Research Article

LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH AT THE PEOPLE'S POLICE UNIVERSITY: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVEA

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, a great deal of researches studies about teaching and learning influenced by the culture has been carried out. And the researchers found out certain theoretical points for English teaching and learning. According to these theoretical points, many nations in the world want to reform their systems of education. However, some are not successful because of their own contexts, the combination between the process of learning and teaching and the way to operate them at many different levels. This paper is about EFL class at The People's Police University, Ho Chi Minh City, the complex, systemic nature of the process of learning and teaching influenced, and the two different significant and long-history systems of education in the world: Western education and Traditional East Asian education.

Keywords: Cross-cultural perspective; learning and teaching; Western education and Traditional East Asian education; motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural perspective on learning and teaching is illustrated in summary of David Watkins and his colleagues' research. Their research was made to server two mains aims. The first aim is to give some evidence to the cross-cultural validity of Western principles of student learning. The second aim is to study how Chinese students think and go about learning and teaching. David Watkins (2000) indicated that any educational practice must be understood from multiple perspective and changes which brought about at anyone level.

Summary

There is a distinction between Western on which most major theories of teaching and learning are based and Eastern culture. The distinction is characterized by the following main aspects:

Memorizing and understanding

Although it is said that Chinese learners are rote learners, but to many teachers and good students, memorizing and understanding cannot stand separately. They interlock and influence on each other and influence on high learning outcomes. (Kember, 1996; Watkins and Biggs, 1996; Marton et al, 1997). However, Western teachers try to object to rote learning which will not bring good results to learners. Memorizing and understanding are viewed differently by Western and Eastern teachers. Educators in countries such as the UK have tended to reject rote learning, e.g. memorizing without understanding because they believe that students cannot understand by memorizing. However, high quality learning outcomes usually require both processes which can complement each other (Kember, 1996; Watkins &Bigg, 1996; Martol et al., 1997). In in-depth interviews of the teachers and students in Hong Kong and China indicates that many of them see memorizing and understanding are not separate but interlock processes.

The role of repetition

According to the research, Chinese students use repetition for two different purposes, both to create a "deep impression" and to deepen or develop understanding by discovering new meaning. Whereas Western students tend to use repetition to check what they have already remembered (Watkins, 2000). Chinese school and Western school students make use of repetition in quite different purposes. The Western students tented to check that they had really remembered something by repetition. The Chinese students, whereas, use repetition to deepen or develop understanding (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000).

Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivation

The intrinsic motivation of Western students is the desire of deep learning strategies (Biggs, 1987). Whereas Chinese students' motivation is activated by many mixed factors: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and even interest (Watkins and Biggs, 1996). The two cultures also in differ in their students' motivation and orientation.

Achievement Motivation

Each Western student tries his best for his own success as well as his own reward (Atkinson, 1964). Meanwhile, each Chinese student is pressured to study hard for the parents' educational level and his matter of "family face" (Rao, 1993). Each individual needs to be successful in Western societies. In contrast, in East Asian societies, success involves contribution of many people, family, friends (Holloway, 1988; Salili, 1996). There are differences in orientation between cultural groups (Tang, 1996) proved that Western students show less collaborative than Hong Kong students when they studying outside the tertiary classroom. Hong kong students find learning collaboratively can promote deeper learning strategies (Chan and Watkins, 1994).

Collective versus Individual Orientation

Vice versa to Western countries, China places more emphasis on group rather than individual good.

Group work

In Western classes, students get involved in group work through simultaneous talk. By way of contrast, in Chinese classes, teachers often use sequential talk for students. Their approach to group work

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more likely cognitive – centered and more skills-centered particularly in the language learning area in Western approach. (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998). The approaches to group work between different cultures are not the same. The Western approaches based on developing skill rather than cognitive skills. The former involves pairs or groups work on a problem together at the same time while the later may involve just two students' performance to the teacher and the rest of the class.

Questioning in Chinese class

According to Jin and Cortazzi (1998), after having learnt independently from the teacher, Chinese students ask questions based on knowledge while Western students ask questions during the class to gather all the of the materials learnt. Questioning in class takes place at different time and has different purposes. Jin & Cortazzi (1998) found that students in Western classroom raise questions during the process of learning. That implies that they prefer "talking to know". Chinese students, however, often ask questions after they have learnt or "talking of the known". Western educators have had a number of misperception when applying some basic tenets of the Western educational methods to Eastern (especially Chinese) classrooms. This cross-cultural perspective strongly recommends that serious consideration should be taken. In order to improve the country's educational outcomes, cultural contexts must be counted for the validity of teaching and learning methods.

