

Analysis of Activities that Enhanced Students' Communication Skills and Cross-Cultural Understanding of ASEAN Community through English Camp: A Case Study of International Inter-Cultural Expedition Camp at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Amporn Srisermbhok

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College, Thailand

amporn@southeast.ac.th

Abstract

This study analyzed the impact of International inter-cultural expedition camp activities from February 8-11, 2019 at UNIMAS Sarawak, Malaysia. It aimed to 1) find out which types of camp activities helped enhance the students' communication skills and increase their cross-cultural understanding and awareness. The samples of the study consisted of 36 participants who volunteered to answer the questionnaire. Their ages were ranged between 18 and 37 years. There were 9 males and 27 females. Data for analyses were based on the questionnaires. Both descriptive analysis and basic statistics were employed to present the data. The findings revealed that all the assigned activities from Day 1 to the last day of the camp have different positive impacts on the participants' communication skills and cross cultural understanding and awareness. The order of favorite camp activities from the highest included Ice Breaking Activities (91.66%), Family Time (77.77%), Trip to the Heritage Village(72.22%), Team Building (66.66%),Going to Water Front(63.88%),Treasure Hunts (49.49%), Night at the Museum (41.66%), and Cultural Performance(36.11%). It was also found that the types of camp activities that helped make the participants become more resilient were Night at the Museum (91.66%), Visiting the Cultural Heritage Village (83.33%), Team Building (80.55%), Family Time (74.99%), and Cultural Performance (69.44%). Outdoors activities should be integrated in teaching English to develop students' communication competence, good character, and cross-cultural understanding of ASEAN community in Thailand.

Keywords: communication competence, cross-cultural understanding, good character, camp activities

Introduction

The 21st Century language teaching and learning has changed tremendously. Kagan (2004) interestingly remarks:

As we enter the new millennium, a number of factors are converging to make many teachers' jobs appear impossible. We face demands to deliver increasingly sophisticated curriculum while at the same time, we face increasingly difficult classroom situations....Our social structure is changing too – the burden of teaching social skills, and good character increasingly falls upon teachers. We can meet all these challenges—but not with a

20th Century concept of teaching. What is needed is a 21st Century approach. We have federally-mandated higher academic standards.... But just scoring higher on tests is a narrow view of education. We have expanded our notion of intelligence – we want to develop students many ways to be smart. Our workforce has become more global and inter-dependent – we want students to acquire teamwork and social skills. Technology is expanding at a dizzying rate – we attempt to teach students technology skills. We move from memorizing facts that will be outdated to teaching thinking skills that will serve students well as they cope with the ever- expanding information base. Our social structure is changing too – the burden of teaching social skills, and good character increasingly falls upon teachers.

From the above, it is clear that we need to change our teaching style to make it interesting so as to motivate our students to put their best efforts to their learning outcomes. It is also practical and sensible to integrate culture and language to enhance their social skills and good character.

Culture and Language Learning

In recent years, many scholars have paid attention to the important role of culture and language learning. Shemshadsara (2012, p. 95) makes interesting remarks as follows:

“Culture awareness has become an important focus of modern language education, a shift that reflects a greater awareness of the inseparability of language and culture, and the need to prepare students for intercultural communication.”

The citation above reveals a need to integrate cultural understanding in teaching a new target language. Therefore, it is important for the English teacher to develop cultural understanding either in or outside the classroom context that, if successfully integrated, will significantly lead to general human knowledge.

Strasheim (1976, p. 198, as cited in Hadley, 1993) argues that:

Language ability and cultural sensitivity can play a vital role in the security, defense and economic well-being of the country and that global understanding ought to be a mandatory component of basic education.

In addition, Knutson (2006, p. 591) states that in order to broaden the humanistic scope of the second/foreign language curriculum, and at the same time alleviating the pressure of a typically over-extended instructional agenda, the teaching of culture can relate an understanding of the target and home cultures as they relate to one another, with explicit reference to the learner’s culturally subjective position. In this way, the learner will become more sensitive to his/her cultural identity and attitudes towards the other, arguing for increased emphasis on an understanding of self as cultural subject and openness of mind toward cultural difference.

Barnhardt (2000, p. 169) describes what one needs to know about learning another culture:

One of the first things to recognize is that the more you learn about another culture, the more you will find out about yourself. We all carry around our own sub-conscious culturally conditioned filters for making sense out of the world around us, and it isn’t until we encounter people with a substantially different set of filters that we have to confront the assumptions, predispositions and beliefs that we take for granted and which make us who we are. To illustrate how those differences can come into play, the following chart summarizes some of the characteristics that tend to distinguish the view of the world as exhibited in many indigenous from that embodied in Western scientific tradition:

Indigenous World View

Spirituality is embedded in all elements of the cosmos.

Humans have responsibility for maintaining harmonious relationship with the natural world. Need for reciprocity between human and natural-world-resources are viewed as gifts. Nature is honored routinely through daily spiritual practice. Wisdom and ethics are derived from direct experience with the natural world.

Universe is made up of dynamic, ever-changing natural forces.

Universe is viewed as a holistic, integrated system with a unifying life force.

Time is circular with natural cycles that sustain all life.

Nature will always possess unfathomable mysteries.

Human thought, feelings and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe. Human role is to participate in the orderly designs of nature.

Respect for elders is based on their compassions and reconciliation of outer-and inner direct knowledge.

Sense of empathy and kinship with other forms of life.

View proper human relationship with nature as a continuous two-way, transactional dialogue.

Western World View

Spirituality is centered in a single Supreme Being.

Humans exercise dominion over nature to use it for personal and economic gain.

Natural resources are available for unilateral human exploitation.

Spiritual practices are intermittent and set apart from daily life.

Human reason transcends the natural world and can produce insights independently.

Universe is made up of an array of static physical objects.

Universe is compartmentalized in dualistic forms and reduced to progressively smaller conceptual parts.

Time is linear chronology of "human progress".

Nature is completely decipherable to the rational human mind.

Human thought, feeling and words are formed apart from the surrounding world.

Human role is to dissect analyze and manipulate nature for own ends.

Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age.

Sense of separateness from and superiority over other forms of life.

View relationship of humans to nature as a one-way hierarchical imperative.

Barnhardt concludes that differences in cultural perspectives such as those outlined above have enormous implications for all aspects of how we approach the tasks of everyday life, not the least of which is the education of succeeding generations. In most indigenous communities today, it is apparent that aspects of both the indigenous and Western perspectives are present in varying degrees.

Viewed in light of what has been discussed earlier, it is important to embody cross-cultural awareness to enhance our students' ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. That means in teaching them English, it is not enough to only focus on English grammatical structures, and vocabulary, but cross-cultural understanding as well.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Many previous studies have underpinned students' learning errors and seek new teaching pedagogy to engage students' active participation. However, this study will focus on the impact of international camp activities that will allow students to get exposed to real time language use and have cross-cultural understanding that can inspire them to develop their language and communication skills.

King (2013) argued that many teachers are aware of the importance of practicing interacting with others using a new language. However, large class sizes and a mandated curriculum that focuses more on grammatical accuracy than on communicative competence make interaction virtually impossible.

As obvious, there are many limitations in traditional teaching methods, of which teachers are found either standing using a microphone or sitting at their desks talking to the students, who passively listen to the lecture, even teachers try to engage their students with project-based learning. Wilson and Brooks (2014, pp. 512-522) point out that the project used

as the final evidence for students' learning achievement has a lot of limitations. Firstly, it is time consuming, involving only one student at a time to present his/her work, taking away from the all-too-limited time available for second language learning, and the number of hours in the weekly time-table for learning a second language is always limited, never enough.

With a belief in real time English use to develop students' English communication skills, the researcher is keen to explore and analyze if English camp activities with International participants from diverse background can motivate Thai and international learners to use English fluently as well as gain confidence in using it. International camp activities are used to motivate students to interact with one another naturally. There are many obvious benefits for students to participate in an international English camp hosted by University of Malaysia in Sarawak. Firstly, students will learn about Malaysian and other Asian cultures. Working and interacting with Malaysian and International students, including staff will allow participants from all over the world to build personal relationships and learn about cross- cultures from a local perspective in and outside the camp. The students will also realize what they can do and cannot. Secondly, the fact that there will be students from other countries, students will get exposed to international participants from many types of cultures working together in a camp. The camp activities allow all the participants to work together to make new friendship and relationship as well as learn how to talk and interact with one another during the camp. Thirdly, the camp provides new working environments within an unfamiliar culture, encouraging young international visitors to have a great experience that involves adapting and learning about a new environment, and this flexibility is beneficial for the students to improve their communication skills before, during and after the camp program. Fourthly, the participants and the hosts act as cultural ambassadors, introducing their own cultures. It is believed that after experiencing life in Malaysia, international participants, including Thai students are more likely to return to Malaysia to visit new friends and to use their English skills for future jobs. Last, one of the best benefits for students participating in an International camp in Malaysia is a chance to make new friends for a lifetime. Camp activities will provide students a cultural exchange program, allowing them to establish lifelong friendship. In other words, what this International camp will truly impact all the participants is the opportunity to connect with students from other parts of the world in order to bond over similarities and to learn from differences.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are to find out

1. Which types of the international inter-cultural expedition camp activities helped develop and enhance students' communication skills?
2. How expedition camp activities helped increase the participants' cultural understanding and awareness?

Definition of Terms:

1. *Participants* in this study refer to 36 students (8 Thais, and 28 international students) who volunteered to answer the questionnaire on the International Inter-cultural Expedition camp activities in Malaysia from February 8-11, 2019.
2. *Group leaders* consisted of 1 American and 2 Thais, and 6 facilitators consisted of 2 Indonesians, 1 Filipino, 2 Malaysians, and 1 Thai. They answered the questionnaire and provided feedbacks to the overall expedition camp activities.

Review of Literature

Related theories and recent research findings on the impact of external activities, cross-cultural understanding and learning environment to enhance students' communication skills and language learning will be discussed as follows:

Cross-Cultural Understanding and Learning Engagement:

According to *Thailand Human Development Report 2014*, the quality of education is a cause for concern, especially in terms of English language learning as Thailand has now become part of the ASEAN Community. The Ministry of Education has examined the prospects of liberalizing education under the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services, and a plan in preparation for the ASEAN Community has prioritized an investment in developing human resources, especially English language capability. There are many studies focusing on innovation in teaching pedagogy, evaluation and assessment in learners' outputs and their language proficiency. Among impacting factors for positive learning outcomes are external activities and cross-cultural understanding to improve English language capability and promote interactive learning, especially with regard to skills that are useful in the ASEAN Context that is cross-cultural understanding. In other words, it is also important to develop the soft side of ASEAN. That means inculcating the feeling of familiarity and commonality to replace the former apprehensions and misunderstandings between neighboring nations. In this aspect, it is sensible to create a good learning environment or organize external activities outside the classroom, such as camp activities or inter-cultural expedition camp to develop learners' cross-cultural understanding as well as improve their communication skills. Some important factors of English Program that are responsive to the ASEAN community include integrating the curriculum with ASEAN content and culture, and maximizing various learning resources for community involvement, networking and utilization of related external resources to promote cross-cultural competence and communication skills. In order to achieve these goals, all concerned parties need to change the learning and teaching patterns in the use of English as a medium of instruction, learning management style with integration of technology, and measurement and evaluation. In conclusion, apart from education reform to prepare Thai learners to become proactive members of the ASEAN Community, we need to upgrade the quality of teaching English for favorable outputs; namely the learners' learning achievement, attainment of their desirable characteristics in society and culture, achievement of their English skills in communication, research and knowledge of the ASEAN community as well as promoting cultural creativity, industry and cultural heritage.

