Investigating the Relationship between Speaking Ability and Willingness to Communicate in Differentiated-Flipped Classroom among Thai EFL Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study emphasizes the relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate (WTC) after the implementation of the speaking instruction using a differentiated-flipped learning approach. The population of this study was 245 second-fourth-year undergraduates, who enrolled in English for Professional Communication course. To this end, 30 Thai EFL undergraduates from the Faculty of Agro-Industry were selected using intact sampling to participate in this study. The research was conducted for 12 weeks, which focused predominantly on providing instruction through online and face-to-face platforms. The content and the activities were differentiated based on students' interest, readiness, and learning profile as well as designed to enhance the main variables affecting the situational WTC, which were communicative competence, self-confidence, interlocutor, topic, and conversational context. The data were collected through a quantitative technique including the WTC questionnaire and the speaking test scores in order to examine the relationship between the speaking ability and the WTC. The Pearson Product's Moment Correlation was employed to analyze the correlation coefficient.

The findings revealed that there was no significant difference at a .05 level of significance of the relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate. However, there was a positive correlation between speaking ability and willingness to communicate. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that the Thai EFL students who had high speaking scores may not signify the high levels of WTC, and vice versa. The study offers some suggestions and conclusions with pedagogical implications for further classroom practice and research.

การศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความสามารถด้านการพูดภาษาอังกฤษและความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารในห้องเรียนแบบกลับด้านตามความสามารถของผู้เรียนระดับปริญญาตรี

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความสามารถด้านการพูดภาษาอังกฤษและความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารหลังการสอนพูดโดยใช้วิธีการสอนแบบกลับด้านตามความสามารถของผู้เรียน ประชากรที่ใช้ในงานวิจัยนี้คือนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีชาวไทยที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารทางวิชาชีพ ชั้นปีที่ 2-4 จำนวน 245 คน โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาจากคณะอุตสาหกรรมเกษตร จำนวน 30 คน โดยใช้กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่มีอยู่แล้วตามสภาพธรรมชาติ (Intact Sampling) ใช้ระยะเวลา 12 สัปดาห์ ในการทดลองสอนและเก็บข้อมูลการจัดการเรียนการสอนในงานวิจัยนี้มีทั้งการเรียนผ่านการใช้สื่อออนไลน์นอกห้องเรียนและการเรียนในชั้นเรียนควบคู่กันไป เนื้อหาและกิจกรรมมีการออกแบบให้เหมาะกับความสนใจ ความสามารถและรูปแบบการเรียนรู้และทำกิจกรรมตามความถนัดของผู้เรียน รวมทั้งออกแบบให้ตอบสนองต่อตัวแปรแบบสถานการณ์ที่มีผลต่อความเต็มใจในการสื่อสาร ได้แก่ ความสามารถด้านการสื่อสาร ความมั่นใจในตนเอง คู่สนทนา หัวข้อสนทนา และบริบทการสนทนา เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลคือแบบสอบถามความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารและแบบทดสอบความสามารถด้านการพูด สถิติที่ใช้วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลคือ ค่าสัมประสิทธิ์สหสัมพันธ์แบบเพียร์สัน

ผลการศึกษาพบว่าไม่มีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 แต่มีความสัมพันธ์ไปในทางบวก ระหว่างความสามารถด้านการพูดและความเต็มใจในการสื่อสาร ดังนั้น จึงสรุปได้ว่านักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีชาวไทยที่มีคะแนนความสามารถด้านการพูดสูงอาจไม่มีความเต็มใจในการสื่อสาร และในทางกลับกันนักศึกษาที่มีระดับความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารสูงอาจไม่มีคะแนนความสามารถด้านการพูดสูงเช่นกัน งานวิจัยนี้ยังได้เสนอข้อเสนอแนะเชิงวิชาการเพื่อการนำไปปรับใช้ในชั้นเรียนและในงานวิจัยต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: ความสามารถด้านการพูด, การเรียนการสอนตามความสามารถของผู้เรียน,
การเรียนการสอนแบบกลับด้าน, ห้องเรียนแบบกลับด้าน, ความเต็มใจในการสื่อสาร

Introduction

There can be no denying that today's classrooms are a diverse lot. The students have a mixed ability especially in EFL context. Borja et. al. (2015) stated that nowadays, classrooms in the twenty- first century are not only heterogeneous class, but also various in many aspects. The components of the diversification of the classroom population are therefore readiness level, interests, and learning profiles. Goh (2007) also stated that in EFL context, speaking is an essential tool for thinking and learning. Students who have confidence in oral communication can make them versatile in their personal, academic, professional and civic lives (Allen, 2002). Thus, the undergraduates are expected to be confident in speaking and oral communication so that they can make use and function in the academic and professional settings effectively (Khan, 2015).

