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Interlinking the cooperative and work-integrated education programs of COLA KKU vis-à-vis english language teaching and learning

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Abstract

Higher education institutions nowadays are eyeing the potential of cooperative & work-integrated education programs (CWIE) in increasing the English proficiency level of Thai students. Hence, this study aims to interlink English language teaching and learning vis-à-vis the various CWIE programs utilized by the College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University in Thailand, and to identify its pedagogical challenges. By way of participatory observation and interviews, data were collected for this study. Likewise, phenomenology was performed on the data in the study. Results showed that the integration of additional English subjects in the new curriculum which foster the 21st century skills and concepts, the employment of foreign native and non-native English language teachers of English, partnerships with universities abroad, the conduct of English camps and intensive English programs, and the sending of soon-to-be graduates for internships abroad help facilitate English language teaching and learning. However, challenges remain, such as lack of exposure to an English-speaking environment, the native-speakerism ideology, the learners' motivation and attitude toward language learning, and the prevalence of Thai as the medium of instruction and pedagogy.

Keywords: Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (CWIE), English camps, English as Second Language, International internships, Language pedagogy

Introduction

Due to the societal and academic demands brought about by globalization in recent years, the clamor for more globally competent graduates has risen. Consequently, today's employers undoubtedly seek employees who possess competence, resilience, and high adaptability especially to the global marketplace (Usher, 2019; Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2021).

To equip students with the necessary competencies they need to meet the needs of the job market after graduation, the College of Local Administration of Khon Kaen University implements a novel concept of educational management which is the Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (CWIE). As promising as it sounds, various CWIE programs are also seen as terrific opportunities to improve the students' English competencies for a prospective global workplace.

Research Objectives

1. To interlink the various Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education programs of COLA KKU with English language teaching and learning.
2. To identify the challenges in the implementation of these CWIE pedagogies and English language teaching and learning.

Review of Related Literature

In the academe, globalization has always been a motivating factor for institutions of higher education to reassess their mission statements and to consider how to best prepare students for an increasingly globalized world (Green et al., 2008, as cited in Jensen, 2022). As Usher (2019) put it, learning as a finite suite of knowledge and skills at university to prepare for a static career is now anathema, with industry demanding constant new insight and innovation to meet the needs of an ever-changing global society. Nowadays, most employers prefer street-smart graduates to book-smart ones. Hence, universities are developing programs and initiatives to assist in this effort including on- and off-campus international learning experiences (American Council on Education, 2017 as cited in Jensen, 2022).

Thailand, like other members of the ASEAN Community, enjoins its government to improve its citizens' competency in the English language. The continuing wave by Thai governments to develop and modernize the quality of education has influenced Thai society. It is quite alarming to note that within Thailand, English proficiency has been reported as being inferior to many ASEAN countries (Wannachotphawate, 2015). Therefore, since English is extensively used among linguacultural users to access life opportunities, it has become a requisite foreign language in the Thai educational system (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). As a result, the Thai state has launched alternative educational policies to elevate the quality of education and the English skills of its citizens. In fact, as early as 1995, the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) already commenced persuading Thai schools to initiate its English Program (EP) curriculum (Wannachotphawate, 2015).

In the study of Boonsuk and Ambele (2021), it was found that pedagogy is less responsive to the changing roles of English use and its widespread use worldwide, especially among diverse linguacultural interlocutors. Hence, English university lecturers should reconsider, adjust, and make more practical global changes in English language teaching for the purpose of language teaching, language planning, and predicting language change. After all, the primordial goal of language learning is its practical applications and not just rote understanding.

An educational model which is seen to achieve the above-mentioned goals is cooperative education. In fact, Eames and Cates (2011) proved that there is sound evidence that the pedagogical structure of cooperative education provides a valuable contribution to students' overall learning because it encourages students to integrate academic and work-based learning. In cooperative education programs, learning facilitation occurs in two distinct settings: the educational institution and the workplace (Eames & Cates, 2011).