Good teacher

According to Jin and Cortazzi (1998), Chinese students considered teachers as the one who have deep knowledge, be able to answer the questions and be a good moral model. Meanwhile, Western teachers are able to arouse the students' interest, explain clearly, use effective instructional methods and organize a range of activities.

Good student

In Western country, good student is the one who obeys and pays attention to what teacher is saying. Nevertheless, in China student has impact on the classroom climate (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998).

Chinese Conceptions of Teaching

According to Gao (1998), there are five basic conceptions: "knowledge delivery", "exam preparation", "ability development", "attitude promotion", "conduct guidance". The two first of these corresponds rather well with the dimension identified in Western countries. Vietnamese culture is the same as Chinese culture in some extents, especially both countries are influenced by the Confucianism; we ourselves quite understand and sympathize with our students in term of their orientation, motivation and learning strategies as well. Vietnamese students also have pressure to succeed academically irrespective of the parents 'educational level. Their success is seen as their families' success while in Western societies achievement motivation is regarded as individual competition. We agree with some of the above hypothesis of Western teachers when they compare the students in two different cultures. According to our teaching experience, we think it is logical and necessary to view understanding and creativity as slow and long process. The first one requires much metal effort which cannot take place suddenly. It takes a certain amount of time for learners to digest the input they are exposed to. Besides, understanding is an internal process of our brain which is affected by many factors such as learners' age, cognitive style, aptitude and intelligence, motivation and so on. Jin and Cortazzi (1998) believed that the second process depends on solid basic

knowledge, for many British teachers "children learn through being creative" but Vietnamese teachers see the process as reversed. In our own classes, the students are usually expected to promote their creativity at the last stage of learning procedure, when they feel confident enough to be involved in free practice or daily life-related tasks. In other word, understanding and creativity should be the result of practice. Therefore, it is unfair to claim that our students are not creative or fail to understand after only one lesson. On the other hand, we do not think it is right to assume students are rote "learners" while they are memorizing. Like Chinese students, the Vietnamese students tend to memorize but it does not mean all of them are learning without understanding. Many young learners often learn by heart or memorize something because they have not developed their analytic thinking. Students can develop understanding through the process of memorization, especially through repetition drill in language classes. High quality learning outcomes usually require both processes which can complement each other (Kember, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Marton et al., 1997). Our English teaching experience shows that learners should always be given enough time to familiar with the new knowledge before analyzing for understanding. Memorization should be seen as preparatory step where students are given controlled practice such as repetition, substitution or got ready for less controlled practice. Then they easily access to the next step, e.g. understanding and developing creativity in free practice. Here are some similarities and differences between Western education and non-Western education, typically Chinese education. They are shown obviously in the following the table:

Western education	Non-western education
Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Individual orientation in learning	Collective orientation in learning
Active in learning	Passive in learning
Success based on effort and ability	Most success based on hard working and effort
Small- size class (18 – 22 students)	Large- size class (50 – 60 students)
Group work : skills-centered	Group work: cognitive- centered
Classroom disciplinary: behavioral problems.	Classroom disciplinary: Teachable students

From some facts above, we recognized that Chinese students are "docile" (Biggs, 1996), and they believe that their teachers and friends are a whole "family". Therefore, they treat to each other politely. And the teachers in China do not spend so much time on getting students participates in classroom tasks and their homework. Contrary to Chinese students, Western students are active in learning and they learn for themselves. Besides, in the classroom, Western teachers have to deal with classroom management and have to work hard to answer all the questions in class, which does not exist in Chinese culture and Chinese classroom. Consequently, educational practice in Vietnam is less or more familiar with Chinese education, which is characterized by collectivism, socialization for achievement and high acceptance of power and authority (Zenhui Rao, 2006). Vietnam was dominated by Chinese for about a millennium, by the French for about a century and by the American for about for thirty years. That means our education was influenced mostly by Chinese education, especially Confucian. There is a famous Chinese saying, "Growing children without teaching them is the father's sin, teaching students without using strict discipline is the teacher's offence and learning unsuccessfully is the students' guilt". With this point of view in mind, we strongly agree with David Watkins (2000) and we would like to discuss the first issue about the role of the teacher in non-Western countries, typically, in China. First, the teacher is considered as the "fount of knowledge" and it is the teacher who decides which knowledge is to be taught and the students accept and learn that knowledge (Ginsberg, 1992). The teacher is responsible for arranging and presenting knowledge in the most suitable way. He is in charge of explaining the selected material. In addition, he has to make the

