

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-FORMAL
EDUCATION PROGRAM TO ENHANCE
VOCATIONAL ENGLISH SKILLS BASED ON
PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AND
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING APPROACHES
FOR TAXI DRIVERS IN BANGKOK
METROPOLIS**

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Abstract: English plays a significant role for entire communicative purposes in global society. Existing literature identifies clearly that there is highly increase in number of English language learners for both formal and non-formal education, which provide various curricular to enhance English capability categorized by learning objective. Focus on vocational development program that enrolled increasingly, vocational English curriculum is provided for various occupations, including taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis. Effective program should be developed to satisfy the place itself and learners' real needs.

The purpose of this research was to develop the non-formal education program based on Place-Based education and Experiential Learning approaches to enhance vocational English skill for taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis. Academic achievement score is enhanced by both in class and outdoor activities, Ecological vitality was generated base on objectives of Place-Based Education and Sense of Place was cultivated through learning activities in the educational program.

Independent sample (t-test) was conducted to analyze the collected data whether there was a significant difference and which the difference occurred. Multiple regressions were used to pinpoint the best predictors. Forty taxi-drivers in Bangkok Metropolis were purposively selected to participate in this research that were screened by 2 specific qualifications Twenty participants were divided into a control- group and others for an experimental -group.

Major research findings were as follows (1) The collected literature of non-formal education program for taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis developed by government and non-government sectors; (2) The completed developed of non-formal education program to enhance vocational English skill for taxi driver in Bangkok Metropolis; (3) The comparison of the result of vocational English achievement score, attitude toward ecological awareness score and attitude toward place (sense of place) score between control group and experimental

group; (4) The study of factors and conditions of implementation of developed non-formal education program.

Keywords: Non-formal Education Program, Place-Based Education, Experiential Learning, Vocational English, Taxi Drivers

Introduction

English plays a significant role in the communication of a global society today. The existing literature identifies clearly that there is a high increase in the number of English language learners in both formal and non-formal education. There are different curricular approaches to enhancing English language capabilities in relation to different learning objectives. The focus here will be on the challenge of developing a vocational English program for taxi drivers in the Bangkok metropolis as well as other occupations. An effective program should link to the learners needs.

The focus of the English curriculum literature on non-formal education includes both general curriculum and vocational curriculum. All curriculums are available to fulfill the needs of particular target groups. The popularity of a vocation English curriculum is evidenced by increased registrations each semester. Each non-formal education decision to set up a short course on demand may be categorized by the occupations of the target group. Course descriptions, teaching approaches, learning assessment and other components in a course depend on the learners' needs. One of the courses with the highest registrations is vocational English for taxi drivers. This provides evidence of the needs for English language enhancement to improve communication ability that benefit the learner's particular occupation. Taxi Drivers represent an occupation serving both local and non-local people that can be enhanced by English communication with indirect benefit for the Bangkok tourism economy.

There are vocational English courses for taxi drivers provided in each non-formal education division in Bangkok. However, the content and learning approach in curriculum is still not practical. (Non-formal education division, 2006)

In order to enhance the vocational English language skills of Bangkok taxi drivers there should a learning emphasis on tourist attractions, well-known shopping centers, and on particular tourist activities in Bangkok. Taxi drivers in the Bangkok Metropolis should be helped to develop awareness about air pollution in Bangkok, which has a negative impact on

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their quality of life. (*Pollution Control Department, 2005*) The most critical point for taxi drivers should be the encouragement to have a sense of 'Bangkok awareness' which leads them to find approach to develop and sustain their own place. This will benefit the Bangkok economy as well as the taxi drivers themselves. Hence, an education program should be developed which is able to enhance vocational English skill, ecological vitality awareness and awareness about place.

Place-based education represents a recent trend in the broad field of outdoor education. It recaptures the ancient idea of "listening to the land" and living and learning in harmony with the earth and with each other. As society becomes increasingly urbanized and technologized, educators must continue to adopt and adapt more of the goals, theory, and practice of place-based education (Knapp, 1996). Place-based education seeks to help communities through employing learners and educators in solving community problems. Place-based education differs from conventional text and classroom-based education in that it understands learners' local community as one of the primary resources for learning. Hence, place-based education promotes learning that is rooted in what is local in desired subjects. (Orr, 1994)

As educators have known, learner as adults possess their own experience (Knowles, 1980) In adult learning experience should be considered a valuable resource for learning (Archanya Rattana U-bon, 2004). Hence, experiential Learning focuses on the learning process of each individual learner. The learning process is a cycle of making meaning from direct experience that can be generalized into the learner's life (Kolb, 2004). Because experience is factor of adult life, whenever adults set out to teach more about anything it is important that they should link this with their previous experience (Brookfield, 1983)

