

# High School Students' Topic Preferences and Oral Development in an English-only Short-term Intensive Language Program

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## Abstract

Developing the ability to speak English is a daunting task that has long been omitted in a test-driven pedagogy context (Chang, 2011; Li, 2012a, 2012b; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Katchen, 1989, 1995). Since speaking is not tested for school admissions, most students are not motivated to learn it (Chang, 2011; Chen & Tsai, 2012). Now, globalization makes English Lingua Franca; speaking English is definitely bound to be one key capability to connect oneself with the world (Graddol, 2007). Thus, teachers strive to help learners learn English by selecting appropriate and interesting topics to motivate them to learn more effectively (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Spratt, Pulverness & Williams, 2011), especially in speaking. However, with only one internationally published research on Taiwanese college students' topics preference (Chen, 2012) and none on high school students, selecting appropriate topics seems challenging. Consequently, this study intended to investigate the potential topics that motivated learners to practice speaking and their oral performance. The results show that learners preferred topics related to their daily life and their speaking improved in terms of speech unit, clause unit, and words uttered.

**Keywords:** oral development, English language teaching, post-primary school, policy issues

## 1. Introduction

Taiwanese students are required to learn English to succeed on the exams for school admissions or even to pass tests for certain certificates (i.e. CSEPT, GEPT, TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, BULATS) to gain some competitiveness to seek, later, advancement in the job market (Chang, 2011; Chung, 2013; Chen & Tsai, 2012). Therefore, English teaching has long been test-driven and learning, test-oriented.

Nevertheless, people still perceive English as a major interface to the world because of the increasing mobility of information and the era of globalization, and as a language of business, technology, science, the Internet, popular entertainment and even sports (Nunan, 2003). Hence, having a good command of English becomes an essential ability to connect oneself with the world (Graddol, 2007), and consequently, government in 2002 declared to promote English as a quasi-official language and a part of life among the general population (Executive Yuan; Challenge 2008: National Development Plan; Lin, 2004). As a guide for the nation to gain competition internationally, the Ministry of Education, therefore, has been adjusting the education system to support this policy since then.

A decade after the promulgation of the policy that has brought some disappointments, a top priority of the English teaching/learning movement, now, is to reveal more innovative ideas to inspire learners to use English orally and to shed some light of what learners should do to face the challenge of globalization.

Speaking and listening to English are the most direct and quickest way for people to acquire information and knowledge around the world. Not only government but also people in Taiwan strive to find a way to master this language. Consequently, helping learners transfer English listening and speaking skills learned in class to the real life use becomes a major goal in L2 classroom in Taiwan. However, there are still quite a few challenges and a long journey to approach this goal. Thus, the present study proposes to encourage learners to practice communicating in English on those daily-life-basis topics through an English-only short-term intensive language program that contains various activities to ease the stress of speaking and listening to English, and to investigate the effects of these oral practices on speaking performance to motivate foreign language teachers to reconsider

some innovative ideas for their classes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Secondary English Language Education in Taiwan: Current Situation

English learning and teaching have long been determined by both high school and college entry comprehensive assessment exams in Taiwan (Chang, 2011; Chung, 2013; Chen & Tsai, 2012). Classroom time, due to the exam-oriented pressure and the large class size, has been mainly used to prepare students to render entrance exams rather than to achieve language speaking skill. Thus, most students are simply deprived the opportunity to practice L2 listening and speaking in language classrooms (Lin, 2006). Learning motivation or the fun of learning to use a second/foreign language, then, has been neglected gradually under the pressure of every single grade-point on tests or exams.

As a result of having implemented a test-driven pedagogy for decades, students have naturally developed a test-oriented learning attitude. If it is not tested, it's not worth of spending time studying it; and as a result, learning autonomy becomes low (Chung, 2013). Since learners are not tested on speaking skill but are recently tested on listening 2015 in the exams for high school admission, the training of these two skills has long been marginalized among the four skills in language classroom in high school and subsequently most students are gradually uninterested to practice speaking. Therefore, after learning the language for about six to ten years, many people can hardly maintain a fundamental conversation in English (Chang, 2011; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Katchen 1989, 1995; Li, 2012a), neither have they increased the overall proficiency level after extending the schooling years of learning English. According to *Apple Daily* (5 March 2012), Taiwanese pupils and high school students' English proficiency performance in the past two years was inferior to Chinese pupils and Korean students respectively. Authorities from Cambridge English Language Assessment reported that focusing on grammar and recitation as a teaching method in high school cannot expand what is learned to daily life application, the performance on the certificate of English is, therefore, negatively influenced (*Wen wei po*, 5 March 2012). English learning and teaching, therefore, need some insights to break through the status quo.

### 2.2 The National Policy in English Education

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people around the world have forecasted and witnessed the impact of globalization. Graddol (2007) claimed that “[t]his may be the stage, now rapidly developing, where English becomes indispensable, a key basic skill for everyone.” (p. 107) With no exception, and perhaps, with the wish to obtain a competitive edge in the BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) market and to develop an internationalized environment, Taiwanese government, in 2002, also declared to promote English as a quasi-official language by integrating it as part of life among the general population (Executive Yuan; Challenge 2008: National Development Plan; Lin, 2004). In fact, many people in Taiwan believe that learning foreign language should be the earlier the better. Hence by responding to the globalization, the rapid and complex changes of the world market, and the popular opinion, the Ministry of Education established “Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines” to begin English teaching and learning in Grade 3 with a hope to develop students' English communication skills earlier (Ministry of Education, 2001).

A few years after the implementation of the reform in English learning and teaching, high school students' English communication skills, especially listening and speaking, are by no means improved. Recently, Ding Yawen, the former commissioner of Taipei City Government's Department of Education, in an interview held in 2014 to promote the 12-year education program, citing New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards in World Languages (1996; Revised 2004), concluded that the world views English not as a learning subject but a tool to learn the 5 C's, Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (Brian, 2014). Hence, to assist the promotion of commanding English among the general population and to cope with the reality that testing leads pedagogy, the inclusion of English listening in the school entrance exams associated with the 12-year education program (Ministry of Education, 2013) in 2015 seems an up-to-date policy although it has not only produced anxiety and controversies but also made a big step toward the goal set by the government in 2002. Speaking, then, is highly expected as the next step to be included in the assessment tests for school admissions despite the difficulty of assessing it.

