Creative Tourism English Learning Strategy

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Abstract: Current growth of tourism industries in Asia has clearly opened up numerous English language curriculum course programs. Many of such programs are actually tailored towards producing future graduates that are not only verse in English language communication skills, but also competent individuals. This case study shall summarize the findings of a Tourism English Learning Workshop for English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in Taiwan. A total of 24 students participate in the workshop. Strategies include group discussions, cooperative learning process, and a multi-media blog project. Results indicate that students show signs of academic grades improvement on various English Language communications related subjects. Furthermore, building on the concepts of experiential learning and cooperative learning theory, students claimed that the multi-media blog project helps them improved on their team-work capabilities, time-management, and information technology skills.

Keywords: Experiential learning; cooperative learning; YouTube; EFL; English for Specific Purpose (ESP)

1 Introduction

The rise of technological advancement and growth of low-cost plane tickets have altogether made air travel so accessible to the mass public. With the recent weather outrage, economic difficulties coupled with the rise of global oil prices, air travel industry would seem to be running on the losing side. However, according to the recent air travel report on June 2011, it is said that the number of travelling passengers have actually risen around 4.4% despite of the aforementioned issues [1]. In fact, international tourist arrivals into Asia have reached a new record at 204 million in 2010, up from 181 million in 2009 [2].

In Taiwan, being an island strategically suited for the tourism industry, Tourism authorities have recently increased their efforts to invest and construct additional tourist destinations for the global tourism market. In addition, the recent expansion of scientific, technical, and economic activities on a global scale has also pushed the drastic need for English communication competent personnel. These issues have sparked the era of the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) language learning in English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries [3]. With such opportunities ahead, the need for fresh human resources (manpower) will be of much important. Therefore, it is quite important to find creative and effective ways in teaching Tourism English to Taiwanese students.

2 Literature Review

To further understand the concepts and constructs behind a Tourism English Learning Workshop, several background literatures are needed.

2.1 Experiential Learning and Engagement

Experiential learning follows Dewey’s concept of learning by doing. Such concept involved the combination of knowledge taught and authentic tasks to reinforce the learning process [4]. This theory also works in the professional field as in the concept of work-integrated learning theories, such as the integration of employment-oriented work experiences into the education curriculum [3]. By enriching student experiences, cultivation of students’ engagement beliefs, values, feelings, motivation, behavioral habits, and skills shall follow next. In essence, the concept of experiential learning is built on the belief that student learning is affected by their engagement in purposeful activities, which are an essential part of the students’ development.

A basic understanding of student engagement is that students’ activity, involvement, and efforts in their learning tasks is related to their academic achievement. In other words student engagement is the degree and quality, to which learners are engaged with their educational activities, which are positively linked to a host of desired outcomes, including high grades, student satisfaction, and perseverance [6]. In essence, the more students spend quality time and study, the more they will know about it. Similarly, the more students interact academically with faculties, the deeper they tend to understand what they are actually learning [7].

2.2 Cooperative Learning and Technology

Cooperation is mainly defined as the association of persons for a common benefit, or simply put is the process of working together to accomplish shared goals.
Within cooperative activities individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Cooperative learning is a relationship in a group of students that requires positive interdependence, individual accountability, interpersonal skills, face-to-face interaction, and processing. Hence, cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.

Many studies have been done regarding the combination of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and cooperative learning pedagogy. Researchers mentioned that the knowledge-building processes occurring in asynchronous discussion do indeed possess much potential in enhancing the learners' competence. Online discussions and maintaining blog postings is both beneficiary to the learners' knowledge gain. Some studies have mentioned that cooperative learning in extracurricular activities helps in both enhancing the students language proficiencies and leadership capabilities. In essence, ICT if used properly and designed together with cooperative learning efforts, should provide students with a non-threatening and accessible way to enhance their English language proficiencies.

2.3 Importance of Tourism English

ESP originated from the massive expansion of scientific, technical, and economic activities on a global scale, which resulted in the increased demands on English communication. In addition, with the usage of English varying from context to context, hence English language practitioners have been pressured to adapt to the needs of the learners within their specific environment. It is noted that advocate of ESP practiced an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reasons for learning.

For the past decade, HEIs in Taiwan have been encouraging English taught course programs, offering more ESP courses, requiring students to pass the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) prior to graduation. These actually brought forth the need for HEIs to become internationally competitive amidst the age of globalization and internationalization, which created dramatic changes in the goal of teaching English. Moreover with the current need for supplying the future workforce of the tourism industry, Therefore, ESP in Taiwan; more specifically learning Tourism English has become a strong necessity for the future graduates’ career.

3 Methodology

This research is designed as a case study, wherein the primary objective is to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. For the current study, the specific case chosen is to understand the benefits and challenges of developing a creative multi-media blog assisted Tourism English learning project. Study participants are the 24 volunteer Applied Foreign Languages Students of a Science and Technology University in the Northern area of Taiwan. Participants are all female students with an average age of 22 years old.

3.1 Research Process

This study was accomplished around six (6) months, starting from the later part of the 1st semester till the end of the 2nd semester of the 2010-2011 School Year. Students meet with their project adviser once every week to discuss the multi-media topics and on how to go about with the project. Students were then grouped into 6 groups of 4 members each. Groups were then assigned famous scenic areas accessible via the Taipei Metro Rail System, such as: Tamsui, Taipei Zoo, Bitan, Beitou, Lin Family Mansion and Garden, and Shilin Night Market. Information regarding what is famous and the history of the various assigned areas were then researched and presented together with each of their scripts. The group members then exchanged their scripts with each other, proof reading, editing and correcting the grammar.