As apparent, English teachers are well-qualified and willing to teach and work hard to develop the students' communication skills with a lot of learning resources. However, the outcomes were not considered satisfactory. That was due to the fact that students still have low proficiency and they also lack understanding of the knowledge of the ASEAN community. Thailand Human Development Report (2014, p. Xii) reveals the following:

Thailand significantly expanded access to secondary and tertiary education over the past two decades. However, this laudable effort has had two major drawbacks. First, the quality of education has fallen. Thai students perform inadequately in international tests. In the context of the ASEAN Community, the lack of skill in English is critical. Second, the output of the education system does not match the needs of the labour market. Too few students enter the vocational stream. Little attention is given to workplace skills.

From the citation above, it is clear that we teachers need to prepare Thai students' English competence, cross cultural and workplace skills. In addition, we also need to change the teaching pedagogy and teaching content as well as the learning environment to inspire learners to learn what they want in the way they want. Many studies have revealed that

outside classroom learning with integration of cross-cultural understanding can enrich students' learning experience. Moreover, the learning environment also has positive impacting factors. In this aspect, it is practical to create a new way of teaching English to Thai students to develop their communication skills in a natural learning atmosphere with international students in a form of international inter-cultural expedition camp.

Egbert (2010, p. 28) explains that learning environments is considered an important component of language learning. Since the environment is a system and not truly a set of discrete components, teachers should be encouraged to consider explicitly other components that impact the learning environment. Therefore, learners must be prepared with more than language and that the use of technology mandates a greater emphasis on thinking skills and strategies in classroom activities for language learners (CALL); engagement, real language, and critical thinking are embedded in the learning environment.

A recent research on learning across cultures showed that learning about a new culture is a way that can maximize the students' chances of making positive learning outcomes, especially in terms of adaptation of the learning experience that includes or involves people from diverse cultural backgrounds. That means native or non-native people involved. International inter-cultural expedition camp can inspire learners to learn and communicate in English naturally and with confidence. Barnhardt (2000, p. 167) remarks that:

When we learn to relate to each other and teach in a culturally considerate way, we benefit not only those with whom we work, but we benefit ourselves as well. We are all cultural beings and accelerating changes in the makeup of the world around us makes the fact an increasingly obvious and inescapable in any setting involving people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

That is to say we need to integrate cultural understanding in language teaching. When Thailand claims to be a member of the AEAN Community, we English teachers need to help our students connect to the world around them in ways that prepare them for the responsibilities and opportunities they will face after graduation. That means they need to know their own immediate world as well as the larger world in which they are situated, and the inter-relationship between the two. To achieve such a goal requires attention to the local culture in a holistic and integrated manner as set in the curriculum, and then build or extend the students' learning experience with everything else that is grounded in that reality. That can be done in an expedition camp with related learning activities. However, the focus is not on the teaching content based on the curriculum, but on what students might be learning. The teacher's task is to create appropriate learning environments that reinforce what the students want to learn. The teacher's role is to help students learn how to learn. In this way, what is considered important is to develop students' problem-solving, decision making, communicating, and inductive reasoning. All these skills are needed and applicable across time and place. As a result, students learn in culturally adaptive ways to acquire all the skills that are beneficial to themselves, their community and society as a whole.

Allwood (1985) analyzed the concept of "Intercultural communication" that involves four primary cultural dimensions as follows:

- (i) **Patterns of thought** – common ways of thinking, where thinking includes factual beliefs, values, norms, and emotional attitudes.
- (ii) **Patterns of behavior** – common ways of behaving, from ways of speaking to ways of conducting commerce and industry, where the behavior can be intentional/unintentional, aware/unaware or individual/interactive.
- (iii) **Patterns of artifacts** – common ways of manufacturing and using material things, from pens to houses (artifact = artificial object), where artifacts include dwellings, tools, machines or media. The artifactual dimension of culture is usually given special attention in museums.
- (iv) **Imprints in nature** – the long lasting imprints left by a group in the natural surroundings, where such imprints include agriculture, trash, roads or intact/ruined human habitations. In fact, "culture" (i.e. a human transformation of nature) gives us a basic understanding of what the concept of culture is all about.

Allwood further explains that all human activities involve the first two dimensions. Most activities involve the third dimension, and ecologically important activities also involve the fourth. When a particular activity lastingly combines several of these traits, one usually says that the activity has become institutionalized and that it is thus a social institution.

Measuring Intercultural Development

Hammer (2003, p. 421) states that today the importance of intercultural competence in both global and domestic contexts is well recognized.

“To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures ,be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences ,and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures.

The citation above shows that intercultural sensitivity is an integral part of effective communication. Therefore, it is important for teachers to enhance cross-cultural competence among the learners.

Hammer (2003, as cited from Perry,1970) further explains that Acceptance of cultural difference is the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex world views. By discriminating differences among cultures (including one’s own), and by constructing a meta-level consciousness, people with these worldview are able to experience others as different from themselves, but equally human. People at Acceptance does not mean agreement – some cultural difference may be judged negatively – but the judgement is not ethnocentric in the sense of withholding equal humanity. The major issue to be resolved in this perspective regards “value relativity”. To accept the relativity of values to cultural context (and thus to attain the potential to experience the world as organized by different values),people need to figure out how to maintain ethical commitment in the face of such relativity.

Impacting Factors Involving Out-of-Class Learning:

1. Motivation

Both Nunan and Richards (2015, pp. 50-53) remark that motivation and entertainment-based activities are key elements leading to learners’ learning achievement in their communication skills. Kerekes (cited in Nunan & Richards, 2015, p.50) draws on her own experiences as a highly motivated learner of English in her native Hungary to speak to the role listening to music and learning song lyrics can play in retaining vocabulary and grammar. In “Out -of –class pronunciation, Long & Huang (as cited in Nunan and Richards, 2015, p. 50) report on the experience of one of the authors developing an-out-of-class method of teaching pronunciation to L2 English university learners with low motivation in China. By creating home tasks that required learners to present their work in class and peer-evaluate classmates’ performances, the authors found students developed the motivation to actively engage in pronunciation activities outside the classroom and ultimately improve their pronunciation skills.

Srisermbhok (2017, p.11) revealed that attitudes and motivation towards learning are considered important factors for learning achievement. From her study of 3rd year Business English Majors at Southeast Bangkok College, 81.25% of the students who highly achieved in their class had good motivation and positive attitudes to learn English. No matter whether they were poor or smart in English, they managed to get through and passed the course, while those few who failed the course were low motivated learners who had to learn English to finish the program.