learning easier for students. That means learning is to know and to understand new knowledge completely. He also has a general or detail knowledge of his subject to answer all the questions raised by the students about what is in the book and what he has experienced. Because of his wide range knowledge, students can consult teachers' advice for future course of study. Therefore, teachers maintain the respect from the students, students' parents, and the society as a whole. This respect for the teacher including his knowledge and his moral model is reflected in the following traditional verses:

"To get across the river, you have to build a bridge, to have well-educated children, you have to respect the teacher" That means the teacher is a model of both knowledge and morality; and the value that learning is moral duty and studying hard is a responsibility to the family (see also Lee, 1996). Second, teacher is able to evoke the students' interest by using his own strategies such as analyzing the problem, paraphrasing what is in the book, asking questions, games, drills and practices, discussing a particular topic, using visual instructions (pictures, films…) The second issue, which we want to mention, is the role of Repetition and belief in it fervently. To gain new knowledge through the text, students' first use "repetition" as the rote of understanding, then the meaning and interpretation come after that. They learn to shape the knowledge before learning what they mean. Therefore, the students have a good deal of repetitive learning. That means students need more mental effort to memorize all aspects of knowledge. In addition, I still keep finding that the students use "repetition" for different purposes. First, they tend to keen on the exact understanding the meaning, a focus on apart fragments and specific syntactic structures (Rao, 2002). The teacher believes that "Learning sparsely but well" is a practical and economic way to second language acquisition (Li, 1984). Then, they constantly review what they have learnt. It is said that we use five organs in learning: eyes to see the shape, ears to hear the sound, hand to write, mouth to speak the sound, mind to think about the meaning (Rao, 2006). As far as we concern, we think that repetition will lead to memorizing. With the thorough memory of the lessons learned, the good students may have qualitative and quantitative analyses based on their knowledge. Nevertheless, repetition really takes time of the students in their learning, especially weak learners.

RESEACHERS' CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

We are now working with the first year students at the People's Police University Ho Chi Minh City (PPU). Being a training institution of the armed forces, the university has a unique culture which manifests in hierarchism and iron discipline. In class, the teacher is the students' superior. Any suggestions made by the teacher, however "softly uttered," must be taken as an order. Collectivism is prominent here in that a member's action would affect the whole organization and vice versa. A person works not for his own interests but for the sake of the collective, and the collective is there to provide support for each of its members (Brown, 2001). Another cultural aspect of the university is that ninety percent of the leaders, teachers and students are male. In all, women account for about ten percent of the university's population. The departments that have the highest percentage of women are the Department of Foreign Languages (which is in charge of English) and the Kitchens (37.5% and 95% respectively). Male and female students live in separate dormitories. All of their activities, from learning to eating, playing, and shopping must be carried out within the confines of the campus. No student can leave the campus without his or her teacher's permission. Students must always wear uniforms on which their names are clearly printed, whether they are on or off campus. The only exception is when they are playing sports and working in the schoolyard. When seeing a teacher, students must either bow or salute with their right hands (i.e. the army way of