As previously described, it can be concluded that the components 'place-based education' and 'experiential learning' that the researcher has applied in the study are all correlated. Together they can enhance vocational English capability, ecological vitality awareness and sense of place awareness. In this way, learners are able to generalize new knowledge integrated into their previous experience through learning activities. Also new experience is generated and becomes part of the learning cycle. The researcher is interested in developing a non-formal education program to enhance vocational English skill based on place-based education and experiential learning approach for taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis. Seven learning activities in program were developed by applying learning activities comprised of indoor and outdoor learning

mentioned in place-based education approach and integrated in the experiential learning cycle.

Literature Review

Place-Based Education

Place-based Education is an integrated learning phenomenon (Sobel, 2004). Education reformers spoke about the importance of incorporating students' experience of particular communities and places into their formal education. This approach to education in a variety of local contexts develops approaches to teaching and learning that redirect students to the value of the local.

Woodhouse & Knapp (2000), Smith (2002), Gruenewald (2003), Power (2004) and Sobel (2004) stated that by its very nature, place-based education is not something that can just be packaged and then disseminated. It depends on the creative interaction between learner and the possibilities and requirements of specific places. Education purposes will be accomplished when the education provided directs their attention to local phenomena. Proudman (1995), Hug (1998), Knapp and Woodhouse (2003) and Sobel (2004) have all described place-based education as the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach. Emphasizing hands-on and real-world learning experiences, this approach to education enhances academic achievement, increases learners' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school.

Place-based education officially links itself to experiential learning as a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experience. Proudman (1995) Woodhouse & Knapp (2000), Gruenewald (2003), Power (2004) and Sobel (2004) describes the importance of being aware that a learning cycle is composed of reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis. Learners are characterized by taking initiative, making decisions, being held accountable for the results, posing questions, experimenting, solving problems, and constructing meaning from experience learning activities.

The characteristics of this educational approach identified by Knapp and Woodhouse (2003) provide the foundation for interdisciplinary curriculum development and contain ecological, multigenerational, and multicultural dimensions. Students and teachers are encouraged to cross the boundaries between the school and the community

and become involved in a variety of constructive ways. Learners are expected to become creators of knowledge as well as consumers of knowledge, and their questions and concerns play central roles in this process. They are assessed on the basis of how this knowledge contributes to the community's well-being and sustainability.

Proudman (1995) as well as Knapp and Woodhouse (2003) describe a course design with the following objectives: (1) to explore and apply the theories and practices of experiential education and place-based education; (2) to increase skills and attitudes in group dynamics, human relations, and community building; (3) to investigate local instructional resources including people and places through using experiential learning approach; and (4) to expand knowledge about available community study instructional resources.

According to Sobel (2004), the most important senses of place to consider are the personal meanings and attachments that exist between each learner and the place or places offered as the context for the curriculum. The term sense of place has been defined and used in many different ways by many different specialists. A 'sense of place' is a characteristic that some geographic places have and some do not, while for others it is a feeling or perception held by people. It is a term also often used in relation to those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging.

Place-based education encourages teachers and learners to use local people as well as local, community, and public places as resources, which turn communities into classrooms. The findings of many researchers about place-based education make clear that place-based education fosters a learner's connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between the academy and community. It boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality. In short, place-based education encourages learners to take care of the world by understanding where they live and taking action in their own local communities.

Proudman (1995), Hug (1998), Knapp and Woodhouse (2003) and Sobel (2004) all describe principles of successful place-based education. These include: (1) learning takes place on-site in school yard, and in the local community and environment; (2) learning focuses on local themes, systems, and content; (3) learning is personally relevant to the learner; (4) learning experiences contribute to the community's vitality and environmental quality and support to the community's role in fostering global environmental quality; (5) learning is supported by strong and varied partnerships with local organizations, agencies,

businesses, and government; (6) learning is interdisciplinary; (7) learning experiences are tailored to the local audience; (8) learning is grounded in and supports the development of a love for one's place; (9) local learning serves as the foundation for understanding and participating appropriately in regional and global issues; and (10) place-based education programs are integral to achieving other institutional goals.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning can be found in many discussions of the theory and practice of adult education, informal education and lifelong learning. Experiential learning thus involves a 'direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it' (Brookfield, 1983).

