

*Engaging Students with Integrated Language Skills through Tailor Made Summer
Camp Activities: A Case Study*

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Abstract

In Taiwan, the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) in English are usually taught separately with the focus on reading, vocabulary building and grammar practice. The present study aims to integrate the four skills through various tasks or activities using teaching materials that are designed specifically for the participants during the summer of 2014. The camp lasted for two weeks from July 21 to August 1. Lessons included food, tourist sites and historical background of three districts in Kaohsiung.

The participants were 55 students from eighth grade in a local middle school. Throughout the two weeks camp, various activities have been used in the lessons during teaching, such as the use of worksheets with questions for students to find the answers from the reading on their own to train their reading skills, a one-day field trip to one of the districts taught was planned to let students explore and experience what they have learned from the lesson in real life, and drama performance to let students apply what they have learned into the drama they have created.

At the end of the camp, 78% of the participants stated that they enjoyed learning English through activities, 67% of the participants indicated their English have improved and 90% of the participants would like to participate in similar English camp in the future.

Keywords: integrated language skills, engage, motivation, tailor made

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Prior to 2005, language teaching was seen as helping learners develop linguistic competence—that is, helping students master the sounds, words, and grammar patterns of English. The idea was that by studying the bits and pieces of a language, students could eventually put them all together and communicate.

However, along with the concept of global village, English has become an important tool for international communication. Thus, in order to conform to government's internationalization policy and raise international competence of Taiwan, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has forwarded English course learning from seventh grade to third grade in 2005.

The objective of the English curriculum for the nine year compulsory education in Taiwan is set to: (1) cultivate students' basic English communication ability, so students are able to apply them in real situation; (2) cultivate students' interest and strategy use in learning English, so students are able to learn English effectively on their own; (3) gain knowledge about the customs and cultures of Taiwan and other countries, so students could compare and respect the culture differences.

Although the objective set by the Ministry of Education was to integrate the four skills into English course, the lack of teacher training, limited class hour (2-3 class-hours per week for third to sixth graders and 3-5 class-hours per week for seventh to ninth graders) and instructional impact (the fact that listening and speaking are not part of the high school joint entrance exam), the four skills were not fully integrated into English lessons in schools. For this reason, it is essential to provide students opportunity to integrate the four skills beyond school setting and strengthen their listening and speaking skills.

Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to integrate the four skills through various tasks or activities using teaching materials that are designed specifically for the participants during the summer of 2014. In addition, this study sought to show how integrating the four language skills through activities and topics that are closely related to students' daily life could cultivate students' interest in learning English.

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are students' learning preferences for the two weeks of English summer camp?
2. Have students four skills improved through summer camp activities?
3. How students feel about the activities and topics designed for integrating the four skills?

Literature Review

For more than six decades, research and practice in English language teaching has identified the “four skills”—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as of paramount practice. However, ESL curricula and textbooks around the world tend to focus on just one of the four skills, sometimes to the exclusion of the others.

Skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESL/EFL program that offer classes focusing on segregated language skills. One extreme example is the grammar-translation method, which teaches students to analyze grammar and to translate from one language to another. This method restricts language learning to a very narrow, non-communicative range that does not prepare students to use the language in everyday life.

When a teacher makes use of activities that have been specially designed to incorporate several language skills simultaneously (such as reading, writing, speaking and listening), they provide their students with situations that allow for well-rounded development and progress in all areas of language learning. The teacher is trying to implement the integrated-skill approach in his/her class. Oxford (2001) has indicated that “the integrated-skill approach exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language.” This approach allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time and promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms.

How can the four skills be used together effectively? Four approaches in particular are structured so that the four skills can be used simultaneously. They are: content-based instruction, task-based instruction, theme-based instruction and the project-based approach.

Content-based Instruction (CBI)

In content-based instruction, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion. The overall structure of a content-based curriculum is dictated more by the nature of the subject matter than by language form and sequences (Oxford, 2001). Examples of content based curricula include immersion programs for elementary school children, sheltered English program (mostly found at elementary and secondary school levels), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (e.g. for engineering, agriculture, or medicine, etc.). In content-based instruction, learners are focused on useful, practical objectives as the subject matter is perceived to be relevant to long-term goals.