2. Types of Out -of –Class Activities

Coskun (2016, p. 1449) investigated the benefits of out-of-class speaking activities for 21 first year English as a foreign language(EFL)students at a state university in Turkey for a period of six weeks. The chosen activities included the following: Fantasy Role-Playing, Continuous Story, Debate, Radio Program, and Broadcasting on Periscope. The findings reveal that students enjoyed playing the game which was interactive for unrehearsed speaking that really improved their English speaking skills, while fantasy Role-Playing provided a unique experience urging every player to speak and act. Even an anti-social person can open up playing this game. The participants found the game to be more fun than they expected. As a group in the game, they tried to solve the problems working together. Each contributed to this game and interpersonal communication skills are creating opportunities for learning based where the interaction takes place. The students also revealed that Continuous Story activity definitely improved their speaking skills and creativity. In each story they created, they had no idea what the next sentence would be, so they had to think every possible sentence that may come right after the one before. That forced the brain to be in the most creative way it could be. As for Debate activity, the students engaged in the group expressed their satisfaction with the activity outcomes highlighting that the activity enabled them to practice their English, feel more relaxed while speaking English, become more familiar with news on the Internet, and learn new vocabulary items ,and pronunciation. Radio Program made students participating in this game gain more confidence and having natural conversations, whereas the broadcasting on Periscope was useful for the students who took part in the game as they could practice their English with people online and learn some daily language during their practices. In conclusion, the study found that outside classroom activities had great influence on hands-on learners in many ways. They shape students' learning environment and influence their motivation and achievement. Furthermore, they can be expected to mediate the effect of job-related policies, such as changes in curricula for teachers' initial education, professional development on student learning. And eventually, all these aspects may shape teachers' working environment.

Developing Intercultural Communication Skills through Camp Experiences

Camp activities not only develop communication skills, but also improve social skills, relationships, and overall well-being in our young people. Park (2004) has described camp programs when very well structured provide extracurricular activities where youth are engaged with friends and have adult emotional support. These camp activities are important to help youth flourish and have a higher life satisfaction. Summer camp counselors and staff are focused on creating fun experiences for campers and promoting positive relationships among them. Many camp practices and traditions- singing, dancing, telling stories and jokes, and playing outdoors – increase positive emotions, which lead campers to feel what they describe as “happiness.” As positive relationships predict happiness, the camp environment is an ideal setting to improve happiness because of the focus on building positive relationships.

Monke (2015) conducted a study on “The Impact of camp Experiences on Social Skills and Happiness”. The samples consisted of 167 children on a two-week overnight summer camp programs in Arizona, California, and Colorado. The findings revealed that the children reported their social skills changes significantly above the neutral value of 3($M=3.97, SD=0.59, t(146)=19.84, p<.05$). Of the 147 children who answered all of the social skills questions, two reported on the negative changes and five remaining 140 reported positive changes in social skills. Children also reported positive changes in their happiness

level after the camp. Parents also reported an increased happiness level as a result of their child's camp experience.

Merryman (2012) conducted a study on "The effects of a Summer Camp Experience on Factors of Resilience in At-Risk youth". Campers who attended a five –week summer day camp were compared to a control group who maintained typical activities throughout the summer. Results showed statistically significant differences in the campers' belief of a good future for themselves. They reported sustained or positive growth in domains of social skills and positive values from the baseline to a six-month follow-up. Three significant themes emerged from individual in-depth interviews including (a) engagement influences skill competence, (b) the camp environment expands positive choice and availability of positive occupations, and (c) males developed skills and resilience from informal physical activity while no equivalent existed for females. Middle school aged at –risk youth can benefit from occupation-based summer camp programs that promote active engagement in an enriched environment and sustain gains once they return to high-risk environments.

Research Method

The researcher employed quality and quantitative research methodologies for the investigation. Both descriptive analysis and simple statistics were used to present the findings of the study.

1. Description of the population
2. Method of data collection
3. Data analysis

Description of the Population

The population in this study consisted of 36 International students, 6 facilitators and 3 camp leaders, joining the International Inter-Cultural Expedition Camp, which was jointly organized by Thaksin University, Thailand and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The participants participated in the camp activities full time from February 8-11, 2019, and they volunteered to answer the questionnaire. Their qualifications, ages, and nationalities can be classified as in the following:

There were 32 participants studying in an under-graduate level, and 4 participants had master degrees. The ages were ranged between 18 and 37 years, with the majority (77.14%) being between the ages of 18 and 22. Just over half of the participants were predominantly female (82.7 %). There were 27 females and 9 males from different countries, namely: Indonesia (7), Thailand (8), Laos (5), Libya (1), Brunei (1), Yemen (1), and Malaysia (13). Their fields of study varied from English Education, Nursing, Computer Engineering, English for Professional Media Studies, Mass Communication, Accounting, and Chemistry. There were 3 camp leaders, and 6 facilitators who were willing to answer the questionnaire.

2 Leaders from Thaksin University: one American, and one Thai

1 Leader (Team Building) Southeast Bangkok College

Group Facilitators consisted of the following:

- 1 Filipino from Southeast Bangkok College
- 1 Thai from Klong Bangkaew School, Samutprakarn
- 2 Indonesians from Sinka Edu & Training Center, and 2 Malaysians from UNIMAS

Method of Data Collection

The research data was based on the questionnaire that was designed according to the nature of the International inter-cultural Expedition camp activities on a daily basis. The camp program provided structured extracurricular activities where the participants were engaged with friends with facilitators and group leaders providing advice and support. The researcher distributed two sets of Closed, and Open-ended questionnaires: one to the participants and the other to the facilitators and group leaders for evaluation of the outcomes of the camp activities on the first day of the Program. The questionnaires were given to all the participants, group leaders and the facilitators on Day I of the Program. There were the total of 50 participants. On the last day of the camp, 36 participants completed the questionnaire, and additional completed questionnaire were collected from 6 facilitators and 3 group leaders.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the collected data, including basic statistics, such as frequency and percentage were used to illustrate the details. For clarity the findings will be presented in tables, and figures.

