vo Hoai Thinh-No.54).

Thanks to much teaching practice, I accumulate more experiences on planning for a lesson, composing a lesson plan, deploying various kinds of teaching methods and using information communication technologies that I used to be afraid to apply on teaching (coded into Dimension 5 and 10- see Table 1.)

(Le Bao Tram-No.46).

I now know how to work together in order to obtain efficient common results. At the same time, working in group helped me recognize how important the individual responsibility is (coded into Dimension 1 and 2.)

(Neang Panith-No.27).

In addition, student teachers also reflected on their attitudes toward portfolio-based assessment that they were involved in.

I do not consider teaching practices as a burden anymore. Working in the portfolio project helped me reduce the stress of the final examination. The tasks were assigned into smaller activities and I completed them following a schedule. I had opportunities to develop pedagogical knowledge and skills.

(Nguyen Thi Nhanh-No.30).

Through teaching practices, I loved my choice of career as a teacher, I thought I had made the right decision. I became more confident and knew how to manage the workload.

(Lam Kim Thao-No.51).

Issues arising from portfolio assessment

The first issue associated with using portfolios was time and workload management. In this study, most students also agreed that compiling portfolios took much time and effort. However, all the data the instructor collected from the field-notes and reports of students' teaching practice as well as the synthesis of PsTs' self-reflection on Google form indicated that keeping a portfolio provided opportunities for professional development rather than just being a work burden.

The data indicated that feedback and scaffolding by the instructor should be conducted periodically (weekly if possible) to foster students' involvement as well as to ensure the quality of portfolios.

The students reported that mutual-assessment among groups was an important component of the portfolio assessment since it can help students get meaningful feedback on their work and provides the social-interaction to encourage students to be task-focused. However, some mutual-assessment provided little feedback that was helpful for professional training, and in other cases some feedback was too critical. Both kinds of this discussion failed to stimulate students' involvement and enhance student's professional competencies. More training for students in terms of language expression and a constructive attitude in discussions seemed necessary for successful portfolio implementation.

Conclusion

The portfolio assessments were shown to have a strong impact on pre-service teachers' professional competence training. The students recognized they matured in terms of professional knowledge and skills as well as pedagogical behavior through every phase of their self-reflection. They became aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their professional competence. Especially, they recognized the usefulness of portfolio assessment and displayed a positive attitude toward this form of assessment.

In the role of the instructor, I received feedback on my teaching and much specific information about students' learning. This is helpful to improve the quality of my teaching and enhance the quality of teacher education programs in general.

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Give for Life: A Project-Based and Service Learning Approach to Strengthen Competencies for Nursing Students in the 21st century

Pimsupa Chandanasotthi
too19@hotmail.com

Nongnutch Chowsilpa
nongnutch@msn.com

Faculty of Nursing,
Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

Project-based learning (PBL) and service learning (SL) are innovative approaches to enhance nursing students' competencies for contributing to the social needs of society in the 21st century. PBL is a student-driven, teacher-facilitated approach to learning, while SL is an experiential approach where the students work to meet the needs of the society and the community to complete academic requirements.

The purpose of this study is to describe the successful PBL and SL experiences of undergraduate nursing students. Sixty-three first year nursing students were divided into 10 groups in the Give for Life subject. In the summer semester each group created and undertook a project which focused on the needs of the local community. For example: students were involved in projects with handicapped children; aging people in homecare and the community; patients in hospital; and a recycling project for the environment.

The students improved their communication and collaboration competencies amongst their groups, the hospital and the institute in the community. They also learned to be self-reliant through critical thinking, planning, and organizing.

The reflections of students' experiences in each project revealed that they gained a better understanding in physical and mental health, and functional needs of children, aged people, and patients.

Moreover, these competencies of creativity, communication, collaboration and compassion through project-based action and service learning can provide knowledge from real world experiences, and also improve the volunteer spirit of nursing students which is needed in the 21st century.

Introduction

Nurses of the 21st century need to be prepared for competency to meet the needs of society which is changing rapidly. Nursing academic institutes must be responsible for preparing the next generation of nurses in the real-world and assist them to become problems solvers, better researchers, and higher-order thinkers.

Project-based learning (PBL) is a learning method based on constructivism which was proposed by John Dewey (Douglas and Stack, 2010). PBL is a key strategy for creating thinkers and learners in real-life situations. Nurses also work in a multicultural society with differences in race, ethnicity, religion, historical experiences, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, socioeconomic status, geographical location, language barriers, and low literacy.

Service-learning (SL) is defined as "a structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection" (Seifer, 1998, p.274). SL is also recognized as valuable instruction involving experiential learning, reflection, and reciprocal learning where the student works to meet the needs of the community while meeting academic requirements (Brown & Schmidt, 2016; Cashman, Sarena, & Seifer, 2008). Research reveals that students' learning is enhanced through service learning where students demonstrate improved critical thinking and problem solving abilities following a service learning experience (Stallwood & Groh, 2011; Nokes, Nickitas, Kieda, & Neville, 2005).

Moreover, a student's attitudes and perceptions have been positively altered by increasing caring, leadership, and professionalism heightening sensitivity to cultural diversity (Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014; Amerson, 2010). PBL and SL enhance nursing students' competency for contributing to social needs. PBL is a student-driven, teacher-facilitated approach to learning, while SL is an experiential approach where the students work to meet the needs of the society and the community, to complete academic requirements.

SL is more than volunteerism because it links academic course work with service to the community. Community is defined in a variety of settings, including community agencies, daycare centers (pediatric and adult), schools, public health agencies, clinics and hospitals. Faculty, academic institutions, community organizations, and community members gain benefits from SL. Faculty reported stronger relationships between students and faculty and also increase satisfaction with the quality of SL (Champagne, 2006). In addition, SL has the potential to improve clients' perceptions of quality of care and behavior changes that improved health care outcomes (Reising, Allen, & Hall, 2006).

Research question

How does the project-based learning and service learning program, Give for Live, strengthen the competencies of 21st century nursing students?

Competency is described as a set of capabilities, skills, aptitudes, expertise, and experiences. The nursing education paradigm in the 21st century shifts from caring for patients to caring for people**.** The paradigm shifts from diseased-based to promoting a culture of health with multiple new roles for registered nurses working with people not patients.

Therefore, the baccalaureate nursing students require more competencies which increase in complexity from 1st year to 4th year of the nursing program. The level of competencies include: recognizing the relationship of health and illness; differentiating developmental and psychological skills; developing a collaborative plan of care; acting as an advocate for patients, families and the population; choosing effective communication techniques; synthesizing the scientific process; integrating technologies; collaborating with a community partner and interprofessional team; evaluating population health interventions; incorporating knowledge; and applying the principle of research in a practice setting. (Bouchaud, Brown, & Swan, 2017).

Objective

The purpose of this study is to describe experiences, opinions, and the competencies of undergraduate nursing students using project-based learning and service learning experiences.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted using descriptive phenomenology. Sixty-three first year nursing students were divided independently into 10 groups in the Give for Life subject. During the summer semester within 2 months each group created and carried out a project as project leader for the whole class, which focused on the needs of the local community. Subjects for projects included: handicapped children; aging people in homecare and the community; patients in hospital; recycling for the environment; collecting money for charity projects for elderly people at homecare and for handicapped children; cleaning a temple nearby university as volunteers. The research aim and information was explained to participating students. Self-reflections, project evaluations, and observations were collected during the project.

The main part of this report records students' reflections on each project according to the activities they performed, the results, and reflections on the impact of the research on themselves**.** The data was analyzed by content analysis.

Results

Nursing student characteristics: 93.65% of participants were female, average age was 19.51 years old, 98.4% used to be volunteers during attendance at high schools.

The nursing students' self-reflection revealed that they improved their communication, compassion and collaboration competencies not only within their group, but also when with elderly people at homecare, and with the disabled children institute in the community.

Communication

The communication with elderly people was improved. Nursing students felt more sympathetic and more comfortable with elderly disabled people. Students created activities that made elderly people laugh and join activities such as singing and playing games. They reflected that they feel as though these elderly people were their grandmother and they felt happy to take care of them and wanted them to feel happy too.

> *'I feel very happy to talk with the elderly people because I feel that they are my grandparents and I want to make them happy.'*
>
> (Student no. 6).

> *'… the blessing from elderly people to us after activities make me warm and proud to be the giver and the receiver happiness as the same time…'*
>
> (Student no. 39).

Students also communicated with disabled children by playing, singing and dancing. They felt happy to take care of the disabled children and gave them some gifts from their own money.

> *'I am so glad to do this project for the disable children here. They need love and care from us. My money that bought gifts for them make me happier than buy gifts for myself.*
>
> (Student no. 13).

Compassion

During the active learning via the activities of the projects, students had opportunities to listen and talk with elderly people and disabled children. These experiences touched their hearts and linked them to their families.

> *'I will not leave my grandparent to be lonely like this. If I have a chance I will be back here to make the elderly people happy.'*
>
> (Student no. 7).

> *'I cried and missed my grandmother at my hometown when I saw these elderly people. I think they must be lonely and miss their children too.'*
>
> (Student no. 3).

Collaboration

The necessity of team work amongst students developed while creating the projects. They found that the project could not be completed without collaboration amongst themselves, institutes in the community, and teachers who were facilitators and consultants for their projects.

> *'Our project of recycle waste needs co-operation from our class, so we could not finish the project by only 7 of us, then the money from selling recycle waste we will give to elderly project.'*
>
> (Student no. 18).

> *'I tried very hard to make the project success by contacting the officer of elderly homecare for asking to do activities. I'm so proud of myself and team. However, the teacher always gave me useful suggestion when I needed.'*
>
> (Student no. 47).

Creativity

They also learned to be self-reliant through critical thinking, planning, and organizing the projects appropriately with each group of people. They felt confident to work with people in different societies.

'In the beginning, I felt very shy to ask people at the evening market in front of our university for donation money for our project, then I play guitar and sing with my friends. It makes me happy and people were interested and gave more donation.'

(Student no. 9).

'When we create the games for elderly people, we need to concern about the safety because falling is very dangerous for them.'

(Student no. 50).

Conclusion

The reflections of students' experiences in each project revealed that they gained a better understanding of physical and mental health, and functional needs of children, elderly people, and patients. Moreover, these competencies of creativity, communication, compassion and collaboration through project-based action and service learning can provide knowledge from real world experiences. A volunteer spirit is needed amongst nursing students as a model for volunteer competency development in the 21st century.

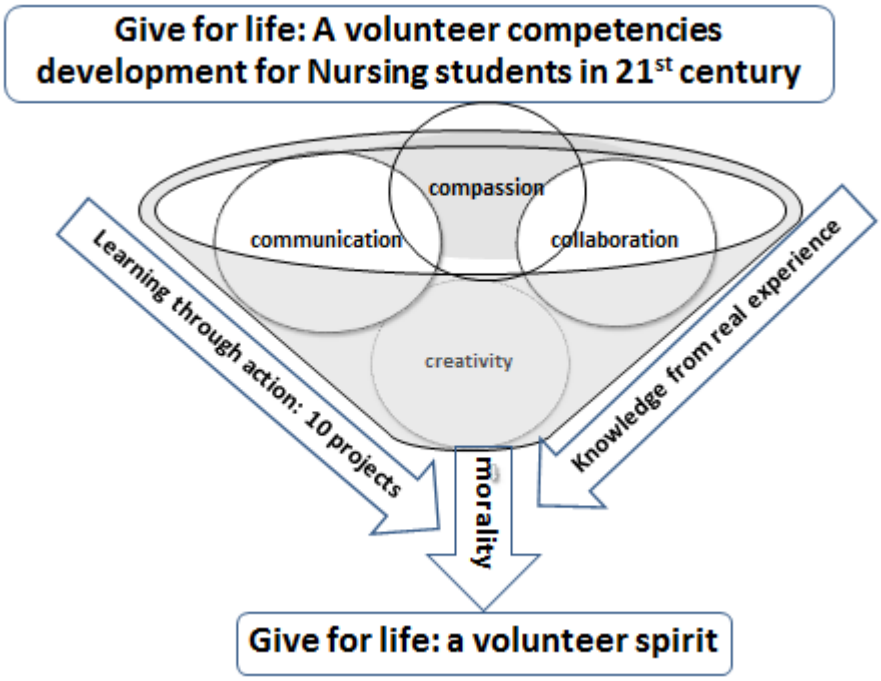

Figure 1: The model of Give for Live: A volunteer competencies development program for nursing students in the 21st century

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Small Group Teaching for Nursing Students

Wanpen Waelveerakup
wanpenw@webmail.npru.ac.th
wanpenw123@gmail.com

Faculty of Nursing,
Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

A small-group nursing teaching (SGNT) activity was developed to encourage teamwork amongst nursing students and enhance student learning by fostering critical thinking and decision-making during a practicing school health program.

A review of literature indicated that small group teaching can help students to achieve greater understanding and have longer retention of knowledge than that which is achieved through other teaching approaches (Davis, 1993; Daredia, 2015).

Eight fourth-year nursing students were assigned to practise school health at a selected secondary school for one week in July 2016. The SGNT activity consisted of three processes: building appreciation through listening; influencing others through dialogue; and developing control through action.

Teamwork was assessed by a rubric score checklist and analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics. Three focus groups and self-reflection meetings were conducted and facilitators' interactions with students were noted. Thematic content analysis was used to identify critical thinking, planning, and decision-making of the subjects.

The results showed students were able to take control of planning and make decisions about school health projects. They demonstrated critical thinking through reflection as well.

The SGNT activity proved to be an effective learning activity that promotes teamwork. The teaching process enhanced the students' confidence in participating in school health issues. All of this can be accomplished in a short amount of practicum time with high satisfaction among the nursing students. Therefore, in the future SGNT should be included as part of the method of school health practice in the faculty of nursing.

Introduction

A recent study by Kusoom and Charuwanno (2017) indicated that the traditional nursing process is a linear process and more likely suite tasks undertaken by individuals**.** The community health practicum is a different concept of nursing care which focuses on health in a whole naturalistic setting such as at home, or in a school or community.
The community health practicum is a core subject for 4th year students in the Bachelor of Nursing Science program and involves students in three different settings: community diagnosis; home care and home visiting; and school health.

The community health practicum requires student nurses to work collaboratively in teams. Previous evaluations of the practicum indicated that students had problems with working in a group, and many students only achieved moderate results. It was thought that the moderate results were due to students not being familiar with the concept of teamwork and tended not to interact when working with a group on a regular basis. Numerous nursing students indicated that they do not feel that implementing a group practicum project was beneficial to them or their learning achievement.

In the nursing practicum activities to be undertaken by the student nurses are planned by nursing instructors according to the familiar nursing process of: assessment of the patient; problem identification; planning for treatment; and evaluation of the results of treatment.

Small group teaching

Mills and Alexander (2013) define small group teaching as any teaching situation in which dialogue and collaboration within the group are integral to learning. They identify the key roles of teacher as to facilitate, to coordinate, and to inspire. For these authors small group teaching has four key strengths:

- *Flexibility*: Small group teaching encourages students to rethink and question views and positions and to find ways of weaving together their different contributions and insights, recognizing their interests and agendas.

- *Interaction*: The repeated iteration of ideas and responses occurs in group discussion. An instructor may use praise to build confidence and encourage participation and find ways of making a student feel part of the team, as well as encouraging them to look out for and support each other, and to think of themselves as being on a shared intellectual journey.

- *Reflexivity*: Instructors may praise what went well and encourage students to think carefully about what might have been done better.

- *Engagement*: Small group teaching implants creativity, passion, and enthusiasm. It should hopefully expose students to current debates and offer them an opportunity to develop their own academic capacity.

(Mills & Alexander, 2013).

Previous studies indicated that small group teaching can help students to achieve greater understanding and that students can retain their new learning longer than through other teaching approaches (Davis, 1993; Daredia, 2015). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, William E. Smith developed an Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC) model which was designed to break the patterns of ‘top-down’ planning by emphasizing the value of small, heterogeneous groups. Small groups allow for interaction and learning among people who tend not to interact in daily life. Small groups open participants to new ideas and different perspectives.

Appreciation, influence and control

In this study, Appreciation, Influence and Control (AIC) was used as a method in teamwork building to encourage students’ power and cooperation on working together. AIC is designed

to provide individuals with a greater awareness of their power sources. The main concepts of AIC activities are focused on building appreciation through listening, influencing through dialogue, and action (World Bank Controlling through Participation Sourcebook, 1996).

Research question

How does small-group nursing teaching (SGNT) affect nursing students in teamwork, critical thinking skills, and decision-making?

Research design

This study used an action research approach utilising quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and about their right to withdraw from the focus group and self-reflection meetings at any time without any penalties.

Process of action

First step

Each student was assigned to review the health status of the school and make suggestions about actions that should be implemented. These suggestions were shared with other members of the group. The instructor required each student to listen to each idea carefully and share only beneficial and positive strategies for improving school health status.

After the first group discussions, the students assessed the current health status of the school by collecting data on the school students' weight, height, visual acuity and a general physical well-being for detecting some common diseases such as dermatitis, dental carries or hygiene-related diseases.

Finally, secondary school students were asked to complete a questionnaire that was developed and proposed by the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand. The questionnaire asked them about food consumption, exercise, happiness, and road traffic behaviors. After that nursing students were asked to identify the existing health problems, the likelihood of future health problems and traffic risk behaviors.

Second step

The second group process was aimed to praise and build up the confidence of the nursing students about working in a cohesive team. This step encouraged them to look out for and support each other, and to think about the shared ideas from the first step. They were then required to use the school health problems that were identified and make a plan according to data analysis from the first step. The school health activities were formulated by students themselves, and a sense of belonging and ownership among students was created through dialogue. This step was facilitated by the instructor.

Third step

After reflecting on the plan with the instructor, the students adjusted their plans based on feedback. The instructor facilitated the students to undertake a task and provided the opportunity for each student to present and discuss their action.

The nursing instructor evaluated participants' impressions and opened the third group discussion about the nursing process of practicum and provided feedback on how the planned projects could be implemented and evaluated. Finally**,** three focus group and self-reflection sessions were conducted.

Data collection

Teamwork was assessed by a rubric score checklist. The checklist included 5 questions representing 5 levels of teamwork skill as shown in the following example:

Skill	**Scoring criteria (gradation)**				
Ability to work as part of a team.	**1 Attempted**	**2 Limited**	**3 Acceptable**	**4 Clearly skill**	**5 Proficient**
					Leadership
				Fellowship	Fellowship
			Cooperation	Cooperation	Cooperation
		Coordination	Coordination	Coordination	Coordination
	Responsibility	Responsibility	Responsibility	Responsibility	Responsibility

Each ability was assigned a score of 1 for each item given a positive check, and a weight of 2 for the gradation level. A high score indicated a high level of teamwork skill.
Focus group assessment was undertaken through content analysis and a conference performance checklist was done with items as follows:

Conference performance	**Yes**	**No**	**Score**
1. Is she a good group member? • Speak out • Listening			
2. Does she have a positive relationship with others? • Insinuate • Friendly			
3. Does she communicate well? • Clear • Verification			
4. Can she make a decision? • Considers possible alternatives • Identifies the best alternative			
5. Does she display good encouragement? • Considerate • Empathy			

Each performance assigned was awarded a score of 1 if the item was positively checked. A high score indicated a high level of participation performance.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. Thematic content analysis was used to evaluate students' critical thinking and decision-making abilities.

Results and discussion

Characteristics of the students

All participants were female with a mean age of 22.37 years. More than half of them had a grade point average less than 3.25.

Measures of teamwork

After implementation, the result showed that the mean of teamwork scores were 8.25 out of 10. The minimum score was 6 and the maximum score was 10.

The mean score of conference performance as measured on the checklist was 8.25 out of 10. Most participants scored 9.

Table 1. The mean and standard deviation of participants' teamwork score and conference performance score for each participant.

Participants	Teamwork scores	Conference performance score
No. 1	8	7
No. 2	8	9
No. 3	8	9
No. 4	10	9
No. 5	8	8
No. 6	8	9
No. 7	10	8
No. 8	6	7
Mean	**8.25**	**8.25**
SD	**0.70**	**1.28**

It was found that participants performed at a high level in teamwork and at a high level in participating during group discussions. Moreover, they provided positive perceptions about teamwork as seen in the following quotes:

> *I didn't like to work in a group. It seems to be waste a lot of time to meet and talk but no conclusion for practicing. … However, after this school health practicum, I feel like a group process is a core tool to help us complete our assigned tasks. I feel so proud of our group projects … the solutions come from the ideas of our group members …*
>
> (Student in third group discussion).
>
> *My self-confidence is more improved. I feel like everyone has their own knowledge and also good ideas, and me too. I think maybe it occurred when we had a chance to talk and listen to each other.*
>
> (Student in third group discussion).

Critical thinking skills and decision-making

The application of the AIC process in small group teaching activities was able to facilitate active participation. The nursing students reflected on their critical thinking by conducting an analysis, critique, and evaluation of information from screening activities. They drew up their plans for promoting secondary students' health and good health behaviors through the three steps in the projects.

The results from a pre-test and a post-test showed that the secondary school students' knowledge, awareness, and health promotion practicing skills improved. All participants demonstrated their critical thinking on the process of practice: assess, identify school health problems, plan, implement, and evaluate projects. The group was able to take control of their planning and decision making on the school health project. They demonstrated critical thinking through reflection, as some participants stated:

> *We had difficulties making a decision about the health issue for implementation. Data analysis from rapid health screening and administrative questionnaires showed nutrition problems such obesity and malnutrition. When we talked with school teachers and administrators and the community nurse we found they would like us to implement teenage pregnancy prevention but our questionnaires do not reflect this problem …. Finally, after group process, we decided to put sex education into our projects for unplanned pregnancy prevention. Our group's reasoning for the change was to address an issue which was the concern of school stakeholders.*
>
> (Student in second group discussion).

> *We have to search and research, read and reread again and again before selection pre and post items for assessing school students ... Some items provided by previous research did not follow our objectives. So we needed to discuss and make our own items.*
>
> (Student in third group discussion).

The research findings supported the conclusion that the nursing students' teamwork ability and critical thinking skills were enhanced during practising school health. Group processes using AIC affected students' performances in both critical thinking and the decision-making process. Furthermore, the group process promoted participants' teamwork ability and participation in subjects within a short period of time.

Learning achievement

The 8 students who participated in the action research had high learning achievement. Six students got grade A and two got grade B^{+}.

Teaching satisfaction

It was found that the students were highly satisfied with the teaching process awarding a score of 4.8 out of 5.

Conclusion

The SGNT activity proved to be an effective learning activity that promoted teamwork. The teaching process enhanced nursing students' confidence in school health practice. All of this can be accomplished in a short amount of practicum time with a very high level of satisfaction. Therefore, the SGNT should be part of the method of school health practising in the faculty of nursing in the future.

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Increasing Learning Engagement Behaviors through Small Group Co-operation

Supanee Injun
supanee_injun@hotmail.com
Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, Thailand

Rungsun Injun
Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University, Thailand

Abstract

A small group learning study was carried out to increase learning engagement behaviors of a section of university students. In several sections of students it had been noted by many lecturers that their learning engagement was deficient, and their attendance and participation was very low. Most of them paid little interest in the course and usually misbehaved in classes.