Task-based Instruction (TBI)

According to Nunan (1989), tasks are defined as activities that can stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interacting in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form.

In task-based instruction, the priority is not the forms of language, but rather the functional purposes for which language must be used. Course goals in TBI are not linguistic in the traditional sense of just focusing on grammar or phonology but centered on learners' pragmatic language competence, such as exchanging opinions, reading newspapers and menus, writing letters and emails, etc.

Theme-based Instruction

Scarcella & Oxford (1992) have included theme-based instruction as one of the model in content-based instruction, but it is not the same as content-based. Theme-based instruction provides an alternative to what would otherwise be traditional language classes by structuring a course around themes or topics. It can serve the multiple interests of students in a classroom and can offer a focus on content while still adhering to institutional needs for offering a language course per se. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in a university is an appropriated instance of theme-based instruction.

Project-based approach

This approach integrates not only the four skills but also language, culture, experience and learning strategies (Turnbull, 1999). With careful selection of a final project, learners would be able to demonstrate what they have learned through both oral and written production. Throughout the process, the teacher plans backwards to identify what aspects of language, culture, experience and learning strategies are required to complete the end project.

Methodology

The study was conducted at a middle school in southern Taiwan. The participants were 55 eighth grade students who attended the camp as part of their summer school program. The camp lasted for two weeks from July 21 to August 1. Lessons included food, tourist sites and historical background of three districts in Kaohsiung. Throughout the two weeks camp, various activities have been used in the lessons during teaching, such as the use of worksheets with questions for students to find the answers from the reading on their own to train their reading skills, a one-day field trip to one of the districts taught was planned to let students explore and experience what they have learned from the lesson in real life, and drama performance to let students apply what they have learned into the drama they have created.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used during the data collecting process. Quantitative data include learning preference questionnaire, pre and post test on the topic selected, and satisfaction survey. Qualitative data include field notes from the lesson and interview with students during the break.

Procedure

10 student teachers from researcher's institute were recruited and trained prior to the camp. Learning preference questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of March. Questionnaires were analyzed to identify topics that were most interest to students. Then the researcher worked with the 10 student teachers to design and plan syllabus for the camp. By the end of May, the syllabus for the summer camp was completed and was sent to the curriculum section leader of the research site for approval (See Appendix 1). During the camp, 55 participants were divided into four groups and each group has 2-3 student teachers who were in charge of leading activities, class discussion, and filming the lessons. The four groups use the same lesson plan

throughout the summer camp. On the last day of the summer camp, satisfaction survey was distributed to the participants and collected for analysis.

Result, Discussion and Conclusion

Research Question One

What are students' learning preferences for the two weeks of English summer camp?

In terms of what participants expected to learn from the summer camp, 25% stated they would like to learn conversation skill, 13% would like to learn grammar and another 13% stated that they would like to learn grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and conversation in the camp (See Table 1). This indicated that students are seeking opportunities to practice their conversation skills, but they also feel that in order to communicate well, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are equally important.

Table 1: What participants expected to learn from the camp?

	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	7	13
Pronunciation	3	5
Vocabulary	1	2
Conversation	14	25
Grammar + Vocabulary	4	7
Grammar + Conversation	4	7
Pronunciation + Vocabulary	2	4
Pronunciation + Conversation	1	2
Vocabulary + Conversation	5	9
Grammar + Pronunciation + Vocabulary	1	2
Grammar + Pronunciation + Conversation	3	5
Grammar + Vocabulary + Conversation	4	7
All four	7	13
Total	56	100

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 2 discussed teaching approach that participants preferred during the summer camp, 36% of the participants indicated that they would like to participate in activities and group discussion and 20% of the participants claimed that they would like to participate in activities such as monopoly, guessing game, role play, etc. This result indicated that participants are interested in learning English through communication with peers and in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Table 2: Which teaching approaches participants prefer?

