

Enhancing Students Willingness to Communicate in English through Korean Pop Culture: A Case Study

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Abstract

In recent years, Korean pop culture such as Korean drama, pop singers and TV programs have gained popularity in Taiwan, particularly among teenagers. The aim of the present study is to find out whether students' will be more willing to use English to communicate with topics they are interested in.

The participants were 37 students from a local middle school. Throughout the five-day camp, various topics related to Korean cultures have been used in the lessons during teaching, such as Korean Festival, Korean Landscape, Korean Food. At the end of the camp, students have to use English to give a three minutes presentation comparing Taiwanese culture with Korean culture. Through the presentation, students will be able to apply what they have learned into the presentation.

At the end of the camp, 78% of the participants stated that they enjoyed learning English through Korean pop culture, 41% of the participants indicated their English speaking ability have improved and 94% of the participants indicated that they have gained knowledge about Korean cultures and 81% of the participant stated that the camp has met their expectation. Among the 32 participants who filled out the questionnaire at the end of the camp, 17 would like to participate in similar English camp in the future and 13 stated they are not sure if they would be able to participate in the future, it would depend on whether they have time or parents' decision.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, motivation, culture, peer influence, learning community

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Learning about the syntactic structure of a target language is not the same as learning how to speak that language. This reality is especially applicable to learners who reside in countries where access to the target language is limited mainly to classroom learning. The goal of the present study is to explore the means to enhance middle school students' in Taiwan to actively and willingly participate and speak English with topics that they are familiar with outside of classroom setting. Middle school students were selected to participate in this study because they were at the stage where memorizing vocabulary words and grammar rules are important and they do not have much opportunity to speak during the class.

Purpose of the Study

In recent years, Korean pop culture such as Korean drama, pop singers and TV programs have gained popularity in Taiwan, particularly among teenagers. The aim of the present study is to find out whether students' will be more willing to use English to communicate with topics they are interested in.

The participants were 37 students from a local middle school. Throughout the five-day camp, various topics related to Korean cultures have been used in the lessons during teaching, such as Korean Festival, Korean Landscape, Korean Food. At the end of the camp, students have to use English to give a three minutes presentation comparing Taiwanese culture with Korean culture. Through the presentation, students will be able to apply what they have learned into the presentation.

The research questions of this study are:

1. What do students expected to learn through the five-day camp?
2. In terms of the four skills, which skill would they like to improve?
3. Did the course and activities designed meet students' expectations?

Research Procedure

The research design and procedure is shown in timeline format below:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| 2015/2/1 | Fushan Summer Camp dates confirmed. |
| 2015/3/1-2015/3/30 | Recruit Camp Assistants |
| 2015/4/1-2015/6/30 | Train Camp Assistant Course design Material design |
| 2015/7/1 | Summer Camp Start Distribute Pre-Course Questionnaire Observing and videotaping students' interaction and performance |
| 2015/7/5 | Summer Camp End Distribute Post-Course Questionnaire |
| 2015/7/5-2015/12/31 | Analyzing questionnaire and observation result |

Literature Review

Willingness to communicate (WTC) has been defined as the intention to initiate communication, given a choice. In the late 1990s, many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers began to realize that there is a difference between WTC and communicative competence. Thus, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) argued that there is a need to examine WTC in the L2, define the concept as the individual's "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (p.547)

According to Wen and Clement (2003), how to generate students' WTC to improve their oral proficiency has been a key issue for English language teaching in China. This is a key issue because Chinese students are recognized for their adeptness in grammar-based written examinations but poor in oral communication skills.

To Chinese students taught in a grammar-translation approach, every phenomenon in language must be judged according to grammar structures. As students have memorized so many rules so well, it is natural that they are rule-ridden driven and tend to monitor themselves all the time, constantly checking their output against their knowledge of English. Horwitz(1984) stated a number of students believe nothing should be said in the foreign language until it can be said correctly and that it is not okay to guess in an unknown foreign language word. Such beliefs must produce anxiety since students are expected to communicate in the second tongue before fluency is attained. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), "learners do not begin the language learning experience with anxiety. Anxiety occurs only when attitudes and emotions regarding the language learning experience have been formed" (p.527).

Methodology

The study was conducted at a middle school in southern Taiwan. The participants were 37 students who attended the camp as part of their summer school program. The camp lasted for five days from July 1st to July 5th. Lessons included food, tourist sites, festival and table manners in Korea. Throughout the five-day 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, and three-minute individual presentation to let students compare the differences between Korean and Taiwanese culture based on what they have learned throughout the five-day camp. (See Appendix 1 for class schedule)

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used during the data collecting process. Quantitative data include pre and post course questionnaires. Qualitative data include field notes from the lesson, videotaping the lessons and students' presentation performance.