Findings

In order to find out the factors that have great impact on the participants' improvement of their English communication skills, the researcher distributed the questionnaire beginning with some closed questions ,and open-ended questions, and ending with suggestions/or recommendations. Their responses are presented in tables below:

Table1. Participants' Responses to Question 1: What motivated you to participate in this International Intercultural Expedition Camp?

Answers	Number of Responses	Percentage
1. To improve my English communication skills	16	44.44%
2. No 1 plus to gain cultural experiences	12	33.33%
3. No1, plus gain more knowledge from new friends	4	11.11%
4. No1. plus learn about ASEAN Cultures	2	5.5%
5. No1. plus learn new ideas from the camp activities	2	5.5%
Total	36	100%

Data from Table2 above revealed that 16 of the participants or 44.44% joined the expedition camp to improve their English communication skills, and 12 participants or 33.33% wanted to improve their English communication skills and learn more about other cultures, whereas 4 participants or 11.11% wanted to improve their English as well as gain more knowledge from their new friends, and the rest of the participants or 11.11% wanted to improve their English communication skills and learn about ASEAN cultures and get new ideas from camp activities. It is obvious that all the participants participated in this International expedition camp to improve their English communication skills and cross cultural understanding and have new friends from different countries.

Table 2 : Participants' Responses to Question 2: In what way did the camp activities help you improve your English communication skills?

Answers varied:	Number of Responses	Percentage
No.1.Communicating with peers on assigned tasks	25	69.44%
No2. Answer no 1.plus check understanding with facilitators/group leaders, and presenting group work	8	22.22%
No3. Answer no1. plus exchanging ideas with friends	3	8.33%
Total	36	100.00%

Discussion

The findings from Table 2.above shows that all of the participants or 100% said that they used English to communicate with their peers. In addition, 8 participants or 22.22% revealed that they also used English to check understanding of the tasks assigned with the facilitators and group leaders as well as making their presentation of group activities. Moreover, 3 participants or 8.33% said that they spoke English to discuss the assigned activities with peers, and also exchanged their ideas on new experiences. It is obvious from table 2.that all the participants agreed that during the camp activities, they used English almost all the time.

Table 3. Participants 'Responses to Question 3: Name 5 activities that have great impact on your communication skills and understanding of different cultures.

Type of Activity	Number of Responses	Percentage
Ice Breaking Activities	33	91.66%
Family Time	28	77.77%
Trip to Cultural Heritage Village	26	72.22%
Team Building	24	66.66%
Going to Waterfront	23	63.88%
Treasure Hunts	18	49.99%
Night at the Museum	15	41.66%
Cultural Performance	13	36.11%

Discussion

After tallying each participant's top five activities that had great impact on their communication skills and understanding of different cultures, there appeared to be 8 impacting activities. As presented in table 5 above, the top one on the list was Ice Breaking Activities that took place on the first day of the camp. All the participants were assigned to pick up a draw that represented a different kind of animals. Then they had to use their body language or cry out like the chosen animal to find out their group members. This created a lot of excitement and fun among the participants. After they found their group members, they introduced themselves and tried to memorize their new friends' names and treated each other like their family members. Each group then made up the name to reflect their identity. They were encouraged to exchange ideas and learn to get acquainted with one another. It is clear that this type of camp activity is ranked the highest up to 91.66%. The next impacting activity was Family Time, which took place in the evening after dinner, was considered the second most popular activity among the participants and it was ranked at 77.77% The participants enjoyed this activity very much as they felt closer to one another and began to talk about each individual conflict and the family members helped one another either showing moral support, understanding, or empathy to their friends as well as giving advice to solve the conflict. They also learned about different cultures among their Asian friends. Their conversation was

extended beyond greetings or small talks to deeper personal discussion to create trust and understanding. In other words, this activity encouraged the participants to talk more fluently.

As shown in table 5, a trip to Sarawak cultural village was ranked as the third popular activity at 72.22%. This activity not only enhanced the participants' communication skills in English, but also exposed them to cultural diversity. The village offered an exciting blend of events and festivals during their visit. And in order to inspire the participants to visit all the museums in the village, they were given a passport to visit each museum, or native house to get a stamp. During their visit, they were entertained by the natives in a traditional way. All together there were 7 museums, and each museum has its unique culture. Lunch was also served in a traditional Sarawak style. Actually, a visit to the cultural village was the highlight of the expedition camp that motivated the participants to learn many things in a short time, such as eating by hand, that made them understand what it was like to live with extended family members.

Team Building activity was ranked the fourth popular activity at 66.66%. This activity motivated the participants to work as a team to initiate a project. They had to choose their leader and discuss a small business they wanted to run together, beginning with SWOT analysis, and finding solutions. The participants were divided into 4 teams. Each team had to come up with an interesting project for their business, and made a logo and slogan for their business brand, and made their presentation. It was amazing that all the teams came up with creative ideas for their business and the presentation was considered from very good to excellent.

Going to Waterfront was ranked as the 5th favorite activity at 63.88% as shown in table5. From the participants' feedbacks, it was found that they enjoyed this activity because they felt free to choose their peers, and were able to walk or sit along the Water Front chatting about anything they liked. This made them feel closer to their friends. They also felt that they had a chance to speak English naturally with one another.

