การเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุกกับนักเรียนที่ไม่มีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนรู้: อุปสรรคทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงสังคมสำหรับอาจารย์ภาษาอังกฤษ ระดับมหาวิทยาลัยไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

ระบบการศึกษาไทยมีการจัดรูปแบบการเรียนรู้แบบดั้งเดิม (บรรยาย) ตั้งแต่ระดับอนุบาล ระดับมัธยม ตลอดถึงระดับมหาวิทยาลัย รูปแบบการเรียนการสอนแบบนี้สะท้อนหลักพระพุทธศาสนาในเรื่องการเคารพอาจารย์ (ดาราสว่าง, 2550) แม้ว่าวิธีการสอนแบบบรรยายสร้างความปรองดองในประเทศชาติ แต่วิธีการสอนแบบนี้ทำให้นักศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัยประสบปัญหาในการเรียนรู้ แบบเชิงรุกมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทยหลายแห่ง อาจารย์ต้องแสวงหานวัตกรรมการสอนเพื่อส่งเสริมการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุกและในขณะเดียวกันก็สามารถรักษาวิถีวัฒนธรรมไทยซึ่งเป็นระบบการศึกษาที่อาจารย์ทำหน้าที่สอน และสามารถทำหน้าที่เป็นผู้ช่วยเหลือ ให้คำแนะนำนักศึกษา วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยนี้เพื่อเป็นการให้มุมมองการเรียนการสอนแบบสัมพัทธ์ทางวัฒนธรรม ผสมกับการจัดการเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุกในห้องเรียนแก่อาจารย์ภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: จัดการเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุก, นักเรียนเป็นศูนย์กลาง, การเรียนระดับมหาวิทยาลัย, การเรียนการสอนแบบสัมพัทธ์ ทางวัฒนธรรม, นักเรียนที่ไม่มีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนรู้

Active Learning with Passive Learners: Sociocultural Challenges for English Lecturers in Thai Higher Education

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Abstract

The Thai educational system follows a traditional method for learning throughout elementary and secondary schooling, and thus carried on to the university level (Darasawang, 2007). This style reflects Buddhist principles of respecting one's instructors. Although such passive pedagogy may account for the harmony of the nation, students of higher education face difficulties with active learning. At Thai universities, lecturers must come up with innovative ways to promote Active Learning (AL) while maintaining a platform embracing Thai culture in education where an instructor can reflect the idea of "sage on the stage" while acting as a "guide on the side." The objective of this research is to provide English

lecturers in Thailand a culturally-relevant perspective when integrating AL strategies in their classrooms.

Keywords: active learning, student-centered, higher learning, culturally-relative pedagogy, passive learners

Introduction

What better reward is there, above not just witnessing the gleam of a student reaching a new understanding of the world, but also knowing one's own hands lighted the source of it? Indeed, all instructors share a passion for stimulating the minds of their students, but there also lies a related intrinsic value in the gift we give ourselves by making it possible. For this reason, failing to see the gleam of the expected insight of students can take a toll on the enthusiasm of educators (Morales, 2017).

The following questions are the driving forces stimulating this research. The methodology for collecting data follows from the research questions. There are three means for collecting data. In each, there is a description for how the researcher has collected the data, and an explanation of what the information means for this study. Considering the data gathered about the questions asked, we can further explore our findings to achieve a deeper understanding.

1. Will the implementation of an active-learning strategy enhance student participation in class discussions?

2. What sociocultural challenges will an active-learning platform invoke?

Literature Review

Rojprasert, Neanchaleay, and Boonlue (2013) explore the effectiveness promoting creative thinking through Active Learning (AL) in Thai higher education. They explain how instructors must match their teaching methods to the learning style of their students. With successful implementation, it will provide the means for doing so while raising students' awareness of their role in their learning

process. The authors explain how the ability to learn is essential when starting a professional career. Papert (1993) proposed the idea that most jobs did not exist when the employees working at present were born, a trend even truer with every passing year and the continuing rise of technology ever since the turn of the millennium. Rojpraset et al. (2013) further define AL as shifting away from an instructors-led learning environment to a partnership between instructors and students celebrating students' problem-solving skills and creative-thinking abilities. They claim successful implementation of AL should be the educational goal for Thailand, where students can develop to their fullest potential while moving at their own pace to promote lifelong learning.