### 2.3 The Difficulties of English Learning

Now, due to the impacts of globalization, the low intellectual quality of college students (Wu, *Common Wealth*, 3 October 2012), and the fierce international competition, both academia and industry have urged people to recognize the importance of English and to investigate issues regarding the effective methods of English language teaching in Taiwan to help students become qualified for job market. Li and Lin (2009) cited the report

in a special issue “*Teach English competence*” in the magazine *Education Parenting Family Lifestyle* in 2007 that revealed, Taiwanese students’ English competence and the pass rate of English Proficiency Test have not been improved since the promulgation of the policy of Learning English Earlier. It seems that by extending the schooling year of leaning English is not the solution to make English part of people’s life. Meanwhile, in the academia, there haven’t been many research studies published in international journals regarding English speaking related issues such as effective teaching methods or the speaking development, but quite a few domestic research studies on the difficulty of speaking test tasks, self-assessment of speaking ability, and the use of technology to assess speaking (Vongpumivitch, 2007, Chen & Tsai, 2012; Teng, 2007; Tsou, 2005), as well as on the reasons for the poor oral performance by Taiwanese students (Chang, 2006; Cheng, Chen & Shih, 2007; Katchen, 1989; 1995; Li & Lin, 2009; Chiu, Guo & Su, 2009; Tang, 2010; Teng, 2007; Tsou, 2005). The frequently mentioned reasons for the poor speaking performance reported by the learners are as the following:

- lack of opportunity to practice using the language,
- feeling inhibited of using adequate vocabulary due to having limited lexicon,
- inability to find a topic to converse,
- lack of experience talking to foreigners

From the above reported difficulties that students experienced, lack of opportunity to practice speaking and listening to English appears to be the major cause. Classroom is the main place where most students could practice using English, but given that language pedagogy has been mainly test-driven, most teachers teach students grammar and vocabulary in order to render entrance exams successfully. In addition, the class-size tends to be large, so the opportunity for the English oral interaction between teacher and students or among students is quite minimal or even neglected. Thus, increasing weekly hours or lowering the starting age of English learning does not actually help improve students’ speaking and listening skills. In fact, one of the keys to succeed in language learning should be learning to use it rather than learning about it (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Yang, 2002). Moreover, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are different language competences that knowledge achieved through one cannot be easily converted to the knowledge of the other. That is, speaking ability can only be established and maintained by continuing practice (Tseng, 2007; DeKeyser, 2007). So the only way to improve students’ English speaking ability is to keep on speaking and listening to it in classrooms.

#### *2.4 Research on English Speaking*

English speaking has long been marginalized in language classroom, thus, relatively much less effort has been devoted to speaking at schools. Nevertheless, as a result of globalization, few scholars have started to explore speaking skill (Katchen, 1989, 1995), learning motivation( Lee, 2012; Tsai, 2012), as well as new intents on teaching speaking (Chen, 2015; Chang, 2004; Li & Lin, 2009; Lin, 2006; Chuang, 2010; Tsou, 2005; Wachs, 1994). Among these different proposals that aimed at enhancing students’ oral communication skills, many of them investigated student perceptions on some new means of teaching, and they all appeared to have pointed out a fact that classroom should be student-centered to provide students with opportunities to practice speaking and with materials to meet their needs, interests, and prior learning experiences. To date in Taiwan, internationally published studies investigating students’ topic preferences is scarce. There is only one study (Chen, 2012) on college student’s topics preferences for listening, none on high school students. Therefore, based on the results of the previous research and the literature reviewed in R. Ellis (2003), the classes in this English-only intensive program were guided by “task-based” approach, recommended by experts in second language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Lee, 2000; Skehan, 1996; 1998), to help students develop English speaking ability. The course material was selected from Science Fusion, an authentic text used in American elementary schools, for providing students an authentic linguistic input to fit the theme, daily-life spoken English, of the program. It is also hoped that via this program students could be encouraged to actively participate in the activities so to be no longer afraid of speaking English and be able to use English to communicate on a daily life basis.

In addition, research studies addressing English learning/teaching issues in Taiwan have focused mainly on tertiary students, only very few on secondary students. To echo Vongpumivitch (2007) who proposed that research on speaking skills should be undertaken from a variety of perspectives, this study thus attempted to address the following research questions by observing secondary students and by using a Q&A task which is deemed less troublesome (Teng, 2007, p. 9) and also contains clearer inherent sequential structure that seems to be more appropriate for students at this stage to accomplish (Skehan & Foster, 1999). The research questions are:

- 1) Do students like the English-only intensive language program? Which topic(s) do they like the most?
- 2) Do the oral activities motivate students to speak English? If they do, do students improve orally?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

There were 55 students (27 male and 28 female), out of 65 newly admitted 10<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in this English-only short-term intensive language program, filled out the questionnaire anonymously and were included in the analysis for preferences of activities or course contents offered. There were ten students absent the last day of class due to an inclement weather warning. Meanwhile due to technical failure and absences, 43 students' (18 male and 25 female) oral recordings were analyzed statistically for oral development. The average of English learning experience was 8.23 years.

#### 3.2 Course Design

It's commonly accepted that an efficient language learning/teaching course should be based on students' learning rather than teachers' teaching. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) mentioned "teaching should be subordinated to learning..." (p. 52). Thus, the main learning objective of this English-only short-term intensive language program was to reduce students' fear of speaking English so to enhance oral performance. Teachers in classroom, hence, acted as assistants rather than lecturers; and the classroom time was designed to foster speaking. There were two types of oral-practice activities to encourage students to communicate in English in order to complete tasks. One was in-class oral activities led by classroom teachers, in which students had to hold a group discussion and then to orally report the results of their inquiry or investigation on some problem cases (see Appendix A as an example). The other type of oral-practice activities was team-game activities led by college students, teaching assistants (the apprentice teachers), in a format of game-contest in which learners were separated into groups to compete against each group. The content of games was relevant to the lessons and the games were designed to provide plenty of opportunities for learners to practice using the just-learned vocabulary words or expressions. That is, students ought to correctly verbalize the linguistic items learned in the classes to complete the designated task or to solve some problems in order to win the contest. For example, they might have to say words like "tape measure, scale, or to weigh", or "I suggest using...to measure..." They had to speak but they were not pressured like in a classroom setting since they were in a playful mode in these games.

Regarding the potential predicaments on students' oral expression, relevant vocabulary words and sentence patterns were introduced in class via handouts or teaching aids like PowerPoint slides to reduce students' negative emotions generated from unknown words that could impede self-expression, which in turn could influence learning motivation and learning effects. In addition, this intensive language program was intended to meet students' needs and interests so to induce students' learning motivation. Thus, topics (in part, referred to the natural science textbooks *Science Fusion*) included: science in our life (Note 1), technology in daily life (Note 2), technology and innovation (Note 3), entertainment and leisure (Note 4), interpersonal life and social network (Note 5), culture exploration (Note 6), and other related problem-solving and inquiry skills. Since this program was held in English only, students' learning load was carefully controlled to avoid potential overloading that could lower learning efficiency. To do so, the content knowledge selected in the lessons was not new to tax students' attentional resources. Thus, students only ought to pay much attention to the relevant linguistic parts and, consequently, the effectiveness of speaking practice and the focus on relevant linguistic forms would be greatly increased and, thereby, their learning should be enhanced.