The researcher, after a short period of observation and consultation with other lecturers came to the conclusion that the students' learning engagement might be raised by using small group learning techniques. A section of these students was approached for their participation in this study. They were then voluntarily grouped into 6-7 students and a leader was elected for assessing behaviors of all members in the group.

The assessment was done twice: before and after the small group activities. These two sets of data were analyzed and indicated that the behavior of most of the students changed significantly towards the desired direction.

Currently, the researcher conducts small group learning activities in all classes and several lecturers have agreed to allocate at least 20 minutes for small group learning/reinforcing activities.

Introduction

This research aimed to raise learning engagement of students in the Faculty of Management Science at Rajabhat Nakhon Pathom University, Thailand. Several sections of students have been observed by many lecturers to be lacking in learning engagement. Their achievement was relative low and their behavior in classes was unsatisfactory. Most of the students rarely completed a single assignment. They often chatted either verbally or virtually with their friends during classes. Cheating was frequently observed during in-class exercises and tests. This situation was upsetting to all parties: the lecturers, the administration, and the students and their families.

Based on their tendency to link with friends and collaborative activities mentioned above, even unrelated to the lesson, the researcher believed that there could be a solution by utilizing group co-operation. There is some evidence that Thais are socially tied: an international survey observed that Thai culture was a highly collectivist society. This type of society fostered strong relationships where everyone took responsibility for fellow members of their group to solve

problems or create a product (Hofstede, 2018). Hence it was decided that a collaborative approach could prove promising for Thai students to overcome their lack of learning engagement.

Initially, this experiment was intended to enrich the social skills and bonds among students; they would gain through small group activities by developing teamwork competencies, a significant attribute for work life.

It was hoped that the findings from this study would identify effective small group teaching techniques that could decrease the undesirable behaviors of the students whose learning motivation was relatively low. Lecturers, who normally employ the typical lecture for large number of students, would have another choice of teaching technique to produce more rewarding classes.

Review of literature

Student engagement

Student engagement is comprised of components and outcomes:

> *Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.*
>
> (Trowler, 2010).

However, many authors contend that there is no single correct definition of student engagement (Bryson, 2014; Dunne & Owen, 2013) and there are terms with overlapping meanings: motivation, attention, interest, effort, enthusiasm, and participation (Marzano & Pickering, 2010). Zepke (2016) reviewed a large number of definitions of student engagement from different perspectives and attested that the meaning differed by culture and time.

Generally, factors affecting students' engagement are categorized into two parts: environmental, and internal (Li & Wang, 2012; Middaugh, 2011). That means both students and the institutions have to invest effort to instigate student engagement. For the students' part, a number and category of factors that significantly affect their engagement have been identified differently: for example, from two factors (Yueh-Luen & Ching, 2012), seven factors (Jensen, 2013), to nine factors (Bryson, 2014). However, all of those models contain the factor of 'people' or relationships among groups on campus (Middaugh, 2011; Yueh-Luen & Ching, 2012; Jensen, 2013; Bryson, 2014). Thus this experiment focused on the co-operation of people, specifically the students.

Components of co-operative learning

Co-operative learning is briefly defined as an instructional method in which students work in small groups toward a common academic goal (Gokhale, 1995; USAID Cambodia, 2009; Cottell, 2012). This technique uses a student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy (Li & Lam, 2013). According to David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota, co-operative learning involves teams of students with positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, inter-personal skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Currently, the term ‘collaboration’ seems to have displaced the more traditional term ‘cooperation’ (Roselli, 2016). Collaborative learning appears to be an ‘umbrella term’ covering the educational approaches that embrace ‘joint intellectual effort’ (Goodsell, Maher, Tinto, Smith, & MacGregor, 1992). However, a difference between these two terms has been observed: collaborative learning is appropriate for learning through loose dialogue and collaboration (Mills & Alexander, 2013), while co-operative learning focuses on small groups of students learning through structured activities and the division of functions (Roselli, 2016).

Merits of small group co-operative learning

Co-operative learning is a very cost-effective instructional procedure (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). This learning technique increases desirable behaviors and decreases undesirable behaviors (Storey & Post, 2017) and reduces anti-social behavior of adolescents (Eskay, 2012). Small group learning, which is best for co-operative learning, can move the learners beyond the recall and recognition of concepts (Jeffries & Huggett, 2010). Co-operative learning is congruent with various cultural practices and is ideal for cultures that tend to be communal (Fallon & Brown, 2010).

Group size for co-operative learning

How ‘small’ is ideal for small group learning? The practical number for this teaching technique has been suggested by several authors: 2-3 or 4 (Johnson & Johnson, 1986); 4 or 5 (Sydney School of Education and Social Work, 2018), 8 to 10 (Meo, 2013), not bigger than 10 (Surgenor, 2010). The biggest number is 10 to 50 depending on the nature of task (Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo, 2012), the learners’ diversity (Sydney School of Education and Social Work, 2018), and the cultural context (Edmunds & Brown, 2010). The group of 6-8 students was most frequently mentioned (Mills & Alexander, 2013; Edmunds & Brown, 2010).

Behavioral indicators of learning engagement

Recently Frederick and McColsky (2012) reviewed a large number of studies on the tools for measuring learning engagement and rearranged the construct into three aspects: Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive. Examples of constructs that are promotive and disruptive to learning engagement have been asserted (Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999; Skinner & Furrer, 2008; Knepp, 2012; Mandernach, 2015; Eberly Center Carnegie Mellon University, 2016). Based on the constraints of data collection, only eight indicators of engagement behaviors were included; four desirable and four undesirable behaviors, because these behaviors were observable and factually-oriented.

Methodological approach

The process of this experiment was adapted from the model recommended by the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University (Brame & Biel, 2015). The procedure of this experiment was arranged into four consecutive stages: Group preparation, Classroom activities, Assessment, and Feedback. Figure 1. shows the conceptual framework of this experiment.

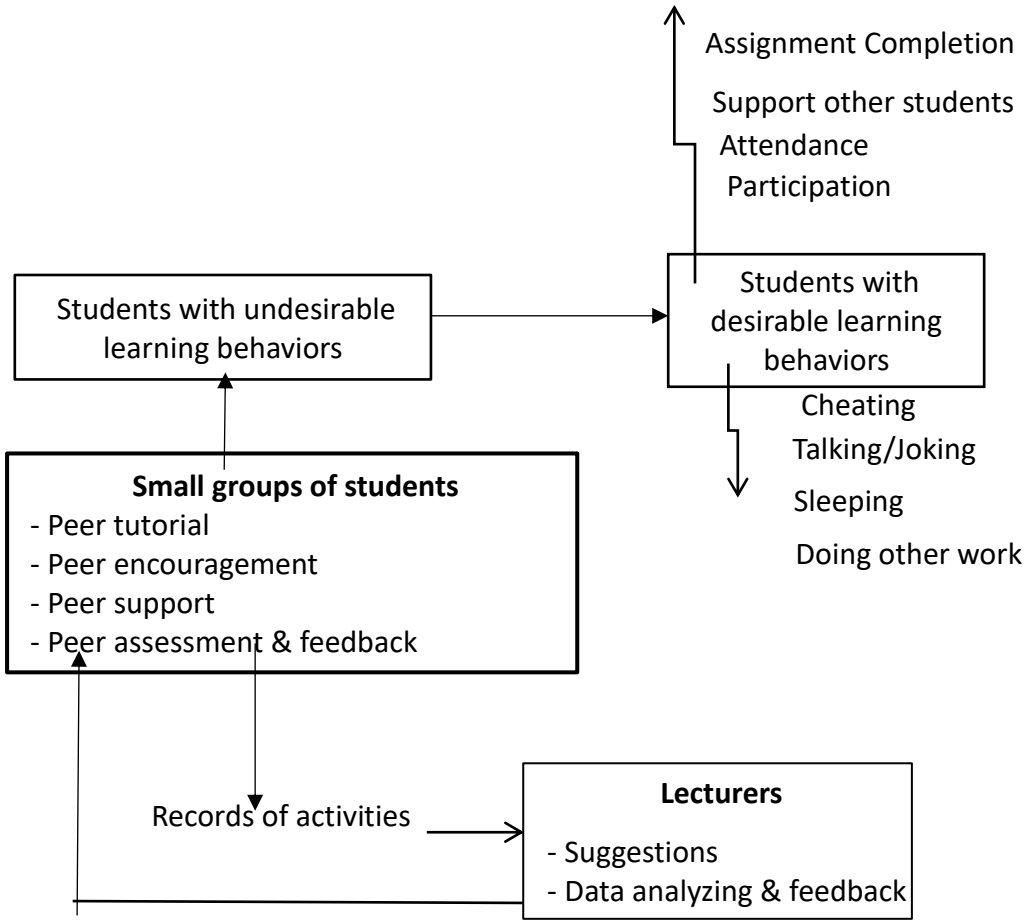

Figure 1. The experimental framework

Group Preparation

The researcher had observed that in any group of students there normally existed a number of 'good' students, even if the majority might be considered the 'bad' and the 'ugly'. It was considered that these 'good' students were latently admired by the other students. The researcher chose the class with the relatively biggest number of students who worked hard and consistently.

The students participating in this experiment were in their second year, enrolled in General Accounting. There were 43 students; grouped into 6 groups of 6 students and 1 group of 7 students (Mills & Alexander, 2013). Group leaders were elected and were trained to check the behavior list developed to assess the individual members of each of the groups. It was noted that the small group leaders were the 'good' students, as expected.

The planned small group activities did not start until the fifth class in order to collect data prior to the commencement of the study. Records from the 5th class to the 12th class were accumulated as the post-experiment data.

Class activities

Prior to this study the main learning mode was the typical lecture. At the beginning this study, the students gathered into their designated groups, the lecturer briefly reminded the class of the group activities and presented a lecture in the same typical style as usual. What was new was that the lecturer would pause for a few seconds from time to time for the students to discuss and exchange perspectives on the topic together. At the end of the lecturing, about 20-30 minutes was scheduled for a written exercise, after which the appropriate response to the exercise was explained. Time was also provided for the leaders to check the behavior lists and handed to the lecturer immediately after the class.

Assessment

The tool for assessment was a 3-level rating scale: 'Often', 'Seldom', and 'Never' for the following behaviors.

Desirable behaviors:

- Complete and hand-in assignment on time
- Come to class on time
- Participate in group discussion related to the course before or after class
- Support others on learning during class

Undesirable behaviors:

- Cheat on the assignment
- Talk/joke with friends during the class, not related to the course
- Sleep during class
- Doing other work in this class

The leaders completed the checklist for all members in their group during the 4th week as the pre-experiment data. This checklist would be completed again on the 12^{tth} week as the source of post-experiment data. These data were compared using McNemar test for significance of the changes (Hirsch, 2016) where:

$$X^2 = \frac{(ABS(A-D)-1)^2}{A+D}$$

A= Number of students who changed behavior from desirable to undesirable.
B= Number of students with desirable behavior and did not change.
C= Number of students with undesirable behavior and did not change.
D= Number of students who changed behavior from undesirable to desirable.
The researcher kept in mind that the students might perform differently just because they felt they were specially treated, as in the concept of the Hawthorne Effect (Cook, 1962; Feist & Gorman, 2013).

Feedback

Starting from the 6th class, feedback from both the lecturer and the students was delivered at the start of the class. The lecturer would briefly inform the students of their performance in their last class, mentioning their successes together with suggestions for improvements. The students would respond to the comments and share their opinions.

Findings

Pre-experiment data were compared to the post-experiment data to identify the differences between the numbers of students exhibiting the behaviors, using McNenemar Test at the significance level .01. The analyses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of changes for the desirable and undesirable behaviors

Behavior	**Number of Students**		**Chi-square Value** $X^2_{.01,1} = 2.71$
	Seldom	**Often**	
Desirable behaviors			
1. Complete and hand-in assignment on time.			
Often	1**	8	21.33*
Seldom/Never	8	26	
2. Come to class on time.			
Often	2	19	4.08*
Seldom/Never	12	10	
3. Participate in group discussion before and after class.			
Often	7	9	0.063
Seldom/Never	18	9	
4. Support others in learning during class.			
Often	2	5	24.74*
Seldom/Never	4	32	
Undesirable behaviors			
5. Cheat on the assignment.			
Seldom/Never	1**	9	22.32*
Often	6	27	
6. Talk/Joke with friends during the class, not related to the course			
Seldom/Never	1**	2	29.26*
Often	6	34	
7. Sleep during class.			
Seldom/Never	1**	7	28.26*
Often	2	33	
8. Doing other work in this class			
Seldom/Never	1**	4	24.30*
Often	8	29	

* The change is statistically significant.
** Actual value is 0. This is to replace 0 to enable the calculation.

The changes between the pre-scores and the post-scores in this study confirmed the merits of small group co-operative learning (Jeffries & Huggett, 2010; Eskay, 2012; Storey & Post, 2017). Almost all the students with undesirable behaviors had changed remarkably. Only for one observed behavior, Discussion before or after the class, were the changes not statistically significant. The technique of group co-operative appeared to be suitable for the culture of these students (Fallon & Brown, 2010).

The results of this experiment should be treated cautiously. Beside the small group co-operative activities, there certainly were extraneous variables affecting the behaviors of the students which were beyond the control of the researcher. This is frequently the case in studies involving human subjects in 'real' situations. The researcher also had concerns about whether the Hawthorne Effect had added any weight to these results.

Conclusion and applications

Co-operative learning activities increased the number of students with desirable behaviors, and the number of students with undesirable behaviors decreased. The merits of co-operative learning were confirmed by the results of this experiment. Co-operative learning appeared to be suitable in this social-oriented culture society.

Currently, the researcher employs small group learning techniques in all classes and several other lecturers have agreed to allocate at least 20 minutes for small group learning/reinforcing activities in each of their lessons. Small group activities for learning are recommended for the lecturers who wish to strengthen their students' engagement.

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Improving Form Four Students' Results in Chemistry Using an Innovative Project

April Tan Cheng Im
chengim_tan@yahoo.com
Teacher Training Institute, TuankuBainun Campus, Penang, Malaysia

Ritha a/p Palayah @Kuriaya
rithapalayah@yahoo.com
Mengkuang National Secondary School, Bukit Mertajam, Penang, Malaysia

Abstract

In Malaysia, the *SijilPelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* or the Malaysian Certificate of Education, is a national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students. It is the public examination before the entry into tertiary level education. Chemistry is one of the subjects for the science stream students in the *SPM* examination.

This action research study was carried out at one secondary school in Penang. Among the 25 students from Form 4 Science class, 6 of them obtained a D in their Chemistry trial examination. An investigation carried out showed that these students were unable to answer the question regarding the topic 'salt'. They did not understand the concept on analysis of 'cations' and 'anions'. To help them solve this problem before they entered Form 5, an innovative project was carried out 2 - 3 times per week until the students had fully understood the concept of 'salt'. Post-test results showed that there was a significant improvement in these students' performance.

Introduction

Today's students are basically different than those of even a decade ago. They were born into a world liberated by technology, therefore it is no wonder that many students have little patience for the normal school environment with its structure and reliance on teacher-directed instruction. This is one of the challenges faced by school teachers today who are encouraged to investigate their teaching practices and continue to develop themselves in order to improve their professional practices.

Literature review

In Malaysia, science is introduced into the curriculum during lower secondary school (Forms 1, 2 and 3). When the students enter the upper secondary school (Forms 4 and 5), students in the Science stream will learn chemistry, biology and physics in separate classes. One of the aims of the Chemistry curriculum for the secondary school students is to provide students with the knowledge and skills in science and technology in the context of natural phenomena and everyday life experiences. Another aim is to enable students to solve problems and make decisions in everyday life based on scientific attitudes and noble values. The curriculum also emphasizes the inter-dependence among living things and the management of nature for survival of mankind.

In addition, Chemistry is also important to create awareness of the need to love and care for the environment and play an active role in its preservation and conservation for future communities (Curriculum Development Centre, 2005). Chemistry is important because it is a big part of life and everyone should know the basic concepts.

It has been observed that a lot of students nowadays are losing interest in science subjects such as Chemistry. The students dislike science because of the amount of information they have to learn as well as the amount of time spent in writing during science classes (Pollard & Triggs, 2000; Ward et al., 2005). Chemistry had been regarded as a difficult subject for young students by Chemistry teachers, researchers, and educators (Pollard & Triggs, 2000; Ward et.al., 2005). According to Jegede (2007) and Edomwonyi-otu and Avaa (2011), a lot of students said that Chemistry is too complex for them to learn in a short time.

The Form 4 Chemistry syllabus in Malaysia requires the students to master nine chapters of the textbook before their examination. This issue is challenging to both students and teachers. The teachers need to arrange extra classes to teach and make the students fully understand the concepts of Chemistry. Students who really want to learn will have little problem grasping the concepts. However, weak students will find Chemistry very dull and challenging. To help students to have a more positive attitude to learning Chemistry, people around them, especially the teachers, have to engage more with the processes and the procedures of students' learning. When students are motivated and interested to learn they may continue to learn.

Games activities in teaching Chemistry

Students are expected to learn both concepts and skills in Chemistry classes. Students might have problems in understanding some of the concepts because certain concepts are abstract and difficult. In addition, the traditional teaching methods might not be motivating. To encourage and help students' learning, teachers need to be more innovative and try different strategies. One teaching strategy, 'games' has been found to be useful. Games in Chemistry are activities with 'play' situations, which are designed particularly for the learning or reinforcement of some concepts/skills, as well as for cultivating some positive attitudes among the students, including the appreciation of Chemistry (Goh & Chia, 2009).

As Piaget (1962) pointed out informal games played by young children are a critical component in their social and intellectual development. Some games could act in a similar fashion on older children, or even adults. Games could motivate students' learning, increase students' critical thinking and decision-making skills. Games could also encourage students to utilize the knowledge learned in an active manner, help students relate information to everyday situations, and enhance students' retention of what they have learnt.

In general, games for Chemistry teaching such as card games are mainly designed for teaching key facts, concepts and for motivating students. Such games provide opportunity for 'drill and practice' for the learner to reinforce the concept. Games are potent learning tools designed to challenge students to learn as they compete, socialize, and have fun. It is believed that as a science teaching strategy, games will have a role to play in the teaching of Chemistry.

Research objective

The objective of this research was to use innovative learning activities that could help students understand the concept of 'salt' in Chemistry.

Research procedure

Before any actions were taken, surveys were undertaken to understand and explore the problems faced by the students in learning Chemistry, especially those students who got a D in their trial examination. Students' *SPM* trial examination results were analysed, and students were interviewed to find out the problems faced. A pre-test (Appendix 1) was administered to identify the extent of the understanding of 'salt' for this group of students.

Research participants

This research involved Form 4 students. Among 25 students in the class, six of them received a D in their Chemistry trial examination. An investigation showed that these six students were unable to answer the question regarding the topic 'salt'. The main reason was these students did not understand the concept of 'cations' and 'anions', and they did not pay much attention during Chemistry classes because to them Chemistry was a dull subject. In addition, these students assumed that Form 4 was only a transition year before they entered Form 5. These students normally memorize the notes and questions without understanding the concept. If the format of the examination changed, the students would not be able to answer the examination questions.

Pre-test results

Pre-test results showed that six students' achievement based on their understanding about 'salt' was between 2 to 5 out of 20 marks, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Pre-test results

Student	Marks (Total 20)
1	5
2	4
3	4
4	4
5	2
6	2

After conducting the pre-test actions were taken to help the students understand the concept of 'salt' better.

Implementation of actions

Various activities were planned and carried out to help the students have a better understanding of the topic 'salt'. Table 2. shows the research activities.

Table 2: Activities and date

Index	Activity	Date
1	Identify students and their learning problems.	4 October 2015
2	Collect information about the students.	10 October 2015
3	Activity 1.	12 October 2015
4	Reflection on activity 1.	13 October 2015
5	Activity 2.	19 October 2015
6	Reflection on activity 2.	20 October 2015
7	Activity 3.	26 October 2015
8	Reflection on activity 3.	27 October 2015

Action 1

The first action was to understand the composition of 'cations' and ‘anions’. In this activity, students learn the techniques to understand the composition of cations and anions in a simple way.

There are nine cations that students have to know in this topic. The teacher divided the cations into three groups. The first group contains 5 cations which are white in colour. Second group contains coloured cations, and the third group is a cation which does not react with the reagent. The reagents used to identify the cations were sodium hydroxide solution and ammonia solutions. When these solutions (reagent) are used separately to test the cations, from the observation of colour change and with the help of simplified tables (3, 4 and 5) students will be able to identify the presence of a cation in a solution.

Cations were divided into three groups and numbered "531". Each number was the sum of cations contained in the group. Then all the cations were summarized in a table for students’ as shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Salt Garden Cation “5”

Cation	**Sodium hydroxide solution**	**Excess sodium hydroxide solution**	**Ammonia solution**	**Excess ammonia solution**
Zn^{2+}	White precipitate	White precipitate dissolve	White precipitate	White precipitate dissolve
Pb^{2+}	White precipitate	White precipitate dissolve	White precipitate	White precipitate
Mg^{2+}	White precipitate	White precipitate	White precipitate	White precipitate
Ca^{2+}	White precipitate	White precipitate	No reaction	No reaction

Table 4: Salt Garden Cation “3”

Cation	**Cation**	**Sodium hydroxide solution**	**Excess sodium hydroxide solution**	**Ammonia solution**
Cu^{2+}	Blue precipitate	Blue precipitate	Blue precipitate	Blue precipitate dissolve to form dark blue solution
Fe^{2+}	Green precipitate	Green precipitate	Green precipitate	Green precipitate
Fe^{3+}	Brown precipitate	Brown precipitate	Brown precipitate	Brown precipitate

Table 5: Salt Garden Cation “1”

Cation	**Cation**	**Sodium hydroxide solution**	**Excess sodium hydroxide solution**	**Ammonia solution**
NH_4^+	No reaction	No reaction	No reaction	No reaction

The summary of five types of chemical reactions when sodium hydroxide solution or ammonia solution was added to a solution containing the cation is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Salt Garden Cation "531"

Cation	Cation	Sodium hydroxide solution	Excess sodium hydroxide solution	Ammonia solution
White Salt				
Zn^{2+}	X	/	X	/
Al^{3+}	X	/	X	X
Pb^{2+}	X	/	X	X
Mg^{2+}	X	X	X	X
Ca^{2+}	X	X	-	-
Color Salt				
Cu^{2+}	X	X	X	
Fe^{2+}	X	X	X	X
Fe^{3+}	X	X	X	X
No reaction				
NH_4^+	-	-	-	-

Note: X: Precipitate; /: Precipitate dissolve; -: No reaction

After that the salt anion was divided into 4 groups and numbered "1223". This means each number indicated the amount of reagent to be added to identify the present of anion in a saline as shown in Table 7. Teaching and learning was carried out with a power point presentation.

Table 7: Salt Garden Anion "1223"

Anion	Confirmatory test	Observation
CO_3^{2-}	Add excess acid (any acid)	Lime water turned chalky
Cl^-	1. Add excess acid (nitric acid) 2. Then silver nitrate solution	White precipitate
SO_4^{2-}	1. Add excess acid (nitric acid) 2. Then barium chloride solution	White precipitate
NO_3-	1. Add dilute sulphuric acid 2. Then iron (II) sulphate. Shake the solution 3. Drop concentrated sulphuric acid (drop along the test tube wall)	Brown ring forms

Table 7 is used to identify the presents of anions in a solution.