Teaching Approach	Frequency	Percentage
Activities	11	20
Group Discussion	5	9
Activities + Drama	2	4
Activities + Singing	3	5
Activities + Broadcast	1	2
Activities + Group Discussion	20	36
Activities + Traditional Teaching	1	2
Drama + Group Discussion	2	4
Activities + Drama+Group Discussion	3	5
Activities + Singing+Broadcast	1	2
Activities + Singing+Group Discussion	3	5
Activities + Group Discussion + Traditional Teaching	1	2
Activities + Discussion + Broadcast + Group Discussion	2	4
Activities +Drama + Singing + Broadcast + Group Discussion	1	2
Total	56	100.0

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

When students are asked to indicated what topics they prefer to learn during the summer camp, 43% of the participants stated that they would like to learn about local food (see Table 3). Based on the result from Table 2 and Table 3, it showed that participants will be more interested in learning English with topics that are related to their daily life and the teaching approach used are fun and relaxing.

Table 3: What topics would you like to include in the camp?

Topics	Frequency	Percentage
Tourist sites	10	18
Local food	24	43
Historical and cultural events	7	13
Festivals and customs	2	4
All four	6	11
Sites + Food	6	11
Sites +food + culture	1	2
Total	56	100.0

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

As participants are asked which language skill they would like to focus on during the summer camp, 50% of participants stated that they would like to focus on speaking (See Table 4). This result is consistent with their expectation from the camp from Table 1 which indicates that participants are eager to apply and use English through oral communication in their daily life.

Table 4: Which language skill would you like to focus on?

Language Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Listening	10	18
Speaking	28	50.0
Reading	3	5
Writing	9	16
Listening + Speaking	3	5
Speaking + Writing	1	2
Reading + Writing	1	2
All four	1	2
Total	56	100.0

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

When it comes to assessment, 52% of the participants prefer to create and display actual product, such as story books, maps, posters related to the topics, followed by 29% of participants prefer written test. This result indicates while students would like to increase opportunities in speaking English during the camp, they do not like to be tested on their oral performance in English.

Table 5: How would you like to be assessed for your final performance?

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
Perform on stage	9	16
Written test	16	29
Create and display actual product	29	52
Perform on stage + Product display	2	4
Total	56	100.0

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Research Question Two

Have students four skills improved through summer camp activities?

As Table 6 shown, over 50% of participants indicated that their four skills and overall English have improved after the summer camp. Approximately 66% of participants indicated that their listening skills has improved, this is probably because throughout the two weeks of summer camp, all activities and instructions were conducted in English, so they have more opportunities to practice their listening skills during the camp. However, 39% of participants feel indifferent about improvement in their speaking, reading and writing skills. This is probably because most of speaking, reading and writing skills were blended into activities such as monopoly, creating drama script or group discussion such as finding answers to questions from the topics, if the participants did not actively participate in the activities or discussion or they could not keep up with the discussion, they may feel they did not have enough chance to practice their speaking, reading and writing skill. Hence, they had neutral feelings toward to the improvement of three language skills.

Table 6: I think my four skills in English have improved over the summer camp.

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Overall
Strongly Disagree	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Disagree	3 (6%)	4 (7%)	4 (7%)	4 (7%)	3 (6%)
So so	14 (26%)	21 (39%)	21 (39%)	21 (39%)	19 (35%)
Agree	24 (44%)	18 (33%)	16 (30%)	16 (30%)	23 (43%)
Strongly Agree	12 (22%)	11 (20%)	12 (22%)	12 (22%)	8 (15%)
Total	54 (100%)	54 (100%)	54 (100%)	54 (100%)	54 (100%)

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Research Question Three

How students feel about the activities and topics designed for integrating the four skills?

At the end of the summer camp, participants were asked to complete a satisfaction survey (See Appendix 2). Survey questions include whether participants are satisfied with the topics designed, teaching approaches used, and their willingness to

participate in a similar camp in the future. In order to find out whether the participants have become more familiar with the topics taught through activities during the summer camp, two questions related to the topics were also included in the survey. In addition, pre and post test were also used to see the actual result on participants learning in the summer camp.

Table 7 shows participants' feeling toward the topics and teaching approach used throughout the camp and also indicates participants willingness to attend similar camp in the future. 65% of participants indicated that they are satisfied with the topics designed for the summer camp, 59% of the participants enjoyed the activities used in the camp, and 75% are willing to participate in similar summer camp in the future. Although majority participants are satisfied with the summer camp topics, activities and are willing to participate in the future, 32% of participants feel neutral about the topics designed, 24% indicated neither agree nor disagree to the activities used, and 17% undecided whether they would like to participate in similar camp in the future. This is probably because the topics selected and activities used during the camp did not match their learning preference stated in the questionnaire prior to the camp.