According to the results of previous empirical studies (Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996; Lee, 2000), the activities in the classes were arranged in three stages, pre-task, task and post-task. Each stage was designed according to some of the principles proposed by Willis (1996) and Skehan (1998) in order to achieve the learning objectives. Basically, in pre-task, students were expected to understand clearly the learning goals of each lesson. Teachers used power point slides, multimedia video clips, and a variety of different practicing activities, such as listening to and filling in the blanks with words/phrases to learn the basic knowledge and related linguistic elements that were needed to complete a task in a later stage. In task stage, students ought to work in small groups and use English to discuss how to solve the problems given to them. Students had to take notes during the discussion because each of them was going to report orally to the whole class their solution to the problem in front of the classroom. For the post task activities, a group of apprentice teachers led a series of game-contest. During those games, students were eager to provide answers without showing any fear of speaking English because they mainly focused on winning the contest and left the pressure behind. As a result, students got some chances to practice producing those linguistics items learned in the classroom.

#### 3.3 Procedures

On the first day of the program, students reported to computer lab and were given a pre-test in which they needed to click on a folder with 16 pre-recorded oral questions in English and in Chinese respectively (see

Appendix B). They were instructed to click on one English question at a time to listen to it and then to record their oral response immediately after listening to it without any planning or going back to change their oral responses until the end of all the questions. They were told to answer each question as if they were conversing with a speaker. They had to respond to all questions asked in English first and then they could proceed to respond to those pre-recorded questions in Chinese. The use of Chinese questions was to exclude the possibility of knowledge deficiency and to verify that using English was the only trouble for these students to respond to those questions.

After pre-test, they moved to their classrooms to have regular lessons that included pre-task learning, in-task oral activities, and post-task game contests.

By the end of this intensive language program, they were asked to do a post-test orally in English and in Chinese respectively, and then they filled in a survey questionnaire written in Chinese anonymously (see Appendix C for the English version).

### *3.4 Measures*

In order to understand whether the arrangement of the this intensive language program reduced students' fear of speaking English and promoted their learning motivation, students' responses to the questions were tallied according to the box they ticked and according to the ranking they ordered.

To measure their preferences on the subject-topics and the oral activities, the survey questions asked them to rank the topics and the oral activities according to their preferences (1 means the most preferred and 6 is the least preferred). The ranking was converted into grade points. That is, the most preferred subject topic received 6 points while the least preferred topic received 1 point. The grade points assigned to each subject topic or each oral activity were summed up to represent the degree of preferences.

To measure the effectiveness of their verbal performance, there were 16 questions in the pre-test and post-test pre-recorded orally in both English and Chinese. The first four questions were warm-up questions to establish the rhythm and were not related to the main content of this study. Therefore, the oral recordings of these four questions were discarded from the statistical analysis on student's oral development. The oral responses to the remaining 12 questions were coded according to AS-Unit (analysis of speech unit) proposed by Foster, Tonkyn and Wigglesworth (2000). An AS-Unit seems to be more sensitive to the nature of utterances and the differences in performance than T-unit that was used to measure syntactic complexity of written data. AS-Unit is mainly syntactic unit that shows "speakers may plan multi-clause units" (Foster et al., 2000, p. 365) and "the ability to plan at the multi-clause level is important for establishing a speaker's level of proficiency, and evaluating the complexity of a particular performance by that speaker" (p. 365). Hence, the verbal expressions, collected from pre-test and post-test, were analysed according to AS-Unit.

The coding criteria were illustrated in the following chart (see Table 1). Grammar was temporarily ignored as long as the semantic meaning was not affected since the merit of this English-only program was to motivate students to start to speak English. In addition to syntactic complexity, the length of utterances was also analysed to show linguistic development if there is any. Words uttered were simply counted after back channel cues (such as mm, uh and yeah), false starts, repetition and other words that are irrelevant to the intended responses were eliminated. In Table 1, braces were used to signal words to be eliminated, brackets to indicate an AS-unit, and double colon (::) to mark the boundary of two clauses.

Table 1. The sample utterances coded according to the AS-Unit.

Question	Students' responses	Responses coded	Syntactic complexity	words uttered
Do you know what science is?	I know, I know the science.	{I know, I know the science.}	2AS	11
	It's a study about...a study, measuring, comparing. It's like that.	[It's a study about{...}a study, measuring, comparing.] [It's like that.]		
	Science is ... a study of nature and what ... and physical by testing, and experimenting, and measuring.	[Science is {...} a study of nature {and what ...} and physical by testing, and experimenting, and measuring.]	1AS	14
	Science is what you use hand to do.	[Science is:: what you use hand to do.]	1AS 2 C	8
What are your hobbies?	My hobbies is collect collect stamps...or sticks. I like to collect them, that.	[My hobbies is collect {collect} stamps{...}or sticks.] [I like to:: collect them, {that}.]	2AS, 2C	12

#### 4. Results

This study aimed at investigating (a) whether students like the English-only intensive language program and which topics they like the most; (b) whether the oral activities motivate students to speak English and whether students improve orally.

According to the results of the survey, fifty two students reported that they liked the lessons, while three did not. These fifty two students (95%) also reported that they liked the “in-class oral activities”, and three did not. Meanwhile fifty one students (93%) liked the “team-game activities” led by teaching assistants (apprentice teachers), four did not (see Figure 1). To understand the reasons why students had positive opinions on the lessons, they were required to indicate the reasons that should explain their opinions. Figure 2a reveals that most students liked the program because the English-only course helped them practice listening (36 students, 66%) and speaking (35, 64%), led them to express orally (30 students, 55%) and to learn a lot of knowledge (31, 56%), and provided very interesting content (25, 46%) etc. On the contrary, the three students disliked the course because they were required to express orally and they felt unable to learn because they did not understand (see Figure 2b).

