

**Toward Knowledge Networks for the Economy,
Society, Culture, Environment and Health
for the GMS and Asia-Pacific**

4.1-8(4)

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Chiangrai Rajabhat University, Chiangrai, Thailand, 2010

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A Case Study of Implementing A Cooperative Learning Strategy: Learning Together In Local Tourism For Tourism Industry Students At Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University

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Abstract

This paper presents an investigation of a Case Study of Implementing Cooperative Learning Strategy: Learning Together in Local Tourism for Tourism Industry Students at Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University. It was intended to evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative learning on English language development amongst tourism students and to evaluate the impact of cooperative learning on the practices of local tour guide students. The study also aimed to develop a set of recommendations for future practice in cooperative learning in Thai educational institutions. The research was conducted in classrooms of two groups of third-year Tourism Major students. The focus of this study was only 12 students to allow for a more in-depth study.

Using a second questionnaire, the study evaluated the effectiveness of a cooperative learning strategy called "Learning Together" in terms of the students' attitude in English language development and the practices of local guides. Another questionnaire evaluated the impact of cooperative learning on the practices of local tour guide students. A focus-group interview with the 12 students provided in-depth information regarding their learning and provided ideas for a set of recommendations for future practice. It is anticipated that the information gained from this study will benefit both the teachers in their choices of suitable methodologies and student outcomes with the respect to improved competency in their skills in English and increased confidence in cooperative learning in small groups.

Introduction

This study presents a case study of implementing a cooperative learning strategy called Learning Together in local tourism at Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University. Learning Together is a method employed successfully throughout Western countries.

The research manuscript provides a context for the study by exploring the relevant literature and describes the methodology used in collecting and analyzing data as well as the ethical principles adopted to guide this process. The findings of the study are discussed and illustrated, drawing upon the narrative data of the methodology used. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings and suggests some implications that could inform further studies, as well as approaches, to the

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East Asian countries and writing, as mentioned above. Thai setting is to improve their work in small groups thus be given more time. The teacher's role would be help when problem arise, skills and the ability to create a product. Olson and Kagan use social learning interaction and learning is a role in the learning, not merely looking at negotiation and students and

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Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University is one of the local universities which has been designated by the government to provide educational services for the two provinces of Phitsanulok and Sukhothai. The university also offers students a tourism industry major in the Faculty of Management Science. Both provinces are rich in cultural and historical resources. Sukhothai Province was named a World Historical Park by UNESCO because it is rich in old ruins. Phitsanulok Province is advantageous in its location. It is considered to be the gateway to Indochina. Phitsanulok is not only a center for government offices but also an educational center (Thiwapphan et. al: 1997).

Development of English Teaching

Teaching and learning English as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL) has been developed by language scholars and linguists for many decades dating back to, amongst others, the Grammar Translation Approach or Total Physical Response and evident today in the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman: 1986). Language scholars and linguists have studied and set up theories, methodologies, strategies, techniques and approaches to enable learners to use language appropriately and competently. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)/Learning Approach which emphasizes interactive communication has been researched throughout the world, especially in Europe, America and Australia. Another approach of interest is cooperative or collaborative teaching techniques. These techniques offer ways to organize group work which in turn has been shown to enhance learning and increase academic achievement. These techniques provide increased interaction between students, seen in skills such as restating, expanding ideas, and contextualizing. These all help students to clarify their meanings, elaborate explanations, and resolve discrepancies (Olsen & Kagan, 1992 in Kessler: 1992). However, the success of such approaches is also dependent on other factors such as the personality, intelligence, educational background, and learning styles of the learner (Ingram: 1998).

More importantly while much research has been conducted in ASEAN and East Asian countries in the three main language skill areas namely, listening, reading, and writing, speaking has been given little attention (Ueno: 1995). For the reasons mentioned above, it is important to see if cooperative learning is applicable to a Thai setting in the hope that a cooperative learning approach will help Thai students improve their communicative abilities in English. Students would have to plan and work in small groups cooperatively on the assignments given by the teacher and thus be given an equal opportunity to share their thoughts and to express themselves. The teacher's role would be that of a facilitator (Henley: 2002). As group composition would be heterogeneous, strong students would be able to help the weaker ones when problems arise. This would allow the strong students to practise their existing skills and the weaker students to feel more confident. In addition, cooperative learning can create a democratic atmosphere with students planning and working together. Olson and Kagan (1992) claim that cooperative structures encourage students to use social language functions and social competence through student-student interaction while working in groups. Dillenbourg (2001) adds that cooperative learning is considered wise to give the learners a more active and more constructive role in the learning process. Moreover, this knowledge-constructing process is not merely looked upon as an individual affair but rather as a process of interaction and negotiation with other agents in the learning environment, such as the teacher, fellow students and the teaching materials.

