

The development of task-based activities for culture-related english lessons essa...

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



The idea that foreign language teaching has a cultural dimension is not a new one (Saluveer, 2004). It is widely accepted that one of the main aims of foreign language teaching today is to develop learners' ability to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEF), 2001: 3). Therefore, language learning today does not only focus on learning the language, but also learning other cultures. As English has become a global language, teaching and learning English in Thailand has become challenging since they have passed through EFL context and gained more EIL status. However, English learning in Thailand has not been very successful so far because most learners lack the opportunity to learn English in an English environment and for interaction in daily life (Wiriyaichitra, 2003, p. 25). Hence, Thais' level of English proficiency is low comparing to our neighbors in ASEAN: Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam (EF EPI English Proficiency Index) Another possible reason is that English lessons in Thailand are not challenging and interesting enough to motivate students to learn (Biyeam, 1997 cited in Wiriyaichitra, 2003).

As mentioned above, language and culture are closely linked; the teaching of culture is seen as an integral and organized component of language courses. Many English textbooks include various cultural topics from different cultures into the lesson such as greetings, cuisine, festivals, tourist attractions, superstitious beliefs. Although those topics provide students with new cultural aspects in language learning, they are not considerably related to Thai students' background knowledge. Including Thai culture into the lessons

would be more meaningful to them. According to Buttjes and Byram who proposed the comparative approach of teaching culture in 1991, the comparative approach emphasizes that foreign language and culture learning should relate to learners' own. They claimed that instead of providing learners with "one-way flow of cultural information", they should be encouraged to reflect their own and foreign culture.

Moreover, to improve learning conditions in the classroom, task-based activities are extensively used in English classes to ensure that students' training is relevant to real world situation and also provide students with more opportunity to learn the language in a more meaningful context. According to David Nunan, task-based language teaching focuses on activating students' learning skills through systematic instructional sequences that will enable them to reproduce and manipulate language models learned in class, and gradually begin to use the language creatively to express their thoughts.

In this way, learning culture-related English lessons through task-based activities would allow students' communicative skills to grow along the learning process.

Research questions

1. Is the course designed with TBL approach effective for teaching culture-related English lessons to improve students' communicative skills? 2. Do the students have positive attitudes towards teaching English with culture

related content in general? 3. Do the students have positive attitudes towards task-based activities used for culture related English lessons?

Objectives of the study

1. To develop a course with TBL approach for teaching culture-related English lessons.
2. To improve students' communicative skills through task-based activities designed for culture-related English lessons.
3. To investigate students' attitudes towards teaching English with culture related content in general.
4. To investigate students' attitudes towards task-based activities designed for culture related English lessons.

Scope of the study: TBLT Framework by David Nunan, 2004

Treatment

Limitations of the study

The study may pose some limitations as its results found may not be representative or generalized for other groups of the students. As such, the findings may not adequately generalize for other various groups of the students in different contexts. Therefore, the need to investigate students' attitudes towards task-based activities designed for culture related English lessons and towards teaching English with culture related content among other groups of the students with different contexts or diversity still remains in order to determine Thai students' attitudes towards learning and teaching English with cultural related topics.

Definition of terms

1. Task-based activities: activities that are designed based on task-based language teaching approach
2. Culture-related English lessons: English lessons that are tied around cultural topics

Research procedure

Population and samples: The population of the study is 1, 200 undergraduate students both male and female studying English 3(Intermediate level) at Siam University. Purposive sampling is used in the study. Purposive sampling is used in this research. The number of the sample is about 240 students from six sections that I am responsible for each semester. The reason for selecting this particular group of students is because they have completed the first and second compulsory English courses (English 1 and 2) out of the six required courses. They, are, thus at the stage of mastering basic grammar points that are necessary to complete the tasks designed for this research.

Research instruments: The instruments of the study are as follows;

1. Pretest and posttest
2. Evaluation rubric of the tasks
3. Attitude questionnaires
4. Teacher's observation and diary

Data collection: the data will be collected before, during and after implementing TBLT framework through testing, observing and interviewing.

Students will be videotape recorded during the tasks and some of them will be interviewed after the task.

Data analysis: The data gathered from the pre-post test, evaluation rubrics and questionnaires will be computed in terms of percentage. The criteria of Likert scale (1932) will be used to measure the level of students' attitudes towards both teaching English with culture related content and tasks designed for the culture related English lessons.

Stages of research according to objectives and method

1. Conducting students' needs analysis in studying English
2. Surveying students' culture related topics of interest
3. Designing an English course of which the units are tied thematically.
4. Designing tasks according to six instructional sequences of TBLT framework proposed by David Nunan, 2004.
5. Data collection
6. Data analysis
7. Summary and conclusion

Significance of the study

Even though it is not necessary that today's learning and teaching be limited only in the classroom, based on my teaching experiences, I have found that in-class learning is still imperative in Thailand's context. As a result of various pressures of time and the need to cover the syllabus, many lessons and activities are often relegated to homework and take place in unsupported conditions of learning. The danger in these circumstances is

that poorer students struggle alone and students will miss valuable opportunities for improvement through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. To help improve English learning conditions in the classroom, TBLT framework is believed to create the optimum condition for language learning. According to Willis (1998, p3), she claimed that the TBL framework supports various essential conditions for a classroom environment, for example; for exposure to a rich and comprehensible input of real spoken and written language in use, opportunities to use the target language for expressing meaning, motivation to engage with exposure and use what they know, and focus on language form to prevent fossilization.

Moreover, to teach English with culture related topics, students should be encouraged to reflect their own and foreign cultures. Instead of providing learners with “ one-way flow of cultural information”, it is believed that the comparative approach can draw on the learner’s own knowledge, beliefs and values which form a basis for successful communication with members of the other culture (Buttjes and Byram, 1991: 13, cited in Edginton 2000: 136)

In this research, I would like to develop an English course regarding culture-related English lessons with TBL approach to improve students’ communicative skills, and to investigate students’ attitudes towards teaching English with culture related content and towards the activities used for the lessons, and to motivate students to learn English in a more meaningful way: learning English through their own culture and the cultures of others.

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