greeting). In class, teachers and students normally call each other "dong chi" (comrade). The situation, however, is more flexible in the English classes, which might be due to the fact that teachers of English are, to a certain extent, affected by Western culture. One of the regulations that affect English teaching and learning at the institution, besides that of "must-not-leave-the-campus" eliminates most chances for students to use their English in real world situations. All the above cultural factors have created a unique teaching and learning climate in the institution and have an effect on all aspects of English teaching and learning there. Such an organizational culture is also a reflection of Eastern culture affected by Confucianism as well as Marxist ideology, as Ellis affirms, "Whether of the old Confucian style or the Marxist-Leninist variety, the power-distance between teacher and student, the collectivist nature of social groups, the need to save face, and finally the confirmatory messages in the system of pronouns have all served to perpetuate the conformist teacher/student relationship in Vietnam." (Ellis, 1994). At the university, students learn the four skills – Listening – Speaking – Reading and Writing, especially written language in the form of reading and writing, and they also need a grasp of English grammar to pass their written tests. To meet the needs of their students, language teachers traditionally used the grammar translation method that focuses on grammatical rules, the memorization of vocabulary, the translation of texts and written exercises. Those might be the main reasons for the limitations in teaching speaking effectively. As a result, students find it difficult to perform speaking tasks in communicative language class at university. This leads to the fact that second language learners tend to be shy and lazy to communicate with each other in English. Thus, in order to motivate students to communicate in English in warm environment, teachers have always discussed the new and effective methods or ways of teaching speaking. Communicative approaches with three clear stages (Presentation – Practice – Production) are considered to be the best devices so as for teachers to evaluate students' comprehension to the second language acquisition. Specifically, using role play in speaking lessons is one of the powerful techniques which can be applied in communicative language classroom. Nevertheless, this new technique is so strange that PPU teachers and students find it difficult to carry out their lesson.

Those students rarely had opportunity to practice speaking at high school where students are often asked to concentrate on grammar to get high scores. At this university, English is a compulsory subject which students have to achieve during their studying time here. The teachers pay attention to improving and developing students' English competence, especially speaking skill because they have to take oral examination at the end of the first semester. Students will have to complete General English in the first-year and English for Police (ESP) for the second and third year. What they have learnt inside the classroom is for passing the exams, immediate use, not for communicative needs. It is hard to admit but we have to say, "our students are passive learners". Hence, we have to use many effective methods to our own students to make sure that there will be a continuing progress of teaching and learning. They used to be familiar with the teacher-centered method and find it so strange and difficult to keep pace with the English curriculum at university where students are asked to master four basic skills. Contrary to the exciting and warm environment in speaking lessons, there has always been silence replying spoken activities. Our students may understand English easily but hesitate to express their ideas orally in front of class. Whenever they speak, they lack of fluency. Furthermore, we can easily find out a great deal of errors when our students speak English, such as pronunciation or intonation, etc. Because of those reasons mentioned above, it is essential to study on various solutions to get students involved in speaking lessons actively and

passionately. Therefore, role-play activities are considered to be one of the best techniques which should be implemented in speaking lessons. Role-play activities are often assigned with specific situation or a particular context, which assumes a good way of learning about other cultures and traditions as long as experiencing new issues (Abduhalk, 2008). Participation in role-play activities allows students to make decisions, see the results, receive the feedback and therefore learn how to adjust words and actions to produce more likeable results (Noor et al, 2012). During a role-play activity, Islam (2012) emphasized students are able to "practice and explore new cultural rules of behavior, and may also identify behavior that would be appropriate in their own culture but not appropriate in others".

Subjects: The subjects were fifty Vietnamese students studying English at The People's Police University in Ho Chi Minh City. Their English proficiency levels were Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Advance.
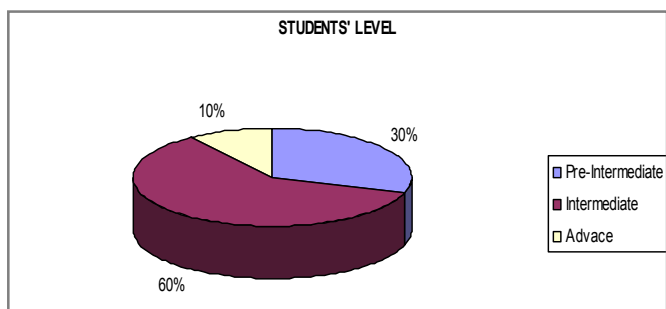

Figure 1. Students' English proficiency level

Instrument

A 7-item questionnaire was designed to study the aspect of the "role-play" technique. We used scaled questions to determine students' reactions to the speaking activities used in class. Each question asked students to rank a statement according to its veracity with regard to students' experience of learning to speak well. The last question was an open-ended question about students' opinions on learning to speak English at the PPU in Ho Chi Minh city. The first section elicited biographical information including the respondents' ages and genders.

Type 1 asked questions about the students' reactions to learning English through the technique used in class. Their responses would answer the research question

How do role-play activities support our students in improving their speaking skills and what are our students' attitudes towards using role-play activities in speaking class?