It is important for any lecturer to explore the issues surrounding AL and Thai culture, where respecting lecturers is paramount (Klunkin, Subpaiboongid, Keitlertnapha, Viseskul, & Turale, 2011). From an early age, children learn to obey and honor their instructors. Although AL does not necessarily entail challenging instructor's views, the idea of coming up with one's solutions to a problem has some implication of undermining an instructor's position. Critical thinking is not a fundamental practice in the Thai educational system, so substantial preparation is necessary for both students and instructors to understand the process of AL (Baker, 2016). Despite the socio-cultural challenges, there is a dire need for Thai educators to incorporate practical approaches for AL within curricula to enhance student learning (Klunkin et al., 2011).

Sinlarat (2005) writes with specific importance to a culturally-relevant academic setting for Thailand. His unique perspective embraces the importance of maintaining Thai culture while making

the paradigm shift to the 21st-century education of higher learning. He illustrates four major problems and the consequences to follow if Thailand continues with this one-directional flow of knowledge:

1.   There is a neglect of Thai traditional knowledge. The nature of this knowledge consists of three main clusters, namely values of Buddhism (e.g. there are no absolute truths), traditional Thai occupations (e.g. agriculture, medicine, lifestyle, and crafts), and Thai society (e.g. the individual, the community, and seniority).

2.   Thai universities lack relevance in education. For a two-way flow of knowledge to exist, Thai scholars must conduct more research.

3.   The instructor-student relationship resembles a consumer system. The system currently in place relies on Thai instructors consuming knowledge from the West and passing it on to their students.

4.   There is a lack of seeking out new knowledge. The goal of educational institutions in Thailand has become a means of creating a workforce to serve businesses and government rather than pursuing knowledge.

Sinlarat (2005) offers suggestions to integrating into a two-way flow of knowledge. He states, "Traditional Thai wisdom firmly holds that the middle path is the way to equilibrium" (p. 267). He further explains to achieve this equilibrium educators must "teach more Thai traditional knowledge, conduct research on the body of Thai traditional knowledge, and carry out more local assessment research of new (Western) knowledge" (p 267).

Description of Setting

Three methods of gathering data for two questions relating to AL and the inherent sociocultural issues are present in this study. The author collected data after the implementation of an AL strategy, namely an open-debate session in regular class instruction. In this session, the instructor selected two students' names at random and assigned each student with either affirmative or negative viewpoints. Next, the instructor read aloud a claim (e.g., Cats are better than dogs). At this point, the student with the affirmative stance had to defend her position for 15 seconds before the student from the negative perspective rebutted in a counter argument for 30 seconds. A closing statement by the affirmative speaker followed the counter argument for a final 15 seconds. Due to the nature of the random assignment, students may have argued against their own belief, an intentional mechanism of its design aimed to provoke thought, discussion, and debate (Gulley, 2009).

Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods approach. The means of gathering these data involved semi-structured interviews with instruc-tors who did not implement an AL strategy before class discussion until their participation in this study. For this reason, any notable change in the dynamics of class discussion when following the open-debate session is sufficient reason to peer deeper into the effects of AL in Thai higher-learning classrooms.

The second method addressed the sociocultural challenges with the implementation of the open-debate session. This portion has a descriptive qualitative design involving semi-structured inter-

views. Three Thai nationals born in Thailand and schooled in the Thai educational system read a description of the open-debate plan and watched an example of a recorded session of its implementation in one of the classes. From this, the Thai nationals noted any conflict of interest between the implementation of the open-debate session and Thai culture.

The third method addressed both research questions. This portion of the study had a quantitative design, where three other faculty members analyzed video recordings of classes where instructors implemented the open-debate session. Each instructor watched independently and identified the major sociocultural challenges present in the video by logging the time in the video, specifying the sociocultural challenge present, and documenting whether they recognized a decrease in student involvement during this time. From the sum of all the observations, we determined a mean for each sociocultural challenge as seen in Table 1.