The last three activities on the list, namely treasure Hunts, Night at the Museum, and Cultural Performance that were ranked at 49.99%, 41.66%, and 36.11% respectively. These activities were also considered valuable as they were listed among the top 5 activities among many of the participants. Treasure Hunts have developed both their reading and critical thinking skills through the slip they got in order to find the artifact in the museum in a short time. They had to help each other, and interpret the clue, and they were proud when they eventually found the artifact. This is also a good way to visit the museum and attentively get a lot of information by themselves. Night at the Museum was a special stunning experience among some of the participants, and their satisfaction level was ranked as ranked at 41.66%. There were a series of meaningful activities to enhance the participants' understanding of the role of a museum as a learning center that can inspire lifelong learning. During the day, the participants were informed about the important role of the museum. They learned about the do's and don'ts when visiting the museum, how things were preserved, how the artifacts were repaired, how insects and animals were preserved by taxidermy experts. The participants also learned about the ways of life of ethnic villagers, their history and mythology. All these inspired them to search for more in-depth information to understand and compare what they have experienced with what they have learned earlier. In other words, the learning experience at the museum has inspired them to pursuit more knowledge for lifelong learning to feel connected with the world outside their own home experience, and at night they were allowed to sleep in the museum. This also allowed them an opportunity to solve any immediate problem to get along with each other throughout an uncomfortable night. Cultural Performance was also one of the favorite activities. As shown in table 5, it was ranked at 36.11%, which means that the cultural performance through many kinds of traditional music and dances. It was considered meaningful among many participants. This kind of activity was

arranged at the end of the work camp. Most of the participants had fun, and good memories to bring home with them. It shows that the participants have not only improved their communication skills, but also social and other soft skills required for the 21st century citizens.

Table 4: The Participants' Responses to Question 4: Do you agree or disagree that cross-cultural understanding is an open gate for mutual understanding and lifelong learning?

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	36	100%
No	0	0%

Discussion

As shown in table 4, all the participants or 100% agreed that cross-cultural understanding is a key to mutual understanding and it also opens doors for lifelong learning. The participants also explained that because we live in the same world, we should learn more about other people's cultures and way of life. It was interesting to note that the participants agreed that the world is becoming more and more connected, so they have to keep on learning. Many of the participants pinpointed that this camp made them understand about other cultures, beliefs, and ideas, resulted in their appreciation of different cultures. Gradually the participants understood how to get along well with their new friends.

Table5: The Participants' Responses to Question 5: Which kind of camp activity helped make you become more resilient to cultural differences?

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Night at the Museum	33	91.66%
Visiting the Cultural Heritage Village	30	83.33%
Team Building	29	80.55%
Family Time	27	74.99%
Cultural Performance	25	69.44%

Discussion

Most of the participants named 4 kinds of activities that they thought had motivated them to become more resilient to cultural differences and they were able to get along well with their peers in the International expedition camp. When ranked all the activities according to the highest percentage to the lowest, there were 5 activities on the list. Firstly Night at the Museum was selected by 33 participants and ranked the highest at 91.66%. That meant at the museum, the participants not only got cognitive knowledge about the artifacts and history of the local people in Malaysia, but they also had to adjust themselves living and spending a night with their new friends. This situation also encouraged them to adapt themselves to the new environment, even among Malaysian students who never had a chance to stay overnight at the museum, claimed that it was a unique experience for them. It shows that cross-cultural adjustment can create a synergistic learning experience for the participants.

Next on the list was Visiting the Cultural Heritage Village in Sarawak, which was ranked at 83.33%. This activity was very successful in showing how the local ethnic groups lived their lives in the past, and the way their heritage has been maintained and preserved. The participants have learned so much about the local tradition. They were able to make a comparison with their own culture in many ways, such as similar musical instruments, cookery and kitchen-ware, including the living condition displayed, as well as the

performances and costumes of the ethnic groups. They experienced some kinship of ASEAN community, leading to the realization that cross-cultural understanding can transfer knowledge sharing of global growth.

Team Building was listed by 29 participants, or ranked at 80.55% as the activity that encouraged them to become more resilient to cultural differences. This activity was also considered remarkable in inspiring the participants to work as a group with constructive and innovative outcomes. The participants in each group consisted of different nationalities who were able to work in harmony as a team to compete with other teams. All the 4 teams made excellent presentations of their projects.

Family Time was listed by 27 participants or ranked at 74.99%. It was one of the most popular activities held in the evening after dinner until about 9:00p.m. This activity consisted of the participants with mixed nationalities. The fact that the participants had stayed in the same group, carrying this kind of activity from the first to the third day of the expedition camp, made them become more resilient to cultural differences. They treated one another like their siblings and close friends. Some were willing to share their family conflicts in a moving way. This also made their peers become more empathetic to religious differences among Muslims, Christians and Buddhists.

Last on the list in table 5 was Cultural Performance taking place at night on the last day of the international inter-cultural expedition camp. This type of activity was ranked at 69.44%. It took a long time, but all the participants were having a good time together. The cultural performances were also the highlight of the camp activity. This demonstrated the participants' cultural resilient to different cultures. They also admired and respected each other's traditional performances. This also brings a happy unity among the participants and the host- institutes.

Table 6: The Participants' Responses to Question 6: Have you experienced any culture shock during this camp? Please give the situation if your answer is Yes.

Answer	Number of Response	Percentage
Yes	1	2.77%
I am a Thai. I experienced Culture shock when my Muslim friend held my hand and used his head to touch my fore-head .		
No	35	97.22%

Discussion

The findings from table 6.above shows that most of the participants are more familiar with the cultures of ASEAN ,so they experienced no culture-shock, except one Thai boy. This experience made him understand and become more open about other people's gesture of friendliness or politeness. In other words, his participation in this camp has already opened up his cross-cultural understanding with a direct experience.

Table 7: The Participants' Responses to Question 7: How did camp activities help you improve your communication skills and cross-cultural understanding with others?

Answers are varied as follows:

-The program was very good. I have many chances to use English. It is fun to exchange ideas with other campers.

- I really enjoyed exchanging my ideas with others. Everything was great. I am happy to be in the program.

- I enjoyed family time, and trip to the ethnic village because I can exchange my ideas with many friends. The Thailand students.(It's so lovely to see them joking and learning language together.