One of the concrete illustrations of the cooperative education programs is the Cooperative and Work-integrated Education (CWIE) programs, which is a term coined by the World Association for Cooperative & Work-Integrated Education. These CWIE programs are eyed to effectively connect what students are learning to the world of work through placements (Khampirat & McRae, 2016). Since it is one of the mechanisms for organizing teaching and learning at higher education institutions and external agencies, CWIE is implemented in a co-production manner with various formats such as internships, semester in industry, international co-op exchanges, study abroad, service learning and community service, among others (“WACE - Advancing Cooperative & Work-Integrated Education - What Is WACE and CWIE,” n.d.). The College of Local Administration (COLA) of Khon Kaen University (KKU) is among the educational institutions which utilize CWIE educational pedagogies not only to promote global visibility, but also to increase the English proficiency level of Thai students. This insight instigated this study.

Three major theories are linked with this study, namely (a) Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, (b) Atkinson's Model of Achievement Motivation, and (c) Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The first theory concentrates on the three fundamental processes in the development of logical thinking: assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium. For the co-op student, the process of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium are naturally at work, as they encounter new knowledge, skills, and experiences in the new context of the workplace. Meanwhile, the expectancy-value model derived from Atkinson's model of achievement motivation states that expectancy, in combination with value, leads to task involvement and subsequent achievement (Atkinson, 1964 as cited in Eames & Cates, 2011). Lastly, the Social Learning Theory developed by Bandura (1977, as cited in Eames & Cates, 2011) states that in cooperative education, students experience social learning as they observe the behaviors and consequences of those behaviors in their colleagues in the workplace. While co-op students will learn from their own successes and failures, they also learn from the successes or failures of others (Eames & Cates, 2011). Remarkably, the Social Learning Theory is also one of the major theories of language learning and development.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This qualitative study made use of the descriptive paradigm. The data generated from the participatory observation and interviews were analyzed and interpreted to interlink the Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education programs of COLA KKU with English language teaching and learning. The study also sought to determine the challenges attached to such.

2. Research Instruments

Participatory observation was the primary tool used in this study. Participant observation allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies

in the description provided by those informants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995 as cited in Kawulich, 2005). In this study, the researcher is an English Language Lecturer of COLA.

The interviews were also used as a supplementary tool. The interviews were verbal, individual, a combination of face-to-face and virtual, and voluntary. The participants were assured of their anonymity. Interviews allow the establishment of rapport between the interviewers and the interviewee. This facilitates the acquisition of more in-depth information needed for the study. Since the interviews were conducted using the English language, some questions were also repeatedly rephrased, explained, and simplified by the researcher to ensure that the participants fully understood the questions. Follow-up questions were also raised during the individual interviews to probe and to clarify their answers.

3. Target Group / Populations and Samples

Purposive sampling was utilized for this study. The population of this study is comprised of two (2) COLA KKU administrators, two (2) English language teachers, six (6) COLA graduate and undergraduate students who participated in the two-week English camp in February to March 2023, and ten (10) fourth-year COLA students who underwent English for CWIE special course prior to their international internship in October 2023. Hence, this study is limited to the perspectives of the COLA KKU EFL teachers, administrators, and students.

4. Data Analysis

Phenomenology was used in this study since this research method is best used in educational settings to explore the essence of a certain phenomenon from the perspective of the one who has experienced it (Bonyadi, 2023). The researcher performed verbatim transcriptions of the interviews. To assure the reliability and validity of the gathered data, the researcher repeatedly reviewed and verified all the transcriptions, and the relevant details were listed and interpreted. Specifically, only the pertinent data related to the study were identified. Repetitive referencing to the concepts and the choice of words by the participants was indispensable in the identification process. These concepts were supported by various theories and concepts in cooperative education and second language learning.

Results and Discussion

1. The CWIE pedagogies interlinked with English language teaching and learning

1.1 Integration of additional English subjects in the curriculum which foster the 21st century skills and concepts

Previously, COLA had been offering several English courses in its programs' curriculum. However, in the new curriculum for the Academic Year 2023-2024, three new English subjects were added with the end goal of improving the English language macro skills of the freshmen students, namely: (1) Basic English Academic Reading and Writing; (2) English Listening and Discussions on Current Issues; and (3) Advanced English Academic Reading and Writing. Notably, the instruction and pedagogy utilized in these English subjects are mostly task-based or performance-based to allow more interactive teaching strategies for the teachers and more realistic learning outputs from the students.