Statistics

	Initiating Confrontation	Internal Stimulus	Instructor Refutation
N Valid	7	7	7
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	13.1429	8.4286	3.2857

Table 1

Data Collection

Three English lecturers participated in an interview following their implementation of an open-debate session preceding a class

discussion.   Before this study, class discussions started every class immediately following taking attendance. For this reason, any notable change in the dynamics of class discussion when following the open-debate session is sufficient reason to peer deeper into the effects of this AL strategy. The semi-structured interviews took place at lunch-time for morning classes and the following lunchtime for afternoon and evening classes providing that all interviews were within 24 hours of the event. Interviewers had taken notes to help remember specific details they might have otherwise forgotten. The three instructors taught seven classes where they implemented the open-debate sessions. Each interview addressed and provided data for each class. An audio recording of each interview provided a quick reference to the discussion. After all the interviews had taken place, the author recorded recurring events and issues the instructors mentioned. The results from this method yielded data that were both qualitative and descriptive. Instructors reported enhanced student participation in class discussions in all seven classes. When asked to describe why they felt this way, two instructors believed the strategy helped prepare students to express their opinions while the other instructor thought enthusiasm for something new was the primary cause of having higher levels of student engagement. Each instructor gave similar results for all the courses they taught, which could be due to their teaching style and enthusiasm, or it could have been an individual bias they had, but this did not affect the results because the differences remained consistently relative to each other.

Results

From extensive research on Thai culture and the three interview-

ees' responses, the author measured the sociocultural challenges to determine the significance of each. Using this method, the three most potentially significant sociocultural challenges affecting this AL strategy in descending order are instructor refutation, initiating confrontation, and internal stimulus. Instructor refutation refers to the instances where an odd number of students were in the room and had to pair with the instructor. Initiating confrontation refers to outward disagreement with a classmate. Internal stimulus refers to students having to come up with ideas on their own.

From the sum of all the observations, the author calculated a mean for the occurrence of each sociocultural challenge (see Table 1). Initiating confrontation had a mean of 13.14 accounts per session (also see Appendix A), internal stimuli had a mean of 8.43 accounts per session (also see Appendix B), and instructor refutation had a mean of 3.29 accounts per session (also see Appendix C).

After analyzing these data, the author could determine which sociocultural challenges had the most significant effects on students when trying to engage their participation in class discussion and which challenges were the most common barriers. Although instructor refutation had the greatest potential challenge, initiating confrontation was most prevalent in this active-learning strategy, followed by internal stimuli. The author had already identified initiating confrontation as a higher potential than internal stimuli; therefore, determining which had a greater impact between instructor refutation and initiating confrontation was necessary.

Contrary to expectations, there were near three times the amount of recognized accounts of initiating confrontation in the open debate that had no effect or, in fact, increased student involvement.

For these students, having already had nearly a complete year of their studies at an international university may account for this unexpected outcome. Perhaps, this study would yield results more congruent with previous knowledge if it included first-year students at the beginning of the first semester. Nevertheless, this anomaly requires further research so drawing additional conclusions is not warranted at this time.

Discussion

Because the nature of debate forces students to oppose and outwardly disagree with their instructors, they were often too reserved to engage fully in the activity. Although all three interviewees determined this to be the most significant sociocultural challenge for student learning, it was less an issue because there were only limited cases when the direct opposition of an instructor took place.

Less significant, but more abundant in the open-debate sessions was initiation confrontation. The translation of the word "debate" carries a negative connotation in Thai. When students had to argue with classmates, a level of distress affected full engagement. Students more quickly overcame this difficulty when compared to arguing with their instructor; however, interviewees deemed this the second most significant factor obstructing learning for students in an open-debate session.

The least significant sociocultural barrier of the three, but still affecting student learning, is relying on internal stimuli. Thai students often prefer having information written down for them to record in their notebooks as they have practiced in elementary and secondary learning (Noomura, 2013). This tendency reflects the reading and

writing ability in the classroom that has developed at the expense of speaking practice (Darasawang, 2007).