- I enjoyed many activities, especially treasure hunt because I can work as a team. I had to read the note or assignment, and tried to get the clue to find the hidden artifact. This increased my vocabulary, and we all share nearly similar cultures that we practice at home. The name of food & delicacies, and everyday words, and cultural taboos.
 - I really enjoyed the trip to the village and the cultural nights because I can speak English freely with anyone. It was good to use English as I wanted without thinking about making mistakes
 - I get a lot of experience and practiced my English during the camp. I have improved my English a lot because I had to speak with my new friends, but I also feel tired. I need more free time to spend in Sarawak.
 - The camp is great. I had a good time learning many things.
 - The camp activities are interesting to me. I can learn about the Thailand greetings, very interesting for me.
 - This program is very good. I practice my English a lot.
 - It is very good and fun to exchange our cultures from this camp.
 - This camp is great. I learn many things and improved my English.
 - This program is very good. I have learned many things and used my English more often. I hope to join the camp again next year.
 - It's fun and get new experiences and exchanging our culture with friends from other countries. One more time next year if we go to another country.
 - I am very happy in this camp. I learned many things and practiced my English a lot, and built a good relationship with friends from other countries.
 - This camp is very good for me. But I wish I had more time for each activity.
 - This program is great. I wish to come again to practice my English and have more friends.
 - I have a lot of opportunity to use English. However, it would be good if we had more time. I really enjoyed doing the activities, especially visiting the village and saw many different cultures.
 - It is impressive. Everything is well-organized. I understand rules at the university, like have a different cultural in seniority (In the university), have a different rules and freedom.
 - Great! I can speak English with my new friends, and can use Thai sometimes.
 - Good program. I liked everything, but too long at the museum. I wish I had more time for myself.
 - I loved cultural village and family time the most because I can talk freely with my team and had more friends.
 - This camp was good. I learned many things and can speak English better. I hope I can come again.
 - I have learned so many things in a short time. I hope to come back again to Sarawak to visit my friends at UNIMAS and spend more time with them.
 - I enjoyed everything and learned that Malaysian people still use their hand to eat and they put food and fruit in the same plate. Everyone helped themselves, even professors stayed in the queue like students.
 - I like every activity. It will be nice if we can spend a night on the beach instead of the museum.
 - I enjoyed going out to the Water front, the Museum, and the Village. I wish we had more time to see Sarawak. I think I am motivated to learn English more.
 - It is great. I learned many things.
 - I will come again next year. I liked everything, especially the last day. It was really fun for all of us. I think it is important to understand other cultures.
-

Discussion

The findings presented in Table 7 clearly show that all the participants have improved their communication skills and cross-cultural understanding. By participating in this International and Inter-cultural Expedition Camp, all the participants showed positive attitudes towards learning English and cross-cultural understanding. When integrating all the answers together, we can see a bigger picture of the impacting outcomes of the camp activities that enhanced the participants' inter-personal communication skills and developed their leadership. They became more resilient to different cultures. Some also have developed their relationship with friends from other countries, which will eventually lead to mutual cultural understanding and lifelong learning.

Table 8. The Participants' Responses to Question 8: Do you agree or disagree that cross-cultural understanding is an open gate for mutual understanding and lifelong learning? Please share your opinion?

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	36	100%
No	0	0%
Total	36	100%

Discussion

All the participants' responses as shown in table 8 above shows that cross-cultural understanding is very important in the 21st Century because it is an open gate for mutual understanding and leading to lifelong learning. The participants' response in the same way shows that they are intellectually mature and their participation in this International inter-cultural expedition camp has, to a large extent, fulfilled their personal experience which is very important for them to become global citizens and learn to live in harmony with others. In addition, 20 participants or 55.55% gave many interesting suggestions and recommendations which can reflect their major concern about the value of the International inter-cultural expedition camp in the future. This not only reveals their support of the international and inter-cultural expedition camp. They have learned many things during the intensive 4 day-camp activities, such as improving their communication skills, understanding the impact of cross-cultural differences on their communication with others, and how to use body language or gestures to make themselves understood. All these experiences made them become more resilient and feel connected with their new friends. In addition, they made useful suggestions for the future international camp activities that reflected their interest in global issues, inspiring them to learn, relearn and unlearn to adjust themselves to the new world through face to face and real time communication to improve their public speaking competence. All these views reassure the success of this camp that emphasized cultural competence, adjustment, good attitude, personal management skills, and personal development, leading to leadership in the workplace.

Part III: The Participants' Responses to Question 9: Data from the group leaders' and facilitators' feedbacks to the outcomes of the camp activities, which will be presented in Tables below:

Table 9: Did camp activities and the participants' engagements fulfill your expectation?

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	8	88.88%
Not really	1	11.11%
Total	9	99.99%

Discussion

The findings from table 9 above reveal that 88.88% of the facilitators and group leaders were satisfied with the outcomes of the camp activities to enhance the participants' communication skills. Although 1 facilitator or 11.11% of the group responsible for the program did not agree to 100%. From the response to the questionnaire, it was clear that she almost agreed with all the activities set up in the program, but would like the participants to have more time to explore the real community in Sarawak, so that they would get more experience during this visit. Consequently, it is correct to say that the activities in the camp have achieved its goals and fulfilled the objectives.

Table 10: The Participants' Responses to Question 10: How did the expedition camp activities help develop the participants' cross-cultural understanding?

Answers are varied as shown below:

- Students managed time to speak and communicate with their friends from different background. By doing so, they gradually learn different cultures and share their own cultures. In the future, I think they will better adjust themselves to a global society.
- The expedition activities helped develop the participants' cross-cultural understanding by exploring information inside each ethnic village. They gained insights, discoveries, and had frequent interaction among their friends and the local, resulting in their realization of the interdependent among ASEAN members. This made them more curious to learn about other cultures around the world.
- The expedition activities helped develop participants' cross-cultural understanding through discussion. When the participants do each activity together, they also learn about the culture, then compare if it is the same or different from their own. So they can learn to live together.
- It went very effective. I saw most of the students communicate in different areas of countries. This expands their cross-cultural understanding.
- Family time is especially very helpful in this expedition camp. The participant felt at ease with each other.
- Team work and group discussion encouraged the participants to communicate and accomplish the tasks assigned, as well as improved their communication skills and cross-cultural understanding.
- All the activities have engaged the students to work in team which means they had cooperation/team-work. The essence of running the activities is making the students learn more about leadership, tolerance, compactness, sportivity to avoid the gaps in order to create a harmonious relationship.
- It is obvious all the students communicate with one another. I asked them to start bonding from Day one event without me being around-Most of the activities encouraged the students to develop their cross-cultural understanding.
- I think tours of cultural backgrounds, museum visit, and leisure time at the Waterfront helped develop surface knowledge by reflecting on historical artifacts, and because they got some knowledge cultural backgrounds they also developed some cross-cultural understanding of these specific backgrounds.