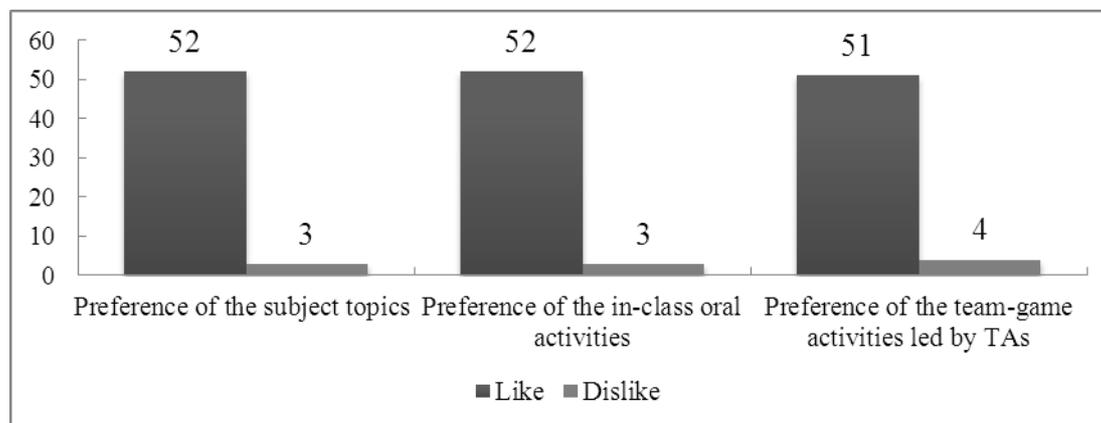


Figure 1. Students' opinions on the intensive language program and on the oral speaking activities

Regarding the in-class oral activities, 52 students liked them but three did not. Figure 3a illustrates that 34(62%) chose that they learned some English communication skills, 33(60%) selected that these activities helped them

understand the word usage, 27(49%) believed that the activities inspired them to strengthen their speaking ability, and 22(40%) indicated that the discussion activities motivated them to speak English. As far as those 3 students who disliked the in-class oral activities reported that they were too difficult so they did not feel like speaking, the objective was not clear to accomplish, or the activities were difficult to understand and hard to comply (see Figure 3b).