In Type 1, for each question, there were three possible responses: 'A' for Agree, 'D' for Disagree, and 'NS' for Not Sure (if the student was unsure / undecided about the answer). Each student was to circle only the single letter that matched his / her agreement or disagreement with each listed statement. The questionnaire called for confidential self-report data from the technique that was used. Most of the participants had studied English for between 4 and 7 years (80%), 12% from 1-3 years, only 8% had done more than 7 years of study of English when they attended our class. As the students' first language was Vietnamese, the questionnaire, the questionnaire instructions and each question item were written in simple sentences in order to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. The questionnaire took about ten minutes to complete. Then the students handed the completed questionnaire directly to the researcher. The questionnaire data was manually processed by the researcher.
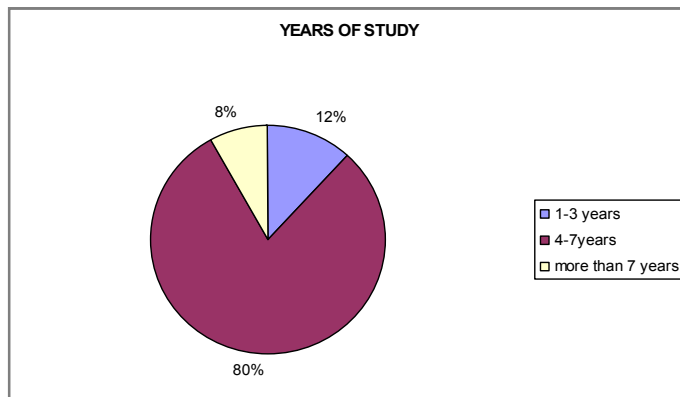

Figure 2. Students' years of study

RESULTS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Respondents' Background

The questionnaire data on the respondents' backgrounds provide a profile of the subjects (Table 2). There were more male than female subjects: 44 (88% of the 50 respondents) were male, while only 6 (12%) were female. The majority of the subjects were 19 and below (44 students or 80%). There were 8 students aged between 20 - 29 years old (16%) and there were two students who were aged 30 and above (4%).
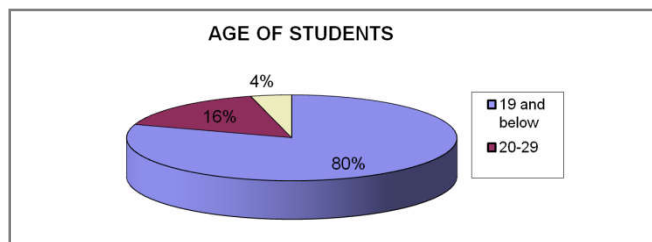

Figure 3. Age of students

RESULTS

Type 1: Tick the column with the heading that indicates your reactions to the lesson teaching

I have more ideas after using role-play

Agree = 80%   Disagree =16 %   Not Sure = 4%

As I pointed out earlier, when faced with certain unfamiliar topics, my students felt confused. The technique may help them prepare to discuss the topic.

I find the role-play very helpful

Agree = 90%   Disagree = 10%   Not Sure = 0%

There are many reasons for students' difficulty in speaking: they may lack vocabulary, or not have enough knowledge of the topic to talk about it. With reading for speaking, they can base their discussion on the given information; learn new structures/ phrases/ vocabulary to apply to the task. This probably gives them more confidence to talk about the given topic.

I speak better than I did before

Agree = 82%   Disagree = 12%   Not Sure = 6%

The majority agrees that with the ideas being given to them to speak about; they are more willing to talk about the subject and speak English more fluently than before.

I enjoy the English lesson

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Agree = 94%   Disagree = 4%   Not Sure = 2 %

The key word is "enjoy". It earned the highest score that means the students are not passive learners; they actively participate in the learning process through speaking activities.

After having the lesson with this technique, I feel it is easy to speak on the topics given by my teacher.

Agree = 80%   Disagree = 16%   Not Sure = 4%

This result shows how useful the technique is; it helps them with grammatical structures, vocabulary and it may improve their knowledge of the issue.

I like the speaking tasks such as pair/group work more than individual tasks.