This finds support in the study of Chaovanapricha and Chaturongakul (2020) which emphasized that students show positive attitudes toward the collaborative process of interdisciplinary teaching in English for Specific Purposes subjects because of the enjoyable and knowledgeable activities. In line with this, Wattanavorakijkul (2019) believed that teachers should always understand and incorporate the 21st century skills and concepts into the classroom and these shall be reflected in what and how they teach foundation English courses especially among Thai university students who are non-English majors like the COLA students.

1.2 Employment of foreign native and non-native teachers of English

To ensure effective teaching and learning of the English language, COLA had employed both foreign native and non-native speakers of the English language. In the past, one American native speaker used to handle an English graduate course. At present, there are two Filipino English Language Lecturers who teach English the newly offered English courses both in the undergraduate and graduate levels. Meanwhile, other English subjects are being taught by Thai English professors from the Language Institute of KKU.

This novel English educational pedagogy of COLA KKU is an illustration of the new and empowering concept of trans-speakerism. Hiratsuka et al. (2023) used the term trans-speakerism to pertain to an ideological stance committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion for all language teachers, irrespective of their first languages or cultures. This is one of the cooperative learning practices that COLA KKU aims to sustain because it undeniably promotes intercultural and multicultural communication and competence.

1.3 Exchange programs and partnerships with universities abroad

With the goal of promoting research and academic collaboration, fostering a deeper understanding of the ASEAN region, and facilitating the English language learning of the COLA students, COLA KKU has established partnerships with universities abroad such as the University of Baguio in Baguio City, Philippines, Eastern International University in Binh Duong New City, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam and Portland State University in the United States of America, among others. In May 2023, the fourteen COLA exchange students who had their international internships in the Philippines and Vietnam participated in the Presentation for the International CWIE of KKU. Apart from sharing their acquired knowledge and perspectives on academic development and administration, they also showcased their English skills in the said presentations.

The study of Ariyanti (2020) proved that international exchange students experience development in terms of their English oral proficiency, vocabulary, and pronunciation since natural condition in using English as language of communication was formed when conversing with local people and teaching in classrooms. Hence, due to the effectiveness of international exchange programs, Ma et al. (2023) stressed that educational research and policy makers should move beyond an emphasis on language proficiency and further examine the role of other factors when developing strategies to facilitate supportive learning environments for English language learners and international students in a university setting.

1.4 The conduct of English camps

In February to March 2023, COLA collaborated with the University of Baguio, Philippines for a two-week English camp. Two exchange faculty members and two BA English Language students from the University of Baguio School of Teacher Education and Liberal Arts were invited to COLA KKU in Khon Kaen, Thailand to facilitate the said program. This English camp has been specifically designed to train Thai students to become effective, confident, and competent speakers of the English language through the utilization of fun learning concepts and principles of effective oral communication. One student participant proudly shared his experience:

“...before I coming to this camp I’m not good at English and I don’t have confidence to speak. but after I’m coming to this camp I feel I have improved my speaking and learning skills and more speak. it’s not very good but it’s better than before.”

English camps are becoming a trend in English language pedagogy especially among non-native speakers of English not only because of their fun nature, but because of their influence on decreasing some students’ anxiety factors (Jing & Junying, 2016; Noguchi, 2019), increasing their perception of their English communicative competence (Noguchi, 2019; Srisermbhok, 2020), improving their language acquisition (Rugasken & Harris, 2009) and aiding in their overall cultural understanding (Rugasken & Harris, 2009; Srisermbhok, 2020). In the study of Asmara et al. (2016), it was also shown that students enjoyed non-formal activities during English camps like playing games, competitions, and adventures, and their interests towards English learning were also strengthened. Hence, Srisermbhok (2020) suggested that outdoor activities should indeed be integrated in teaching English to develop students’ communication competence, good character, resilience, and cross-cultural understanding and awareness of ASEAN community in Thailand. Apart from the goal of English language learning, COLA’s English camp also aimed at familiarizing the student participants with each other’s culture, religion, arts, and customs since the COLA international graduate students from Myanmar and Indonesia also partook in the event.