Since speaking is a productive skill that students need time to produce and practice (Bashir, 2011), one of the recent learning approaches that can boost students' interaction in class is flipped learning approach. The students would be required to study the content provided by teachers prior to the classroom, then they would have to do some activities in class. It provided plenty of time for students to do the activities since the students had already learned the contents before class. For these reasons, the one-size-fits-all teaching instruction does not convey good teaching instruction practices in these types of settings.

Besides, one of the important factors that may have an effect on speaking ability is their willingness to communicate (WTC). As WTC was defined as a "readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person, before they will get engaged in L2 interaction" (MacIntyre et.al., 1998,). That is, if the students are not willing to communicate with others, they may move away from communicating and therefore result in the lack of the opportunity to practice speaking. Hence, it was crucial to design the instruction concerning the factors that affected WTC.

The purpose of the present study is therefore to investigate the relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate (WTC) of Thai EFL undergraduates. To this end, it could help the teachers to gain a better understanding in enhancing students' speaking ability and willingness to communicate. In terms of planning the speaking instruction using differentiated-flipped learning, various factors should be addressed and managed in both online and face-to-face instructions, including the readiness, interest, learning profile, social-individual, cultural, and

interlocutors in order to optimize students' speaking ability and WTC throughout the course to achieve the best possible outcomes in EFL learning.

Objective of the study

To investigate the relationship between speaking ability and levels of willingness to communicate (WTC) after the implementation of the speaking instruction using differentiated-flipped learning approach.

Definition of terms

1. Speaking ability refers to the ability to engage in the interpersonal and presentational modes of communication. In this study, it refers to the ability to communicate in spoken English in the context of daily life and the global workplace, which is evaluated by the speaking tasks created by the researcher.

2. Willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to a learner's desire to communicate in a second or foreign language conversation when given opportunities (MacIntyre et. al., 1998). In this study, it refers to a student's readiness and willingness to engage in communication in English language at a particular moment and situation. WTC was enhanced through each stage of the instruction and activities concerning with situational variables that affect situational WTC, which were communicative

competence, self-confidence, interlocutors, topics, and conversational context.

3. The differentiated-flipped learning approach refers to a compatible match of differentiation and flipping to offer a rich learning environment that cultivates differentiation, increase flexibility, and provide students with strategies to meet students' needs both in class and out of class (Carbaugh & Doubet, 2016). In this study, it refers to the approach that combines the concept of differentiated instruction and flipped learning approach together to provide opportunities for the students to study the content and do some activities regarding students' readiness, interest, and learning profile via online tools before the class time. Then, in the classroom, the students have had sufficient time to practice activities and do the tasks regarding their readiness level, interest, and learning profile.

Methodology

The study was conducted using the quasi-experimental design. It was conducted in the university setting where the randomization is impractical. The students have choices to choose elective courses on their preferences according to the university policy, so it is inappropriate to randomly assign students to control and experimental group. Hence, implementing the

quasi-experimental design was more practical in this study (Creswell, 2014).

Population and sample

From 245 Thai EFL undergraduates who enrolled in the English for Professional Communication course at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand, 30 participants, (8 males and 22 females) from the Faculty of Agro-Industry majoring in Food Processing Engineering and Fermentation Technology in Food Industry were selected by means of intact sampling based on the class assigned to the researcher by the Office of General Education. They all signed a consent form that they would participate in the present study. In terms of Internet accessibility and electronic devices, all of the students owned a smartphone and a laptop. Most students used a tablet instead of using a hard copy. All the electronic devices were able to connect to the Internet. Thus, the students were equivalent to each other in terms of the background knowledge of the English language as they all passed the Foundation English course and the ability to access the Internet.

Research Instruments

To collect the data required for achieving and answering the research question, two instruments were used in the present study. They are speaking tests and the WTC questionnaire. Regarding the speaking tests, which were created by the researcher, they were used to assess the students' speaking ability in terms of the interpersonal and presentational modes of communication after participating in the instruction. For the WTC questionnaire, it was adapted from Reinders and Wattana (2014) and Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2016). The questions were adjusted based on the factors that could enhance levels of WTC including the communicative competence, self-confidence, interlocutors, topics, and conversational context. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five items with four Likert's scale options. All the instruments were validated by three experts, who were invited to check the appropriateness of the questionnaire. The Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) was used in the validation process.