This table is simplified for students to test the present of anions in a solution.

- To test the first anion only one acid is used to get the result.
- To test the second anion only two solutions are needed the first of which is acid followed by silver nitrate solution.
- To test the third anion also two solutions are used (acid and barium chloride solution).
- To test the fourth anion three solutions are needed (sulfuric acid, iron (II) sulfate solution and concentrated sulfuric acid). Students remember this as 3S reagent.

By using the simplified table for cation and anion students were able to answer the questions to score good marks for this topic.

Reflection on action 1:

After the explanation to the students using a power point presentation, students were able to understand how to easily identify the cations and anions in salt. Students were also aware that they need to understand the basic concepts of salt.

Action 2: Innovation project and puzzle game

The students were taken to the laboratory to participate in the chemical puzzle game (Appendix 2). It was expected that through this activity, students would understand more clearly when they performed hands-on activities. The hands-on activity and the puzzle game helped students remember what they had learned and helped them answer questions posed to them.

Reflection on action 2:

All the students were able to answer all the questions. This showed that the hands-on activity and the puzzle game allow the students to understand the concepts in chemistry.

Action 3: Answer previous SPM year questions

Students were given practice in answering questions on the topic of 'salt' from previous SPM examinations. Students were exposed to structured questions, essays and laboratory reports.

Reflection on activity 3:

Students responded immediately to the structured questions, essays in SPM Chemistry Paper 2, and laboratory reports which were usually part of SPM Chemistry Paper 3.

Post-test results

Post-test results showed the target groups had mastered the topic. Table 8 shows the students' improved performance.

Table 8: Post-test results

Student	Marks/20
1	16
2	18
3	18
4	16
5	18
6	15

Overall reflection

Table 9 shows the pre-test and post-test scores of the students. Post-test results showed a remarkable improvement. The activities carried out helped the students to understand 'salt'. I was very happy because the students can understand the topics they studied. I was excited to

continue my teaching of Chemistry and would like to have another new innovative project to help all students in their studies.

Table 9: Students' achievement in pre-test and post-test

Student	Pre-test result	Post-test result
1	5	16
2	4	18
3	4	18
4	4	16
5	2	18
6	2	15

Suggestions for further research

Based on the results, we found that the hands-on activity was very effective for students to learn Chemistry. We would suggest that chemistry teachers should use innovative methods as alternative methods to teach, especially to those students who learn Chemistry mainly by memorization only. In addition, teachers should conduct action research to improve their teaching strategies and teaching methods.

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Appendix 1

Pre-test questions

1. (i) Lead (II) iodide is one example of an insoluble salt. Plan a series of tests that will allow you to identify salt, lead(II) nitrate. [6 marks].

1. (ii) The following is list of salt, classify the salt given into soluble salt and insoluble salt. [4marks].

Copper (II) sulphate	Magnesium chloride
Silver nitrate	Potassium carbonate

2. The table below shows observations from the tests carried out on salt X

Test	Observation
I: Heating of salt X solid.	A metal oxide is formed and a brown gas is given off.
II: Salt X solution is mixed with excess aqueous ammonia.	A white precipitate insoluble in excess aqueous ammonia is formed.

Based on the above information,

(i) Identify the anion which is presented in Test I and describe a chemical test to verify the anoin. [4 marks].

(ii) Identify **two** cations which are presented in Test II and describe a chemical test to verify the cations. [6 marks].

Appendix 2

Puzzle Game 1

Cation 531 Garden
Name:_____ Date:_____

Information	Name/symbol of cation
Please go to house No. 1 Lorong 5, Tmn Cation 531.Open the door, Who am I? I am …….	
We are twins. I stay at house No 2 and my twins stay at No.3 Lorong 5, Tmn Cation 531. Open the door. Do you know us? We are ……	
Hello, walk along Lorong 5, Tmn Cation 531, I live at house No. 4. Come in. Do you recognize me? I am ……	
Hi! Welcome. Can you send me to house no 5, Tmn Cation 531.Thank you. See you again. I am …….	
Oh! Oh! Oh! I only remember Lrg 3, Taman Cation. My house number is ????? I forgot the house number. Please send me home. People call me MR blue. Thankyou. I am …….	
Hello! People like me, because I make photosynthesis and give oxygen to them. Do you know my house number at Tmn Cation? I am ……	
Acid rain cause me to rust. I am the owner of that house. Please send me home. I am ……	
I am old and weak. I can't react. I stay alone. Send me to my house. Thank you. I am …….	

Effects of an Advance Organizer on Learning Basic Scratch 2.0

Ahmad Jihadi bin Abu Samah
jihadi07@gmail.com

Siti Fatimah binti Anuar
sf.hudmam7977@gmail.com

Teacher Education Institute, Tuanku Bainun Campus, 14000 Bukit Mertajam, Penang, Malaysia

Abstract

Information and Communication Technology **(**ICT) became a compulsory subject in all primary schools in Malaysia in 2011. When pupils are in Year 6 they have to learn basic programming language using Scratch 2.0.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of an instructional strategy on an intact group of pupils at a primary school in Penang State. The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2003) was the main theory for this research. In addition the concept of an Advance Organizer (Ausubel, 1960) was chosen as the instructional design model. This study utilised an experimental design.

The researchers wanted to find the achievement and motivation level of students after participating in the experiment. Results showed that there were significant higher achievement and higher motivation levels when learning with Scratch 2.0.

Introduction

This study investigated the delivery of instruction to develop computational thinking (CT) skills in the ICT subject of Year 6 pupils in Primary School. This study was carried out at *Sekolah Kebangsaan/*Primary School *(SK) To 'Bedor, Tasek Gelugor*, Penang.

Background of the study

The subject ICT was implemented in all primary schools (SK) throughout Malaysia in 2011. The first cohort to study this subject is currently in Year 6.

In the national curriculum there are six pillars that need to be studied by all students: communication, physical and aesthetics, humanity, skills, science and technology, and spirituality, attitudes and values (Curriculum Development, 2014).

In the Malaysian curriculum ICT was placed under the pillar of science and technology and it is programmed to be studied in Year 6. Two objectives are to be achieved by students:

1. To recognize and understand a programming algorithm to build programs.

2. To generate ideas and information in creative and innovative ways (Curriculum Development, 2014).

When this study was conducted computational thinking skills had been introduced.

Problems

There are many issues facing the introduction of ICT for Year 6 students. Many teachers claim they were unable to attend any course or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for this subject, so most of the time teachers just teach ICT by referring to the DKSP document and the textbook. When it comes to topic programming with Scratch 2.0 many teachers said they cannot teach their pupils except at a very basic level.

The school at which this study was undertaken has a computer lab that can accommodate 35 students at a time, but it does not have a computer technician. The personal computers and notebooks provided by MOE at this time are sufficient for only 25 users.

Preliminary investigation

A survey and interviews were conducted to determine the students' level of learning about programming with Scratch 2.0 that had being taught by the teacher. The researchers wanted to know the level of skill mastered by Year 6 pupils for programming using Scratch 2.0.

The teacher of Year Six was interviewed. He stated this subject was taught in September after the national examinations had finished. He had shown the pupils about ten minutes of a YouTube video of games developed by others and interfaces of Scratch 2.0. None of the PCs and notebooks had Scratch 2.0 installed because the school does not have a technician and the nearest Teachers Activities Centre (*Pusat Kegiatan Guru/PKG*) officer will only come to install the software if an official letter is written. Researcher decided to install Scratch 2.0 and teach basic Scratch 2.0 to an intact group of Year Six pupils.

Purpose of the study

The researcher investigated the use of Ausubel's Advance Organizer instructional design model together with Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning to deliver instruction in Basic Scratch 2.0 programming language.

Research objectives

The study objectives were:

1. To design an effective instructional delivery model for a two hour teaching and learning session for the subject ICT and investigate the development of CT in Year 6 pupils.

2. To study scores of the two assignments of the Year 6 learners after the two hour lesson.

Method

Students were required to do:

- Assignment 1: Write a programming code with single option using suitable features (blocks in Scratch 2.0) using the arrow key to move an object to the left, right, up and down.

- Assignment 2: Write a programming code to add a beach ball to Assignment 1 on the same stage and make it bounce when it touched the edge.

Advance organizers (AO)

In this study, the researcher chose the AO model as an instructional model for delivering instruction. An advance organizer is a cognitive learning aid that helps students "integrate new information with their existing knowledge, leading to 'meaningful learning' as opposed to rote memorization". The primary idea of AO theory is that learning of new knowledge is dependent on what is already known.

According to Ausubel, using an advance organizer is important for teachers to:

- Provide a preview of information to be learned by providing a brief introduction about the way that information that is going to be presented.

- Link old information to something new being taught, which helps students to recognize that the topic they are beginning to learn is not totally new, but can be related to a previously learned concept or process.

The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML)

The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning presupposes the human information processing system contains two channels for learning: visual (pictorial) and auditory (verbal). Each channel has the capacity to process information.

According to Mayer (2001), students will learn more effectively and more easily, and remember the information communicated when the information is presented in two forms, namely visual and verbal channels.

Five steps are involved in multimedia learning and cognitive processes that will produce meaningful learning:

1. Selecting a related word to be processed in the verbal working memory.

2. Selecting the image related to processing in the visual working memory.

3. Organizing the selected word to the verbal mental model. Here students will build relationships between bits of verbal knowledge.

4. Organizing selected image into a visual mental mode.

5. Integrating verbal and visual representation with existing knowledge. (Mayer, 2001).

A pre-test consisting of a checklist of 10 items was administrated to examine the students' learning level in Scratch 2.0. The same test was administered as a post-test after the instruction.

Analysis of data

The details below show the *mean* and *standard deviation (sd)* for both the pre-test and post-test:

Pre-test 1 *mean*= .00 (*sd*= .00) and Post-test 1 *mean*= 8.25 (*sd*= .72)
Pre-test 2 *mean=3.00 (sd=.00)* and Post-test 2 *mean=8.15 (sd.67)*

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the results between pre-test and post-test scores for Assignment 1 and pre-test and post-test scores for Assignment 2.

There was a statistically significant difference in the score of Assignment 1 (M=8.25, SD=.72) t(19)=-51.50, p=.001.

There was a statistically significant difference in the score of Assignment 2 (M=5.15, SD=.67) t(19)=-34.33, p=.001.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using Ausubel's Advance Organizer model together with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning in teaching basic Scratch 2.0 programming language to Year 6 students studying ICT.

Implications of the study

This study has resulted in the following contributions to knowledge and development:

- Firstly, the AO instructional model and two principles of the CTML that were used resulted in gain scores for both assignments. This is in line with the use of an expository organizer as suggested by Ausubel when students are facing new learning materials.

- Secondly, in this study the characteristics of learners were not considered due to the limited time allocated. For research in education it is appropriate to consider psychological attributes and cognitive styles of students because these could play a role in the effectiveness of instruction delivered.

- Thirdly, this study acts as a pioneer in looking at the effectiveness of instructional system designs on ICT and CT at one school in Penang. This study could be further expanded in the near future, as CT across the curriculum will be implemented in all government schools by January 2017.

- Fourthly, the use of AO and CTML proved to be successful for the basic learning of Scratch 2.0 and as a method of instruction used in delivering this topic. This study can be the starting point for teachers' training to deliver instruction in a Scratch 2.0 lesson.

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Utilizing Digital Writing Tools to Improve Argumentative Essays

Soni Tantan Tandiana
sonitantantandiana@gmail.com

Yuyus Saputra
yuyussaputra@unsil.ac.id

Siliwangi University, Indonesia

Abstract

Skilled argumentative writing is not achieved by the majority of students even at college level (Graham & Perin, 2007; Wolfe, 2011). In assessing students' argumentative essays it was found they had limited experience on their topic, unsupported prior knowledge, and English language barriers. For this reason, this study examined how Digital Writing Tools (DWTs) may assist students in writing argumentative essays.

In writing argumentative essays it is essential to 'support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence' (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). To write argumentative essays, students should have necessary ideas readily available and be able to organize the key ones.

Action research was employed as the method for this study. The target group was one class of thirty students of an English Education Department of a university in Indonesia. Data were collected through observation and an essay writing test. This study used Hyland's Elements of Structure of the Argumentative Essay (Hyland, 1990) to analyze the data. It was expected that the students could produce well-reasoned persuasive arguments, make inferences based on evidence, and utilize hierarchical grouping as well as logically sequencing ideas (Rex, et. al. 2010, p. 61).

The results indicated that implementing DWTs considerably enhanced the students' skills in writing argumentative essays. DWTs provided abundant information to strengthen the claims of argumentative writing. In addition, DWTs encouraged autonomous learning and critical thinking. The findings suggest that employing DWTs to teach how to write argumentative essays results in better arguments and better students' writing skills.

Introduction

For students for whom English is not their first language, even at university level, writing in English is a complicated process. They find that writing in English is difficult because the writing process demands that they utilize cognitive and linguistic strategies of which they are uncertain. The obstacles students face in writing include language barriers, restricted knowledge of writing, limited prior knowledge, psychological factors, and the lack of experience in writing (Tandiana, 2014).

An argumentative essay is a particular type of writing which attempts to convince the readers of the writer's opinions. Argumentation is a popular kind of essay question for it requires students to think on their own. They have to take a stance on an issue, support their stance with solid reasons, and strengthen their reasons with solid evidence (Oshima & Hogue, 2006, p. 142). In addition, an argumentative essay is often designed to focus on controversial public issues. Further, it is a bridge to facilitate students to identify and resolve a controversial issue in their lives, and in Western culture it is claimed as a means for raising intellectual development (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1996, p. 388).

Writing an argumentative essay requires writers to have at least two distinctive viewpoints, to actualize their arguments to decide their positions, and to negotiate discourse in regard to different perspectives. Negotiation is a complicated activity for readers' as they could be affected by the writers' arguments (Crasnich & Lumbelli, 2005, p. 181-182). More importantly, writing an argument requires the students to take a stance and provide evidence to support it (Rex, et al., 2010, p. 57).

There have been numerous investigations focusing on writing argumentative essays. In particular, Hillocks (2010) explored how teaching argumentation can influence the growth of critical thinking as well as writing.

Tandiana (2014) analysed students' errors in argumentative writing and found they were caused by the weaknesses of their arguments, opinions, claims and warrants. Later, Tandiana (2015) scrutinized the effect of teaching techniques and thinking skills on the students' argumentative writing skills and found that mind mapping (as a teaching technique) could enhance the students' critical thinking and argumentative writing skills. More recently, Tandiana, et. al. (2016) studied the implementation of the *Talk-Write Technique* to invigorate the students' argumentative writing skills and reported that the use of *Talk-Write Technique* can create a more effective, enjoyable and dynamic learning atmosphere.

The current generation of students has been utilizing a range of digital tools to compose and to create in new and exciting ways. The rapid development of Information Computer Technology (ICT) involving texting, tweeting, blogging, and social networking enables students to write more than ever. In the case of teaching argumentative essay writing the use of ICT can strengthen the power of the students' arguments. It is a game-changing moment for teachers because:

1. Digital writing challenges what counts as writing and reveals the gap between how writing works in the world and how we teach it in schools.

2. Digital writing platforms and services are ways to bring about innovative instruction and learning (Grabill, 2012).

Nobles & Paganucci (2015) contend that technology in the classroom encompasses access to the internet via computers, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, and other devices (p. 17). DWTs in this study refers to various technological-based tools for writing, such as web 2.0, blogs and wikis

(Nobles &Paganucci, 2015). In particular, the use of new technologies emphasize how DWTs can be used to empower the students' arguments when writing argumentative essays.

The present study aims to investigate how students' arguments in argumentative essays are sharpened through Digital Writing Tools.

In particular, it seeks to answer the following research question:

> How do Digital Writing Tools empower students' arguments when writing argumentative essays?

Method

Classroom research was employed as the research method of this study as it allows reflection and analysis of the teachers' teaching performance through appropriate data collection procedures based on daily teaching practices (Wallace as cited in Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 216).

The study was conducted at one university in Indonesia involved in the preparation of English teachers. Thirty undergraduate English Education Department students, in their sixth semester of an eight semester degree program, were selected through purposive sampling (Gall, et. al., 2007, p. 650).

The research was carried out from June to July 2017. In accordance with the process of collecting data, the teacher conducted a pre-test to determine the students' prior skills of writing argumentative essays. Then he taught four argumentative essay class meetings by employing DWTs. At the end of the learning, a post-test was conducted to determine the change in students' skills for writing argumentative essays after experiencing the teaching program utilizing DWTs.

In implementing DWTs in the classroom activities, the teacher and the students undertook the following: students accessed the internet to obtain models of the text type, they also used the internet to access information to support their arguments. Students typed their argumentative essays on their personal computers and emailed them to the teacher for feedback. The teacher's role was that of facilitator, and instructor for the teaching process.

The data were analyzed qualitatively. This enabled the use of an interpretive scheme.

Findings and conclusions

The pre-test results showed that the mechanics and writing elements of the students' writing were not well-arranged. It showed their inability in organizing their writing, as well as many inadequate lexical features and grammatical errors.

In regard to the content of writing, it was found that the students had difficulty in establishing supportive and convincing arguments. They failed to provide a conclusion to their argument, and their essays did not contain the generic structure of argumentative essays. The students' prior writing task indicated that the propositions used to support their arguments were still powerless and unsupported by the facts. The initial essays also showed that the participants did not state a

gambit which functions to capture the reader's attention. Their arguments were not supported by the facts nor supported statements.

During the teaching process, the teacher tried to get the students to recognize and to understand different types of argumentative essays by asking them to search argumentative essay texts as models using the internet. He asked the students to analyze the generic structure of an argumentative essay after giving a brief explanation of it. As a result, the students were given the opportunity to internalize the learning materials (e.g. argumentative essays) conveyed by the teacher and put it into practice. This type of classroom activity enabled the students to have a learning experience by recognizing each aspect of argumentative essays systematically.

The teacher considered that the students should be able to summarise their own arguments from their own perspective. More importantly, they should have two sides to any argument, namely pros and cons. Pro-arguments (supporting arguments) are employed to support the positive sides or strengths of an issue, while con-arguments (contradictory arguments) were used as the representation of contradiction (rebuttal) towards an issue. Once they have stated pros and cons, they should take a stance or position towards the issue based on their own considerations and judgement. This is commonly called claiming.

Classroom activities related to the implementation of DWTs were summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Classroom activities with DWTs

Classroom activities	**Observations by teacher throughout the study time**			**Total**
	I	II	III	
Teacher's suggestions for using DWTs	3	1	1	5
Students' learning activities with DWTs	4	1	0	5
Students' arguments after using DWTs	3	0	0	3
Teacher's explanations of learning materials	4	13	5	22
Teacher's modeling of the text (s)	0	6	4	4
Teacher's suggestions on the students' argumentative essays writing	0	9	1	10
Students' arguments without using DWTs	1	1	4	6
Teacher's exemplification of learning materials	0	3	7	10

The table portrays the classroom activities generally occurring when the teacher and the students dealt with DWTs as an instructional medium in the classroom. In particular, it describes how DWTs were employed to support comprehension and production of argumentative essays.

The activities were thematically categorized based on real classroom activities. Such categorization encompasses eight classroom activities regularly performed by both the teacher and the students in the classroom:

- Teacher's suggestions for using DWTs
- Students' learning activities with DWTs

- Students' arguments after using DWTs
- Teacher's explanations of learning materials
- Teacher's modelling of the text(s)
- Teacher's suggestions about the students' argumentative essays writing, students' arguments without using DWTs
- Teacher's exemplification of learning materials

In short, this categorization was based on the natural-occurring data emerging in the classroom activities.

The writing practices in each classroom meeting provided the students with experience in looking for information from the internet to support their statements or claims. In addition, they were able to utilize a grammar checker and virtual dictionary to support their writing quality. It seemed that after the sessions the arguments proposed by the students were stronger and more powerful. They use some propositions to support their pro- or con- arguments. They used some gambits to attract the readers' attention.

Overall, DWTs made a significant impact on the students' arguments. This was supported by teacher observations which indicated that the students were more engaged in planned classroom activities.

The findings indicated that implementing DWTs considerably enhanced the students' skills in writing argumentative essays. DWTs provided abundant information for students to access evidence to strengthen their claims or to support statements to weaken the con-side of argumentative writing. In addition, DWTs encouraged autonomous learning and critical thinking so students were able to learn by themselves as long as the digital devices supported them.

The findings suggest that employing DWTs for teaching argumentative essay writing is significant as it strengthens the power of students' arguments as well as fostering writing skills.

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Cultivating Intercultural Competence in a Tertiary English Foreign Language Classroom

Quyen Phuong Vo
vpquyen@ctu.edu.vn
School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

Brown (1994) states, language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language. English language, therefore, can form a bridge for cross-cultural communication thanks to it being a worldwide lingua franca. It is recommended that cultivating intercultural competence (IC) should be a special concern in the English language teaching (ELT) curriculum generally and English classrooms in Vietnam, especially in tertiary contexts.

This study aims to utilize an adaptation of Newton's (2016) strategies for enriching IC to develop the IC of Vietnamese English-major students. In addition, the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) developed by Byram (1997) and Hartmann and Ditfurth (2007) was employed to examine the practice of students' IC achievement.

Thirty-eight Vietnamese tertiary English-major freshmen at Can Tho University were involved in this eight-week program. Data were collected through various IC activities, recorded by class observations, students' reflections on each activity, and evaluations of students by a questionnaire.

The findings revealed that participants experienced positive gains in knowledge and attitudes towards IC activities, while practical skills in cultural interaction and critical awareness was less enhanced due to limited time for practice. Students' lack of ICC motivation indicated that the lecturer/researcher should plan more carefully and provide graded structural supports.

Introduction

As a member of regional and international organizations such as ASEAN, TPP, WTO, the important role of cross-cultural communication in various areas of science, technology, economics, and education has increased in importance for Vietnam and its interactions with other nations. Along with this concern, different views on the crucial role of cultivating IC in English language teaching in Vietnamese universities has been also emphasized (Ho, 2013; Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen, 2013; Tran & Seepho, 2014, Vo, 2017). Byram and Risager (1999, p. 58) stated that the role of a language teacher is a 'professional mediator between foreign languages and culture' to equip students to acquire intercultural communicative competence (Lázár et al., 2007; Liton & Qaid, 2016; Newton, 2014; Neff & Rucynski, 2013).

In spite of the importance of English in the development of intercultural communication, Vietnamese students tend to be more concerned about their compentence in English grammar and

linguistics rather than their intercultural competence (Nguyen, 2013). Additionally, Vietnamese teachers are likely to concentrate on teaching language before introducing culture (Omaggio, 1993; Tran & Seepho, 2014), or teaching inergrated culture and English language skills (Tran & Duong, 2015; Vo, 2017).

Furthermore, Ho (2015) and Vo (2017) reveal that a lack of adequate knowledge and skills in intercultural communication may cause Vietnamese English learners difficulties in intercultural communication. It is therefore necessary for teachers of English to be more concerned about cultivating students' intercultural knowledge and awareness of cultural knowledge.