Agree = 90 %   Disagree = 10%   Not Sure = 0%

Being in a group lowers apprehension and gives a feeling of security compared with having to speak alone to an entire class. Fellow group mates can be a source of help to give advice, check on what to say, or simply be supportive.

I have the chance to share and listen to my peers' ideas.

Agree = 88%   Disagree = 10%   Not Sure = 2%

In pair/group work, the students can say what they think and they feel less shy than when they work individually.

Type 2: Ranked question: Rank the following component according to its importance for learning to speak (1=the most important).
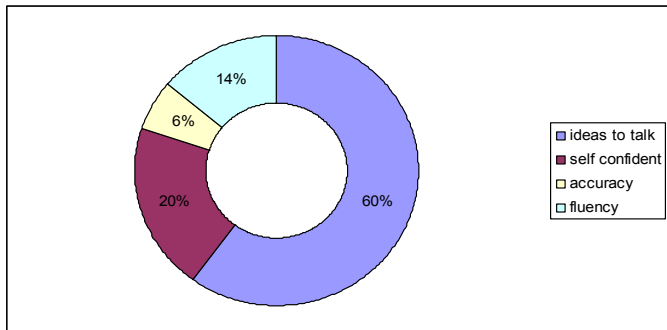

Figure 4. Students' component for learning to speak

Ideas to talk about=60% chosen is the most important one by my students, because that is their most difficulty with speaking, 20% choose self-confident, they think that if they had had ideas to talk, they would have been more confident to speak out. Besides that 14% choose fluency and the last one is accuracy, 6%.

Type 3: Tick the column with the heading that indicates your reactions to the teaching technique.
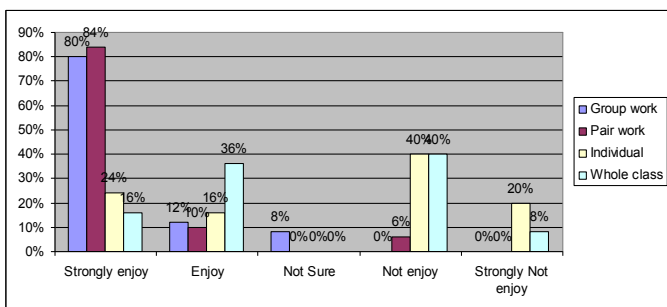

Figure 5. Students' reaction to speaking activities

Group work: Strongly enjoy = 80%; Enjoy = 12 %; Not Sure =8 %; the remaining two options; Not enjoy and Strongly not enjoy weren't chosen. For the majority of the respondents (80%), group work increased their vocabulary and ideas and led them to speak more than when engaged in a whole-class activity, in which each student works alone. In a group, when tasks are shared, there tends to be more collaboration and hence more opportunities to interact and communicate in the target language.

Pair work: Strongly enjoy = 84%; Enjoy = 10%; Not sure = 0; Not enjoy = 6%; Strongly not enjoy = 0. Students said that pair work was as useful for them as group work as they could exchange ideas with each other.

Individual: Strongly enjoy = 24%; Enjoy = 16%; Not sure = 0; Notenjoy = 40% ;Strongly not enjoy = 20%. Students do not enjoy doing individual activities because they feel safer doing pair/group work.

Whole class: Strongly enjoy = 16%;Enjoy = 36%; Not sure = 0; Not enjoy = 40%; Strongly not enjoy = 8%. As mentioned above, students find working in pairs/groups more comfortable than working alone, so both individual and whole class activities got the same reaction, the students did not enjoy them = 40%.

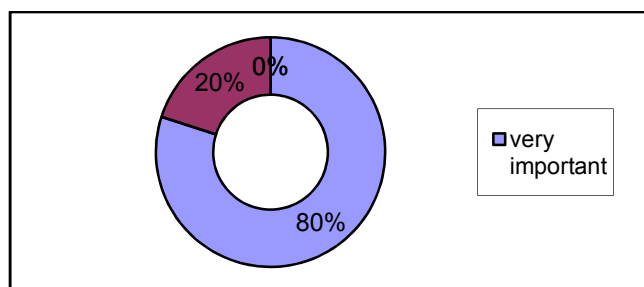**Type 4:** What do you think about learning to speak English at the PPU in Ho Chi Minh city?