Procedure

The study was conducted in a public university in Bangkok, Thailand with undergraduates who enrolled in English for Professional Communication course. The data collection covered 12 weeks. The placement test was conducted at the beginning of the course in order to assess students' readiness level, so that they can do the tiered activities that match their readiness level during participating in the instruction. The speaking tests and the WTC questionnaire were carried out after the implementation of the

speaking instruction using differentiated-flipped learning approach. Then, the correlation coefficient between the speaking scores from the speaking tests and the scores from the WTC questionnaire were analyzed using Pearson Product's Moment Correlation. The collection of the data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The collection of the data

Week	Data Collection
Week 1	- The placement test and the pre-test of the WTC questionnaire were conducted to the students.
	- The orientation of the speaking instruction using the differentiated-flipped learning approach.
Week 2-11	- The students explored the content via the given website and do online activities (online instruction).
	- The students participated in the activities in class (face-to-face instruction).
	- At the end of each unit, the speaking tests were administered.
Week 12	- The post-test of the WTC questionnaire was conducted with the students.

Conceptual Framework

In the present study, the concepts of differentiated instruction, flipped learning approach, WTC, and speaking instruction were synthesized and combined to provide the speaking instruction using differentiated-flipped learning approach in order to investigate the relationship between students' speaking ability and WTC. Regarding the differentiated instruction, it accommodated a class that students had differences. Teachers could differentiate the instruction and offer different approaches to what students would learn (content), how they would learn (process), or how they would demonstrate what they had learned (product) based on their readiness level, interest, or learning profile with the intention to enhance students' performance (Tomlinson, 2017).

Concerning the flipped learning approach, the students would be required to study the content provided by teachers prior to the classroom, then they would have to do some activities in class. It could boost students' interaction in class since the students had plenty of time to participate in the class activities (Bashir et al., 2011). In terms of WTC, it is a fundamental concept for efficient interaction and language production. It involves a student's desire to communicate in a second or foreign language conversation when given the opportunity (MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC could be viewed from two levels, which are a trait level and a situational level. In this study, the situational variables, including communicative competence, self-confidence, interlocutor, topic, and conversational context were the main focus of the study because they had a direct influence on the WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and had a more immediate impact as well (Pattapong, 2010).

Therefore, all the aforementioned concepts were employed and designed

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based on the speaking instruction, which synthesized from Harmer (2015) and Thonbury (2013). The speaking instruction that provided online instruction for the students to study the differentiated content, the process and the product prior to the class and the face-to-face instruction that provide activities in class. There were four steps, including awareness, assure, appropriation, and activate.