Nguyen (2007) suggested a variety of learning and teaching activities integrated in English learning and teaching to improve the current situation of English learning and teaching. Ho (2013) particularly addresses intercultural language learning in English textbooks. Sharing the same concern, Nguyen (2013) examined the extent to which Vietnamese teachers of English in the north of Vietnam integrate English language teaching. The results indicate that cultural knowledge is prioritized more than the integration of IC components. However, Vo (2017) revealed there is still a gap between teachers' perceptions and their practices of integrating ICC in English classrooms. In the south of Vietnam, however, there has been little documentation on the cultivating of IC in English classrooms. Given the above reasons, the researcher of this paper was motivated to conduct an action research project which addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the cultivation of intercultural competence in English classrooms implemented in a tertiary context in the south of Vietnam?
2. What are the implications of cultivating intercultural competence in English classrooms in this context?

Literature review

Byram (1997) conceptualised Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as consisting of intercultural competence (IC) and communicative competence (CC) and identified five relevant components:

1. *intercultural attitudes* (curiosity, openness, or readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own);

2. *intercultural knowledge* (learning about social groups, products, practices, and processes of interaction);

3. *skills of interpreting and relating* (the abilities to identify and explain cultural perspectives and mediate between and function in new cultural contexts);

4. *skills of discovering and interacting* (the abilities to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and to operate knowledge attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication);

5. *critical cultural awareness* (the ability to evaluate critically the perspectives and practices in one's own and other cultures).

ICC in ELT is aimed at facilitating students' competence in these components.

Moeller and Nugent (2014) argued that the traditional emphasis in teaching foreign languages focuses on language structures, pronunciation and vocabulary. This is likely to inhibit language learners' growth of intercultural competence 'as the learner is not given equal opportunity to bring his/her beliefs into the conversation'. The authors concluded that if foreign language teachers want to prepare their students to achieve globally interconnected goals, intercultural competence must be integrated as an essential part in the foreign language curriculum so learners experience how to use language to build relationships and understandings with people of other cultures.

In relation to tertiary English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom practice, Newton (2016) systematically constructed step-by-step strategies for cultivating intercultural learning competence in EFL tertiary classrooms which are likely to fit English language teaching practice in the Southeast Asian contexts like Vietnam. To enrich learners' intercultural competence, Newton (2016) proposed five strategies:

1. Situate language in real communicative events;

2. Start with self;

3. Encourage experiential learning;

4. Provide opportunities for learners to compare experiences and reflect on what the experiences felt like;

5. Guide learners to construct understandings.

These strategies were adapted in the current study in terms of *positioning language communicative tasks*, *guiding students to think interculturally*, and *engaging students in real intercultural situations* which provide them with opportunities to compare and reflect on their experiences to construct their intercultural understandings.

Methodology

The current study followed a model of action research suggested by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988) and Sagor (2004), namely: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The current action research was applied to a course in the English skills of listening and speaking for English-major freshmen, in which intercultural competence activities supplemented speaking activities.

Participants

Thirty-eight English-major freshmen (10 males and 28 females, aged between 19 and 21) participated in this action research. The participants were mainly mother-tongue speakers of Vietnamese who were intermediate levels of learners of English.

Research instruments

Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods included text-book analysis, class observations and students' reflections during the process of teaching and learning culturally-integrated activities. The quantitative data were obtained from the pre-survey and post-survey questionnaires.

Procedure of action research

Planning

The class textbook was analysed to identify intercultural topics. Once the topics had been identified a pre-survey was developed and administered to identify students' preference for specific intercultural topics and their level of IC.
The analysis of the text-book by Kenny and Wada (2008) revealed that there were twenty-four units, twelve in each book. Each unit consisted of three main parts, namely listening, further listening and extended listening. Topic-related speaking activities were designed in pair-work activities, but these activities were not developed in accordance with IC learning principles.

The pre-survey results showed that nearly a half of the participants (47.3%) agreed that they had heard about the concept of IC, but their knowledge of intercultural language learning varied. Ten participants (26%) did not share views on this question. Additionally, a similar percentage of respondents mentioned intercultural language learning as using English language to discover other nations' cultures and customs, traditions, history, and geography (with 34% and 36% respectively). Some respondents shared their ideas as follows:

> *Intercultural language learning means understanding other countries' customs, history and geography via learning language.*

> *Intercultural language learning is language learners' discovery of other cultures when he or she learns language.*

Moreover, six students (15.7%) related intercultural language learning to the knowledge of other nations' cultures. One specific explanation was:

> *I think intercultural language learning is understanding about the countries all over the world such as languages, food, cultures.*

However, none of them shared their views on the connection between intercultural language learning and developing critical cultural awareness.

The pre-survey questionnaire identified the four most interesting topics for the students related to eating customs (13 responses, 36%), festivals (11 responses, 28%), family (10 responses, 26%), and new friends (08 responses, 21%). Therefore, these four topics were considered for implementation as supplementary IC speaking activities in the next stage.

Implementing

Activity 1

The first activity related to Unit 7 in the text-book. After completing this unit, each student was asked to surf the web for an authentic text of another country's family structure and make a comparison with what they knew about the Vietnamese family structure. Working with authentic texts was suggested by Hartmann and Ditfurth (2007) as one practical activity to enhance students' intercultural competence. Upon the completion of this activity, the students were asked to give their reflections.

Activity 2

To further enhance Bryam's five components of ICC, students were involved in an oral presentation related to the topic of Unit 10 in the text-book. In particular, students were asked to work in groups on the topic of festivals around the world. Each group presented one nation's festival in forms of power point slides assisted with clips or images. The presentation time for each group was around ten minutes. The students' reflections were recorded.

Activity 3

The third activity was watching a video-clip of a cultural situation. This activity was on the topic of foods. The four-minute clip showed a cultural situation in which an American man had a meal with his Japanese girlfriend's family. The man was surprised by the Japanese' noodle eating styles and reactions to his eating and drinking manners. Students were asked to give their reflections of the clip content regarding to what extent their IC was developed.

Activity 4

This activity was based on Unit 7 in *Listening Advantage 2*, meeting people. Each student was asked to interview a foreigner who could be his friend or a person he just met. The interview questions were related to the topics they have learned in the current course. Also, the student participants reviewed some expressions of language provided in the text-book to use in their talks with foreigners. Finally, the students were asked to give their reflections of the clip content regarding to what extent their IC was developed.

Observing

The data were obtained from class observations and students' reflections on the four implemented IC activities. The class observations indicated that students preferred Activities 2 and 4. In relation to the five components of ICC developed by Byram (1997), the observations indicated that Activities 1 and 3 could promote the development of the five components of ICC for students. Activity 2 was likely to significantly develop students' skills of discovering and interacting and their knowledge of social interaction which was most developed from Activity 4.

Reflecting

The data collected from the students' reflections on the four activities revealed their perceptions to these IC activities in a more extensive way (see Table 1). Of the four implemented activities, most respondents agreed that Activity 3 significantly enhanced their five IC components regarding: *intercultural attitude* (92%); *knowledge of social interaction* (92%); *skills of interpreting and relating* (90%); *skills of discovering and interacting* (87%); while just a half of them (50%) agreed their *critical cultural awareness* was developed. For other activities, the level of ICC component achievement reflected by the students varied.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of their achievements in intercultural competence

Activity	Intercultural attitude	Knowledge of social interaction	Skills of interpreting & relating	Skills of discovering & interacting	Critical cultural awareness
Activity 1	65%	92%	45%	90%	10%
Activity 2	79%	87%	31%	79%	50%
Activity 3	92%	92%	87%	90%	50%
Activity 4	84%	71%	37%	90%	61%

The post-survey questionnaire consisted of three parts: students' knowledge of intercultural language learning; their preference for the implemented intercultural learning activities; and their perceptions of their achievement of ICC components via cultivating IC activities.

The results showed students' positive attitudes to the four IC activities.

Students' explained:

> *I think it is very helpful for me to join these cultivating intercultural competence activities because I can widen my knowledge of language skills such as listening, speaking or writing and know about other cultures all over the world.*
>
> *I felt excited about these activities because they enlarge my knowledge of many cultures around the world and can help me avoid cultural shocks or cultural problems in communicating with foreigners.*
>
> *I think cultivating intercultural competence in English language teaching is exciting since it makes English classes more exciting.*
>
> *Cultivating intercultural competence in English language classes can help learners know how to use English appropriately when they communicate with foreigners. It also lessens my nervousness in speaking English with foreigners.*
>
> *I think it (ICC) is useful for graduates of English to study oversea or get better jobs.*

Of the four activities, nearly 80% of participants expressed their greatest interest in Activity 4 in which they were given opportunities to make new friends with foreigners. Some reasons for their preference for this activity were:

> *This activity is very useful for my language skills of listening and speaking, improving my communication skills with foreigners, and understanding their cultures thoroughly.*
>
> *I liked talking with foreigners since it gave me chances to express my ideas with real people and understand more about their countries or know more about what they think about Vietnam.*
>
> *I love interviewing foreigners. This activity widened my knowledge of many aspects in other countries, such as jobs, foods, music, movies, and so on. The information received from foreigners were clear and up-to-date. It also improves my communication skills.*
>
> *It is a good way to get a lot of authentic information. I will not feel confused of which information is real or not real because the foreign may not lie me.*

The findings further revealed students' perceptions of cultivating IC activities in terms of their achievements of the five ICC components. The most highly achieved component was *intercultural attitude (95%).* Participants believed that their *critical cultural awareness* (81%) and *knowledge of social interaction (81%)* were the second most improved components. Although *skills of discovering and interacting* received fewer responses than the other components, its rate was quite high (76%).

Participants further indicated their challenges to cultivating IC activities in terms of internal and external factors. Internal factors included: limitations of language proficiency; lack of vocabulary; limited capacities of information seeking; and emotional issues were most mentioned by participants.

> *My reading skill was not good, so I could not link ideas in reading texts of family.*
>
> *I do not know how to write a summary for comparing information.*
>
> *I faced challenges when I spoke English with foreigners because they did not understand me sometimes.*
>
> *I felt so shy, so I could not talk a lot with foreigners or make a presentation in front of many people.*
>
> *I did not know what source of information on the internet was reliable.*

External factors such as: time limitations; unfamiliarity with intercultural activities; and lack of experience in a multicultural community were mentioned.

Participants stated:

> *I did not have time to complete assignments for many courses this semester, so I could not complete intercultural activities as what the teacher assigned.*
>
> *Looking for a foreigner to interview took a lot of time since I did not know where to look and I did not have many foreign friends on social networks.*
>
> *When I was first assigned these activities, I felt confused because I have never done them before.*

Discussion

The findings revealed that the student participants in the current study experienced positive attitudes to cultivating IC activities in English classes. The findings were different from the implications of previous studies in the Vietnamese context regarding students' unwillingness to get involved in IC activities as mentioned by Ho (2011) and Vo (2017).

The findings are in line with the underlying objectives of Byram's ICC model and previous studies (Hartman & Ditfurth, 2007; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Newton, 2016) in relation to simultaneously enhancing language skills and IC.

Additionally, the students' perceptions of IC learning before and after the implementation were significantly changed in terms of their awareness of intercultural knowledge and interests in intercultural activities. It appears that the strategies developed by Newton (2016) for cultivating IC activities in EFL tertiary classrooms are likely to be applicable to this tertiary context.

The findings also shared the same concerns related to challenges in IC teaching with previous studies mentioned by: Tran and Seepho (2014) concerning students' limitations in English language proficiency; Nguyen (2013) in relation to students' limited opportunities for access to multicultural socialisation; and Ho (2014) regarding time allowance for the integration of intercultural activities.

Suggestions

Suggestions emerging from the current study include:

Firstly, it is suggested that the course should be redesigned based on the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs,1996) with regard to consistency among teaching objectives, teaching and learning activities, and learning assessment in accordance with IC dimensions.

Secondly, various intercultural activities need to be constantly incorporated into all units of the textbook from simple to more extensive intercultural activities to motivate students of all levels of English proficiency to engage in such activities.

Thirdly, more forms of professional development in IC teaching should be engaged so that most lecturers can implement and share ideas to tackle challenges. Last but not least, the different forms of IC teaching of Moeller and Nugent (2014) should be considered to maximise students' awareness of IC.

Further research should investigate how to develop models of integrating IC in English classrooms for EFL English non-major students. More research instruments need to be employed to enhance results, such as students' diaries, classroom observations, individual interviews, and focus-group interviews.

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Helping IELTS Learners Write Essay Introductions Under Time Pressure

Huynh Van Hien
hvhien@ctu.edu.vn

School of Foreign Languages,
Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

An introduction in a writing task is usually short – two or three sentences in length. Writing an introduction for an essay is often considered a task not requiring a lot of time or a lot of effort. However, knowing how to and being able to write an interesting introduction for an essay under high pressure of time is not an easy job for my International English Language Testing System (IELTS) students, who come from a variety of backgrounds in general English. To identify some of the causes preventing my learners from writing successful introductions, I decided to carry out some action research to investigate the issue.

The research was conducted over an 8 week period and involved 30 students who took part in the research on a voluntary basis. I started the study by asking my learners to write two introductions for two different IELTS Writing Task 2 essays: one in 10 minutes and the other in only 2 minutes. I asked them to tell me about any difficulties they encountered. Then I passed out a questionnaire with open questions asking them to analyze their problems in writing the introductions.

In the next steps I showed the participants how to analyze the tasks and paraphrase to provide hints for writing introductions. More instructions and exercises on paraphrasing were provided. Later I asked the participants to write an introduction to an IELTS Task 2 essay whose topic was different from the ones they had practiced before my instructions were applied.

The results showed students' significant improvement in writing introductions in 2-3 minutes. All writing topics were taken from Cambridge IELTS books and represented real test topics.

Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a standardized test. There are two modules of the IELTS Test: Academic and General Training. My learners and the participants of the current study who take the IELTS Academic Module test (hereafter the IELTS) wish to use the results of the test to gain admission to colleges and universities worldwide. In Vietnam, students also use the IELTS results to study for Masters' or doctoral degrees without taking further English tests.

Before taking the IETLS test, students usually attend IELTS training courses offered by foreign languages centers most of which are at private institutions. There are no standard English levels

for those who start to take IELTS training courses, and there are no standard curricula applied to all or most centers.

Some centers offer English placement tests to classify students and put them in classes supposedly to be at the appropriate level for each individual. Nevertheless, it is a fact that learners' levels of general English usually vary in any IELTS training course. Some may have finished Bachelor degrees in English teaching education; some are studying at certain universities majoring in different areas; some are high school students; some used to be good at English but, as they admit, have forgot most of their English. These facts show that students' starting points in most IELTS training courses are very different.

I have been an instructor of IELTS training courses for more than ten years. I have taught all four skills of the IELTS test; namely, Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Depending on my learners' English levels, I also teach extra lessons on grammar and pronunciation.

For the writing test candidates complete two tasks in 60 minutes.

1. Task 1 involves visual stimuli, e.g. a table, a line chart, a flow chart, a bar graph, a pie chart and so on. It is supposed that candidates spend about 20 minutes on Task 1 and need to write at least 150 words.

2. In Task 2 candidates need to write an essay of at least 250 words in approximately 40 minutes.

The tasks are scored based on 4 main criteria: task achievement; coherence and cohesion; lexical resource; and grammatical range and accuracy.

Task 2 is weighed twice as much as Task 1. For Task 2, candidates are provided with an opinion or a problem, and they should be able to analyze and evaluate the opinion or suggest solutions to the problem or issue. They at times should show their ability to compare and contrast ideas or challenge an idea (Cullen et al., p. 8). During my time of teaching, I have recognized that most learners find it very difficult to deal with writing an essay for Task 2 in a very limited amount of time – approximately 40 minutes. They find it especially hard to write an introduction which seems to be just an easy job at a glance. To help my learners overcome such challenges, I decided to do this action research.

The study aimed to find effective ways to write an introduction for Task 2 of the IELTS test under time pressure. It was conducted to address the following research question:

What should be done to help IELTS learners write essay introductions under time pressure?

Literature review

There has not been much literature on writing an introduction for an IELTS Writing Task 2.

According to the IELTS guidelines,
(http://www.examenglish.com/IELTS/ielts_writing_task2_Introductions_and_Conclusions.htm)

> *The purpose of an introduction is to* ***clarify what you understand the title to mean****. You may also want to* ***mention briefly why this is an important issue****. You need to* ***outline how you intend to answer the question.***

This guideline gives a clear explanation of the aim of an introduction and what candidates need to do to write an introduction. However, it does not tell learners how many sentences they need to write and how they should arrange their ideas in an introduction. A further issue arises in the statement 'outline how you intend to answer the question'. The author of the website states that candidates should write a thesis statement staring with 'This essay will…' This guideline suggests to candidates that they are writing an essay rather than arguing on a certain topic. Such a guideline makes an introduction seem quite mechanical.

Other writers have provided advice to candidates on how to approach Writing Task 2. Pell (2015) classified Task 2 questions into five types with five structures for introductions which are outlined as follows.

Opinion questions (Agree or disagree**)**

- Sentence 1: Paraphrase question
- Sentence 2: Thesis statement (It is agreed…/I disagree…/This essay agrees/disagrees)
- Sentence 3: Outline sentence (This essay will discuss…)

Advantages and disadvantages questions

- Sentence 1: Paraphrase question
- Sentence 2: Outline question

Discuss both views questions (Discussion essays)

- Sentence 1: Paraphrase question and/or state both view points
- Sentence 2: Thesis statement
- Sentence 3: Outline sentence

Problem and solution questions

- Sentence 1: Paraphrase question
- Sentence 2: Outline question

Two-part questions (Two questions to answer in one essay)

- Sentence 1: Paraphrase question
- Sentence 2: Outline question (mention both questions)

These guidelines for writing introductions share two things in common:

First, it is suggested that candidates should start their introduction as well as their essay by restating the question in their own way.

Second, they should include a sentence outlining what their essay will discuss.

In her online video concerning IELTS Writing Task 2, Ferguson (2014) suggested that a general outline for an introduction to a Task 2 writing should not include the hook, which is generally recommended for other kinds of tests to capture the reader's interest. She suggested including the background statement which plays the function of a restatement or paraphrase of the question raised in the task; and a thesis statement. One of the strong points from her instruction is that she showed learners how to paraphrase the task or the question by identifying key words and change them with synonyms if possible.

On another website http://ielts.allearsenglish.com/ielts-energy-introduction-writing-task-2/# (2015), it is recommended that candidates should have the hook as something that interests the readers.

Different instructors have contradictory viewpoints on how to write an effective introduction for an IELTS Writing Task 2. A further complication, as stated in the introduction of this article, is my learners' backgrounds of English vary considerably. Most of them are so familiar with Vietnamese rhetorical styles of writing essays in the Vietnamese language. These are technically different from the Western ways in general and more specifically those required for the IELTS test.

Research methodology

This research employed a questionnaire written in Vietnamese with 11 open questions including:

- Regarding the importance of an essay introduction;
- The difficulties learners encounter while writing an introduction, especially under time pressure of 2-3 minutes;
- Whether learners know how to make good use of the question as hints to write an introduction;
- If learners know how to paraphrase the question and use synonyms.

See Appendix A for an English translation of the questionnaire. My prepared instructions were applied partially based on the answers I obtained from my learners' responses to the questionnaire.

Participants

This research involved 30 learners (18 females and 12 males; aged 16 to 35) in my IELTS training class. They had various backgrounds in English and length of time studying for IELTS. They took part in the study on a voluntary basis.

Procedure

The research was carried out when learners started to learn how to write an essay for the IELTS Writing Task 2. To begin I passed out two writing topics, which can be considered pre-tests, one-by-one, and asked the participants to write an introduction for each; one in 10 minutes and one in 2 minutes. They were given 5 minutes for analyzing the task and brainstorming for ideas.

After submitting their papers, they were asked to share some difficulties they had when they wrote. In the next step, I passed out the questionnaire. In the following class sessions, I showed the

participants how to analyze the tasks and provided them with lessons and exercises on brainstorming and paraphrasing. When I taught the learners how to write specific types of Task 2, I repeatedly helped them with identifying key words and paraphrasing.

By the end of the data collection period, which ended in week 6 of the study, the participants were given a writing task as a post-test. They had five minutes to analyze the task and brainstorm for ideas and up to three minutes to write an introduction. All writing topics were taken from Cambridge IELTS books of past test papers (See Appendix B).

Findings and discussion

For the pre-tests, when learners were given 10 minutes to write after 5 minutes of analyzing the task and brainstorming, all of them were able to write their introductions. In fact, most of the sample essays printed in the series of Cambridge IELTS books written by experts and graders were short, just two or three sentences in length. However, since most of the participants were so used to the Vietnamese rhetorical style of writing which required a long introduction, sometimes more than eight sentences, most of the introductions for the pre-tests turned out to be longer than expected. When given only 2 minutes to write an introduction, more than half of the participants could not complete the task. Some simply tried to copy the question.

For the post-test, all participants could finish writing their introduction in three minutes at most, and their introductions looked to be closer to the Western rhetorical style for writing an essay of approximately 250 words.

In answering the questionnaire, all participants indicated that they understood the importance of an introduction. More than half of them stated that they could not write the first sentence and they seemed to feel comfortable to begin their introduction with the word 'Nowadays' or the phrase 'These days' and repeat the wording of the question. All of them understood that they should not copy word for word from the question because it does not show their ability in writing. They were all aware of paraphrasing but indicated that they needed more training on this special type of writing. They expected the instructors to give them more brainstorming techniques.

As discussed in the literature review of this paper, there have been no standard frameworks for writing an introduction for an IELTS Writing Task 2. Therefore, it is not easy to teach students to write a very well-organized introduction**.** However, from my teaching experience and from the samples provided in the Cambridge IELTS books of past tests, I strongly believe that learners and test candidates should not try to follow a framework that suggests writing one outline sentence such as "This essay will…". This sounds as though they are showing people that they are writing an essay rather than taking advantage of doing the test to present their views and/or arguments in a written form.

I believe writing the hook is necessary to get readers' attention and to have a clear focus of writing. The background information should also be included if possible. An introduction should always end with a clear thesis statement.

Conclusion

This action research was conducted to investigate possible ways to teach IELTS trainees how to write an effective introduction under time pressure. It was carried out with a group of 30 participants who had different levels of English proficiency.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that a learners' English background impacts on the learners' performance in writing an introduction under the pressure of time. Learners can do a good job if they are taught to identify key words and phrases in the questions as hints to brainstorming ideas. Learners also need to be able to paraphrase the question to make it part of the introduction.

Overcoming one of the most challenging tasks of writing an essay – the introduction will help learners confidently write the rest of the essay and remarkably reduce tension in the test room. More important than that they can apply the techniques in writing in their academic life.

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Appendices

Appendix A: **Questionnaire**

Writing Introductions for IELTS Writing Task 2.

The following questions are for research purposes. The information you provide is for research only.

Part 1: Personal information

1. Full name (optional):
2. Gender:
3. Education level:
4. Level of English:
    a. Level according to national criteria (circle): A/B/C
    b. Graduating from overseas (circle): YES/NO
    c. If graduating overseas, what level and what major:
    d. Have you ever taken the IELTS? If so (the latest time):
        i. General band
        ii. Writing score

Part 2: Questions related to writing the introduction of IELTS Writing Task 2 (hereafter *introduction*).