Experiential learning is most easily compared with academic learning, the process of acquiring information through the study of a subject without the necessity for direct experience. While the dimensions of experiential learning are analysis, initiative, and immersion, the dimensions of academic learning are constructive learning and reproductive learning. Though both methods aim at instilling new knowledge in the learner, academic learning does so through more abstract, classroom-based techniques, whereas experiential learning actively involves the learner in a concrete experience. Experiential learning is a form of education that occurs through a direct participation in the events of life (Houle, 1980). Learning is not sponsored by some formal educational institution but by people themselves. It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience and is the way that most of us do our learning.

While there have been various additions to the literature, such as the above, it is the work of Kolb (1984) which still provides the central reference point for discussion. Following on from Kolb's work there has been a growing literature around experiential learning and this is indicative of greater attention to this area by practitioners - particularly in the area of higher education. David Kolb's interest lay in exploring the processes associated with making sense of concrete experiences - and the different styles of learning that may be involved. In this, he makes explicit use of the work of Piaget, Dewey and Lewin (1970).

Kolb (1985) created his famous model out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. He represented these in the famous experiential learning circle that involves (1)

concrete experience followed by (2) observation and experience followed by (3) forming abstract concepts followed by (4) testing in new situations.

From literatures about learning theory of educators, Dewey (1938) Rogers (1969) Kolb (1984) Pfeiffer and Jones (1988) Pfeiffer and Jones (1988) Pfeiffer and Jones (1988) Goh (1983) Tittly (1994) and Phornphapasorn Pharinchankul (2006) explained that experiential learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points and should really be approached as a continuous spiral. However, it is suggested that the learning process often begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. Following this, the second step is to understand these effects in the particular instance so that if the same action were taken in the same circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In this pattern, the third step would understand the general principle under which the particular instance falls. Therefore, generalizing may involve actions over a range of circumstances to gain experience beyond the particular instance and suggest the general principle

Frenwick (2003) suggested its application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization. In some representations of experiential learning these steps, (or ones like them), are sometimes represented as a circular movement. In reality, if learning has taken place the process could

be seen as a spiral. The action is taking place in a different set of circumstances and the learner is now able to anticipate the possible effects of the action: (1) the learner must be willing to be actively involved in the experience; (2) the learner must be able to reflect on the experience; (3) the learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience; and (4) the learner must possess decision making and problem solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience.

Experiential learning can be a highly effective educational method. It engages the learner at a more personal level by addressing the needs and wants of the individual. Experiential learning requires qualities such as self-initiative and self-evaluation. For experiential learning to be truly effective, it should employ the whole learning wheel, from goal setting, to experimenting and observing, to reviewing, and finally action planning. This complete process allows one to learn new skills, new attitudes or even entirely new ways of thinking (Pfeiffer and Jones, 1983)

Building upon earlier work by John Dewey and Kurt Levin (1970), and further developed by Rogers (1969), Kolb (1984), Pfeiffer & Jones (1988), Goh (1983), Tittly (1994) and Phornphapasorn Pharinchankul (2006). Experiential learning theory itself presents a cyclical model of learning consisting of four stages as shown below. One may begin at any stage, but must follow each other in the sequence:

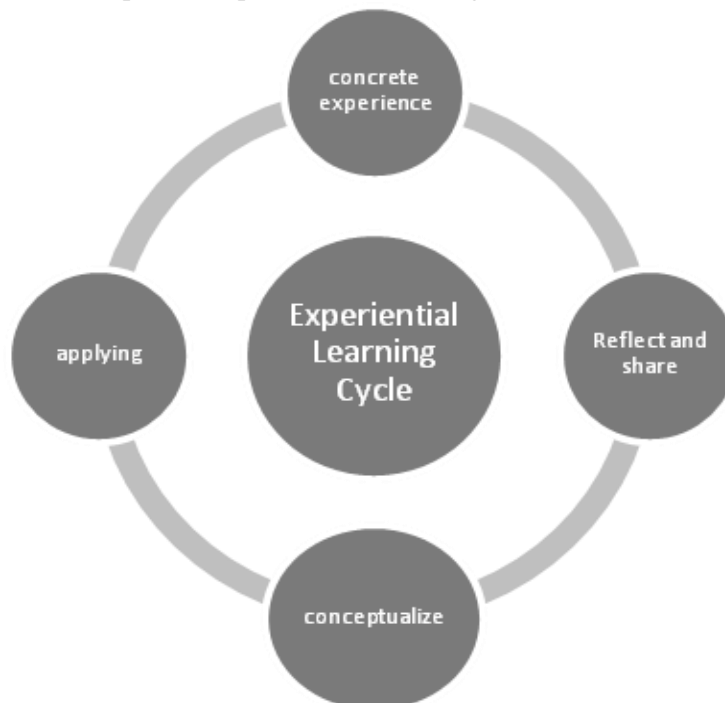


Figure 1: Experiential Learning Cycle

Source: Kolb (1984), Pfeiffer and Jones (1988), Goh (1983), Tittly (1994) and Phornphapasorn Pharinchankul (2006)