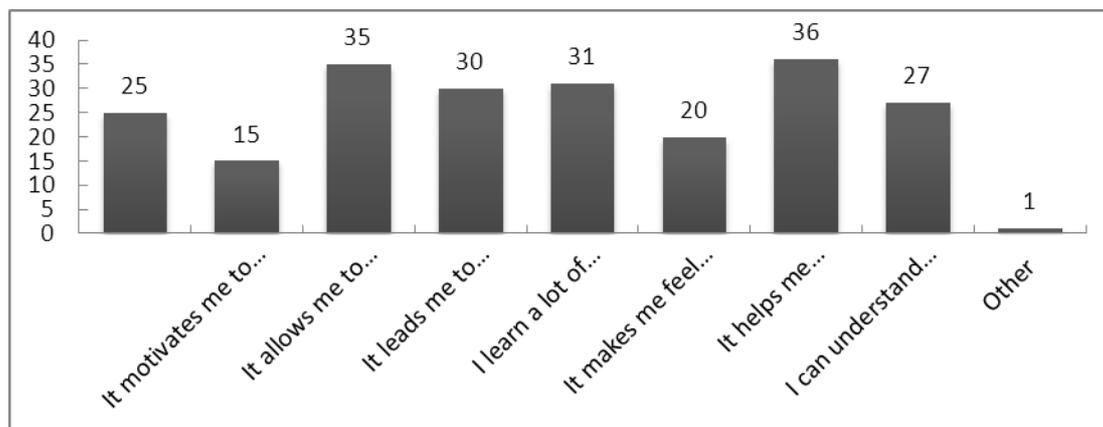


Figure 2a. Reasons for their preference of the lessons

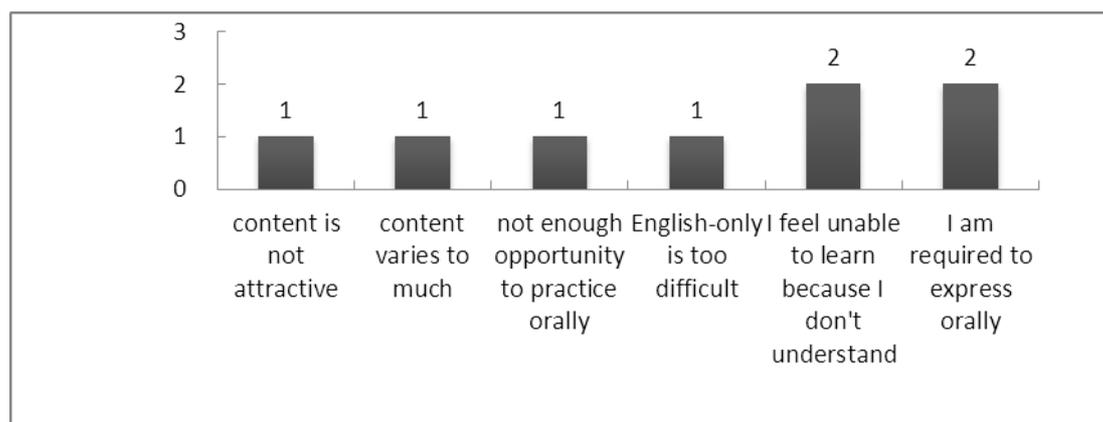


Figure 2b. Reasons for their dislike of the lessons

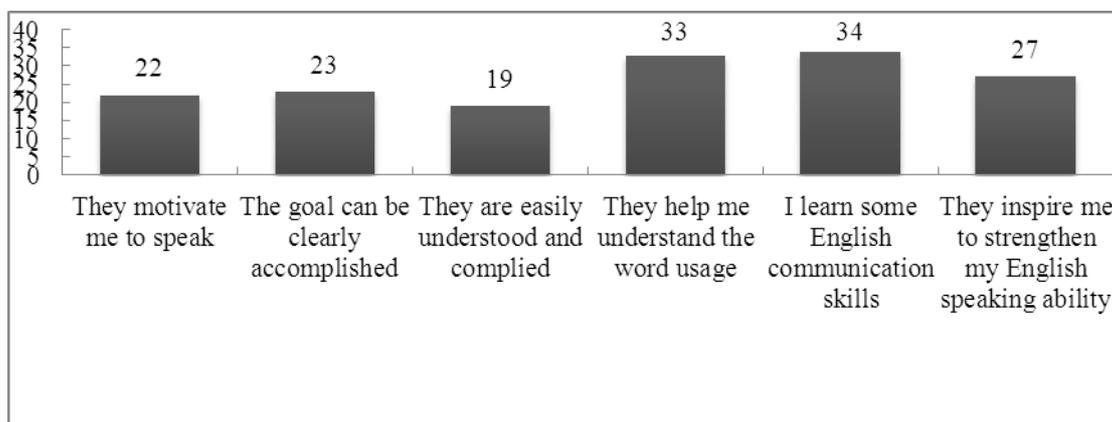


Figure 3a. Reasons for their preference of the in-class oral activities

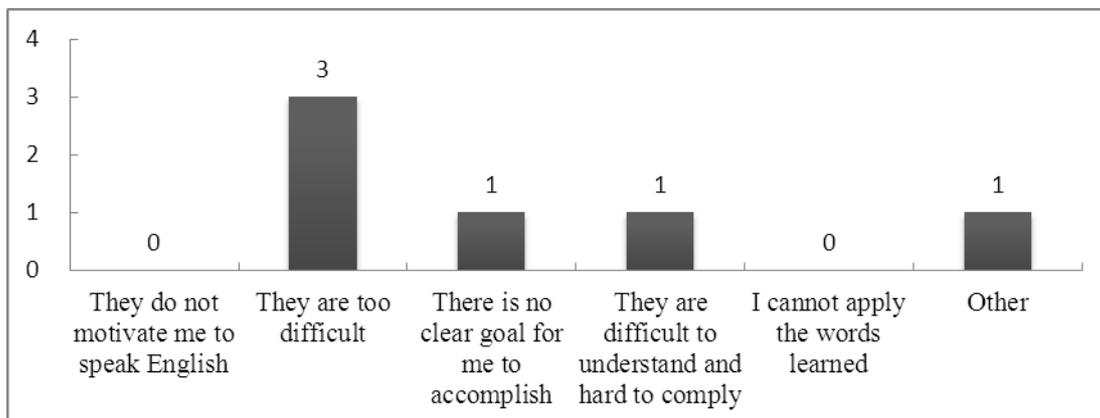


Figure 3b. Reasons for their dislike of the in-class oral activities

The questionnaire also revealed that 51 students (93%) liked the teaching assistants-led team-game activities and four students disliked them (See Figure 1). Figure 4a shows the reasons for their preferences of these group-activities. Thirty three (60%) chose “I can cooperate with classmates to complete the task assigned”, 31 (56%) selected “I can brainstorm ideas with classmates using English”, 28 (51%) picked “Team work drives me to participate in discussion”, and 22 (40%) selected “I have more opportunity to practice speaking”. For those four students who did not like the team-game activities reported that they were not used to sharing opinions with classmates, they felt their English proficiency was relatively low or they were not used to expressing themselves in English (see Figure 4b).

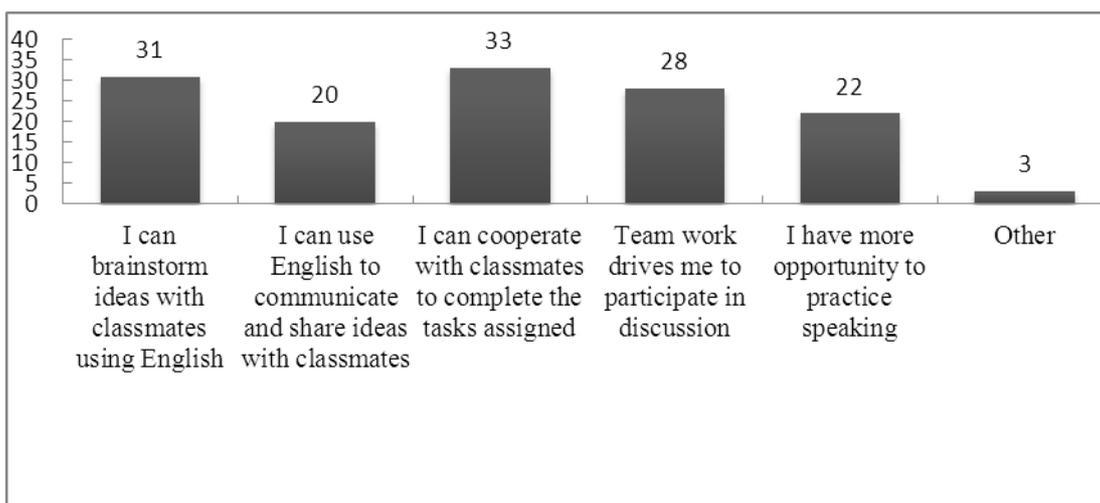


Figure 4a. Reasons for their preference of the team-game activities led by TAs

Research question one also intended to investigate student’s preference on the subject topics of the lessons during the program. The rankings required by questions 11 and 12 in the survey questionnaire disclosed that student’s preferences of the topics ranged as the following: entertainment and leisure activities, interpersonal life and social network, technology in daily life, science in our life, culture exploration, and technology and innovation (see Figure 5). As for the preference ranking on the oral activities students preferred team-game activities that contained oral applications and contest, in-class case-application discussion, and group project oral report (see Figure 6).