1. In your opinion, how important is the introduction (In terms of information and score)?
2. Do you have difficulties writing the introduction? If so, please specify.
3. Can you write an introduction in 2-3 minutes? Why (not)?
4. In your opinion, what are the requirements for an introduction?
5. In your opinion, do Vietnamese face difficulties writing the introduction? Why (not)?
6. In your opinion, to write an introduction in a limited time (no more than 3 minutes), what skills do the writers need to have?
7. Does the title provide hints for writing the introduction?
8. Is it a good idea to repeat the words and wording of the title? Why (not)?
9. Do you know what *paraphrasing* means?
10. Do you often use synonyms instead of repeating the words and wording of the title? Why (not)?
11. What should instructors do to help IELTS trainees to write good introductions?

Thank you for answering the questions!

Appendix B. **Writing tasks**

Pre-test 1

Full name: _____

After analyzing the question and brainstorming for ideas (5 minutes), write an introduction for your essay on the following IELTS writing task 2 (10 minutes).

Some people believe that unpaid community service should be a compulsory part of high school programmes (for example working for a charity, improving the neighbourhood or teaching sports to younger children).

To what extent do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Source: *Cambridge IELTS, Book 9*, p. 54.

Pre-test 2

Full name: _____

After analyzing the question and brainstorming for ideas (5 minutes), write an introduction for your essay on the following IELTS writing task 2 (2 minutes).

Successful sports professionals can earn a great deal more money than people in other important professions. Some people think this is fully justified while others think it is unfair.

Discuss both views and give your own examples. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Source: *Cambridge IELTS, Book 6*, p. 52.

Post-test

Full name: _____

After analyzing the question and brainstorming for ideas (5 minutes), write an introduction for your essay on the following IELTS writing task 2 (3 minutes).

Some people believe that visitors to other countries should follow local customs and behaviour. Others disagree and think that the host country should welcome cultural differences.

Discuss both views and give your own examples. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.
Source: *Cambridge IELTS, Book 6*, p.76.

Difficulties in Learning and Teaching English in a Tourism Classroom

Tran Thi Diem Can
ttdcan@ctu.edu.vn

School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

In recent years, the improvement in learning and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is attracting more interest from universities and managers in Vietnam. ESP students are usually adults who already have some knowledge of English and are learning the language to communicate a set of professional skills as well as performing job-related functions. The ESP program is therefore built on assessment of purpose, needs and functions for which English is required, as well as the expectations of ESP learners who attend such courses.

Previous research reflects the reality as well as the difficulties of the situation where the curriculum, teaching materials, learners and teachers are facing challenges. According to Evans and St. John (1998) the teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator are the key roles which have been identified for ESP practitioners. ESP teachers bear the extra burden of being familiar with content.

This study aimed to identify the difficulties in learning and teaching an ESP program for tourism students at Can Tho University (CTU).

It was found that ESP teaching should not be limited to the formal instructional setting but incorporate other methods, such as self-access study, project work, and cooperative learning in the learning-teaching program. It was found that learners should actively participate in the process of content material selections, curriculum development and teaching methodology to ensure motivation of the program participants.

The article gives some recommendations for improving effectiveness in learning and teaching ESP that would help students meet the English requirements for their work and lives.

Introduction

English is the most popularly used language in the world (Ethnologue, 2015). It plays an increasingly important role in the development of many fields including science, economics, culture and international relations. Therefore, the demand for teaching and learning English, especially English for specific purposes is rising, especially in universities. In particular English is recognized at present as the leading language in communication, presenting the key for conducting and consolidating international tourist relations in the world.

A good command of the English language is a requirement in an important number of occupational standards in tourism (e.g. travel agent, receptionist, manager of tourism activities, mountain guide, hotel or restaurant manager, concierge). These are all realities which should

be considered by language teachers to ensure future graduates are well prepared for a challenging labour market.

However, teaching and learning English for specific purposes in Vietnam is ineffective and does not meet society requirements. Only about:

- 49.3% of graduating students meet employers' English requirements;
- nearly 19% do not meet employers' English requirements; and
- nearly 32% need to be trained further (Vietnam Department of Higher Education, 2014).

Apart from teachers' qualifications and teaching methods, challenges for teaching and learning this subject include lack of time, classes with too many students, and not regularly updated textbooks. For these reasons this study aimed to analyze the difficulties of Learning and Teaching English in a Tourism Classroom, and then proposes recommendations for students and teachers at CTU.

Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected through direct interviews conducted with respondents using an open-ended questionnaire. Respondents consisted of forty students who are majoring in Tourism, and five teachers who are teaching English for Tourism at Can Tho University.
In addition, students and teachers were required to complete a questionnaire aimed at determining their motivation regarding the learning and teaching strategies used. The data were analysed by mainly descriptive statistics in order to determine the students' and teachers' views on difficulties associated with using English in the tourism course.
Students were expected to tick the appropriate answer to five questions. Students had to comment on learning ESP and especially the carrier content of the course. The survey results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' answers about learning English for Tourism (%)

No.	Question	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree
1.	Do you have enough knowledge of a foreign language to learn English for Tourism?	22.2	24.4	53.4
2.	Do you understand carrier content of the English for Tourism course?	26.6	35.6	37.8
3.	Do you understand ESP words and collocations needed for a specialty?	13.3	60.0	26.7
4.	Do you understand ESP words and collocations needed for a specialty?	51.0	31.2	17.8
5.	Does the carrier content of English for Tourism course meet your learning needs?	17.8	33.3	48.9

Table 1. showed that over half of respondents believe they have sufficient knowledge of a foreign language to learn English for Tourism, and about one-quarter of respondents partly agree that they have enough knowledge of a foreign language to study it. Almost one third of the respondents stated that it was difficult to understand the carrier content of the course.

It can also be seen from Table 1. that over one-quarter of the respondents understand ESP words and collocations needed for tourism, 60% of the respondents understand them partly and over one-tenth do not understand them at all. As students study the ESP course in the third semester they have not acquired the knowledge of the specialty subjects yet. This problem can be effectively solved by consulting the subject specialists.

Important things which must be considered when analyzing learning needs include who the learners are, their level of general English, their level of professional knowledge, and their expectations about the course, etc.

Very important decisions have to be made by the teacher. These include selection and adaptation of ESP materials, the selection of tasks, designing tasks for students, and choice of teaching methods that would suit the learners' needs best.

Table 1. indicates that the carrier content of the ESP course meets the learning needs for about half of the respondents. One-third thought the course partially met their needs, whereas almost 20% answered that the course does not meet the needs of the learners.

Teachers may have difficulty teaching both language and content but in the real world people learn language and content simultaneously, and teachers need to be able to address both language and content within their classrooms. One more thing that ESP teachers can do is to try to develop their competence in students' particular professions. The experience of teaching and knowledge of students' specialties gives the ESP teacher confidence.

Research findings and discussion

Table 2. Results of the empirical study

Difficulties	Very difficult	Difficult	No problem	Easy	Very easy
Differences between Vietnamese and English	56.5	43.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lack of vocabulary	39.2	60.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Dependence on dictionary	4.3	43.5	3.1	8.7	4.4
Listening skills	39.1	43.5	4.4	8.7	4.3
Speaking skills	10.9	37.0	26.1	10.9	15.2
Reading skills	8.7	37.0	32.0	10.9	10.9
Writing skills	13.0	58.7	21.7	2.2	4.4
Quality of lectures and textbooks	8.7	47.8	30.4	8.7	4.4
Qualifications and teaching methods of teachers	4.4	34.8	37.0	19.6	4.3
Lack of theoretical framework	2.2	28.3	23.9	30.4	15.2
Lack of teaching materials	41.3	37.0	8.7	8.7	4.3
Classes with too large numbers of students	30.5	34.8	15.2	8.7	10.8
Heavily focused examination	32.7	43.5	15.2	4.3	4.3

Difficulties related to students

It can be seen from Table 2. that over half of respondents believed that there are differences between Vietnamese and English involving parts of speech, pronunciation, word usage and grammar. This is partly the reason they have difficulties in learning and teaching ESP in general and English for tourism particularly. Many long and difficult ESP words as well as complex structures in scientific articles creates difficulties in teaching ESP. This results in the lack of English vocabulary among Vietnam students.

The survey results show respondents have difficulties with vocabulary. Therefore, they depend heavily on the dictionary. There are 43.5% of respondents who think that dependence on the dictionary causes difficulties in teaching ESP.

The proportion of students who feel they have difficulties with the four skills is relatively high. Writing is the most difficult one (58,75%), then listening (43,5%), speaking (37%); and reading (37%). Reading skills are considered essential as they help students understand the course. Teaching English for Tourism at Vietnamese universities heavily focuses on grammar and vocabulary. Meanwhile, English communication skills are neglected and this negatively influences students' ability to find jobs after graduation.

Difficulties related to teachers

Nearly half the respondents think that the quality of lectures and textbooks brings about difficulties in learning and teaching ESP. In fact, the lectures and textbooks at Vietnam universities still have many shortcomings, such as a heavy focus on theory as well as insufficient scientific and practical content. Besides, over one-third of respondents believe that teachers' qualifications and teaching methods are big challenges for teaching ESP. One challenge is the need for a theoretical framework to support teaching.

The fact is that many teachers have English certificates but cannot teach ESP is due to poor listening skills. Some teachers are good at the four English skills but lack specialized knowledge, so their lectures are not lively and attractive to students. Meanwhile, the number of native English-speaking teachers trained in their major is still small.

Difficulties related to environment and others

Over 40% of respondents considered that one difficulty in teaching ESP is the lack of appropriate teaching materials. Can Tho University as well as other Vietnamese universities now focus more on equipment investment, especially for teaching English, such as: classrooms equipped with projectors and the library with many computers connected to the internet.

However, large classes with too many students and a heavy focus on examinations have a negative impact on teaching ESP. English classes usually have 40 students or more. Moreover, the difference in students' language proficiency makes teaching ESP more difficult. Meanwhile, most students are passive learners and have no real interaction with the teachers. A heavy focus on examinations makes students learn passively and decreases their proficiency.

In short, teaching English for tourism is facing many difficulties arising from subjective and objective factors. These difficulties have a direct impact on teaching ESP and students' ability to find jobs after graduation. For improving ESP teaching effectiveness, there should be

collaboration between students, teachers and universities as well as the relevant authorities.

Recommendations for students

- Students should clearly establish learning objectives by improving their learning responsibility (regular class attendance, paying attention to the lectures and so on).

- Students need to improve their knowledge by finding more materials, especially specialized documents for improving reading comprehension skills.

- Students should be more active in learning by interacting more with teachers and participating in activities and tasks such as discussions, presentations and group activities. In addition, students can also gain more knowledge and skills by taking part in clubs and teams at universities. They should spend more time practicing the English skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

- Students need to practice two important skills for learning English for tourism, these include translation skills and skills in using a dictionary in small groups. Attending skills training courses would also be desirable. Students should also share knowledge with friends.

- Students should seek part-time jobs requiring English, especially English for tourism for the opportunity to practice regularly the learned knowledge.

Recommendations for teachers

- Teachers' professional experience should be improved by actively participating in domestic and overseas professional training courses. Sharing experiences with other teachers both in their university and with others is also desirable. This helps expand the relationship and enhance professional experience. They must improve their language knowledge especially by finding more ESP materials and learn from others' experience.

- Teachers should regularly update teaching methods in grammar and focus on the skills of students. Teachers can give more practical examples and organize trips to acquire specialized knowledge which would help students better understand their major.

- Teachers should use information technology in lectures to increase attention as well as save time and effort. This would increase teaching efficiency especially with equipment investment in universities.

- Teachers need to establish closer relationships with students in the classroom and understand and share the difficulties that the students encounter. Teachers should divide the class into groups of students with different levels. In addition, teachers should also encourage students to participate in listening and speaking skill training classes.

Can Tho University should allocate time within subjects more reasonably by increasing practical classes and focusing more on English for tourism. The University should adjust the student numbers in English classes (about 20 students in a class). This helps students to have more opportunities to practice ESP.

The University needs to invest more in teaching materials especially textbooks, by actively coordinating with domestic and overseas universities to develop ESP textbooks in line with Can Tho university and in Vietnam generally. We should increase cooperation among universities in Vietnam and in the world to increase the opportunities for learning and sharing experiences and knowledge among teachers.

Conclusion

The survey results showed that teaching and learning English for tourism in Can Tho University still faces many difficulties. The study showed that the lack of vocabulary, especially ESP terms, makes many students depend on a dictionary. As a result, this dependence limits the flexibility and imagination of learners. Lack of skills in using a dictionary is also a worrying problem. When using a dictionary, many students only pay attention to the first meaning of a word and do not consider its other meanings and usages. Besides, teachers do not often teach dictionary-using skills to students.

The study indicated that most learners had difficulties in identifying and understanding the syntax of sentences. This makes reading English more difficult and sometimes learners may misunderstand sentence meaning. The reason is that there are too few interesting scientific English articles in the university library, so students are unfamiliar with ESP documents.

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Undergraduate Students' Beliefs about Language Learning and English Achievement

Luh Angelianawati
angelianawati@gmail.com

Faculty of Education and Teacher Training,
Christian University of Indonesia

Abstract

This correlational study, involving undergraduate students in the English Teaching Study Program investigated the relationship between students' beliefs about language and their actual English achievement. The participants were 48 students selected through a proportional random sampling technique from a total of 193. Data were collected from a questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that students' beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution to their English achievement.

Introduction

Current expectations of English language learning at schools is that students master the language both written and orally. This expectation challenges teachers of English since to make language learning successful they need to consider teaching instruction and materials, the language learners themselves, as well as other factors. The learners become one of the important components of language learning because they bring their individual characters to the language learning processes.

Sardiman (as cited in Tjandra, 2009, p. 4) stated that the language learning achievement of an individual is an interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors involve physical factors, psychology, and fatigue (both physical and mental). External factors include family factors, school factors, and community factors (Slameto, 2010, pp. 54-72). Johnson (2001, p. 117) affirmed that characteristics brought by the students into the learning tasks are significant and should be taken into account. The learners' individual characteristics can help to explain their individual outcomes. The roles played by male and female students, their social contexts, beliefs and experiences, age, motivation, aptitude, cognitive styles, learning styles or strategies, their affective states, and personal characteristics may help to understand their learning processes and the final results they obtain (Madrid, 1995, p. 62).

Because the English language curriculum focuses on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, teachers do not always explore the individual characteristics that the learners bring into the classroom, such as what are the underlying beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1987). Breen (as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) stated that in the classroom context, the language learning beliefs, and other characteristics that students bring with them to the learning situation are significant contributory factors in the learning process and ultimate success.

Wenden (1987) proposed that to discover what characterizes lead to successful language learning, it is necessary to discover what students believe or know about their learning. Richards and Lockhart (1996) define beliefs about language learning as very specific assumptions brought by students to the classroom about how to learn a language and about the kinds of activities and approaches they believe to be useful. It covers motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, and their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language. Horwitz (1987) divided language learning beliefs into five different elements: (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) the difficulty of language learning; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations.

Very little research has concerned the contribution of students' beliefs about language learning on their language learning achievement. However, Sioson (2011), conducted a prediction study in relation to language learning strategies, students' beliefs, and students' oral performance. It was found that students' beliefs had a significant contribution to the oral performance of the participant. Lan (2012), studied the roles of anxiety and beliefs about language learning on the English achievement of Taiwanese 7th graders, and found their beliefs had a correlation with their achievement. A correlational study conducted by Angelianawati (2012) found that there was a positive and significant contribution of the beliefs about language learning, learning styles and language learning strategies with students' English achievement.

Therefore, this research was aimed at investigating how undergraduate students' beliefs about English language learning contributed to their English achievement.

Research method

Frankel and Wallen (2009, p. 328) proposed that the possible relationship amongst variables can be studied through correlational research. The results cannot determine the causes but can suggest the need for future studies. Furthermore, Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) state that 'correlational research involves collecting data to determine whether and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables' (p. 196).

The objective of the study was investigating the contribution of beliefs about language learning on the undergraduate students' English achievement using correlation research through predictive analysis. The beliefs about language learning were limited on types of beliefs proposed by Horwitz (1987).

In the present study a sample of 48 respondents was selected from a total of 193. The variable which became the predictor in this study was beliefs about language learning. Meanwhile, the dependent variable (criterion) was English achievement. Data were collected from an inventory and documentation. The inventory used in the present study was Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory adapted from Horwitz's (BALLI, ESL version, Horwitz, 1987).

Data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis. Data description was used to describe the characteristics of each variable to understand the data for the next steps of the analysis. The inferential analyses tested the hypothesis of whether there was a significant contribution of the student's beliefs about language learning towards their English achievement. Pearson product moment correlation was utilized to determine the relationship between, and contribution to, language learning beliefs and students' English achievement.

With regard to the descriptive data, the categorization and distributions of students' scores of beliefs about language learning, and the students' English achievement were based on norm-referenced measurement.

Research findings and discussion

The result of the descriptive analysis showed that the tendency of the beliefs about language learning was high seen from the mean score of 120.77 from 165. 10.42% of students' beliefs about language learning were categorized very high, and 89.58% were in the category of high. Moreover, there were no respondents whose beliefs about language learning were in category of very low. The results of the mean score calculation showed that the tendency in undergraduate students in the English Teaching Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, for beliefs about language learning was high.

Based on the students' answers to the questionnaires as well as a short discussion with the classes, it was found that some students asserted that learning English would be more interesting when they could speak to native English speakers and when media such as video, music, games, pictures, tape were used. They also believed that learning English would make them be better able to study other subjects which were taught in English, as well as being able to find a good job in the future.

In terms of difficulties, some students believed that listening and speaking were more difficult than reading and writing. They needed to concentrate fully, memorize many words, and understand the words and grammar. They realized that vocabulary was very important in learning English. Some other students believed that although English was quite difficult, if they were willing to study, it would become easier. Some of them also said that English appeared to be easier than mathematics and science. They expected that in the future teachers would be able to give them optimal assistance while learning English. They also stated that it was important to find the best ways to study English. They needed guidance from the teachers about what, when, where, and how to learn English to gain the best results, so that, they could use English accurately and fluently.

Based on the data, the mean score of students' English achievement was quite high at 71.74% with 35.42% of students scoring very high; 52.08% high; and 12.50% average.

To test the hypothesis of whether there was a significant contribution of beliefs about language learning on undergraduate students' English achievement, product moment correlation and linear regression analysis were used. All data fulfilled the requirements to be analyzed further. The data were normally distributed and linear. The product moment correlation and linear regression showed that there was a positive correlation between beliefs about language learning and English achievement; the correlation value (r) was 0.004; the correlation value (r) was 0.004 ($0<r<+1$— positive correlation).

Subsequently, in order to know whether the r value was significant or not, the counted r was compared to r critical value (cv) or r table. If the counted r is higher than r_{cv} with the degree of significance ($\alpha=0.05$), the correlation was significant. However, if the countable r was lower or the same as r_{cv}, the correlation was not significant.

In this study, since the number of respondents (n) was equal to 48; df = 46, so that the $r_{cv} = 0.284$ ($\alpha=0.05$). Based on the comparison done, the scores indicated that the counted r was lower than r_{cv} ($0.004 < 0.284$). This means that the correlation between beliefs about language learning and English achievement was not significant. Additionally, it was also found that R Square = 0.000

(0.0%). This indicates that beliefs about language learning had no contribution to English achievement. The t-test provided a value of 0.025 ($\rho = 0.980 > 0.05$) which indicated that the contribution of beliefs about language learning toward English achievement was not significant either.

Additionally, based on the linear regression analysis, it was found that the contribution of students' beliefs about language learning was a very small - only 0.005(X).

From the results obtained the hypothesis was rejected. There was no significant contribution of beliefs about language learning (the predictor) to the dependent variable (or criterion) English achievement. Even though the predictor had a positive correlation towards the criterion, its contribution was not significant. In other words, students' English achievements are mainly influenced by factors other than their beliefs about language learning.

The results that the students' beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution toward their English achievement, signifies that other considerations, modifications, or explorations in terms of theories, methodologies, instruments used are needed. It is acceptable because students' beliefs about language learning influence and contribute to their language achievement (Horwitz, 2010; Madrid, 1995).

It appears that having better methodologies, instruments, as well as investigating different populations may result in a better outcome. In terms of methodology, it will be better if the researcher modified the methodologies used by utilizing a mixed method, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Moreover, the data will be more elaborate if gathered using several techniques such as survey, interview, observation, questionnaire, and documentation. In terms of instruments used it is important to consider their appropriateness especially in relation to theories been examined.

Conclusion

It was found that beliefs about language learning made no significant contribution towards the English achievement of English Teaching Study Program students in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Christian University of Indonesia, Jakarta. It signifies that there were other factors which were more influential and dominant for students' English achievement. These other factors should be studied further. In this study it was found that the students had strong beliefs about language learning. However, their strong beliefs did not guarantee that they would be successful in learning English.

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Enhancing Teenage EFL Learners' Motivation through Activity-Based Language Teaching

Van Thi-Hong Dao
dthvan286@gmail.com
English Division, FPT University, Can Tho City, Vietnam

Thuy Quang-Ngoc Tran
tqnthuy@hueuni.edu.vn
College of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Hue City, Vietnam

Abstract

Promoting learners' interest in learning is very important for learning to be effective. This action research study was conducted to find the answer to the issue 'To what extent does activity-based language teaching (ABLT) affect teenage EFL learners' motivation?'

In this study, 74 teenagers using the same level with a course book, *Smart Choice 2*, were divided into two groups: the control group was taught in a traditional way with lectures; and the experimental group was taught with ABLT. Participants were required to complete questionnaires and invited to join in interviews. Classroom observations were also made. Data were analyzed and synthesized using the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The results showed that ABLT had a positive effect on teenage EFL learners' motivation. In addition, it helped to raise learners' confidence and provided insights into factors which distracted students throughout the experimental period.

Introduction

As educators introduce innovations to improve teaching quality, there has been a big shift in the role of teachers and learners. Instead of maintaining the traditional teacher-centered classroom model, researchers have advocated learner-centered models. ABLT is considered a progressive teaching method which allows learners to construct knowledge for themselves. Nevertheless, very little research has been conducted to determine the effects of ABLT on EFL learners, especially on their motivation.

Literature review

Christiansen and Walther (1986) define activity as goal-oriented actions occurring as a consequence of changes in their needs and intentions. This definition emphasises Leontev's theory about the structure of activity and the role of human needs and goal-directed processes caused by the motive of the activity. Richards (1982) supports the above mentioned theory and sees activity as a kind of purposeful procedure involving learners in doing something related to the goals of the course.

Activity-based language teaching (ABLT)

Many researchers (Harfield, Davies, Hede, Panko, & Kenley, 2007; Prince, 2004; Suydam & Higgins, 1977) have discussed ABLT as a teaching method in which students actively participate and learn through planned classroom activities. According to Prince (2004) ABLT requires the active involvement of learners in their course of study. Harfield et al. (2007) reflected that ABLT is a teaching method in which learners can make a dynamic contribution in all learning activities without being 'unreceptive spectators' (p. 98). Further, Suydam and Higgins (1977) defined ABLT as a process of learning with students 'actively involved in doing or seeing something done' (p. 8).

Why ABLT?