The conceptual framework of the current study is presented in Figure 1

Results

The relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate was conducted by comparing the speaking tests scores and the results from the willingness to communicate questionnaire after the implementation of the speaking instruction using differentiated-flipped learning approach by using Pearson Correlation. The results are presented in Table 2.
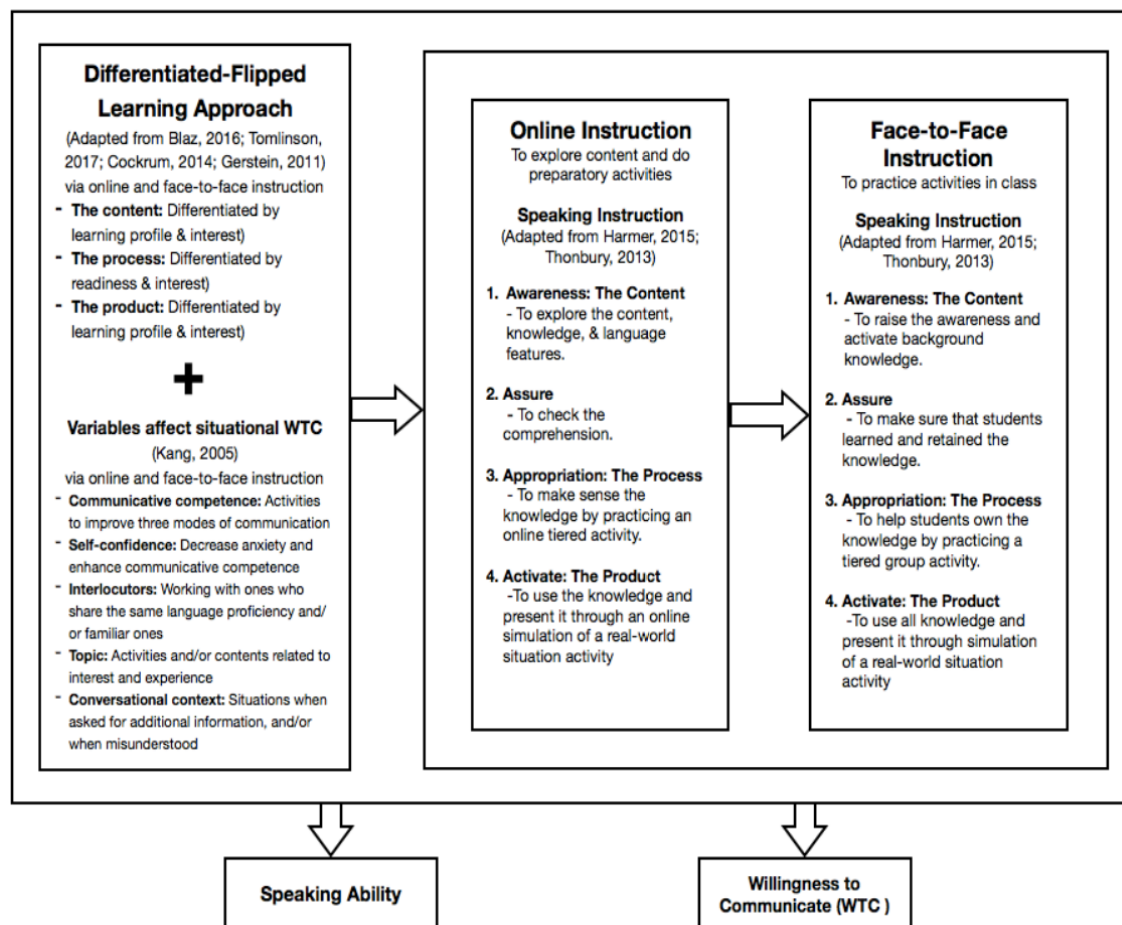
Figure 1

The conceptual framework

Differentiated-Flipped Learning Approach
(Adapted from Blaz, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017; Cockrum, 2014; Gerstein, 2011)
via online and face-to-face instruction
- **The content:** Differentiated by learning profile & interest)
- **The process:** Differentiated by readiness & interest)
- **The product:** Differentiated by learning profile & interest)

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Variables affect situational WTC
(Kang, 2005)
via online and face-to-face instruction
- **Communicative competence:** Activities to improve three modes of communication
- **Self-confidence:** Decrease anxiety and enhance communicative competence
- **Interlocutors:** Working with ones who share the same language proficiency and/or familiar ones
- **Topic:** Activities and/or contents related to interest and experience
- **Conversational context:** Situations when asked for additional information, and/or when misunderstood

Online Instruction
To explore content and do preparatory activities

Speaking Instruction
(Adapted from Harmer, 2015; Thonbury, 2013)

1. **Awareness: The Content**
   - To explore the content, knowledge, & language features.

2. **Assure**
   - To check the comprehension.

3. **Appropriation: The Process**
   - To make sense the knowledge by practicing an online tiered activity.

4. **Activate: The Product**
   - To use the knowledge and present it through an online simulation of a real-world situation activity

Face-to-Face Instruction
To practice activities in class

Speaking Instruction
(Adapted from Harmer, 2015; Thonbury, 2013)

1. **Awareness: The Content**
   - To raise the awareness and activate background knowledge.

2. **Assure**
   - To make sure that students learned and retained the knowledge.

3. **Appropriation: The Process**
   - To help students own the knowledge by practicing a tiered group activity.

4. **Activate: The Product**
   - To use all knowledge and present it through simulation of a real-world situation activity

Speaking Ability

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Table 2

The correlation between the speaking ability and willingness to communicate

Variables		Willingness to Communicate
	Pearson Correlation	.027
Speaking ability	Sig.	.887*
	N	30

*p ≤ .05

From Table 2, the results indicated that there was not significantly different at .05 level of significance of the relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate. Surprisingly, there was a positive correlation between the speaking ability and willingness to communicate. The effect size was .027 (r = .027, Sig. = .887).