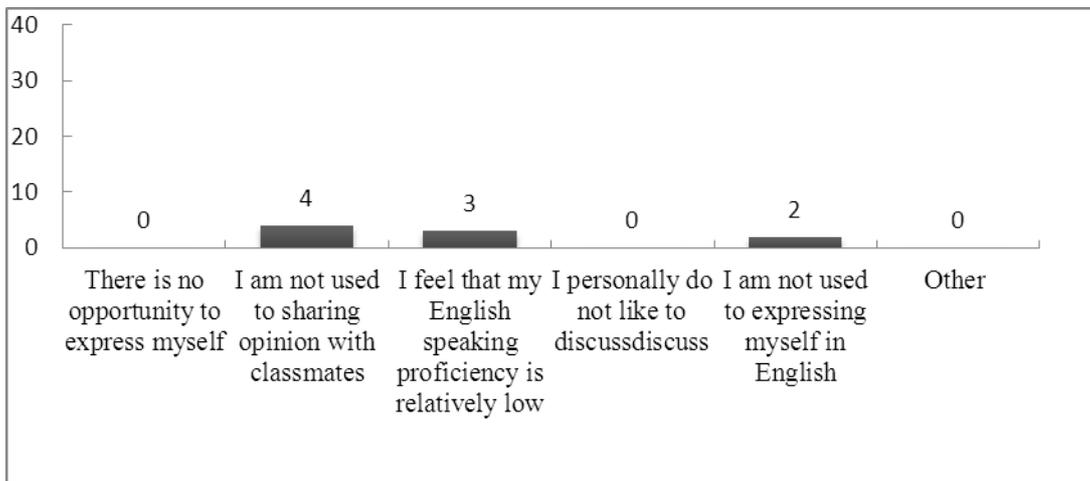


Figure 4b. Reasons for their dislike of the team-game activities led by TAs

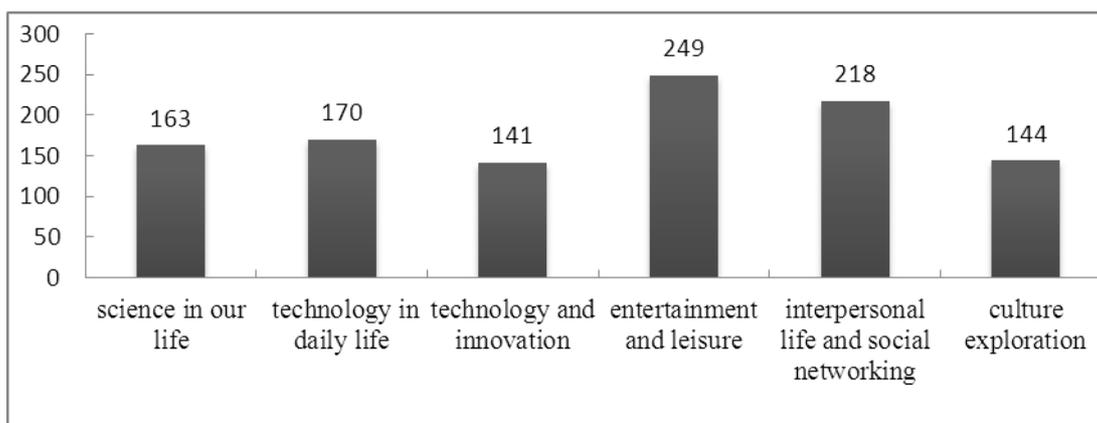


Figure 5. Preference ranking on the subject topics

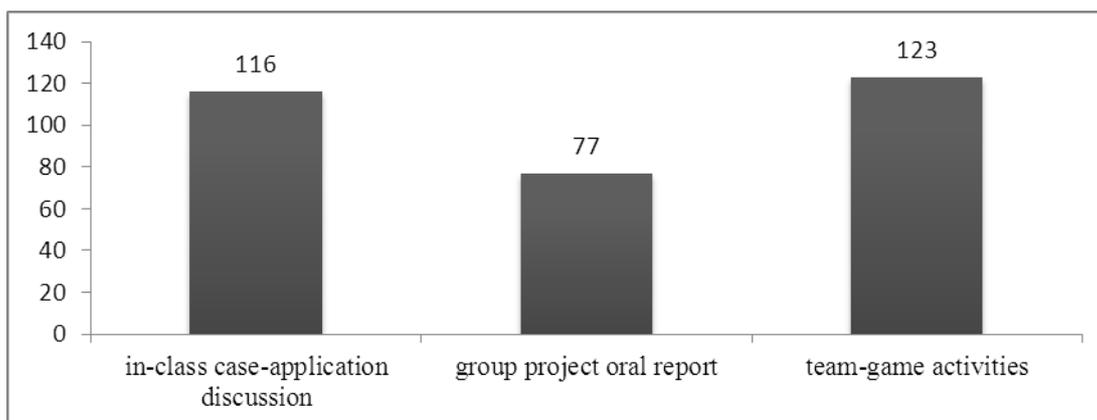


Figure 6. Preference ranking on the oral application activities or games

Research question two investigated whether oral activities motivated students to speak English. Student’s opinions were embedded in several probing questions such as 4, 5, 6 and 7 from the questionnaire (See Appendix C). For example, from question four that asked students’ opinion on the course, 15 students (27%) marked “it motivates me to learn English”, 20 students (36%) checked “it makes me feel willing to practice speaking in the

future” (see Figure 2a). At the same time, question 5 asked whether students liked the in-class oral discussion activities, 22 (40%) students indicated “they motivate me to speak”, 27 students (49%) selected “they inspire me to strengthen my English speaking ability” (see Figure 3a). From question 6 that investigated students’ preference on team-game activities, 28(51%) students reported that “team work drives me to participate in discussion” (see Figure 4a). Finally from survey question 7 that asked students’ reaction toward their participation in group discussion, only two students reported that they did not dare to speak English, while the majority checked, “I am more willing to speak English” (51%), “my fear to speak English is lowered very much” (58%), and “speaking English with peers is less pressured” (64%) (see Figure 7). Moreover, from the comments section on the questionnaire, 52 (95%) students expressed that they would be willing to participate in a similar English-only intensive language program in the future.

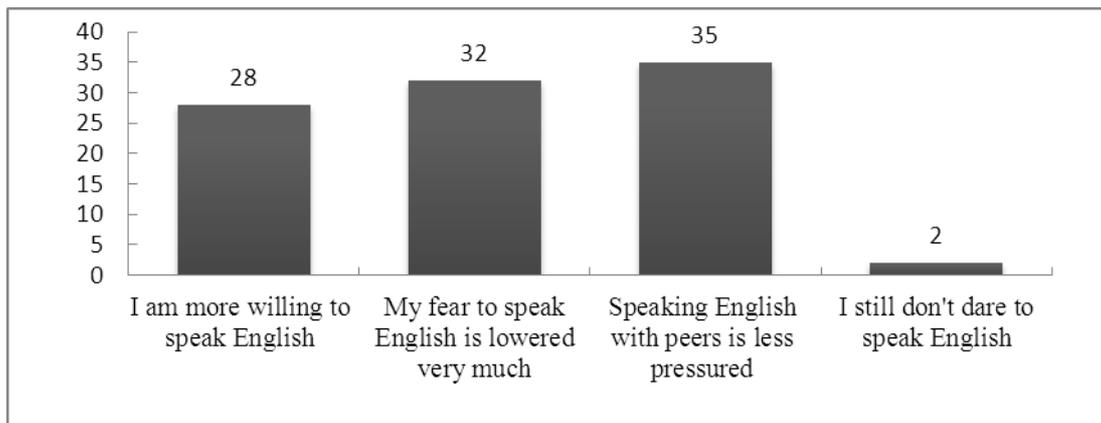


Figure 7. Students’ reactions toward their oral participation in group discussion

Research question two also intended to explore whether student’s English speaking is improved. Forty three students’ complete oral expressions on the 12 course-related questions<sup>7</sup> were transcribed and then coded according to Foster et al.’s AS-Unit (analysis of speech unit). The raw scores were entered into SPSS dependent sample t-test. Paired-samples t test report shows that there is a significant difference between the oral pre-test and post-test in English measured in AS-Unit (the mean difference between pre-test and post-test is -5.63,  $t = -8.80$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In addition, there is a significant difference between the oral pre-test and post-test scores in number of clauses uttered (the mean difference in pre-post-test is -2.21,  $t = -4.42$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .001$ ). On the other hand, there is no significant difference between the oral pre-test and post-test in Chinese version (the mean difference in pre-post-test is -.83,  $t = -1.77$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .085$ ), but there is significant difference between the words uttered in English pre-test and post-test (the mean difference in pre-post-test is -43.49,  $t = -6.97$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .001$ ) (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Paired-samples t test on students’ oral learning effects

	Mean	df	SD	t value	p
Pretest AS Unit English	2.674	42	2.5609	-8.804	.000
Posttest AS Unit English	8.302	42	4.4268		
Pretest Clause English	.698	42	1.4563	-4.420	.000
Posttest Clause English	2.907	42	3.5309		
Pretest Chinese	6.988	42	3.0128	-1.765	.085
Posttest Chinese	7.814	42	2.6682		
Pretest words	19.88	42	26.825	-6.965	.000
Posttest words	63.37	42	45.246		