Fines (1994) pointed out that 'good learning is always active learning, in which students rather than the teachers do the work'. Suydam and Higgins (1977) considered that teachers who use ABLT need to have the use of manipulative materials. Teachers should not only follow the task sequences in textbooks. Instead, they should assign, rearrange and split the task into shorter activities which integrate the new content with the learners needs. Stößlein and Changchun (2009) argued this approach is a way that teachers integrate learning with learners' current knowledge. Students are exposed to a myriad of different activities as they learn how to learn. Actively involving learners in classroom activities is believed to be an effective way for them to improve. ABLT helps learners not only gain knowledge but also improves and develops some important skills including team-working, communicating and problem solving.

What is an ABLT lesson like?

In investigating the effect of ABLT on students' performance in listening Khan and Tabassum (2015) conducted a study in which an ABLT lesson of forty minutes comprised four activities: Preparation, Presentation, Practice and Production.

Gomathi (2013) in his research suggested some ideal activities for use in the communicative grammar classroom included: Brainstorming; Word/Sentence Building; The Jigsaw method; Just for minute; and the Twenty Questions Game.

The process of designing a task is more complex than that of designing an activity. As can be seen from Figure 1, an activity is merely a part of task designing. Moreover, according to Nunan (1989) a task can stand alone as a communication act and has a sense of completeness. An activity, in contrast, is just a simple action which serves a concrete purpose in the whole lesson.

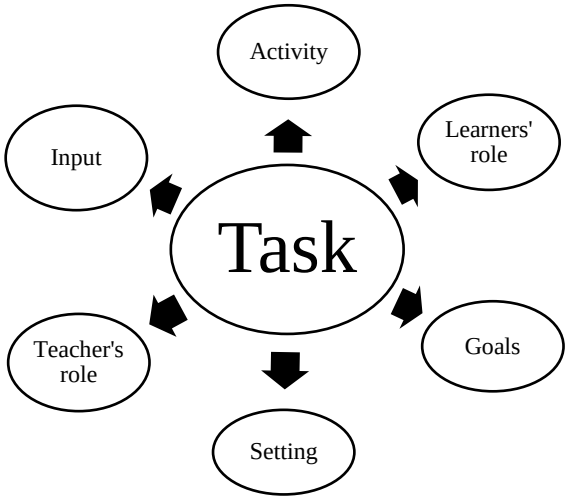


Figure 1: A framework for analyzing communicative task (Adapted from Nunan 1989/2000, p. 11).

Motivation

The concept of motivation has been defined in different ways, but most researchers agree that motivation is 'responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction' (Dörnyei, 2009, 117).

Brown (1994) considered motivation as an inner drive or impulse that promotes people to do a particular action. According to Cherry (2014) motivation is viewed as the process in which all behaviors are begun, guided and goal-oriented. Regarding motivation in second language learning, Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2009) saw it as the key factor that directly influences the success of a learning process. Connecting this factor with the use of ABLT in English teaching, Hake (1998) argued that learners' motivation is facilitated by involving learners in interactive activities.

During the 1990s there was a revival of research interest related to motivation in learning a second language or a foreign language (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1993, 1997). Dörnyei (1994) developed what he termed an 'extended framework', which considered motivation at the Language Level, the Learner Level and the Learning Situation Level. According to Dornyei course-specific motivational components are related to 'the course syllabus, teaching materials, teaching method and learning task' (p. 280). These are mentioned in another framework proposed by Keller (1983) which related motivation to teacher's behaviors, personality and teaching style. Group-specific motivational components concern the group dynamic of learners and include four sub-factors: goal, norm and reward system, group cohesion and classroom goal structure (Keller, 1987).

Table 1. Components of foreign language learning motivation

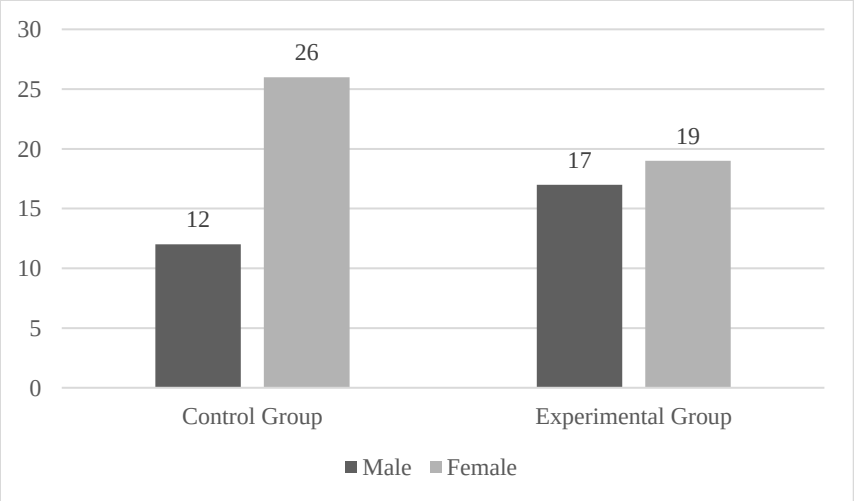
Language level	Integrative motivational subsystem
Learner level	Need for achievement Self-confidence • Language use anxiety • Perceived L2 competence • Casual Attribution • Self-efficacy
Learning situation level *Course-specific motivational components* *Teacher-specific motivational components* *Group-specific motivational components*	Interest Relevance Expectancy Satisfaction Affiliative motive Authority type Direct socialization of motivation • Modelling • Task presentation • Feedback Goal- orientedness Norm and reward system Group cohesion Classroom goal structure

Research question

To what extent does Activity-Based Language Teaching affect teenage EFL learners' motivation?

Twenty-nine male and 45 female learners participated in this research study. All of them were required to complete a questionnaire. Six students (3 boys and 3 girls from the experimental group) were randomly chosen to participate in follow-up in-depth interviews about their attitude toward the practice of ABLT. Each interview lasted from 10 to 15 minutes. All of the answers were recorded and transcribed for the process of data analysis.

Figure 2. The number of participants in each group



The ARCS model (Keller, 1987) was used to measure students' motivation. This contains four components: Attention; Relevance; Confidence; and Satisfaction, which are required for people to be and to remain motivated.

Research design

The five steps of Learning through Action (Laws, 2013) were applied in the research.

Step 1: Identifying the issue

In many lessons it was noticed that the students were excited with warm up activities but they quickly became bored with the lessons, especially when the teacher kept lecturing to explain grammar rules. The idea arose as to whether turning all learning content into activities to make students become more active in the learning process and to gain knowledge by themselves, would retain learners' motivation.

Step 2: Gathering data

The study began by requiring all students to complete the questionnaire. This provided primary data about the level of students' motivation before the intervention. Next, the students in the experimental group, were taught with ABLT and those in the control group were taught through traditional teaching methods based mainly on lecturing.
The classrooms were observed to gain an impression of students' attention and confidence (which were determined by the number of students volunteering to answer questions and take part in activities, and the number of students who looked outside or did something else instead of learning English).

The teacher researcher noted positive and negative aspects after each lesson, recorded the interviews, made videos of the lessons, wrote reflections, and took photographs to provide illustrations about students' work. After six weeks the participants were asked to do the questionnaire for the second time.

Step 3: Interpreting data

The data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantifiable data from the questionnaire were processed with SPSS, and the qualitative data were analyzed manually through theme grouping.

Step 4: Acting on evidence

The process of acting on evidence is summarized in Figure 3.

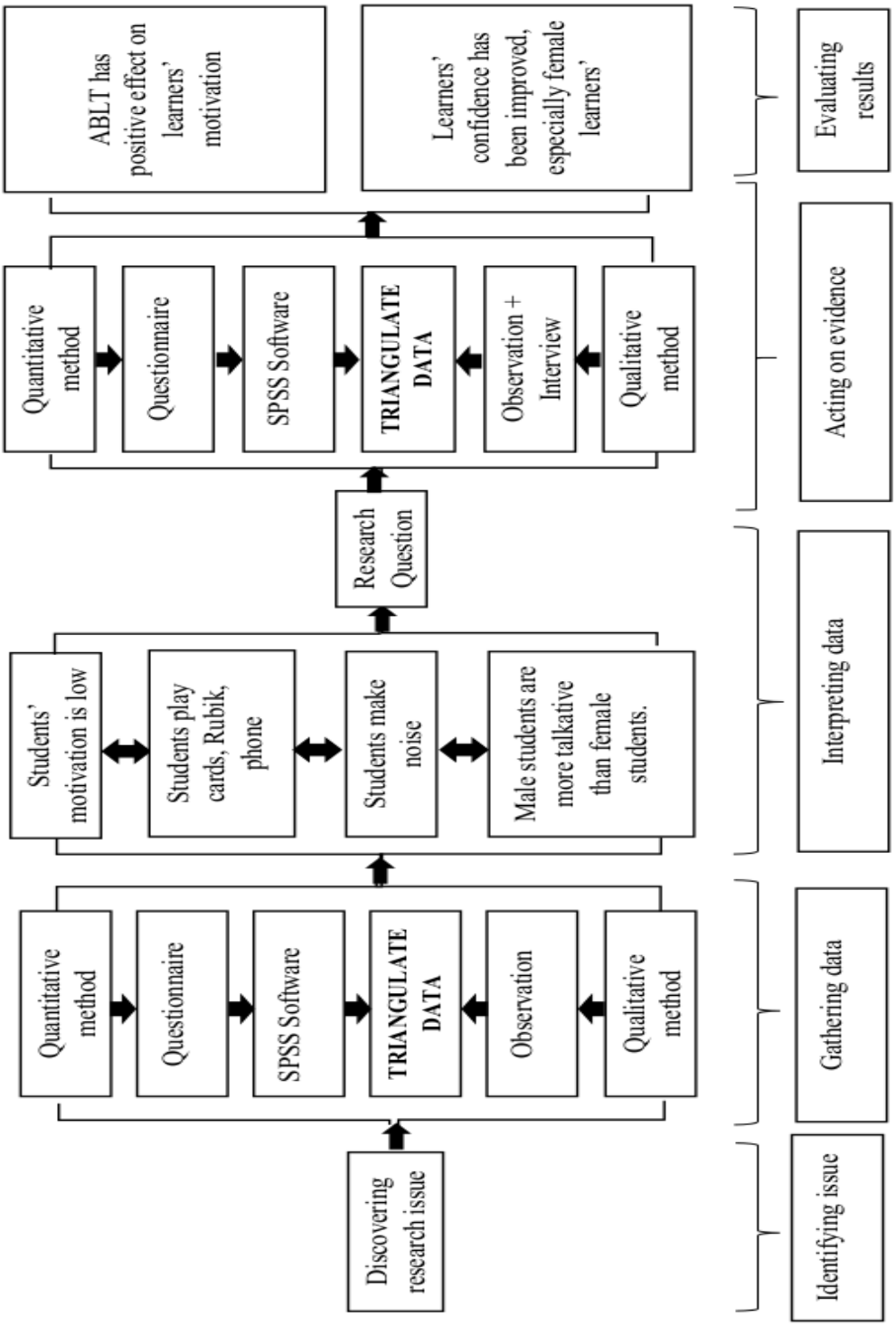


Figure 3: Five-step procedure of Learning through Action model

Step 5: Evaluating results

The researcher evaluated the results and prepared a report.

Results

When the questionnaire was administered before the intervention it was found that there was no significant difference in the motivation between two groups.

After the six-week experimental period, the teacher researcher delivered the questionnaire for the second time (see Table 2):

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on pre-intervention and post-intervention of the two groups

Group		**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**SD**
Experimental (N=36)	Pre-intervention	2.82	4.41	3.71	.42413
	Post-intervention	3.24	4.71	3.95	.38094
Control (N=38)	Pre-intervention	2.74	4.74	3.64	.53471
	Post-intervention	3.09	4.29	3.7	.32931

As indicated in Table 2, the pre-intervention mean score of the Control group (M=3.64, SD=.53) and Experimental group (M=3.71, SD=.42) were at the same level. For the post-intervention, the mean scores from both groups after receiving different treatments show that the Control group remained at the same level of motivation, while the Experimental group scores changed.

An independent sample t-test was run to analyze and compare the mean score in learners' motivation between two groups. The results from the Control group show that teenage EFL learners' motivation between pre- and post- tests was at the same level (p=.134). The results from the Experimental group indicate that teenage EFL learners' motivation between pre- and post- tests was somehow different.

After the intervention, students are more motivated than before, with the mean scores at 3.95 and 3.71 respectively. In other words, ABLT had positive effects on teenage EFL learners' motivation.

Table 3: Mean scores of the experimental group between pre- and post- intervention

Group (N=36)		**Mean**	**SD**	**t-value**	**P**	**df**
Experimental	Pre-	3.71	.42413	-2.494	.015	70
	Post-	3.95	.38094			

Data collected through qualitative methods supported these results. The interviews indicated that the students agreed that the use of activities brought about a different classroom atmosphere and helped the lessons become attractive and lively.

Student 1 said:

> *Compared with the previous one, this course makes me more interested in learning English by the appearance of new things such as new topics, new activities and new games…*

Student 4 said:

> *… students can interact with teachers and friends, while the teacher in the last course just let me learn by lecturing and he did not gave chances for us to interact …*

It can be concluded that ABLT helped change the atmosphere in the classroom positively. The students became more involved in the class activities and were aware of what they could do in the lessons. When students are involved in the learning process they feel more interested in learning and therefore become more engaged in their learning.

Each cluster made a contribution to motivation which included Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction. It was noticed that learners' confidence had been improved after the intervention.

ABLT and learners' confidence

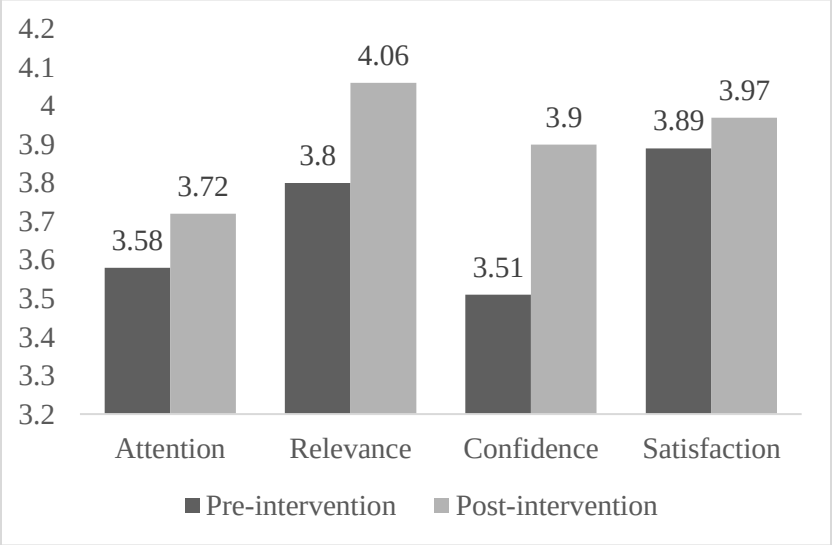


Figure 4. Descriptive statistics on pre- and post- Intervention in the experimental group

It can be seen that EFL learners' motivation in each cluster increased in the post-intervention columns. Although the statistical analysis showed that there were no statistically significant differences between pre- and post- intervention in Attention, Relevance and Satisfaction, learners' Confidence has been raised significantly.

Qualitative data also indicated an increase in the students' confidence after the intervention. Through observation, the teacher-researcher found that the students actively took part in learning activities. The data collected in the interviews also showed that the students in the Experimental group were quite confident when joining in the activities.

Participants believed that the activities in the lessons helped reduce boredom and thus they concentrated better on their studies. As a result, the lessons became understandable and they could remember what they did and learnt longer (Student 2).

However, the interviews provided some insight into why some learners become distracted during lessons. When the teacher-researcher asked the students 'What are reasons that disturb you in the lesson?' the students revealed some reasons that were also supported by teacher observations.

Student 4 said:

> *…many students bring cell phones to classroom and use [these] while studying…because they think that the main purpose of coming to this center is for relaxation …and talking.*

Student 2 said:

> *'students love playing'. Since most of the students in this group were 10 to 12 years old, they were quite innocent and they loved playing games such as Rubic, cards and yoyos that they brought into the classroom.*

Student 2 also said:

> *… because they just meet together twice a week, they have many things to talk about together…*

Students 4, 5, and 6 agreed that they could be affected easily by their surrounding environment.

Pedagogical implications

The results of this study indicated that ABLT helped the teacher boost teenage students' motivation and hence the students paid more attention to their study and became more confident. In the light of the findings, it can be concluded that teenagers are aware of their active role in the classroom and they highly appreciate interesting activities in an EFL lesson. Therefore, appropriate teaching methods such as ABLT should be taken into consideration for positive changes in the EFL classroom.

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Anchoring Student's Critical Thinking through a Critical Discourse Approach: Discursive Strategies in a Language Classroom

Fuad Abdullah
fuad.abdullah182@gmail.com

Agis Andriani
agisandriani@unsil.ac.id

Siliwangi University, Indonesia

Abstract

Critical thinking (CT) has become an essential competency in this current era because it can lead students to construct knowledge and understandings. The development of students' critical thinking can change students' emotions, motivation and metacognition. However, Indonesian students tend to be reluctant to think critically, negotiate their ideas and engage in non-traditional classroom contexts.

This study utilised discursive-oriented activities based on pedagogical intervention for shaping the students' CT skills. Theoretically, this study was framed within a *Discourse Historical Approach* (Reisigl, 2017). The corpora of this study were 98 students' final project reports on the Introduction to Linguistics course. Such corpora were analysed with Wodak's discursive strategies (2009), namely *nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification and mitigation.*

The findings revealed that the students can shape their critical thinking through (1) recognizing the applied linguistic research, (2) conceptualizing ideas, (3) collecting relevant linguistic data and other needed information, (4) sharing ideas and providing feedback, (5) creating research reports, (6) consulting and evaluating the initial research reports and (7) presenting the research reports.

By deploying critical discourse analysis in English language teaching and learning practices, the teachers can go beyond text analysis and prepare the students to use CT in their lifelong learning. More importantly, these activities do not only foster CT but also critical literacy (CL) and critical pedagogy (CP) required to be an ideal English language teacher.

Introduction

Critical thinking (CT) has been considered an important competency for individuals and an essential outcome for higher education students (e.g. Paul, 1988; Facione & Facione, 1996; Watson and Glaser, 2002; Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2012; Taie, 2015; Chen, et. al. 2017). Koening (2011) contends that educators, policymakers and employers constantly believe that teaching critical thinking enables the students to develop important life skills. Baki et. al. (2016) argue that 'critical thinking maximizes the use of cognitive strategies and the concern is the process of accomplishing a task, and not so much on the physical outcome' (p.73).

Atkinson (1997) studied the significance of critical thinking pedagogies in TESOL contexts and claimed that CT is probably a part of non-overt social practice instead of a definite and teachable pedagogical array of behaviours. Cultural problems become a sensitive issue among the non-native speakers when exposed to CT. Metha and Al-Mahrouqi (2014) investigated how CT can be taught in EFL contexts and found that continuous oral and written practices supply chances for the students to foster their CT abilities. More recently, Aunurrahman, et. al. (2017) explored students' academic writing competencies focusing on their critical thinking and found that students showed little control over their argumentative writing, especially in terms of schematic structure and linguistic features, and their texts indicated low levels of critical thinking skills.

Unfortunately, the spirit of cultivating critical thinking has encountered various challenges in a number of Asian countries. Mueller and Waring (2012) contend that international students, and especially Chinese students, cannot grasp critical reasoning because they conform to a "Confucian notion of 'order' or 'harmony' that is reinforced by an 'authoritarian State'" (p. 4). Nguyen (2011) argued that Asian students, particularly from Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam were probably restricted by their learning styles, such as quietness, rote-learning, passiveness, and insufficient critical thinking. Similarly, Rao (2001) claimed that Asian students generally display a lack of learning autonomy and dislike vagueness. Such typical characteristics are thought to emerge as a result of the teacher-centered pedagogical approach and closure-oriented learning mode.

One of the possibilities to address such challenges is to deploy discursive-oriented activities for teaching English (i.e. Critical Discourse Analysis). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) refers to a study of how practices, events and texts appear and are constructed by power relations and power struggles (Fairclough, 1995a). Wodak and Weiss (2005) theorise that CDA is 'aggressively interdisciplinary and pluralistic in both method and theory' (p. 124).

In spite of attention given to CDA few studies have addressed how critical thinking (CT) is shaped through the CDA approach. With this in mind, the current study aimed at probing how CDA classroom-based activities can support the students' critical thinking skills.

Methodology, findings and discussion

Anchored in Action Research (AR), the current study aimed at demystifying how CDA classroom-based activities support the students' critical thinking skills. Kemmis (2009) claimed that the primary objective of action research is to change practitioners' practices and their understanding of practices. Burns (1999) adds AR is a wide investigative area endeavoring to enhance the social context where the research is manifested through collective problem-solving and collaboration. AR attempts to galvanise and liberate the stakeholders by cooperating with practitioners and encouraging their critical awareness and consciousness (Grundy 1988; Berg 2004). These parallel the focus of the present study, namely CDA classroom-based activities to support the students' critical thinking skills (e.g. recognizing applied linguistic research, conceptualizing ideas, collecting relevant linguistic data and other needed information, etc.).

This action research was conducted in a university situated in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. Ninety-eight sophomore students (45 males and 53 females) enrolled in the *Introduction to Linguistics* course were grouped into four classes. Generally, these students communicated in local

languages (e.g. Sundanese and Javanese), the national language (e.g. Bahasa Indonesia) and foreign languages (e.g. English and Arabic). They participated in sixteen class meetings in which teachers applied critical thinking activities as proposed by Bloom's higher-order thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002) through Critical Discourse Analysis-based activities (CDA-based activities) to support their classroom activities in producing a research report. Such activities were derived from Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2009), namely *nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation and intensification and mitigation.*

Stages used in the production of the research report project were adapted from Cots (2006). These are explained further in the following section.

CDA offers a new perspective on language, which considers that language use (a) is questionable and problematic (b) reflects social/ideological processes and (c) constitutes a resource to act upon those processes (Cots, 2006). This analysis can be performed in the classroom along with the students, while developing their procedural skills. By doing this, EFL teachers can help students develop their internal values and capacities to critique the world. Cots (2006) contends that the stages of discursive-oriented activities in producing a research report project encompass *pre-task*, *work cycles*, and *language focus*.

Pre-task stage

This stage aims to help students understand the concepts of language and think about using language in accordance with the intended goals. Thus, learning activities should be introduced through discussion of matters related to language and its function in contextual communication. In this study, students discussed *what language is, the functions of language, the position of Linguistics in language teaching, field in Linguistics, and research involving language phenomena with the critical discourse analysis approach*. In this stage, theoretically, the teacher explained the concepts and encourages them to engage in discussing the teaching materials.

Student's 1 vignette # 1

Teacher's question:	*Why is language productive and dynamic?*
Student's answer:	Because people *develop* along with the era they live. *This development creates new terms of language* which also influence to *the development of the language.* The word "*hacker*" as the example, isn't found centuries ago but now it is commonly referred to as one who broke the networking system used by certain institutions.