Last but not least, as a teacher of English at a local university, the researcher realizes the importance of English language teaching and learning, so he will try by every means to prepare the students, who someday will become teachers in primary schools or secondary schools or even local tour guides to be a capable workforce in the country, especially in the field of language teaching and local tourism. Finally, the findings from this study, hopefully, if adopted, will help improve the speaking proficiency of students and so lead to successful collaboration in tertiary institutions and improve Thailand as a whole.

Methodology

Objectives of the Study

This chapter describes how the research was conducted in order to:

1. evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative learning on English language development amongst tourism students;
2. evaluate the impact of cooperative learning on the practices of local tour guide students;
3. Develop a set of recommendations for future practice in cooperative learning in Thai educational institutions.

The Sample Group and Data Collection Methods

This study is qualitative research involving a case study as defined by Depoy and Gitlin (1998). That is, it seeks to investigate a single phenomenon at a single site. It was conducted involving two groups of 60 third-year Tourism Major students where a cooperative learning method called Learning Together was being implemented. However, the focus of this study is 12 students only, to allow for a more in-depth study. The subjects were purposively sampled and placed into three heterogeneous groups of four. These groups consisted of students with a range of results in "English for Tourism 1, 2 and 3" class. One student in each group had achieved a high level, two had achieved average levels and one had achieved a level below average. The students named their own groups: JPK Travel, Tourist Gangsters and Swan, respectively.

Data collection activities included three questionnaires: the first is to find useful topics suggested by foreign tourists that will be taught for tourism students, the second is to find how students feel towards the method used and the third is to assess how students perform as local guides, and focus group interviews. The questionnaires can be found in Appendices A, B and C. Christensen and Johnson (2000) define a questionnaire as a self-report data-collection instrument that each research participant fills out as part of a research study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) define a focus group interview as a form of group interview on which the reliance is the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher. The interaction of the group leads to data and outcomes. Its contrived

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nature is both its strength and weakness: it is an unnatural setting yet it is very focused on a particular issue and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview. The focus group interview is economical on time, producing a large amount of data in a short period of time, but it tends to produce less data than interviews with the same number of individuals on a one-to-one basis. Foreign tourist questionnaires investigated the reasons for their visit to Thailand, especially Phitsanulok and Sukhothai, what they would like to know and see, where they stayed, how they would prefer to arrange their trip, what factors contributed to their decision to visit those two provinces, if they would come again and if they would recommend them to a friend. The students administering the tourist questionnaire presented a letter of introduction (Appendix D). A student questionnaire investigated two classes of 60 tourism students' attitudes to cooperative learning called Learning Together. The third questionnaire (from foreign tourists) investigated how foreign tourists assessed students' performance as local guides, and a focus group interview of the 12 students provided triangulation of the findings.

The researcher developed the questionnaires. They were tried out with another group by a colleague who teaches English for English major students to enable any readjustment of the questionnaires. The questionnaire items have been adapted from Slavin (1995). The questionnaire is comprised of 10 items, the second questionnaire comprises 40 items: 20 items with positive attitudes and another 20 with negative attitudes and the third questionnaire is comprised of 10 items. Since there is an open-ended question in the second one, the students or participants are allowed to write in Thai so they can express their thoughts more fruitfully and meaningfully.

Notification of the research was made by Flinders University to Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University by letter (Appendix E).

Procedures

The teaching activities were conducted by a contract teacher who is a native English speaker from America. The teacher used a cooperative learning strategy called Learning Together adapted from Johnson and Johnson (1992) for eight weeks. Topics were made from the first questionnaire involving foreign tourists who traveled in Phitsanulok and Sukhothai. At this stage, the researcher and tourism students helped gather questionnaires from foreign tourists who were staying in two hotels: Topland and Phailin in Phitsanulok. Moreover, some questionnaires were gathered willingly by a fourth year English major student from Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University who went for job training at Sukhothai Historical Park Information Center and also a former English major student from Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University who sings at the Topland Hotel. More than 200 questionnaires were returned, then the researcher together with the tourism students helped tally the items and made them into topics. At this stage the teacher chose topics that most foreign tourists