## 5. Discussion

According to the results from the survey, 95% of the students reported that they liked the course in this English-only intensive language program because the lessons helped them practice listening and speaking as well as leading them to express orally and to learn a lot of knowledge. Meanwhile, 95% of the students also reported that they liked the arrangement of the oral activities held in this English-only intensive language program. The main reasons selected by most students (60%-65%) include that the course and activities helped them practice speaking and listening to English, learn some communicative skills, and understand vocabulary word usage; while some students (40%-49%) expressed that the oral activities motivate them to speak English, to strengthen their speaking ability and give them more opportunity to practice speaking. From these selected options, it is not difficult to understand that if classroom becomes student-centred and provides opportunities to practice using the language, students seemed quite enthusiastic to learn to speak English. Although the numerical data do not seem overwhelmingly convincing, they are relatively representative because these options were not directly primed but embedded in the responses to address other research interests. Moreover, when the oral-practicing activities required learners to cooperate with peers, learning to communicate in English was definitely promoted. For example, some learners indicated, "I am more willing to speak English" (51%), "My fear to speak English is lowered very much"(58%), "Speaking English with peers is less pressured" (64%), "I can brainstorm ideas with classmates using English" (56%), or "team work drives me to participate in discussion" to learn to speak English (51%). Thus, by cooperating, oral activities became more attractive to students to enhance their interest in speaking.

On the other hand, the top 3 preferred subject topics chosen by students are "entertainment and leisure", "interpersonal life and social network", and "technology in daily life". This result seems to reveal that students felt interested in topics that are closely related to their daily life and the language forms learned could come into play when they need to interact with peers in English. This appeared to corroborate Paulo Freire's ideas that education is most effective when it relates to students' real needs (Freire and Macedo 1987 in Larsen Freeman & Anderson 2011, p.170-174). As for culture exploration and technology and innovation, generally and conventionally believed popular subjects in foreign language textbooks, are perceived relatively less interesting. The reasons could be due to age, generation, or some other possible factors that future research might be necessary to unveil this mystery.

As for the training objective of this program, the lessons were supplemented with a variety of oral application activities to ensure ample opportunities to practice speaking. As a result, 93% of the students reported that they liked the team-game oral activities that were designed to make students use English to complete some tasks. In other words, students appeared to prefer this type of practice that applied what they just learned and that was in an interactive and playful mode. This explains that students nowadays expect the immediate evidence of effective learning outcomes, or they lose patience or enthusiasm. Moreover, if oral practice proceeds in a playful mode, the pressure of learning or speaking a foreign language would be reduced naturally because students think they are in a game rather than in an academic practice. As a result, student's learning desire should be increased. In contrast to the team-game activities, group project report is the least preferred oral activity because they had to be in front of the whole class reporting the results of their discussion. Although students were accompanied by their group members while reporting, the oral delivery was still individual. Therefore the pressure was relatively large. Even so, there were still 17% of the students liked such public speaking-training activity. In addition, from the results of the self-evaluation over the in-class verbal participation (Question 8, Appendix C), 18% of the students reported that they took the initiative to answer teacher's questions, 38% of them reported that unless the teacher called on them, they would not take the initiative to speak aloud in classroom. Again conformed to the expectation that Asian students normally play a submissive role in classroom, 53% of the students reported that they actively participated in the peer group-discussion. In short, although public oral report did not win student's affection, peer-group discussion prior to the public oral report should be an indispensable and favourable oral learning process. Many students in this study reported that their fear of speaking English was lowered very much in group discussion and they thought that speaking English with peers was less pressured.

Finally, t test revealed that students' pre-test and post-test oral performance is significantly different. That is, after immersing themselves in the English-only intensive language program, students' average mean score on the English speaking post-test is significantly better than their pre-test in terms of the number of speech unit, clause unit, and words. As a result, these students were more capable to plan at the multi-clause level afterwards. Thus, students' level of proficiency or the complexity of their speaking performance seemed to have improved after this program. It is also important to note that students could not answer questions in English was not due to the lack of content knowledge since the Chinese oral pre-test given right after the English version revealed that their

verbal scores ( $M = 6.99$ ) was significantly better than their spoken English scores ( $M = 2.67$ ) ( $t = -7.98$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Therefore, it should be English deficiency rather than the lack of content knowledge that disabled student from replying those questions in the beginning. In short, the results of present study appear to support what Dekeyser (2007) suggested. Skill cannot be easily transferred because procedural knowledge is highly skill-specific and thus, if students' speaking skill is to be improved, a separate practice in it is definitely required.

## 6. Conclusion

It is a priority, without a doubt, for an English teacher nowadays to enhance students' English language skills in order to connect themselves with the world. Thus, it is recommended, first, that the course content must include topics that deal with students' daily life so they can apply their knowledge in order to experience the fun of learning and to enhance their interest in learning. From the results of this study, the majority of the learners expressed their preference for topics that describe (1) the leisure activities they can practice, (2) how to organize a party and what to be careful with to manage their interpersonal life and social network, and (3) how to report to people their process of solving a common day-to-day problem. For teenagers, the above topics interested them more than the others such as cultural exploration, and technology and innovation.

Second, English-only and interactive teaching styles are necessary in order to fully train students in listening and speaking skills. The learners in this program reported that they enjoyed brain storming ideas with classmates, and team-work prompted them to discuss in English and to learn to speak English; meanwhile, peer group-discussion lowered their fear of speaking English and speaking with peers is less pressured, so they were more willing to speak English. Therefore, English-only in class seems motivating to the learners and the interaction among peers fosters positive attitude toward communicating using the target language.

Finally, language class must include a variety of oral practice activities so that students have ample opportunities to practice speaking to increase their learning of vocabulary and their experience of English conversation to overcome the difficulties that the previous research studies have reported. The results of the present study reveal that learners' speaking performance improved in terms of the structural complexity and the extensions of words they could express to answer questions, and that the majority of the learners reported that they liked this English intensive language program because the lessons trained speaking skill by including many oral activities to help them practice, learn communicative skills and understand the use of vocabulary words.

In sum, classroom time should be returned to students, and teaching should be built upon learner's learning rather than teacher's teaching. When students become the lead in classroom, speaking English will definitely be a daunting task for both learners and teachers.