Vignette # 1 shows that the teacher posed a question to her students "Why is language productive and dynamic?" This implies that she attempted to raise her students' critical thinking since they may have not understood well why the language is *productive* and *dynamic.* In other words, the students were challenged to realize that language will change over time, along with changes in society.

Another question raised by the teacher asked students to identify how Linguistics contributes to language teaching and learning. This question was aimed at constructing students' insights that

Linguistics provided benefits to other disciplines, such as education, psychology, sociology, anthropology.

Before being asked the question students thought that a study of Linguistics did not fit their needs as the English Education Department students who will probably become English teachers.

Student's 1 vignette # 2

Teacher's question:	How does *Linguistics* contribute to language teaching and learning?
Student's answer:	*Linguistics* contributes toward *teachers' competence and performance*. Competence of language teachers, especially English language teachers is based on their knowledge. This includes *knowledge of phonetics, phonology, semantics, pragmatics, syntax and psycholinguistics* which is the study of Linguistics. *Performance* of the teacher means *the use of language* which is being used by them for *teaching*. For example, *the teacher can implement their knowledge* of syntax in teaching the *structure* of English.

However, after considering the question the students' minds were opened. They understood that Linguistics contributes to a language teacher's competence and performance. Student #1 claimed that language teachers should possess linguistic competence as a theoretical ground for them to teach. On the other hand, performance is required to practice such theories.

Working cycles

Pre-task stage gives the foundation to understand some concepts in language and Linguistics. To strengthen and deepen this foundation, the students need to understand the practical knowledge of how to implement the language, as well as its function, and use. This investigation is supported by some steps of activities. These steps of activities were implemented from the ninth to sixteenth meetings. The students accomplished those steps in groups consisting of at least three students.

Recognising the applied linguistic research

In this stage, the students were introduced to applied linguistic research based on its features, functions, designs, etc. They were provided with a variety of different types of linguistic investigations and learned collaboratively through shared reading and classroom discussions. This stage helped them to understand how to select and apply appropriate applied linguistic research, guide them to diagnose the phenomena and help them determine the agreed topic with their group members.

Conceptualising ideas

This objective relates to a series of 'life-long learning skills' including (a) handling the unexpected, (b) making informed choices, (c) developing sharp observational skills, (d) building useful knowledge in one's interactions with the world, and (e) being guided by internal values, beliefs, and reasons. In other words, when students are confronted with a particular phenomenon, they should be responsive and be able to build the knowledge and skills to treat it. By doing so, they

can ultimately make judgements on the basis of their internal values and reasons for approval or acceptance of the consequences. The critical attitude of analysing the use of language is to view that there are various premises of a social approach to discourse.

As an illustration, each group of the students shared their linguistic topics with other students in the classroom. Here are their topics and their reasons to choose them.

Group 1 topic:	*Figurative language* in love song lyric *I'd do it all again* sung by Corrine Bailey Rae.
Reason:	Why a song that has *meaning* is more *touching* than others to understand. Moreover, our group realizes that they included figurative language and *implicit meaning.*
Group 2 topic:	*Language status in social media.*
Reason:	Why people use some ***codes*** in social media whether they know that using *some codes* in social media can cause a bigger problem.
Group 3 topic:	*Beautiful image in cosmetics advertisement.*
Reason:	There is *a hyperbole*, so it can *make people interested in buying the products* especially woman who buy it *without thinking the effect.*
Group 4 topic:	Military language.
Reason:	It is unique. It is *how to make the language brief, dense* and *clear.* Therefore, how is it used in *daily life*?

When the topic had been determined, they needed to decide on a text for their topic. For example, group 1 used the song lyric *I'd do it all again* sung by Corrine Bailey Rae. Cots (2006) to argue that to engage the students with the text performs two purposes.

- The first activity motivates the students to adapt the existing materials in the light of promoting students' critical literacy. It requires only low-level English language skills.
- The second activity, easy reading, demands a higher level of language proficiency and integrates students' experiences as literature readers with their future professional dedication as EFL teachers.

The point here was to make students interpret the text (not just read it for literal meaning) in terms of representations of the social structure and ideological presuppositions the author created, and its ideological effects (Cots, 2006). This required students to read a simplified version and check the accuracy of their basic understanding of the situation. The teacher then focused students' attention to a series of features in the original text version. To help students understand what to do in these activities, the teacher provided guidance by using concepts from Discourse Historical Approach as proposed by Wodak (2009).

Further, the teacher provided the explanations about the concepts through questions:

- Nomination: How are people, objects, phenomena, process or actions named?
- Predication: What characteristics are represented by the naming?
- Argumentation: What is the questioning focus related to the focus of the problem?
- Perspectivisation: From what perspective does the argument arise?
- Mitigation and intensification: How is the argument delivered?

Collecting relevant linguistic data and other needed information

The conceptual understanding of DHA further requires students to review other sources related to the text they selected. This was performed because discourse is a practical, social, and cultural phenomenon. With this in mind, there is a connection to the context as dialectical relationships distinguish between local and more global functions of discourse (van Dijk, 1997). In harmony with that, Cots (2006) reveals that the critical nature of this model is that it depends on the ability of the learners to interpret a text within a certain communicative, social, and ideological context. This involves how they react to it by considering their personal experience and values as well.

In this stage, the students were also guided to have a comprehensive understanding about data, data source, research instruments and data collecting procedures before gathering the required data for supporting their inquiries.

- First, they were introduced to various types of data, such as observations of classroom activities, utterances, clauses, audio, visual, audiovisual and gestural modes etc.
- Second, they were equipped with a variety of research instruments as tools to collect the data (e.g. observation sheets, interview guidelines, etc.). Moreover, they were guided to engage in data collection procedures, such as observation, interview and document analysis.

Sharing ideas and providing feedback

Once the students collected the data they made presentations about what they had gained from the field. They were provided with feedback from classmates as well as the teacher to help them select, analyse, describe and interpret the text related to the language phenomena chosen.

Creating research reports

This step is perceived as the most challenging one because the student researchers should be able to tailor their conceptual, practical and empirical notions into a written work. For these reasons, guiding the students to write their research reports was crucial. Technically, the students were prepared for writing their research report by utilizing a prescribed template. The templates were based on organization, content and language use (Becker, 2018). In addition, they were guided to create a draft of their research report. Once the draft research reports were produced, they were reviewed to evaluate to what extent the reports met the purposes of the investigation. In this stage, the students were encouraged to be open-minded, open-mouthed and open-hearted in accepting the reviews.

In reviewing the reports students considered the elements of *organization* (the main idea, supporting details, concluding sentence, and transition words), *content* (consideration of key ideas from the text and idea development), and *language use* (grammatical features, vocabulary items, and presence of language errors). By understanding these three elements, the students should be able to produce a cohesive and coherent research report.

This activity involved the teachers in consulting with students about their research report drafts, providing feedback to enable the revision of research report drafts, and the revision and rewriting of the research report drafts. This process enabled students to present and discuss their research reports, gain feedback and reflect on what they experienced in discursive-oriented exercises.

Presenting the research reports

Each group was given an opportunity to present their research reports to an audience (the teacher and classmates). More practically, they shared their research findings publicly to radiate their research contributions to society. Clark and Creswell (2015) wrote that by disseminating a research report publicly enables the students with new knowledge to develop as a result of examination and criticism. This provides a bridge for reflecting on what they have undergone during the process of creating a research project. Before reflecting, the teacher gave the students five questions encompassing the topic they chose, the reasons they chose such a topic, how they developed the topic, information related to the topic, and how the topic provided benefits to language teaching in an EFL context. These reflections were synchronized with their weekly notes of their topic development created by the teacher.

How questions play important roles in critical thinking

Questioning is an important activity in the process of cultivating critical thinking through the use of DHA concepts. Questions were used in the teaching learning process of this study to interpret and analyse the text and involved various questions: the literal level of the content of the text, interpretational, applicative, analytical, synthetic, transposition, and evaluation questions (Becker, 2018). The questions act as tools for raising critical thinking skills as they play an important role in students' intellectual and social development.

How DHA and CT support teacher's language competences

Critical thinking refers to individuals' ability to think and make appropriate decisions independently (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011). Without receiving explicit instruction, most students, irrespective of their language proficiency, would not be likely to understand how to effectively demonstrate critical evaluation in the work they have produced (Manalo & Sheppard, 2016). These explicit instructions are realized through the teacher's questions to motivate and guide students involved in leaning activities (e.g. interpreting and analyzing the text). In sum, discursive-oriented activities enable the students to enhance such competencies.

Conclusion

Questions, the teacher, and the students are the three important elements in anchoring critical thinking through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Questions make the concept of CDA,

specifically Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), purposeful, logical, and goal-oriented (Gedik, 2013). This purposeful point reveals that classroom activities rooted in CDA notions facilitate the students to sharpen their logical thinking. It assists the students to be aware of the importance of goal-oriented education (Douglas, 2012) and requires the teachers to be good motivators, facilitators, and models of language use. Promoting critical thinking not only engages the students in a critical learning atmosphere but also leads them to their own critical literacy and critical pedagogy.

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Boosting Student Confidence through English Club Activities

Nguyen Huu Gia Bao
nghuugiabao@gmail.com

Phan Viet Thang
vietthang@ctu.edu.vn

School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam

Abstract

With the increasing importance of English as a medium of international communication in Vietnam, government and individual efforts have been made to create more exposure to this foreign language by means of learning communities, especially English clubs.

The emergence of Can Tho University English Club (EC) has raised the question of its potential as an English communication confidence booster, which was the motivation for this research which aims to firstly, investigate participants' attitudes towards English and communication upon coming to EC, and secondly, examine the effectiveness of well-structured activities in boosting the participants' confidence.

The action research was carried out with 45 participants in 12 one-hour meetings. At first, a questionnaire with 44 Likert-scale items was administered to examine participants' attitudes and confidence-related behaviors both verbally and non-verbally. The data were then analyzed, and the participants undertook typical English Club activities and kept track of their reflections in a journal. After the 12 meetings, the same questionnaire items were answered by participants to test whether their attitudes and confidence had changed. Two participants and two EC volunteers were also interviewed to provide qualitative insights.

The results revealed that EC is acceptably effective in improving students' confidence, yet more emphasis should be put on music-related and quick-response activities.

Introduction

The nature of educational initiatives has regularly been regarded as "quixotic", failing to stand the test of time. However, the initiative of developing a learning community is quite an exception, capturing the attention of faculty with its sustainability. A learning community can take many forms from a formal academic club, to an informal learning opportunity. The key factors for this success embrace the holistic approach that values both teaching and learning (Lardner and Malnarich, 2008). For this reason, a number of research studies have been conducted globally so as to shed light on the potentials as well as implications of this pedagogical practice.

In Vietnam Phuong, Luu and Phan (2015) write that learning communities have appeared to be a promising addition to the existing curriculum, attracting funding and research for extensive implementation. The ultimate purpose of constructing multiple learning communities across Vietnam is to create a learning society, starting with localized movements. In response to this

demand, in 2013, the Government ratified the Decision 281/QĐ-TTg, i.e. Project 281 (GOV, 2013) to facilitate students in further advancing their studies in a comfortable and secure environment.

Concurrently, the implementation of Vietnam's National Foreign Language 2020 Project (the NFL 2020 Project) with the ambitious goal of employing a holistic reform in teaching and learning foreign languages in the national system, led to the idea that learning communities may serve as the central role in this nationwide project.

At Can Tho University (CTU), the establishment of the English Club (EC), marked a milestone on the path of reforming English teaching and learning. EC serves as an interest club with the regular consultancy of CTU Youth Union administrators and other stakeholders. EC is responsible for offering complimentary practical English activities, alongside cultural immersion events to help boost students' confidence and language capacities for a fully integrated future (CTU Youth Union, 2016).

During the first few months, EC only provided a venue and volunteers to help students practice speaking English. Initially, EC was a place for free talk so that participants had their freedom of expression. What the researchers found thought-provoking was that, through their observations, there was a lack of confidence and enthusiasm towards a free-talk approach. Participants refused to initiate and maintain conversations or were able to produce one-word responses only. Also, they constantly complained that they had nothing to say, despite the fact that volunteers were willing to help them when asked. It was decided that a more structured and systematic approach to EC should be added to and tested as soon as possible.

From August 2016, a new series of activities were available at EC, aimed to provide bite-sized knowledge and training to participants, instead of just creating an English-speaking environment like free talk did.

This particular research project aimed to investigate the efficacy of EC's new approach in boosting student confidence, in terms of communicative aspects. It also offers a vantage point for EC founders and administrators to:

1. Observe the demand for and status quo of communicative performances of its participants;
2. Assess the efficiency of structured activities at EC which would enhance verbal confidence;
3. Suggest possible solutions if the findings indicate negative progress or recommend some improvements otherwise.

Literature review

Learning communities

To better conduct the research and design of EC activities, the researchers first reviewed past studies on learning communities, starting with ones defining the practice.

Efforts to define learning communities have led to a variety of descriptions which serve as the backbone for this research.

A common definition states learning communities are groups of learners who continuously and critically improve their shared ways of accumulating knowledge so that they feel best supported (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas & Wallace, 2005).

The Center for Communicative Learning and Leadership at San Jose State University (n.d.) proposed that the concept of a learning community could serve as a platform for students and mentors alike to enjoy continuing shared knowledge through outside-the-classroom activities. To study the effects of learning communities on students' learning the researchers utilized the approach of Tinto and Russo (1993). They included the manageable size of a learning community, interdisciplinary sessions lasting 3 to 5 hours per day, abundant opportunities to practice, compare and analyze, as well as a safe and non-threatening environment. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the present research would also identify an improvement in student confidence thanks to English Club activities.

Confidence in verbal communication

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, confidence is the "state of being sure of doing something, and not being shy and aggressive in social situations". Phe et al. (2002) defined confidence as "the belief in oneself" (p.1077).

Many past studies have indicated that there is a relationship between self-confidence and oral performance. McIntyre (2004) suggested that self-confidence plays a vital role in students' "willingness to communicate in a foreign language". Tran (2016) also observed this tendency when conducting empirical research on the willingness to communicate. A quantitative data by Gürler (2015) also pointed out that there is a "significant correlation between self-confidence and speaking skill". It is clear that without self-confidence, English learners could hardly express themselves fluently.

Based on the Personal Competencies Dictionary (n.d.), Akagündüz (as cited in Gürler, 2015) and Matta (n.d.), the researchers constructed a framework for verbal communication self-confidence consisting of five factors: attitude, body language, language use and contents, response and habitual behaviors, as in Figure 1.

Figure 1. **Conceptual framework of self-confidence in verbal communication**.

Methodology

The researchers focused on two questions in this study:

(1) What are the impacts of EC's oriented activities on student confidence?
(2) What are students' attitudes towards EC's confidence-centered activities?

Forty-six first, second and third-year students at Can Tho University, with a variety of majors were involved in this study. They were asked to sign a consent form detailing the terms and conditions for participation in this study. They all started learning English at Grade 6.

The questionnaire used in this research was based on the conceptual framework of self-confidence in verbal communication. Forty-four Likert-scale items, grouped into five different clusters: Attitude, Body language, Language use and contents, Response time and Habitual behaviors were developed. The first pilot questionnaire was answered by 80 random people so as to check the reliability (α=.754).

Initially, the researchers collected quantitative data from the pre-questionnaire and used it for the lesson plans (detailed instructions and on-the-spot assistance were available to avoid misunderstandings). The same procedure was applicable for the post-questionnaire. Data of the questionnaires were then subjected to an SPSS analysis. The participants' progress and overall observation were additionally kept track of in journals.

To confirm the observations and questionnaire findings, the researchers decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with 2 participants and 2 EC volunteers. The qualitative findings from the

interviews helped researchers gain better insights into participants' reflections on the current activities and fill in any gaps left by the quantitative data analysis.

The materials for 12 meetings were developed by the researchers based on the conceptual framework. Each meeting focused on one particular topic such as greetings, family, friends, university life, etc. which served as a support for participants to initiate and sustain conversations. The materials used supported language use and contents as the aim was to provide students with lexical items necessary to sustain the conversation. The research follows the action research design and is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

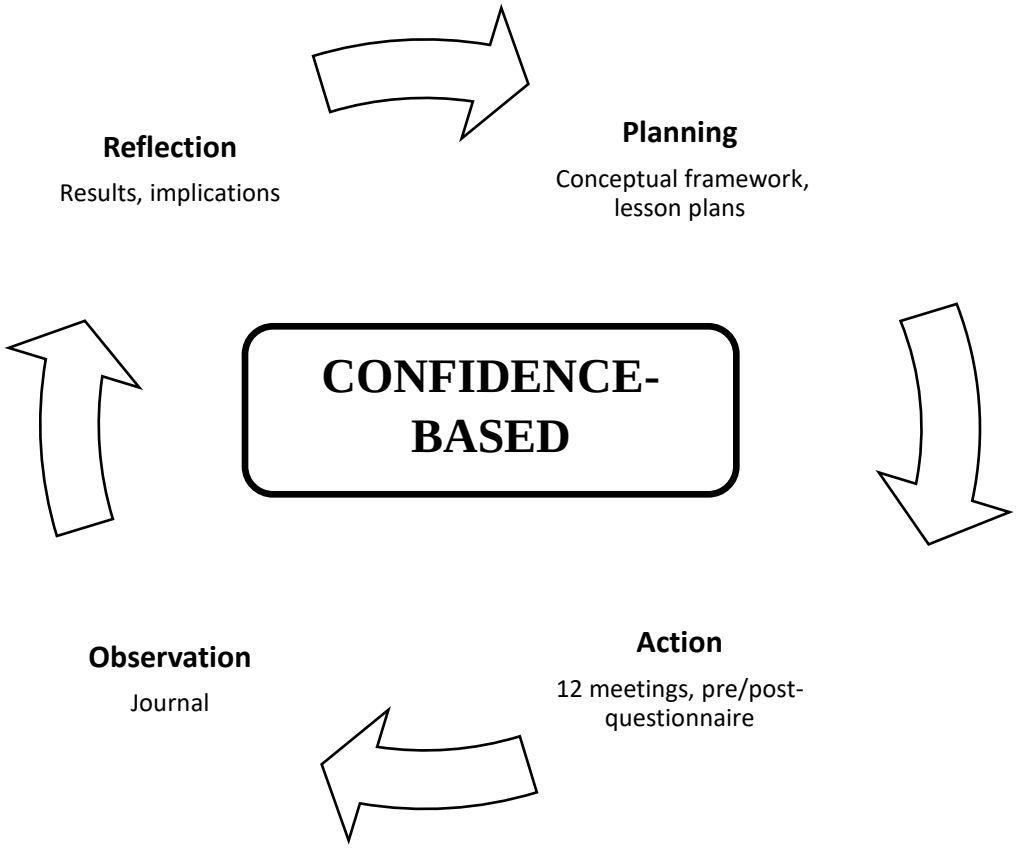

Figure 2. Phases in action research for self-confidence in verbal communication

Results and discussion

The students' attitudes towards EC's confidence-centered activities

For this research question the main data source is the Likert-scale questionnaire and the author's journal.

Table 1: Attitude cluster's statistics

	N	Max.	Min.	Mean	SD
Before 12 EC meetings	45	2.74	4.47	3.82	0.34
After 12 EC meetings	45	3.21	4.53	3.96	0.33

It is noticeable from Table 1. that the average self-evaluating points for the attitude of the participants are somewhat high, both before and after 12 EC meetings. This question cluster is the one which gained the highest average score amongst five clusters. The highest point is 4.53, which is 1.1 higher in comparison with the lowest one. Despite being the lowest mean score, 3.21 is still above average. These results indicate that, with the collaborative attitude of the participants at the beginning, it was easier for EC to support them.

Table 2: Attitude mean scores for each activity

Activity	**Mean (Before EC)**	**Mean (After EC)**
Board games	4.11	4.22
Active games	4.24	4.31
Discussions	4.22	4.25
Short presentations	3.84	4.11
English songs	4.38	4.53
English videos	3.98	4.13
Role-plays/ drama	3.98	4.07

The researchers analyzed mean preference score for each type of confidence-based activity separately (Table 2). In terms of music-related activities, after 12 meetings, the participants expressed an increasing preference after 12 meetings (4.53 and 4.53 respectively). Interestingly, although the "short presentation" activities were among the least favoured, it increased most significantly in the mean score, with a 0.27 difference.

The researchers also conducted a paired sample t-test between two attitude mean scores for all activities listed in Table 2, before and after participating in EC. There was a statistically significant difference in the scores before (M=4.12, SD=0.19) and after (M=4.23, SD=0.16) conditions; $t(6)=-4.26$, $p = 0.005$. These results suggest that there is a significant increase in how positively participants perceive the activities.

The efficiency of EC as a confidence booster

Table 3: Mean scores of the questionnaire

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Before EC	45	2.61	3.95	3.45	.27
After EC	45	2.84	4.27	3.59	.34

Students coming to EC are diverse in terms of confidence level when communicating in English. After joining EC, the one with the lowest mean score obtained 2.84 and that with the highest got 4.27, which are all above average. The mean score increases, from 3.45 to 3.59 after 12 meetings. A paired sample t-test also indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the figures for before joining EC (M=3.45, SD=0.27) and after (M=3.59, SD=0.34) with t(44)=-2.16, p = 0.037.

Table 4: Before coming to EC

Cluster	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Attitude	45	2.74	4.47	3.82	0.34
Vocabulary and content	45	2.25	4.00	3.33	0.42
Body language	45	2.57	5.00	3.63	0.67
Response	45	1.00	4.00	2.36	0.93
Habitual behaviors	45	2.14	3.71	2.88	0.38

Table 5: After coming to EC

Cluster	N	Min.	Max	Mean	SD
Attitude	45	3.21	4.53	3.96	0.29
Vocabulary and content	45	2.63	4.13	3.42	0.36
Body language	45	2.29	5.00	3.79	0.58
Response	45	1.00	5.00	2.70	0.97
Habitual behaviors	45	2.00	3.86	2.95	0.46

For response and habit clusters, the lowest points are 1.00 and 2.00 (after 12 meetings) respectively, which are considerably below average. However, there are some participants who self-evaluated with the highest points in terms of response (5.00), together with the body language. It can be inferred that the confidence aspects of the participants are not the same and there is an improvement in the mean scores of all clusters after 12 meetings. Results show that most participants still faced the burden of making quick responses which affects their level of confidence in English communication (Table 4 & Table 5).

From the journal that recorded observations the researchers found that the participants made significant progress in their willingness to initiate a conversation and to volunteer to perform speaking tasks in front of the whole club. The interviews conducted after the post-questionnaire confirmed the importance of EC in contributing positively to the interviewees English communicative confidence and encouraged the researchers to develop this practice as a sustainable English community.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the quantitative and qualitative data, it is apparent that by using the new systematic approach based on the researchers' conceptual framework instead of free talk, EC managed to improve participants' verbal confidence when conversing in English. The attitude towards all activities is also positive both before and after trying them. The indicators of confidence were all improved after 12 meetings of EC according to researchers' observation and the interviews. In conclusion, EC helps the students improve their confidence in verbal English communication.

It is noteworthy that not all aspects of communicative confidence are easily improved. Therefore, some could be further developed into another action research cycle, e.g. body language, language use and contents, etc.