Discussion

As presented in table 10 above, it shows that all the group leaders and facilitators amounted to 100% have positive comments about all the camp activities that have contributed to the development of the participants' cross-cultural understanding. Their answers have covered all the aspects about how the participants have improved their communication skills and cross-cultural understanding, either by sharing ideas in a group discussion with friends from different countries, or discussing various issues during an expedition trip to the heritage village. The artifacts displayed in the small museum were used as a means for their discussion, enriching their personal experience. In addition, the different nature of each activity, such as Family Time, Team Building, Language Games and sportivity activities including leisure time at the Water Front, and museum visits have significantly enhanced the participants' communication skills, and cross-cultural understanding, not only about the ASEAN community, but worldwide.

In addition, it is clear that all the group leaders and facilitators have shared their similar observation about the positive impact of all the camp activities that have helped enhance the participants' communication skills during the 4 day activities. All together the participants have improved all the four skills: speaking listening, reading and writing through various task-based activities. They were inspired to use English all the time to fulfill the tasks to accomplish their goals. By participating, and helping one another in a group, they not only practiced their English, but also shared team work spirit and achieved a collective success. This resulted in their openness to communicate with each other naturally without being afraid of making any mistakes. In this way, they became more creative and interactive. In conclusion, the facilitators and group leaders revealed that all the camp activities have helped develop the participants' communication and cross-cultural. As is obvious, many valuable

experiences they have mentioned include new teaching pedagogy for meaningful external activities for students outside class to enhance cross-cultural understanding, gaining direct experience in interacting with international students, extending their network and personal relationship for lifelong learning and feeling free to gain extra experience about the local surrounding and ways of life of the local people apart from learning how to organize a meaningful international expedition camp on their own.

The group leaders and facilitators also suggested additional meaningful activities for the future international cross-cultural expedition camp to reinforce the participants' cross-cultural understanding and fluency in English communication, including corporate social responsibility activities (CSR) and artistic work such as beach clean-up activity, paper-cutting, bead-work or embroidery. An extension of activities to include understanding of ASEAN community, educational system, and social issues of the host country. If there are a number of international participants, they should be encouraged to form a national group to make suggestion or evaluation of daily activity for improvement. Family Time is considered very meaningful to make the participants connected with one another. Therefore, they should be motivated to make network for long lasting personal friendship. For more impact, a local guru needs to be included to share his/her wisdom on folk history or wisdom.

Conclusion

As obvious from the findings, the participants have demonstrated their English improvement and cross-cultural understanding through their engagement in the activities assigned in many ways. During the 4-day-international inter-cultural expedition camp, the participants have both intensively and extensively communicated with their peers and group leaders and facilitators in English, resulting in their natural communication to get through and/or made themselves understood. They have also developed the four language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing although they were required to respond spontaneously using their listening and speaking skills. The fact that they had to work in small groups doing different kinds of activities, they need to communicate with their peers in writing online to plan what to do together in advance. In this respect, they were inspired to read and write, which can develop their reading and writing as well. In sum camp activities have fulfilled the two objectives of the research:

1. To find out the types of the international inter-cultural expedition camp activities that helped enhanced the students' communication skills
2. To analyze how the camp activities helped increase the students' cross-cultural understanding and awareness.

The discussion on the findings earlier has clearly explained that all the camp activities have significantly improved the participants' communication skills, starting from Ice Breaking Activities, Family Time, Family Time, Trip to Cultural Heritage Village, Team Building, Going to Water Front, Treasure Hunts, Night at the Museum, and Cultural Performance. All these activities have engaged the participants' attention and participation from the first to the last day. Each activity was well planned and inter-connected, inspiring the participants to be engaged and active all the time. Some activities were relevant to the participants' daily lives, such as Ice Breaking, and Family Time, that encouraged them to use real time communication on a face to face. Some other activities are more demanding and the participants needed help from their peers to achieve their goals, such as Treasure Hunts and Team Building. These two activities not only, improved their communication skills, but, also cultivated their leadership and creativity to come up with new ideas or to solve the problem. Competition was employed to motivate the participants to do their best to

accomplish the task as a team. Through these activities, the participants have learned to get recognition and approval from their peers. In addition, Night at the Museum, Going to the Water Front, and Trip to Cultural Heritage Village also enhanced their cross-cultural understanding and communication skills. These two activities were very time consuming. The organizers had to spend a lot of time planning, and they involved many people concerned. These can be considered outdoors activities. The last activity was Cultural Performance held on the last day of the camp. It has eventually provided fun, unity, and harmony among all the participants, who felt acquainted with one another and they were proud of their own culture. This turned out to be a meaningful activity that provided human touch and unity and a sense of belonging to the ASEAN community. It shows that language and culture goes hand in hand.

In sum, Leveridge, (2019,1) states that teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings show that the camp activities have enhanced the participants' communication skills and cross-cultural understanding, the participants including the group leaders and facilitators also found some limitations, such as the duration of the camp. Since it was a 4 day camp, the activities were intensive, and the participants had no time for personal exploration on their own to relax and have self-reflection on what they have learned. They had no formal time to reflect their opinion for improvements of the activities during the camp, and since it was an International inter-cultural expedition camp, the participants felt that it would be more beneficial if they had a chance to listen to the real guru of the village to extend their understanding of folk culture that still has an impact on the local daily life. Since the data obtained were voluntary-based, female participants outnumbered male participants. Therefore, there may be gender bias in the answers to the questionnaire. For those interested in conducting a similar study it is recommended that the number of male and female participants are equal to examine whether their responses to all the activities were the same or different.

Amporn Srisermbhok: an Associate Professor and Dean of Faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College

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