1.5 Implementation of special English courses

Ten fourth-year students of COLA signed up for an international internship for the Second Semester of the Academic Year 2023-2024. Since interns must engage in boundary crossing when connecting academic learning with professional practices, the role of COLA’s administrators and English language lecturers in the development of professional learning in such complex professional learning settings is very crucial (Chue & Säljö, 2022). Thus, to prepare the students for their respective international sojourns to government and non-government institutions in Laos, Taiwan, and Vietnam, COLA organized a 30-hour intensive English for International CWIE crash course for them. For Bekteshi and Xhaferi (2020), the highest priority for the students is learning English for employment purposes, with the primary focus on the enhancement of their communicative skills. Hence, the said English course was centered on English for Work Purposes and basic functional English particularly their speaking and listening skills.

In relation to this, a separate one-month intensive English training program focused on English for Work Purposes was also conceptualized for the COLA employees and staff to boost their English proficiency

and overall communication skills which would be useful for their intercultural official businesses in COLA and abroad.

1.6 International Internships

One of the work-integrated learning (WIL) activities under CWIE which is deemed to be essential for career exploration, preparation, and development is the post-course internships. Specifically, international internship experiences facilitate students to become culturally savvy, build their international professional networks, enhance their level of self-perceived competency, and cultivate a globalized career adaptability perspective (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). This is possible because the intentional incorporation of experiential learning principles in the design and implementation of internship abroad programs has clear potential to increase participants' intercultural competence and develop their skills for the 21st century workplace (Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2021). The international internships not only offer a rich training ground for college students to gain valuable international and intercultural career experience (Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2021), but they also enhance the students' globalized social, cultural, and human capital and their ability to adapt to culturally diverse business contexts. The international internship experience can also increase student's confidence to enter the global labor market and seek opportunities beyond their original country of residence (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). Aside from these, COLA KKU has been sending students for their international internships believing that their English language proficiency would improve as a result since the student have no other choice but to use English in communicating with people from various countries.

2. The challenges in the implementation of CWIE *vis-à-vis* English language teaching and learning

2.1 Lack of exposure to an English-speaking environment

Most participants shared that one of the reasons why they think they lack English proficiency skills is that they do not have the opportunity to practice what they have learned in school. They added that they may be trained to use English in school or in special English programs organized by COLA, but they revert to speaking in Thai outside the English classroom and at home. In line with this, one student-participant of the English camp shared:

“I have learned a lot of English and I learned about speaking English is very easy if you want to say you say because when you say everyone understand but you don't speak everyone don't understand.”

Certain studies prove the truth of the lack of exposure to the English language not only in terms of speaking, but also in writing. For instance, the study of Dueraman (2015) showed that only the students who chose to major in English at universities in Thailand were given opportunities to experience writing skills.

These occurrences find support in Bandura's Social Learning Theory which emphasizes the role of the environment and exposure in language learning. Specifically, the study of Zhao and Dersingh (2022) suggested that an L2-supportive learning environment can help increase the participants' self-confidence

and self-esteem, which are very important factors affecting the students' willingness to communicate in English. Thus, if Thai English language learners would want long-term opportunity to practice their English skills, promoting an English-speaking environment must be implemented with consistency and sustainability. It is high time for administrators to review their language policies.

2.2 Native speakerism ideology

Like most countries, Thailand indubitably conforms to the native speakerism ideology, making them still prefer English language teachers who are native English speakers to non-native English speakers (Huttayavilaiphan, 2021; Hiratsuka, Nall, & Castellano, 2023; Liu, 2021). On the other hand, the study of Jumsai Na Ayudhya (2021) proved that English language students nowadays are already aware of the differences between native and non-native English speakers and that they perceive both to have unique linguistic, cultural, and teaching strengths and weaknesses -- eventually debunking the native speaker ideology.

Thus, to prepare Thai learners for the new changing role of English and reduce English language teaching dependency on the native English variety (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021), several schools and universities in Thailand already employ English teachers from the Philippines (Nawamawat & Cedar, 2021; Ulla, 2021). English is an official language in the Philippines. It is considered as a second language or even a first language to some Filipinos. However, although Filipino teachers were positive about teaching English to Thai students, majority still perceive that English language teaching in Thailand is challenging because of students' lack of interest in the English language; lack of exposure to and support for an English-speaking environment; unclear and unsuitable English language curriculum; and lack of teacher professional development (Ulla, 2018). Other technological challenges also arose during the pandemic.

Nonetheless, regardless of the racial background, English teachers remain as the main interlocutors in increasing the students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. What matters is that the English teachers can bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world by preparing students for real social situations (Tan et al., 2020). Indeed, this is the gist of trans-speakerism.