In the following months, the students went to each of the scenic areas videotaping the needed introductory movie in the multi-media blog. This went on for around six weeks. After video editing the movie with the English subtitles, the students uploaded their introductory video into YouTube and started designing their multi-media blogs. During the whole process, the students still met with their project adviser each week, discussing the problems and challenges that they have encountered.

After five months since the beginning of the project, the students have finally finished their multi-media blogs. This is then followed by giving comments regarding the topics and vocabularies placed on the blogs. Lastly, students were asked to write a reflection essay regarding the whole project.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data are collected and transcribed using the Miles and Huberman [33] method for generating meaning from transcribed data. Resulting themes were then organized and group together forming the various benefits and challenges in developing a creative multi-media blog assisted Tourism English learning project.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Benefits of the Multi-Media Blog Project
In order to understand the benefits of a multi-media blog group project, the students’ were asked to provide their academic grades for the 1st and 2nd semester of the 2010-2011 School Year. To minimize the error in interpreting the academic grades differences, only the subject whose teachers are the same for both semesters are collected and analyzed.

Results of the grade comparison have shown that students got increasing scores in the subjects English Literature, Foreign Language, and Theater Arts. Improvement on the following subjects was primarily caused by the undertaking of the multi-media blog project. Students claimed in various focus-group sessions that appreciation of our local scenic spots and their histories, have undoubtedly increased their curiosity towards learning more about English literature and Japanese language.

While making the videos, I actually learn that a lot of our scenic areas are history related. These areas are quite rich in both historical and cultural knowledge. Knowing them have motivated me towards understanding other countries’ literature and language. (FGI-02)

As for the subject Theater Arts and Creative Skills, students repeatedly claimed that they have become more creative. In some cases, they also mentioned that they have to repeatedly prepared and practiced acting for the videos.

Me too, my mind seems to think more quickly now. I definitely become more creative. (FGI-05)

Besides analyzing the students’ academic grades, qualitative analysis was also accomplished on the focus-group interview data, researchers’ logs, and students’ reflection logs. Table 1, shows that after undergoing the multi-media blog project, students have gained various knowledge and skills, such as: learns to appreciate local sceneries, learns various scenic histories, video editing skills, blog design and creation, leadership skills, peer cooperation, and time management skills.

### Table 1. Benefits of the Multi-Media Blog Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>G5</th>
<th>G6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learns to appreciate local sceneries</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns various scenic histories</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video editing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog design and creation</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Peer cooperation</td>
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<td>Time management skills</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

During the course of the project, students have learned to appreciate the various scenic spots in Taipei. Furthermore, the students were able to learn about the historical background of the scenic spots.

I think the most important thing that I did during the whole project is that I learn a lot of historical facts regarding the places that we visited. (FGI-02)

In addition, students also mentioned that they improved on their information technology skills, more specifically with their video editing skills and blog creation skills.

At first I don’t know how to upload movies into YouTube, but after some guidance from my group mates, I was able to do so. (FGI-04)

In essence, the multi-media blog project indeed brought about numerous beneficial factors to the students. Although, not all of their grades increase, the multi-media blog project was able to help improving some other areas.

### 4.2 Challenges of the Multi-Media Blog Project

With regards to the challenges met during the creation of the multi-media Tourism English blog, students were asked what kind of barriers they encountered during the entire process of the project.

Table 2 shows that barriers of the multi-media blog project are as follows: finding available time in doing the project, poor communication skills, lack of appropriate computer skills, and poor writing skills. Finding the right time in doing the project is quite difficult. Students mentioned that most of them are already working (or have part-time jobs). It is quite hard to find time that all of them are available.

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<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding available time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of computer skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor writing skills</td>
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</table>

I am working now, I think I will not be able to find time in making the videos. Are there any other options that I can choose from? (FGI-02)

At the beginning of the project, some students were having difficulties in finding the right time that all of the project members are able to meet. However, after discussion with their adviser, students are then separated into two sub-groups; grouping the students with the most similar schedules. Furthermore, proper negotiations between the students were also applied and rotation of roles among the members. In doing so, students learn to be-
come responsible and improved on their communication and peer collaborative skills.

Being a leader, I should set a good example for my members. I should talk with my members. Maintain open communications all the time. Only by this way the project can be accomplished smoothly.

(FG3-05)

Initially, students find it hard to start and write their blog; due to the lack of proper information technology skills, such as video editing and blog creation. In addition, the students were not able to come up with the content of the blog immediately. Poor writing and creative skills have caused delay in the multi-media blog project.

I don't know how to write and design my blog. Even the video editing I don't know anything about this. It's a good thing my group mates help me. I don't want to cause anymore delays in the project. (FG3-04)

In sum, the multi-media blog project does present numerous difficulties and barriers for the students. However, such barriers were all turned into challenges that the group finally learned to overcome. Upon overcoming the said challenges, the students were able to learn and benefit more.

5 Conclusions

This case study is primarily aimed at understanding the benefits and challenges of developing a creative multi-media blog assisted Tourism English learning project. The main idea of the project is for each of the student group participants to create an English video introducing a pre-selected famous Taipei Scenery. This is followed by uploading the video to YouTube and consequently used in creating a multi-media blog posting.

Results indicate that students show signs of academic grades improvement on various English language communication related subjects, such as Public Speaking, English Literature, Foreign Language, Theater Arts, and Creative Skills. Although, the students did not show improvement in their TOEIC competency test subject; students were able to create and write a blog posting on their own and at the same time learn some knowledge. Similarly, building on the concepts of student engagement and cooperative learning theory; while undergoing the multi-media blog project, students have gained various knowledge and skills, such as: learns to appreciate local sceneries, learns various scenic histories, video editing skills, blog design and creation, leadership skills, peer cooperation, and time management skills.

In sum, the multi-media blog project does present numerous difficulties and barriers for the students. However, such barriers were all turned into challenges that the

References