All three of the instructors expressed a desire to implement this strategy in the future because they believed it would either improve overall learning or the efficiency of instructional delivery. If the instructors conducted this study with a control group of students who had a new passive-learning activity, we could draw more conclusions about the influence this particular activity had. However, due to time restraints, this remains subject to further study.

After discussing the nature of this AL strategy, the author believes that instructors can reduce instructor refutation since their involvement is not a necessary component in the debate. In contrast, initiating confrontation is an unavoidable characteristic in the makeup of this activity. Further, the near four times more accounts of initiating conformation give reason to believe it is the most significant socio-cultural challenge when implementing this AL strategy.

Communicating the Findings

These results were presented to all the instructors involved, for it is crucial for them to see how their time and effort helped achieve a better understanding of their students and to achieve the ultimate goal of benefiting the pedagogical practices for the university. They read the research description; however, it was deemed too wordy, unnecessary, and even redundant at times. With each colleague who read the paper, the researcher invited questions, some of which led to broad discussion for half an hour or more.

This research was far from the full-scale research it could have been, but there were enthused colleagues who expressed their

desire to be a part of further studies in this area. The feedback and consensus received from colleagues demonstrated a promising future for research specifically aimed at English language learners of Thai higher education.
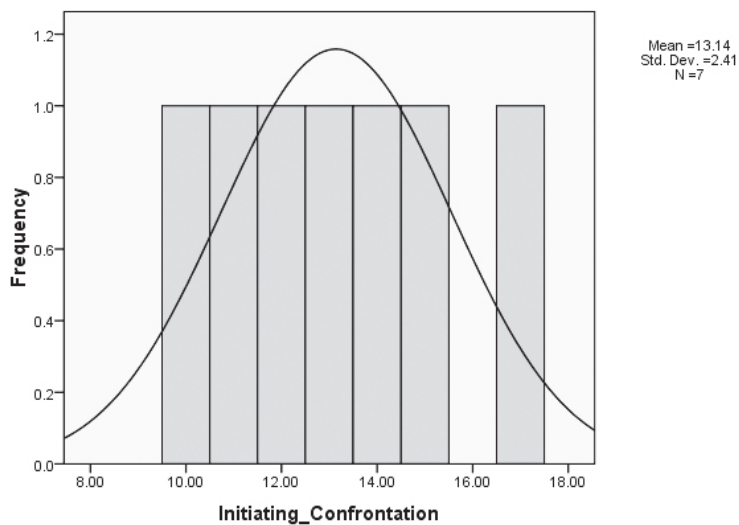
Conclusion

The ultimate objective of this research was to engage students to perform on an AL platform to enhance class discussion. There is an unavoidable clash between Thai culture and AL; however, with careful planning, instructors can minimize the sociocultural challenges. By choosing an open debate session as the AL strategy to engage students, instructors imposed additional unneeded sociocultural challenges, namely instructor refutation and student confrontation. The author already recognized eliminating instructor involvement in the future model, but the very makeup of a debate breeds student confrontation. For this reason, another AL strategy might be a better substitute than an open-debate session, at least at the initial stages of implementing AL. Perhaps, debating should develop from a natural progression of courses from the international program. The author could have students compare notes on a video clip they had just watched and present to the class, translate and reenact a conversation they had in Thai to English, or an assortment of other AL strategies. With such new approaches, the only sociocultural challenge breached is calling on internal stimuli. This barrier was the least significant sociocultural barrier in this study of the three, yet still an effect on student learning. The Thai government is directing a push at transforming the education from a passive-learning to active-learning platform (Rojpraset et al., 2013). For this reason, the author believes

the goal is in harmony with maintaining a culturally-relevant peda-
gogy and promoting AL in all classrooms.

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Initiating_Confrontation

Mean =13.14
Std. Dev. =2.41
N =7

Internal_Stimulus

Mean =8.43
Std. Dev. =1.718
N =7

Instructor_Refutation

Mean =3.29
Std. Dev. =1.38
N =7

การเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุกกับนักเรียนที่ไม่มีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนรู้:
อุปสรรคทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงสังคมสำหรับอาจารย์ภาษาอังกฤษ ระดับมหาวิทยาลัยไทย