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## Notes

- Note 1. It deals with how we find out information and learn about the world. Learners learned some action verbs and tools used in scientific inquiry to solve problems in our life.
- Note 2. It introduces how to work like a scientist. Learners learned how to report their designing process of solving a common problem in their daily life.
- Note 3. It covers the newest technological gadgets (like an air multiplier fan, an electronic reader, a two finger camera, etc.) in which learners needed to learn their features and to compare the innovation with the old model.
- Note 4. It presents some leisure activities they can practice. Learners learned some sentential patterns to report their favourite leisure activities, how to do them and what to be careful with.
- Note 5. It shows students how to manage their interpersonal life and social network by throwing a party as an example. Learners needed to learn to make a guest list, food list, and many other things to hold a social event.
- Note 6. This topic familiarizes students with a local indigenous group, Rukai tribe, and a foreign group, Maori. Learners learned the similarities and differences in background information and cultural specialties of the two groups of people.
- Note 7. The first four questions mainly asked students' basic personal information, as long as there is an answer

to the question, one point is granted; on the other hand, if students did not speak or said “I do not know”, zero is assigned. Students’ mean oral pretests for both the English and Chinese versions are 3.28 and 3.98, the mean oral posttests for English and Chinese versions are 3.88 and 3.98 respectively. The Paired-samples t test revealed that students performed significantly better on pretest and post-test in Chinese version compared to English version ( $p = .001$  and  $.044$  respectively), and they improved significantly from pretest English version to post-test ( $p = .001$ ) while in the Chinese version, they remained the same from pretest to posttest. That is, their English speaking on their own personal information (1) was inferior to their Chinese speaking at first, which shows that they seemed to have some difficulty speaking English, and (2) they improved after having participated in the English-only program although it was not as good as their native language, but the gap seemed to be shortened.

## Appendix A

### **In-Class Case-Application Activity: Using Science Tools**

Please use necessary and appropriate tools to solve the problems. Later you are going to do an oral report to share your solutions. You’ll tell the whole class: (1) what tools you use, and (2) what function each tool does to help you solve the problem.

#### **Problem 1:**

You need to measure around the basketball, but you **CAN NOT** use a tape measure.

#### **Problem 2:**

Please pick the apples from the piles and pack 1 kilogram of them in a gift box. You need to find a box with 40cm in length, 25cm in width, and 10cm in height. You **CANO NOT** use a scale, but you have found an empty 1.5-liter bottle available at hand.

#### **Problem 3:**

Your friend needs you to help him prepare a glass of 450cc warm water that is 50°C for an experiment. He asks you to get the tap-water first and then start doing it right away.

#### Useful language:

##### During the discussion

I think we can use... to measure...

I suggest/recommend that we (should) use...

I suggest/recommend using... to measure

##### During the report

We have discussed/decided that we would use...to measure

We decided to use...to measure...

## Appendix B

### **Pre-test and Post-test Questions:**

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. Why do you come to this English camp?
5. Do you know what science is?
6. Please name some inquiry skills and some science tools.
7. What are the steps of an investigation?
8. What do engineers do?

9. What are the steps of a “design process”?
10. Do you know what technology is? Please name some technologies in our life?
11. Do you know couch surfing?
12. Do you know any technology innovation?
13. What are your hobbies?
14. Please describe your appearances?
15. How much do you know about Rukai and Maori?
16. What's your favorite leisure time activity? How to do it? (First, ... Second, ...)

## Appendix C

### Survey

#### I. **Biodata :**

1. Gender :  Male  Female
2. Length of English Learning : \_\_\_\_\_ year
3. Experience of a similar English-only program :  Yes  No

#### II. **Opinion regarding the course content : Please read carefully and tick the option(s) applies to you.**

##### 4. **Do you like the course of this English-only intensive language program?**

- i.  Yes.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  content is very interesting;  it motivates me to learn English;  it allows me to practice speaking;  it leads me to express orally;  I learn a lot of knowledge;  it makes me feel willing to practice speaking in the future;  it helps me practice listening;  I realize I can understand lessons by using known knowledge;  other: \_\_\_\_\_

- ii.  No.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  content is not attractive;  content varies too much;  there's not enough opportunity to practice orally;  English-only is too difficult;  I feel unable to learn because I don't understand;  I am required to express orally;  other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### 5. **Do you like the in-class oral activities in classes?**

- i.  Yes.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  they motivate me to speak;  the goal can be clearly accomplished;  they are easily understood and complied  they help me understand the word usage;  I learn some English communication skills;  they inspire me to strengthen my English speaking ability;  other: \_\_\_\_\_

- ii.  No.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  they do not motivate me to speak English;  they are too difficult, so I do not feel like speaking;  there is no clear goal for me to accomplish;  they are difficult to understand and hard to comply;  I cannot apply the words learned in class in the discussion;

other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### 6. **Do you like the team-game activities led by the teaching assistants?**

- i.  Yes.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  I can brainstorm ideas with classmates using English;  I can use English to communicate and share ideas with classmates;  I can cooperate with classmates to complete the tasks assigned;  Team work drives me to participate in discussion;  I have more opportunity to practice speaking;  other: \_\_\_\_\_

ii.  No.

Reason(s) (choosing more than one option is allowed):  there is no opportunity to express myself;  I am not used to sharing opinion with classmates;  I feel that my English speaking proficiency is relatively low;  I personally do not like to discuss;  I am not used to expressing myself in English;  other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. After having team/group-discussions with your classmates(choosing more than one option is allowed):**

I will be more willing to speak English;  my fear to speak English is reduced quite a lot;  I think speaking English with peers is less pressured;  I still do not dare to speak English.

**8. How is your verbal participation in this program? (Choose only one option.)**

I take the initiative to answer teachers’ questions.  I actively participate in the peer group-discussion.  Unless teachers call on me, otherwise I would not take the initiative to speak;  even if teachers ask me to speak, I do not want to speak.  other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. When I speak English...(choosing more than one option is allowed)**

I will pay attention to pronunciation;  I will pay attention to words used;  I will pay attention to fluency;  I will pay attention to grammatical accuracy ;  I will self-correct if I find errors;  I can accept correction from teachers;  I can accept correction from classmates.

**10. Do you understand the content taught in this program?**

i. (Choose only one option)  completely  mostly  generally  seldom  hardly

ii. Continued from 10i, if you choose “generally”, “seldom”, or “hardly”, please choose the reason or reasons:

topics are too difficult  vocabulary words are too difficult  teachers speak too fast  English-only is too hard to understand  other: \_\_\_\_\_

**III. Lesson preference:**

**11. Please arrange the lessons in the order of your preferences. The blanks go from the most to the least preferred.**

(A) science in our life (B) technology in daily life (C) technology and innovation (D) entertainment & leisure activities (E) interpersonal life and social network (F) culture exploration (G) taboos in different cultures (H) travel

\_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Please arrange the oral activities in the order of your preferences. The list goes from the most to the least favorable activities.**

(A) in-class discussion (B) group project report (C) team-game activities

\_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_ → \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. Opinion:**

**13. Would you be willing to participate in a similar English-only intensive language program like this in the future?**

Yes  No Reason(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**14. What is your viewpoint of toward English listening and speaking before this program? Then, what is your viewpoint now after experiencing this English-only intensive language program?**

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**15. What do you think you have learned from this program?**

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**16. What would you suggest for this English-only intensive language program?**

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Thank you for filling up this survey ☺

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