Table 7: I think the topics and activities designed for the summer camp are interesting and I am willing to participate in similar English camp in the future.

	Topics	Activities	Future Participation
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Disagree	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	4 (7%)
So so	17 (32%)	13 (24%)	9 (17%)
Agree	27 (50%)	24 (44%)	17 (32%)
Strongly Agree	8 (15%)	15 (15%)	23 (43%)
Total	54 (100%)	54 (100%)	54 (100%)

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Based on the result from the preference questionnaire, the topics designed for the summer camp focused on the local food and tourist sites in three districts in Kaohsiung. The results of the learning outcome are shown in Table 8 and Table 9.

In Table 8, 76% of the participants stated that they were more familiar with the local food and tourist sites introduced in the camp. The result from pre and post test in Table 9 also showed 20% increase on the test score. This result showed learning

through activities with four skills integrated into the lesson is as effective as through the traditional class setting.

Table 8: I am more familiar with the local food and tourist sites in the three districts in Kaohsiung.

	Local Food	Tourist Sites
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Disagree	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
So so	11 (20%)	11 (20%)
Agree	19 (35%)	21 (39%)
Strongly Agree	22 (41%)	20 (37%)
Total	54 (100%)	54 (100%)

Note: The percentages calculated are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Pre and post test Result

There are 40 questions on the test, which include 22 true and false questions and 18 multiple choice questions (See Appendix 3). Questions are related to the topics and some grammatical knowledge is also included. As Table 9 shown, participants' average score have increased from 24.72 to 29.81, which indicate that participants' have gained some knowledge on topics taught throughout the two-week summer camp.

Table 9: Pre and Post test Result

	Pretest	Posttest
N	54	54
Missing	0	0
Mean	24.72	29.81
Standard Error	.605	.558
Standard Deviation	4.444	4.103
Minimum	14	19
Maximum	36	37

Conclusion

The participants in this study generally expressed positive attitude toward learning English through activities. They expressed how learning through activities could provide them more opportunities to use the language and more fun. Their attitude toward future participation of similar camp relies on whether the topics designed and teaching approaches used meet their learning preference. Therefore, to become a global citizen and to comply with the English teaching objective set by the Ministry of Education, teachers should make efforts to structure the English class to meet students' needs-that is to be able to use the language in their daily life rather than prepare them for the test. The results from the study have showed with careful planning, integrating four skills in language class can be beneficial for both teachers and students.

Limitation of the Study

This study has its limitations. First, it is possible that some information was not covered in the interview. Second, the role of the interviewer may have affected the results and how the students expressed their attitudes and feelings during the interviews. Although this study concerned only one middle school in southern Taiwan, the results may shed lights on the effect of integrating language skills through activities in students' learning.

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Appendix 1

Course Syllabus for English Summer Camp

Week 1: 7/21-7/25

Time	7/28	7/29	7/30	7/31	8/1
9:00-9:50	Ice breaker	Review	Review	Review	Field Trip 8:30-15:00
10:00-10:50	Overview of camp syllabus	Yenchen	Gushann	Cijin	
11:00-11:50	Overview of Kaohsiung	Yenchen	Gushan	Cijin	

Week 2: 7/28-8/1

Time	7/28	7/29	7/30	7/31	8/1
9:00-10:00	Field Trip reflection	Monopoly	Guessing Game	Group Activities	Final Drama rehearsal
10:00-12:00	Final Drama Instruction	Final Drama Preparation	Final Drama Preparation	Final Drama Preparation	Final Drama

Appendix 2
Satisfaction Survey

	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	So so 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
1. I am satisfied with the topics designed for the summer camp.					
2. I am satisfied with the teaching approaches used in the summer camp.					
3. I think my English listening skill has improved.					
4. I think my English listening skill has improved.					
5. I think my English speaking skill has improved.					
6. I think my English reading skill has improved.					
7. I think my English writing skill has improved.					
8. I think my overall skills in English have improved.					
9. I am more familiar with the local food in Kaohsiung.					
10. I am more familiar with the tourist site in Kaohsiung.					
11. I like the group activities in the summer camp.					
12. I like the field trip in the summer camp					
13. I like the arrangement of final performance.					
14. I would like to participate in similar camp in the future.					