2.3 Prevalence of Thai as the medium of instruction and pedagogy

In the past curricula of COLA KKU, English subjects were not given much attention. Although the graduate school programs of COLA are being offered in both Thai and English languages, the Thai language is still the prevailing medium of instruction for all the undergraduate courses. Thus, if COLA wants to produce more globally competitive and English-proficient graduates, the administrators must consider using English as a Medium of Instruction for certain subjects.

On the other hand, caution must be observed when it comes to the implementation of English as a medium of instruction as this concept is subject to vulnerability and subjective interpretation. To illustrate, the study of Jantadej (2021) shows that English language teachers did not entirely implement English as an international language teaching (EILT) in their classrooms. It was manifested that they were confused with the concept and principles of EILT as they considered it a new language teaching paradigm. Unfortunately, it led to uncertainties on how to implement EILT into practice.

Thus, the abovementioned issues strengthen the clamor for an informed and systematic implementation of the English curriculum in Thailand (Dueraman, 2015), the possible development of a TESOL degree curriculum and teacher preparation (Jumsai Na Ayudhya, 2021), and the urgent and sustainable endorsement and integration of the EILT paradigm into the English teaching curriculum in Thailand (Jantadej, 2021).

2.4 Learners' motivation and attitude

Despite the strong and proud localism of Thai students (Jantadej, 2021), the results of this study still prove that most COLA students are enthusiastic to learn English not only due to extrinsic, but also intrinsic motivation. This is in accordance with the Atkinson's model of achievement motivation. In fact, in the study of Thongprayoon et al. (2020), willingness and motivation emerged as implementation forces to drive students to exhibit intercultural communicative language learning competencies.

During the COLA English camp, confidence in using the English language was the leading takeaway of most of the student participants. Events such as this encourage them not only to speak using the English language, but it helped them gain more friends as well. They also underscored that one of the traits of an effective future leader is good English-speaking skills so that effective communication could be attainable.

Meanwhile, another student participant also shared that he would like to do an internship abroad that is why he considered joining the English camp as first step towards achieving his goal. However, although international internship opportunities are available to students, few students are willing to challenge themselves in a foreign setting (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). In COLA, only 10 out of 224 fourth-year students signified their intention for international internship even if there would be financial support by the college. In cases such as this, one of the solutions proposed by Kattiyapornpong and Almeida (2022) is the setting up of a task force of academics and professional staff that would form part of a cohesive resourcing structure for the long-term sustainability of the international internship programs.

Suggestions

The results of this study provide supporting evidence that there is a need to implement certain measures in language policy and educational pedagogies, namely: (1) a global quality standards framework, (2) an effective implementation strategy, and (3) a quality evaluation model for CWIE programs. In other words, administrators, language policy makers, and English language teachers should exert due diligence and attention on the planning, execution, and the evaluation of these CWIE programs. This could be an effective springboard for establishing, developing, and accrediting quality CWIE programs (Khampirat & McRae, 2016).

Therefore, since CWIE can also be seen as being the basis for any practice across professional fields where resilience and adaptability are essential (Usher, 2019), it is important to educators that learning through work experience is understood so that appropriate curricula, pedagogy, and assessment can be designed and implemented (Eames & Cates, 2011). Specifically, a standards framework and a well-tested quality evaluation model could function as a valuable resource and guide, as well as a tool, for CWIE

practitioners and administrators across all disciplines on a global scale (Khampirat & McRae, 2016). In the case of COLA who is still in its exploratory stage of the implementation stage of some of its CWIE programs, long-term and sustainable plans should be established and institutionalized.

Furthermore, to cope with the demands of the global market, notable revolutionary academic concepts related to CWIE could be considered by Thailand's higher education institutions such as strengthening international mobility (Myhovich, 2019) and considering the utilization of English as a Medium of Instruction (Tang, 2020).

Overall, to borrow the words of Wannachotphawate (2015), there is a need to re-evaluate institutional rules and to participate in the formation of a political will where the stakeholders have their roles as citizens to play. The implications of such a commitment to a new concept in learning management innovation will indubitably affect curriculum planning and overall educational pedagogy especially in higher education, and the English language learning development of students. Moreover, it would also pave the way for more partnership opportunities in the global arena.

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