The four-stage learning cycle shows how experience is translated through reflection into concepts. It also shows how experience is translated through reflection into concepts, which in turn are used as guides for active experimentation and the choice of new experiences. The first stage 'concrete experience' is where the learner actively experiences an activity. 'Reflective and share' is when the learner consciously reflects back on that experience. The third stage 'conceptualize' is where the learner attempts to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed. The fourth stage 'applying' is where the learner is trying to plan how to test a model, theory, or plan for a forthcoming experience.

Program Developing Model

Non- formal education program of this research was developed from the educational Program of Brookfield (1995), the adult educator. It can be applied for many different settings because its flexibility of program. The importance of Brookfield's program is concentration on objectives. Program Development model divided into 5 steps that are the following:

(1) Identifying learners need for both contexts relate Bangkok Tourism attractions and learning activities which appropriate for learners.

(2) Identifying behavioral objective for overall educational program. There are three major objectives of this research considered through Place-Based Education, which are academic achievement, ecological vitality awareness and sense of place awareness. There, learning objectives deviled into three main parts, which clearly identify objective.

(3) Identifying learning experience to achieve objective. Researchers apply Place- Based Education and Experiential Learning approaches to create learning activities in education program. Learning activities were divided into 7 units. All learning activities in column include in-class, outdoor and self-learning. Overall activities will be completed in 30 days.

(4) Preparing and coordinating for program which include preparing learning document and coordinating to related organizations and.

(5) Comparing learning outcome between prior and post all test score of learners with testing, observing and interviewing.

As previously described, it can be concluded that the components, Place-Based Education and Experiential Learning, that the researcher applied in the study is all correlated and supposed to be able to enhance vocational English capability, ecological vitality awareness and sense of place awareness. The components previously mentioned are main objectives of Place-Based Education related with Experiential

Learning, learners are able to generalize new knowledge integrated into their previous experience through learning activities, new experience is generated and reconsidered as experience in learning cycle.

If this developed non-formal education program is effective learners, which are taxis drivers in Bangkok Metropolis will be enhanced their vocational English skill, moreover there will be the enhancement of ecological vitality awareness and sense of Bangkok awareness that benefit for both learners themselves and Tourism in Bangkok Metropolis.

Research Objectives

The research objectives are as follows:

(1) To collect relevant literature about a non-formal education program for taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis developed by government and non-government sectors.

(2) To develop non-formal education programs to enhance vocational English skills for taxi drivers in the Bangkok Metropolis.

(3) To compare the vocational English achievement scores, attitudes toward ecological awareness score, and attitudes toward place scores (sense of place) which distinguish between the control group and the experimental group;

(4) To study factors and conditions of implementation in the development of a non-formal education program.

Research Methodology

The research Methodology is as follows:

Research participants in this research were taxi drivers in Bangkok Metropolis. Participants were selected after being screened in relation to two prerequisite factors: (1) they were able to communicate in English, and (2) they had at least 2 years' experience for driving in Bangkok.

The participants were divided into two groups, twenty participants in the experimental group and the other twenty in the control group. The control- group participants enrolled in the vocational curriculum in the Academic year 2010 in the Non Formal Education Division, Bangkok Noi District and the experimental – group participants take course in developed non-formal education program.

An independent sample (t-test) was conducted to analyze the collected data to see whether there was a significant difference and where the difference occurred. Multiple regressions were used to pinpoint the best predictor.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are as follows:

(1) The scores of vocational English, ecological vitality awareness and sense of place awareness for the experimental -group samples is higher than the prior experimental score.

(2) The scores of vocational English, ecological vitality awareness and sense of place awareness for the experimental -group participants is higher than the scores for the control-group samples.

Research Expected Outcome

The research h Expected Outcomes are as follows:

(1) The developed non-formal education program which links vocational English skills, ecological awareness and a sense of 'place awareness' provides significant vocational improvement for taxi drivers themselves and indirectly beneficial for tourism in Bangkok Metropolis

(2) The developed non-formal education program will be a guideline to be further development of curriculum for related target groups - for example, airport limousine drivers and hotel drivers.

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