Appendix 3

Pre and Post Test

I. T and F. According to the information provided, write T for True and F for false for each statement.

- (F) 1. You can take the MRT by using credit card.
- (T) 2. When you take a MRT, you need to insert your money into the coin slot to buy the single journey ticket.
- (T) 3. You can rent the Cbike by using credit card.
- (F) 4. When you rent the Cbike, you can remove the card while it is processing.
- (F) 5. When you want to get off the bus, you need to press the emergency button.
- (T) 6. Maketao people chose a kind of bamboo with thorns to set around their house as a fence in order to prevent attack from enemy.
- (F) 7. Kaohsiung MRT, the orange line goes from Siaogang to Gangshan South.
- (T) 8. Kaohsiung was forced to open to other country for trade, preach and medical practice during Ching Dynasty.
- (F) 9. Yan-Cheng still has salt business now.
- (T) 10. The Museum of the History was built by Japanese.
- (F) 11. Yan-Cheng district is located in east of Kaohsiung.
- (F) 12. Yan-Cheng is the biggest district of Kaohsiung.
- (F) 13. Resident in Yan-Cheng district makes living by making sugar.
- (T) 14. Siziwan was called “Yanlu Bay” or “Skewed Bay.”
- (F) 15. Tunnel of Siziwan was designed and built by a Chinese in 1927.
- (T) 16. Show Shan Zoo is the only zoo in Kaohsiung.
- (F) 17. Taipei Zoo receives animals from the Show Shan Zoo.
- (T) 18. Gushan Ferry Station was also called Siziwan Ferry Station.
- (F) 19. The northernmost of Kaohsiung District is Cijin.
- (F) 20. Pepper Handmade Fish Noodle is made from flour.
- (T) 21. Qihou Church was the first medical center in Taiwan.
- (T) 22. The Qihou Lighthouse was rebuilt in 1916.

II. Multiple choice. Select the best answer for each statement.

- (B) 1. When you rent the Cbike, you have _____ to take your bike.
A. 60 seconds B. 90 seconds C. 120 seconds
- (A) 2. When you rent the Cbike, you need to press the _____ button to retrieve your bike.
A. red B. green C. yellow
- (C) 3. You can find _____ on the ferry.
A. swimsuit B. helmet C. life jacket
- (A) 4. Hold the _____ when you are standing on the bus.
A. lug B. seat belt C. button
- (B) 5. Fasten the _____ when you are sitting on the bus.
A. lug B. seat belt C. button
- (B) 6. Kaohsiung's old name was _____.
A. Formosa B. Takao C. Maketao
- (A) 7. There are _____ lines in Kaohsiung MRT.
A. two B. three C. four
- (B) 8. The Kaohsiung MRT was built in _____.
A. May, 2008 B. March, 2008 C. May, 2012
- (B) 9. Which is NOT a local food in Yan-Cheng district?
A. Da- Co- Pan Sandwiches B. Ice of the Ocean C. Kumquat Tofu
- (A) 10. Which is the most famous ice in Ice of the Ocean?
A. Fruit Ice B. Chocolate Ice C. Milk Ice
- (C) 11. Which of the following is NOT a name for Siziwan in the past?
A. Yanlu Bay B. Skewed Bay C. Yamay Mala Bay
- (A) 12. Which district is Siziwan in?
A. the Gushan District B. the Cijin District C. the Yanchang District
- (A) 13. What was the original name of Takao Railway Museum?
A. Kaohsiung Port Station
B. Kaohsiung Station
C. Kaohsiung Museum of History
- (B) 14. Which building was Kaohsiung Martyrs' Shrine(忠烈祠) remodeled from?
A. Kaohsiung Museum of History
B. Kaohsiung Temple
C. Kaohsiung Film Archive
- (C) 15. Which historical site didn't have more than 100 years of history?
A. Qihou Church B. Tianhou Temple D. Cijin Windmill Park

- (A) 16. Which year was Qihou Fort rebuilt?
A. 1991 B. 1995 C. 1945
- (A) 17. The cake _____ by Grace.
A. was eaten B. was eat C. eating
- (C) 18. He _____ English for 10 years.
A. learning B. learned C. has learned