Result, Discussion and Conclusion

Research Question One

What do students expected to learn through the five-day camp?

In terms of what participants expected to learn from the summer camp, 35% stated they would like to learn Korean culture, 24% would like to learn all Korean related topics designed for the course and another 14% stated that they would like to learn Korean culture (See Table 1). This indicated that students are interested in topics related to Korea.

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

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Korean Culture | 13 | 35 |
| Korean Food | 2 | 5 |
| Korean Festival | 2 | 5 |
| Korean Landscapes | 1 | 3 |
| Food + Landscape | 3 | 8 |
| Culture + Landscape | 5 | 14 |
| Culture + Landscape + Food+ Festival | 9 | 24 |
| Culture+ Landscape + Festival | 1 | 3 |
| More vocabulary | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

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

Table 2 discussed teaching approaches that participants preferred during the summer camp, 97% of the participants indicated that they would prefer interactive teaching approach instead of traditional teaching. 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 |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Interactive | 36 | 97 |
| Traditional | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 56 | 100.0 |

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

Research Question Two

In terms of the four skills, which skill would they like to improve?

As participants were asked which language skill they would like to improve during the summer camp, 54% of participants stated that they would like to focus on speaking, 16% would like to improve their writing skills and 13% of participants would like to improve both listening and speaking skills (See Table 3). This result is consistent with their reasons for attending the camp which indicates that participants are eager to apply and use English through oral communication in their daily life.

Table 3: Which language skill would you like to improve?

| Language Skill | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Listening | 1 | 3 |
| Speaking | 20 | 54 |
| Reading | 1 | 3 |
| Writing | 6 | 16 |
| Listening + Speaking | 5 | 13 |
| Listening + Speaking+ reading | 1 | 3 |
| All four | 3 | 8 |
| Total | 37 | 100 |

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

Research Question Three

Did the course and activities designed meet students' expectations?

At the end of the summer camp, participants were asked to complete a post course questionnaire; 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. As Table 4 shown, 82% of participants indicated that the course and activities designed has met their expectation and they have gained knowledge about Korean culture through the camp (See Table 5).

Table 4: The course and activity designed has met my expectation.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 13 | 41 |
| Agree | 13 | 41 |
| So so | 6 | 18 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

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

Table 5: I have gained some knowledges related to Korean culture through the camp.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 16 | 50 |
| Agree | 14 | 44 |
| So so | 2 | 6 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

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

In terms of the skills students would like to improve, as Table 6 has shown, 41% of participants claimed their speaking skills have improved through the camp and 22% indicated that both their listening and speaking skills have improved as they expected at the beginning of the course .

Table 6: Which skills did the camp help you improve?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Overall | 32 | 100 |
| Listening | 1 | 3 |
| Speaking | 13 | 41 |
| Listening + reading + speaking | 3 | 9 |
| Listening + Speaking | 7 | 22 |
| Reading + Speaking | 1 | 3 |
| Speaking + Writing | 1 | 3 |
| Listening + Writing | 1 | 3 |
| Reading + Writing | 1 | 3 |
| Listening + Reading + Speaking | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 32 | 100 |

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

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 Camp Schedule

| 2015 Fushan Junior High School Korean Culture English Camp | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|------------|------------|---------------|--|
| | 7/1 | 7/2 | 7/3 | 7/4 | 7/5 |
| 8:30-9:00 | Register | | | | |
| 9:00-9:10 | Opening Ceremony | Video time | Video time | Video time | Final Performance |
| 9:10-10:00 | | Lesson 2 | Lesson 4 | Lesson 5 | Rehearsal |
| 10:00-10:10 | Break | Break | Field Game | Break | Break |
| 10:10-11:00 | Ice Breaker | Lesson 2 | | Lesson 5 | Closing Ceremony and Final Performance |
| 11:00-11:10 | Break | Break | | Break | |
| 11:10-12:00 | Lesson 1 | Lesson 3 | | Oral Practice | |
| 12:00-13:10 | Lunch Hour | | | | |
| 13:10-14:00 | Lesson 1 | Lesson 3 | Lesson 4 | Oral Practice | |
| 14:00-14:10 | Break | Break | Break | Break | |
| 14:10-15:00 | Oral Practice (Computer Lab) | | | Rehearsal | |
| 15:00- | End of the Day | | | | |

Note:

Lesson 1: Korean Festival

Lesson 2: Korean Table Manners

Lesson 3: Korean Food

Lesson 4: Korean Traditional Buildings

Lesson 5: Korean Landscapes