Discussion

The findings revealed that there was not significantly different at. 05 level of significance of the relationship between speaking ability and WTC. In other words, the participants who had high speaking scores may not signify the high levels of WTC, and vice versa. Although the content and the activities were designed based on the readiness, interest, and learning profile as well as the situational variables that affected WTC, the participants initiated a conversation spontaneously regarding the provided situations. The reasons behind the decision to begin a conversation tend to be influenced by other factors rather than the speaking ability. The result ties well with several previous studies wherein the individuals' speaking ability was not related to their WTC. Rahmatollahi and Khalili (2015) found that speaking ability of EFL learners, who were homogenous in terms of language proficiency, which was not correlated with WTC. Also, Matsuoka (2004) investigated WTC among Japanese college students, and it was revealed that WTC and English proficiency were not correlate. From this standpoint, it can be considered that there were other factors that influenced WTC of Thai EFL undergraduates rather than their speaking ability regarding the finding of the present study. From the results of the speaking tests score, the individual characteristics of each students also played an important role in the decision to speak. The students who were not a talkative person did not express their ideas much in the speaking tests even the vocabulary used was knowledgeable. Additionally, the students at all levels were worried about losing face if they say something ungrammatical especially when they participated in the speaking activities both interpersonal and presentational modes of communication. They usually told the teacher that they were worried about embarrassing themselves in front of the classroom. This can be inferred that the cultural context has an influence on their WTC. Lastly, the interlocutors, the students were required to work with the ones who had the same readiness level to do the tiered activities based on the teacher assigned, and it was revealed that they tended to speak less if they had to work with unfamiliar friends. For

example, the intermediate students who worked with their friends from different majors were found a touch of hesitation in their speaking. Meanwhile, the novice students who worked with their close friends appeared to initiate the conversation quite a lot. The present findings also supported Pattaphong (2015)'s study which concluded that social-individual context, cultural context, and classroom context were the important factors that have an effect on WTC of Thai EFL undergraduates.

Even though there was no statistically significant relationship between speaking ability and WTC in the present study, there was a positive correlation between those two variables. One possible explanation for this result is the use of the website and social media. Since online technology is fast becoming a crucial instrument in language learning. The students explored the content through the provided website regarding the preferences modes of learning at anywhere and anytime as well as participated in the activities that were differentiated based on their readiness, interest, and learning profile by using Facebook as a hub to share their tasks and interact with their peers. These can facilitate students' learning and speaking ability. This result reflected the finding of Li (2017) and Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon (2013), who found that

computer technology and social media suited students in this digital era as well as promoted their learning. Regarding the WTC in this study, the engagement in social media, which students could post, share, and comment their tasks enhanced students' participation and WTC. From the observation of the participation in the Facebook, the number of the students' participation increased in every unit. This also resulted in the active participation in the classroom. The finding is in the lines of Alipour (2018) and Chotipaktanasook (2014)'s study, who found that social media had a positive effect of Iranian and Thai EFL students respectively. Therefore, the implementation of the online technology and social media, which facilitated and enhanced both speaking ability and WTC could somewhat affect the positive relationship between those two variables.

This combination of findings indicates a need to understand the various factors that affect the relationship between speaking ability and WTC. EFL teachers should be aware that students' speaking ability may not predict the levels of WTC, and vice versa. Nevertheless, they had a positive correlation. It is recommended that planning a speaking instruction in differentiated- flipped learning to enhance speaking ability and WTC for

Thai EFL learners required various factors to be addressed and managed in the instruction, including the readiness, interest, learning profile, social-individual, cultural, interlocutors, and the online platforms in order to optimize the students' speaking ability and WTC throughout the course to achieve the best possible outcomes in EFL learning.

Recommendations

1. Recommendation for pedagogical practice

In Thai EFL context, there are various factors that influence on students' willingness to communicate. Since it was found from this study that there was no significant relationship between speaking ability and willingness to communicate, the teachers should be aware that the high level of speaking ability students may not have a high level of willingness to communicate, and vice versa. Hence, in order to improve students' speaking ability, designing the lessons and activities that are suitable for students' interest, readiness, and learning profile as well as flipping the class by using online tools are the beneficial ways to free up the class time for the students in this digital era. Regarding the students' willingness to communicate, the teachers should develop lessons and materials that can influence on increasing students' willingness to communicate. This may motivate and encourage students to communicate and speak more, so that the teacher can assist and facilitate them while they practice their speaking.

2. Recommendation for further study

The samples of present study were only the students from the faculty of Agro-Industry, which provided an overall picture of Thai EFL undergraduates. Therefore, for further research, students from various fields of study should be carried out in order to investigate the insights into the differences of Thai EFL undergraduates.

Acknowledgement

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