Figure 6. Students' thought about the importance of speaking skills

80% chose 1 for very important, because they all have to pass the oral exam to get the B certificate, 20% think it is important, and no one chose not sure and not important. The results show that what students want is to be fluent in English. This part of the research is evaluative. It investigates the effectiveness of the technique with its activities in speaking that were implemented. To help our students, we do not care whether they are traditional or communicative approach. Then, we use our own strategies that are most effective to our teaching at school. Basically, we have to design the tasks, task-based teaching, which are effective for our students to use their knowledge in order to work and learn at the same time. For example, in our speaking classes, we often encourage their speaking by designing some familiar topics: what you did yesterday, the film or the game show on TV, daily routines… Some are interested in speaking, but the others are not. They try to overcome this task by talking to each other about it in Vietnamese. Therefore, what we should do is to ask them some brainstorm ideas, key words and write on the board, use role play. From that point, they can speak about the topic easily to their peers. In addition, we will also give them bonus marks if they can act out in front of the class. Most of them are willing to do this to get the bonus to their better marks on the next tests. What can we do in our reading classes? As a teacher, we have to present all the new words in the text. It is rather difficult for our students to prepare new lessons at home. We always ask them to underline the difficult or keys words first, and they have to give us the meanings after

checking in the glossary or in the dictionary. Thence, most students know their duty and do this at home easily. Then, at school, they concentrate on the content of the reading not translating the separate words of the text. At that time, they see what they prepare at home is useful for the lessons at school. They feel getting involved in the lessons. That is the purpose we really want to achieve. On the other hand, Listening and Writing tasks may be complicated to our students because they require their skills and their ability a lot. For the listening, we ask students to do task listening in the textbook, beside that we let them listen to some popular songs and fill in the blanks. After that, they sing together and then memorizing some words of this song. It relates to the listening tasks in the course or the tasks we design. Gradually, with the repetition of singing the songs, they can recognize the contents of the listening they hear. It takes us sometimes to do this kind of task.

The last and the most difficult task for our students is writing. It is influenced by their mother tongue, their culture in writing. The easiest task we do first is writing simple sentences, then a complex one, which related to the course book (English Unlimited A2). We lead our students to a small paragraph, which makes them not boring to this type of task because it needs more skills than the others do. With some good paragraphs, we read them aloud in front of the class and consider them as samples to the other students. As a result, some of my students are steadily progressing in their study. Moreover, as we know, being influenced by the culture, our students seem to be less confident to raise the questions to contribute the ideas to the lessons, or even comment on their peers' answer. We ourselves also give the students marks when they volunteer in classroom activities and discussions. We hope that day by day, our students will be more self – confident and be able to study independently and actively. Extra games or activities related to the textbooks are often applied in my class to create the friendly atmosphere to my students. Moreover, we try not to form too much pressure on their learning. In addition, we always keep in mind the concept of respecting the students not judging them in order to build personal relationships with students, their families and communities. From the information gained, we understand more about their local culture. With the combination of the local culture and the English culture, we have tried my best to apply the global theories in our own local situation. Like what our professor often says, "Understand globally, but act locally". Consequently, an arising question for Vietnamese educators is which cultural aspects they should take in consideration before trying to adapt developed teaching methods. From our point of view, such of the following points need to be considered:

Students' orientations and motivation

Vietnamese society is typically characterized as a collectivist society. The educational system of Vietnam which is considered as a closed system and knowledge-centered, expect students to "return" the desired behavior. That is assessed by examinations (Le Van Canh, 1999). Vietnamese learners' motivation in learning English is limited; there are three main types in terms of needs. First, many people learn English to enable themselves with further study at universities or colleges. Second, some might learn because of their employment opportunities. And finally, most young learners just learn to pass their examinations. (David, 2000) showed that assessment system is under the control of classroom teachers and other educators; they themselves decide to persuade students that higher quality learning outcomes will be rewarded. It is the educators' duty to help students set their aims of learning, for example in English teaching, which skill learners need to acquire or they learn English for what purposes? Our learners have obvious goals and strong motivation; they easily succeeded in learning by reducing their fear of failure.