The findings have also suggested that more emphasis should be placed on music-related and quick response activities. CTU Youth Union may use this particular study to gain deeper insights into how to create replicas in other Schools and Colleges of CTU.

The findings of this particular study contribute to the body of literature about English clubs in Vietnam in particular and Vietnamese learning communities in general, shedding light on the potential of English clubs as an alternative to classroom activities to boost students' confidence.

Firstly, it offers concrete documentation and evidence for educators to sustain the English club model for upcoming years as a powerful tool to alleviate students' diffidence.

Secondly, it responds to the question of whether to replicate this pilot model on a larger scale, as a response to the thirst for innovative English teaching and learning methods. Last but not least, within the scope of this research, some indications for how to structure activities will also be a reliable resource for EC administrators to consider.

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Problems of Teaching and Learning in the ASEAN Economic Community: Case Study of a Bangkok University

Prapassara Thanosawan
mthano@gmail.com

Tippawan Datesong
c/- mthano@gmail.com

Division of Higher Education, Faculty of Education,
Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

Abstract

This study stemmed from the lack of research in Thai tertiary teaching and learning in the context of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The researchers aimed to discover issues affecting teaching and learning in a Faculty of Education in an inner-city university in Bangkok and consider how changes can be made to contribute to the AEC objectives of quality teaching in higher education.

Two issues identified as hindering higher education development in Thailand were the level of use of the English (Jitpaisanwattana, Pathumcharoenwattana, & Tantawutho, 2015; Singsi, 2014; Sinhanet & Fu, 2015; Tantiniranat, 2015; Thanosawan, 2017; Yaakub, n.d.), and a lack of requisite work skills (Barbin & Nicholls, 2013; Nguyen, 2015).

The research involved a two-phase data collection process. The first phase involved collecting questionnaires from 50 staff members from five faculties. These were used to identify problems in teaching and learning. The second phase included in-depth interviews with 28 staff of the Faculty of Education. Content analysis was used to identify themes.

The results confirmed students and instructors lack of English language proficiency as a key deficiency. In addition, a reticence to become involved in changing teaching and learning practices, a lack of a uniform framework of teacher standards among the ASEAN members, the organizational culture of the university, a lack of understanding of the need to improve teaching and learning to international standards, and the need to internationalise the curriculum were identified as issues. Most concerning was the reluctance of lecturers to get involved in professional development activities because of the perception that this would lead to additional work.

Introduction

This research stemmed from a serious lack of studies into the changes and problems and complications that the AEC brings to Thai higher education especially in teaching, learning and the curriculum. It has long been argued that the curriculum in Thailand needs to be updated to respond to the fast-changing global environment. However, the ASEAN community is scarcely a

main focus of Thai higher education. Compared to higher education, it is often found that basic education embraces ideas and changes quicker.

The issue of autonomous universities is most relevant to this research. Currently, many Thai public universities have opted out from being government-operated to being autonomous. Higher education institutions face tighter budget constraints and limitations by the law and state regulations. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) have tried to streamline their operations and reinvent themselves while other universities and tertiary institutions are still caught-up in the outdated bureaucratic system.

The ASEAN Economic Community

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is an initiative to develop a consortium of ten nations to promote freer movement of goods and services. The AEC is a part of the ASEAN Community. The essence of the ASEAN Community is that the assembly of ASEAN nations will facilitate the development of ASEAN in three ways: political-security; socio-cultural; and economic. The AEC aims to establish a "single market and production base" (ASEAN Secreatariat, 2008) similar to the European Union in terms of integration of the economy.

The AEC promotes the development of quality human resources and the knowledge economy. The Thai higher education system has a tremendous task to produce and develop quality human resources which will drive the sustainable development and prosperity of the region. The changes from the AEC and intensive globalisation will manifest in many areas including education. Universities are an important mechanism to improve the quality of education and equip students to be prepared for the changes and future work.

The changing trends

Major changes that would unfold in the area of education is English as a lingua franca of the Southeast Asian countries (Jitpaisanwattana, Pathumcharoenwattana, & Tantawutho, 2015; Singsi, 2014; Sinhanet & Fu, 2015; Tantiniranat, 2015; Thanosawan, 2017; Yaakub, n.d.), as well as the intensive reform of higher education administration/management, and the development of research-intensive universities (Thanosawan, 2017).

The new era calls for critical thinking, analytical thinking and problem-solving skills, and IT skills (21^{st} century skills). The functioning skills in the 21st century differ vastly from those of the 20^{th} century. Thailand is lagging behind other nations in academic excellence since it has not overcome the heavy reliance on the 20^{th} century teaching approach. Barbin and Nicholls (2013) and Nguyen (2015) argue that Thai graduates lack awareness and skills required to operate in the AEC. The main point of the discussion is that the Thai education system needs to be reformed and the education system should give priority to the skills, core knowledge and other desirable traits of learners rather than grades and unrealistic learning outcomes.

Education issues in ASEAN and Thailand

A lack of English proficiency and a lack of harmonisation of education in ASEAN countries impacts upon quality education, as does the university entrance system, teachers' workload, insufficient resources and students' motivation.

Large public universities in Bangkok and major provinces have performed generally well in delivering quality education, but smaller provincial universities are suffering from low educational quality and underachievement of students. In 2014, Thai higher education was ranked eighth in ASEAN. The quality issue is highly controversial. There is little attempt to develop the system of harmonisation of academic standards especially among regional universities and institutes.

Savage (2011) cites the serious lack of English skills among the academics in certain countries where basic and tertiary education is conducted in a national language. Moreover, it becomes a dilemma as English becomes the major language of communication. Given that the diversity of languages used in the region, English as a lingua franca in the academic domain is seen as a double-edge sword. Whereby only some academics who are proficient in English can thrive, other regional academics may be deprived of opportunities to join in academic dialogues.

The use of English language as a main language of teaching could undermine the diversity of languages in the region and decrease the chance for students to develop essential thinking skills such as critical thinking through their native language.

Noom-ura (2013) cited a series of problems reported by teachers in English language. The problems included teachers' heavy workloads, inadequately equipped classrooms and educational technology, the university entrance examination system, and teachers' lack of English language skills and cultural knowledge.

For students, problems in learning English related to interference from the mother tongue, being too shy and poorly-motivated to learn English, and lack of responsibility were reported (Wiriyachitra, 2002, as cited in Noom-ura, 2013, pp. 139-140). Also large class sizes and a mixture of students of various proficiencies in English in the same classroom were reported. Students reported having little or almost no opportunity to use English outside the classroom (Dhansobhon, 2006; ONEC, 2003, as cited in Noom-ura, 2013 p. 139).

Deep and surface learning

The learning approaches that students use to respond to the task determine the extent to which they engage with their subject and this affects the quality of their learning outcomes (Marton 1970). Two approaches have been identified: deep and surface approaches to learning.

The first approach is a "deep" approach which students engage "to understand and seek meaning, leading students to attempt to relate concepts to existing understanding and to each other, to distinguish between new ideas and existing knowledge, and to critically evaluate and determine key themes and concepts. Whereas the second approach, surface learning is typified by students aiming to "complete the task, memorise information, make no distinction between new ideas and

existing knowledge; and to treat the task as externally imposed". In surface learning facts are considered the most important outcome of learning. Generally, rote learning is the typical surface approach (as cited in Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2008, pp. 10-11).

The stereotype about Asian students is that they are "rote-learners" and "brainy" (Marton, Dall'Alba, and Tse, 1993 as cited in Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001, p. 335). However, cultural background has little impact on learning approach. Ramburuth and McCormick (2001) argue that Asian students do not differ from their Australian peers in their overall learning approach, but what is distinctive is that Asian students show greater deep motivation, surface and achieving approaches whereas their Australian peers employ deep strategies and surface motivation. Other factors that could impact on students' learning are family pressure, family commitment, workload, or cost and short time span for studying abroad.

Internationalised curriculum

Knight (2004) defined internationalization of higher education as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 11). The element of an internationalised curriculum addresses the greater interconnectedness between nations and essentials skills such as cross-cultural communication (Mestenhauser, 1998) Internationalisation can benefit higher education institutions by improving the quality of teaching and learning if it is implemented appropriately.

The OECD (1994) defines international curricula as having "an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students." (p. 9). In Leask's (2009) view, internationalisation of the curriculum is the "the incorporation of an international and inter-cultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning processes and support services of a program of study" (p. 209).

In this present research context, an internationalised curriculum is flexible; it is not a Thai curriculum taught in English, or an entirely Westernised curriculum that has no relation to the local context. It is a curriculum that has integrated international content and local content and delivers the expected graduate outcome of global-mindedness. It can be in taught in Thai in the first phase but eventually becomes English over time. This is possible when the learners' English language skills expand. The other characteristic of internationalised curriculum is that it develops the cross-cultural understanding, recognition of differences, as well as openness to new ideas not only among students but also the instructors.

The internationalisation process can nonetheless be problematic. Hellstén and Prescott (2004) cited some difficulties of teaching international students as ranging from their preference for rote-learning, their lack of cultural communication and critical thinking skills as well as poor English language proficiency. Their results were different from Ramburuth and McCormick (2001) who reported that Asian students do not differ from their Australian peers in overall learning approach.

Research methods

This study employed a mixed-method research case study approach involving a two-phase data collection process. The Faculty of Education of a comprehensive university in Bangkok was selected as an intrinsic case for this research. An intrinsic case offers "thick description of a particular site, individual, group, or occupation" (Grandy, 2010). The Faculty of Education had approximately 70 academics in the academic year 2016.

The first phase involved collecting questionnaires from 50 staff members from five faculties and one centre. Selected staff from the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Physical Education, the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Fine Arts, and the Innovative Learning Center were surveyed. The faculties were selected because they co-produced undergraduate and postgraduate programs with the Faculty of Education.

The questionnaire consisted of items which were scored using a 5-point Likert scale. These data were used to identify the problems in teaching and learning in the Faculty of Education. The second phase included in-depth interviews with 28 staff of the Faculty of Education (18 teaching faculty and 10 executives). The data were analysed by using content analysis to determine the themes and the contents that associated with each theme.

Quantitative research

The first phase of this study employed a survey from which problems and challenges in teaching and learning were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was derived from the Strategy for Thai Higher Education to prepare for the ASEAN community (OHEC, 2011).

The framework was intended to guide higher education in Thailand and to equip them with necessities in services and infrastructure for changes. The original version of the framework consists of 5 objectives, and 5 indicators. The modified questionnaire was categorised into four areas: administration; curriculum/teaching and learning; the quality of graduates; and internationalisation. The questionnaire was cross-checked by three experts in higher education leadership, management and teaching for its validity and tried out with 30 lecturers from different faculties and a centre in the university for its reliability. Finally, the questionnaire was administered to 50 lecturers of five faculties and one centre which co-produce the graduates of Bachelor of Education.

Qualitative research

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a total of 28 academics and executives of the Faculty of Education. The interview was used to elicit information to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation (Berry, 1999, in-depth interview).

Participants were selected based on their expertise and positions. Executives were the dean, deputy-deans and the heads of departments. The academics were selected from each department to represent the wide spectrum of the disciplines of the faculty. The data from the questionnaires

were analysed and categorised according to the importance of the issues. The questions were derived according to the themes based on the questionnaire: administration; curriculum/teaching and learning; the quality of graduates; and internationalisation. However, this paper will only focus on curriculum/teaching and learning, and internationalisation.

Data analysis

For the quantitative data SPSS was used for descriptive statistics to get a broad understanding of the problems and challenges in the four areas. For interview data, the researcher used Content Analysis to unearth the problems and challenges that the participants feel or expect will be coming. Then the researcher used a qualitative data analysis program, Atlas, to help with coding and categorisation of data.

Results

Survey results

Each item on the questionnaire was scored using a 5-point Likert scale with a score of 5 indicating the respondent Strong Agreed with the statement. Thus, the higher the mean score the greater the level of agreement there was with that statement. The survey shows that the greater proportion of participants agreed that the Faculty needs to improve itself in four areas: administration; teaching and learning, and curriculum; graduate quality; and internationalisation of the curriculum.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations of the opinions of lecturers and executives on the issues and challenges of the ASEAN Economic Community

Problems and challenges of the ASEAN Economic Community for Thai higher education	**Lecturers and Executives** (n=50) $\bar{X}$	**SD**	**Level**
Administration	4.15	.56	High
Teaching and learning, and curriculum	4.18	.67	High
Graduate quality	4.24	.74	High
Internationalisation of the curriculum	4.34	.69	High
Total	4.20	.60	High

Table 1. shows that Internationalisation has the highest mean, followed by graduate quality. Teaching and learning, and curriculum ranked the third and administration is rated the least for issues and challenges of the AEC. The overall level of these areas shows a high level. The Faculty will need to implement these recommendations into their policy and practice. Combined with the internationalisation of the curriculum/teaching, the teaching/learning and curriculum area becomes a priority in restructuring of the Faculty in the AEC.

Table 2. Results of survey in two areas: Teaching/learning and curriculum; and Internationalisation of curriculum/teaching

Teaching/learning and curriculum	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
15. There should be curricular/extra-curricular activities that develop knowledge and understanding of ASEAN and ASEAN identity	50	4.06	.767
16. Existing teaching and learning need to be more responsive to AEC.	50	4.10	.789
17. Knowledge about ASEAN need to be incorporated in teaching and learning to prepare students for changes	50	4.14	.783
18. Curriculum, teaching and learning should be improved to ensure international quality.	50	4.28	.834
Internationalisation of curriculum/teaching			
28. International perspectives should be incorporated into teaching staff.	50	4.28	.757
29. Faculty should engage in internationalization.	50	4.28	.784
30. Internationalisation should be promoted through curricular/extra curricular activities.	50	4.34	.772
31. Infrastructure and atmosphere that promote internationalization should be provided.	50	4.30	.814
32. The areas in which Thailand is specialised and sought after need to be promoted.	50	4.40	.700
33. English language learning would develop students' better understanding of subject matters.	50	4.46	.838

Table 2. shows the results of the survey in two areas which are teaching/learning and curriculum, and the internationalisation of the curriculum/teaching. The results are arranged according to the scale of needs to improve from high to low.

Internationalisation was rated the highest score. Item 33 illustrates the urgent need for English language learning in the curriculum to support students' understanding of the subject matter. The staff and administrators felt that internationalisation could be promoted in and out of the classroom. They also felt that infrastructure e.g. building, equipment in the classroom and outside, as well as the atmosphere must be supporting the internationalisation of learning and teaching.

For teaching/learning and curriculum, there is a high consensus that the faculty needs to improve its curriculum, teaching and learning, and staff should incorporate knowledge of ASEAN into teaching as to prepare students for changes that are to come. Teaching/learning needs to be more responsive to the AEC or the ASEAN Community and elements of ASEAN and the ASEAN community and identity needs to be developed and understood through extra-curriculum and curricular activities.

Interview results

Many issues were identified as challenges and problems for teaching and learning in the AEC. One issue that was reported was that the academic staff are reluctant in developing themselves

professionally. Although varied professional development opportunties have been provided by the University and the Faculty of Education many staff members did not make use of these opportunities.

> *The Faculty has supported [professional development], the main thing is that our lecturers have to respond to these supports … however much we or the University offer support, the lecturers didn't participate or engage with these things. Some of them are unmotivated to do so.*
>
> (An executive in Student Development and Affairs).

This dialog shows that despite much support for professional development, some lecturers are not interested to participate in these efforts and therefore the results are somewhat disappointing.
A second participant notes the lack of enthusiasm among the lecturers.

> *[Lecturers are not very] enthusiastic with updating ourselves with new knowledge … with this lack of knowledge, it is impediment of internationalisation of our Faculty. But perhaps because they [lecturers]have to do so many things [workloads]... Some people do not want to know anything new for fear that they will have more work to do in the future.*
>
> (An administrator of one department).

When a lecturer participates in a course and learns something new it might be a burden for them because she or he will be assigned the work which others might not want to do. Being active in the Faculty sometimes puts pressure on lecturers because there are colleagues or heads of the department who are passive and looking for these active people to do the unwanted jobs.
The participants cited organisational culture as being an obstacle for raising the faculty's internationalisation of teaching.

> *It is like we are in safe house…you will see that the lecturers are like students. They are relaxed and feel comfortable in this Faculty. When they are too relaxed, they do not have to be very active because there is no need to compete …. We need to be much more active. If we continue to do things the same way, we cannot get anywhere near our expectation. Our lecturers cannot compete because they are always in safe and secure environment.*
>
> (The head of Academic Affairs).

The understanding of the AEC and its relevance to higher education is rarely understood by academics. Much of the discourse of promoting AEC is only rhetoric and does not essentially lead to actions.

> *The problem is that we don't fully understand it* [*the AEC*]. *How it may connect and affect us in higher education and even in the Faculty. They know that the AEC is the cooperation*

of the Asean nations in four areas: *environment, politics, arts and culture and the economy*. *But we do not know what effects it can have on higher education*. *What implications does it have in the faculty administration? It is very unclear to us*.

(The head of a department).

This lack of understanding among the academic staff and executives is widespread. To explain this phenomenon, the leader needs to prioritize internationalisation and promote understanding among the academic staff and office staff, as well as making a strong case for an internationalised curricula.

One administrator described the problems in international teaching:

When it comes to international programs. *It is delivered in English*. *For Thai program, the language is Thai*. *When we talk about bilingual programs, it is delivered in both Thai and English*. *This becomes a challenge for us if we offer bilingual programs*. *The students have to be proficient in English*. *And for the lecturers, they have to be very proficient in English in order to teach these classes*.

(An administrator in Student Affairs).

This administrator shows concern about the language competency of lecturers if the Faculty is to offer international programs. This was also reflected by many other quotes that indicate the lack of English skills among the lecturers.

Another lecturer commented on the internationalisation of curriculum:

… If we are to offer the courses in the AEC, we need international contents… I mean that the content we teach. *If we* [*are to*] *go to the AEC*. *The principles of teacher training are similar else where but the contents need to be internationalised*.

(A lecturer).

One serious issue that the faculty is encountering in the age of regional integration is that there are no international contents. Moreover, most of the lecturers are not proficient enough in English to deliver lessons in international courses.

A final issue that was identified was the lack of common teacher professional standards among the ASEAN countries.

For the Asean countries, there should be a shared set of teacher professional standards. *Without these professional standards, nothing tangible can be done*. *That's why we need shared professional standards*.

(A lecturer).

In Thailand, there are 12 teacher professional standards (The Teacher Council of Thailand, 2013) that a teacher requires to practise teaching in public schools. However, in Singapore there is the v3sk Model which incorporates the core values, and skills and knowledge for teachers in the 21st century (NIE, n.d.). In Cambodia, there are four teacher professional standards i.e. knowledge in subject matters and nature of learners, teaching practise (e.g. planning, delivery and evaluation), learning and participation, and ethics.

These discrepancies in teacher training in the ASEAN countries call for broad central teacher standards. The process is called harmonisation of curriculum among the ASEAN higher education institutions. Currently, ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance attempts to unify and raise the quality of teaching and learning in universities in Thailand in order for them to be in line with other universities participating in the ASEAN network. With the broad central teacher standards, it is easier for teachers to transfer to other countries within ASEAN.

Discussion

It was obvious that proficiency in the English language is the largest issue that the Faculty and perhaps the University will face in the AEC. English language was seen as problematic in terms of the mode of content delivery. Many participants cited their lack of confidence in speaking English because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes. They were also afraid of being unable to communicate the contents effectively since many of them do not use English as a first or second language but a foreign language.

Being unable to use English professionally is complicated and leaves one behind in professional development. The instructor who does not use English in the teaching/learning process would not read materials or academic journals in English. This will affect the quality of the contents since the education field is highly internationalised. A lack of reading skills strips the instructors' ability to update their knowledge from a well-established or international peer-reviewed source as well as the skills to critique and understand different views on the subject matter.

The participants also listed the internationalisation of curriculum as a problem for the development of teaching and learning in the ASEAN community. As one lecturer voiced his concern about the curricula of the AEC stating that the contents and delivery of the programs are not internationalized, at least at the AEC level. Therefore, it become a massive challenge for the staff if the Faculty is to internationalise the curricula.

Internationalised curricula were quoted as an issue for AEC higher education. Not having internationalised curricula to offer to the new group of international students from ASEAN countries could be complicated by the Faculty and the University. The concern of the internationalised content in the understanding of the academic staff shows that internationalised content must be incorporated deeply in the level of curriculum. According to Knight (2004) internationalisation must be integrated into the purpose, function or the delivery of higher education (p.1).

Lack of understanding of the ASEAN Economic Community and its implications for teaching and learning is another problem that the Faculty is facing. Lecturers reported lack of knowledge of the

AEC. The findings of this study concur with the study by Jitpaisanwattana, Pathumcharoenwattana, & Tantawutho (2015) who investigated accounting students' knowledge of ASEAN and AEC. They cited the need to develop skills and awareness among accounting students as they are in a transferable occupation. The occupation of accountants in Thailand is reserved for Thai nationals.

Jitpaisanwattana et al. (2015) reports that the teaching and learning in the accounting curricula use Thai as a medium and this makes the curricula highly contextualised in the Thai locality. The interviews of the study reveal a similar situation. Teacher training, likewise, is a highly contextualised subject deeply grounded in Thai culture and system. The law enacts that only Thai citizens can apply for a job in public schools as teachers are civil servants. The curricula are written by Thais and are to be practised by Thai students. There is no need to internationalise the curricula. However, the democratic shift and aging population sees the younger population decreasing. Thus, the need for teachers is reduced.

Thailand is expected to look for students from the neighboring countries and adult students who already have a degree in other subjects to fill the shortfall in the number of teachers in the future. What we can learn from the lesson in Jitpaisanwattana et al. (2015) is that teacher education cannot be complacent about what is to come, for it will be too late when the changes take place.

The inertia among the faculty members was quoted frequently among the academic staff. Some lecturers stated that although the Faculty was trying to help improve career advancement by providing free courses, the interviews showed that few would participate. Those who attend the workshop run the risk of being exploited by co-workers and managers. There is very little mention in the research literature of the inertia among Thai academic staff. Thus, this study raises an important unresearched area which needs further investigation.

Concluding remarks

From the results, it was clear that most lecturers are not aware of the issues and they do not like changes. Professional development is one key indicator of resistance to changes. Many faculties resist changes that are imposed on them. They see the need to change as a threat and a burden. When a faculty member attends a workshop or develops certain skills or knowledge, he/she is often responsible for tasks requiring new skills.

As the Faculty's executives are setting a goal that the Faculty is to be internationalized there is pressure placed on many academic staff about their need to improve their English language proficiency.

The process of regionalisation may take decades to stabilize. Much effort is needed to make the teaching and learning in the Faculty of Education suitable and in line with the development of the AEC and the movement of the students from other ASEAN countries. Amornvivat (2017) argues that globalization might not benefit Thailand as people think it will. As the foreign capital and funds pervade the country, not all people gain from globalization forces. While increased trade would increase the GDP of Thailand, globalization would "precipitate income inequality" (p. 9)

making the rich and skilled richer, and the poor maginalised and unskilled poorer. This dialog implies that the Faculty has much to improve in teaching and learning.

Great resources are urgently needed in many departments, but the Faculty can only provide some resources. This leaves the researcher to wonder if the Faculty can truly become internationalised to accept more students from the ASEAN countries. The discussion is still open.

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