Teachers' roles and the relationship between teachers and students

In Viet Nam, teachers are supposed to be the only providers of knowledge and therefore are highly respected by the students, students' parents, and the society as a whole. Teachers maintain such a high profile in their function as the norm of knowledge, wisdom, and behavior that they do not accept their role as "instruments to see that learning takes place" (Medgyes, 1986). Vietnamese teachers should realize their roles that provide students with knowledge and develop it in the most effective possible way. It is necessary for teachers to adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms and their own teaching (Richard &Nunan, 1990). However, theories are always different from practice in specific environment. So modifications to meet the students' expectations and socio-cultural context of teaching and learning, flexibility in using the syllabus and deciding how to approach the classroom culture are on the part of teachers.

Classroom interaction

An examination of classroom discourse show that is teacher-centered and teacher-led. Classroom interaction is largely one-way; either between teacher and individual student or between teacher and the whole class (Le Van Canh). Interaction is directed by teachers through question-answer pattern. Learning follows the hierarchy of first listening to teacher, then repetition, then copying models (Kennett & Knight, 1999). Learning and memorizing rules are viewed as a safe way in the traditional learning style because Vietnamese learners are also influenced by the Confucianism. That means some activities like role play, problem-solving tasks or discussion are strange to them. (Canale& Swain, 1980) suggest that it is relevant to provide learners with the opportunity to take part in meaningful communication interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, e.g to respond to genuine communication needs in realistic second language situations. In Vietnamese context, it is necessary to accept a hierarchy of negotiated interaction which students could achieve first accuracy, then fluency or acquisition following learning. If teachers commit themselves to such a context of teaching and learning, they should be more patient to encourage students' positive attitudes towards learning.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Unquestionably cultural factors have certain influenced on education in general and on teaching and learning approaches in detail. However we can neither make any changes towards the culture itself nor its related in aspects such as people's points of view, their beliefs etc… The best solution should be not adopted but theoretical tenets in such a way satisfying or meeting the cultural contexts in different countries. From our point of view, the findings above have following implications for English teaching and learning in Vietnam: First, for teachers and educators it is time to reconsider the most suitable approach to teaching and learning. Traditional methods are still favorable, not absolutely outdated. (ZhenhuiRao, 2006) suggested that the current communicative language teaching is not perfectly suitable for all Chinese students. Therefore teachers should be always very cautious in choosing teaching methods. In English class, learners should be given chances to participate in meaningful interaction which is not feasible in every classroom. Besides, Vietnamese students are influenced by Confucianism, so they seem slow in adapting to the participatory approach to education on account of their traditional passiveness (Canh, 1999). Therefore a flexible combination of different ways of teaching and learning turn out to be effective and applicable in Vietnamese context. In our

teaching practice, we often use various methods of teaching to suit different situations. In detail, if we know our students prefer learning rules before speaking or writing, we can use Grammar-Translation method before getting them to do tasks. Second, the testing system needs reforming in order to reduce the students' pressure to pass the exams. Canh also suggests that students should be tested in terms of skills to use the language communicatively rather than a good memory of language rules. The traditional approach could be improved by adjusting it to meet the principles of communicatively, e.g. focus on both forms and functions of the language. In addition to the form of assessment system, basic criterion to evaluate students' levels should be made clear and logical. For example, what level we should put students at university or high school, or secondary school graduate students, how much of grammar and vocabulary they should acquire at a specific level. Finally, we also need to improve the teacher training course. Mc. Groarty (1984) asserts that students, program planners, administrators and teachers will be able to provide better instructions only after considering the specific purposes for which the language is to be used. And this is supported during teacher training courses. Training should help to develop teachers' ability to decide the appropriateness, feasibility, applicability and practicality of methods against their socio-cultural and pedagogical situations. Trainers in teacher training courses should be provided with hands-on experience in teaching English effectively in their local context, with a partnership to address the challenging from the cultural and educational system. In our opinion, mutual understanding and sympathy between teacher and leaner can help us overcome the challenge easily. If we know our students' characteristics and their expectation from us, we might set ourselves some principles in teaching. Teachers are not only knowledge providers but also consultants helping their learners chose suitable strategies, and also guiders facilitating classroom interaction communicatively. Teachers should let students familiarize themselves with working in pairs or groups on problem-solving tasks, projects and discussion in order to develop analytic thinking, increase communicative interaction. In addition, to promote students' creativity and understand questioning in class should always be encouraged by teachers, by giving students chances to contribute, share ideas, and express their opinions as much as they can. Being tolerant and patient when teaching is also the teachers' responsibility, which help effective and successful learning outcomes.

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