

**Combining Oral Competence with Digital Competence to Innovate the L2 Spoken
Language Classroom Syllabus**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a proposal to create a bilingual Taiwan and on how university English language classes can contribute to the realization of this goal. Improving digital literacy is considered to be one aspect that will support the bilingualization of Taiwan. With the plan focusing on primary and secondary students, a question can be how universities, specific departments, or even individual teachers can contribute to the goal. This paper evaluates the current spoken language objectives for the English Department of a Taiwanese university and proposes changes to combine the teaching of digital competence alongside the development of spoken language competence. It then reports on the implementation of one segment of the proposal that focuses on digital support for storytelling in one section of the course. Application of the proposal can be extended to other universities or universities in any country interested in combining digital literacy with language learning.

Keywords: bilingualization of Taiwan, digital competence, digital literacy, L2 spoken language competence, digital storytelling, oral presentation, course design

INTRODUCTION

On December 6, 2018 the "Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030" was announced by Taiwan's National Development Council (NDC), the policy planning agency of the Executive Yuan (Taiwan's Executive Branch) whose role is to "strengthen the execution efficacy" of the current administration by enhancing "the government's overall plan for national development and to effectively manage program implementation and budget performance" among the various Ministries of the government (National Development Council, n.d.).

One of the NDC's four Major Tasks for 2019 is "Deeply cultivating talents and building a solid foundation for national development," and a subpoint of this Major Task is "Developing Taiwan into a bilingual nation" (National Development Council, n.d.). According to National Development Council Minister Chen Mei-ling, associations such as the European Chamber of Commerce and Academia Sinica have promoted the idea of Taiwan becoming a bilingual country and Chen believes that "in the era of the digital economy, an excellent language ability is necessary for the development of Taiwan" (Nguyen, 2018).

NDC Minister Chen Mei-ling also explained the motivation for the push toward bilingualization by stating that "it is important for a nation to have broad horizons and possess international communication skills to stay competitive in the era of globalization" (Hsu, 2018). Chen also believes that this promotion of English language learning will be more effective than past drives because "[t]his time, a demand-driven approach will guide the effort with a focus on verbal communication. Gone is the emphasis on exams, that drove teachers and students to give top priority to spelling and grammar accuracy. Rather, we hope that by 2030 people will be brave and ready to speak, listen, read and write in English, even if they still make mistakes" (Hsu, 2018).

The “Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030” states that the NDC intends to implement a full scale bilingualization of Taiwan’s education system, and an important method of achieving this bilingualization is by “making effective use of digital technology and promoting individualized learning” and by “adopting a dynamic teaching approach with focus on daily English use” (National Development Council, 2018). One suggestion for creating dynamic teaching is to promote CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and establishing a TEIE (Teach English in English) policy for primary and secondary schools. While the NDC Blueprint has bilingual education goals for the primary and secondary level, nothing is mentioned in relation to university level courses. Instead the role of universities in the Blueprint is to provide the human resources required to teach bilingual classes at the primary and secondary levels. This will be done by providing subsidies at teacher training universities to develop TEIE research centers.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) (2018) also announced five policies to reach the goals set by the NDC. The MOE policies all mirror the announced NDC goals and include making effective use of digital technology and adopting dynamic teaching approaches. In terms of addressing university level programs to increase the bilingualization of Taiwanese society, the MOE only mentions increasing the number of degree programs for international students. However, the MOE policy statement does provide more detailed targets for the goal of developing the teachers that will be needed at the primary and secondary levels.

Teacher preparation and professional development: In accordance with the “CLIL Teacher Preparation Plan”, promulgated in November 2018, the MOE will host pre- and in-service teacher training programs to ensure that there are enough qualified teachers for CLIL classes in primary and secondary schools. Eighteen teacher training universities have already stated that they are willing to take part in the plan, and it is expected that 2,000 teachers (the short-term goal) will be ready to begin teaching in 2022; 3,000 teachers (the medium-term goal) in 2026; and 4,000 teachers (the long-term goal) in 2030 (Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2018).

A final aspect of the NDC Blueprint that is relevant to this paper is the goal of “cultivating friendly bilingual tourism environment” where the English proficiency of transportation personnel like bus and taxi drivers is improved, and tourism practitioners have sufficient English proficiency (National Development Council, 2018).

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTION

In light of the NDC goals to promote digital literacy and the desire to increase the English language proficiency of the next generation of students, the question being considered in this paper is how can university level English language instructors modify or innovate their courses in meet these national goals of digital competence and spoken language competence, especially at universities that are not one of the 18 teacher training universities mentioned by the MOE and NDC.

In this paper, I will examine syllabus designs for spoken language training classes from my own university, propose ways that spoken language training classes can be further improved to meet the goals of the “Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030,” and finally report on ways that I have already made alterations to it to promote digital competence. The purpose of this paper is to create a design for a course the combines the goals of improving English speaking competence with digital competence.

This paper takes an action research perspective which is “inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. It typically is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze the data to improve their own practice” as defined by George Mason University (Action Research, n.d.) with the goal of “creat[ing] a simple, practical, repeatable process of iterative learning, evaluation, and improvement that leads to increasingly better results for schools, teachers, or programs” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2015).

While the curriculum designs are intended to meet the education goals of Taiwan specifically, I believe that combining digital competence with spoken language competence can be a goal for any country where English is being taught as a foreign language. Thus I believe that the model I create can serve as a start for course design in other universities, especially ones in Asian countries that have a learning and teaching style similar to Taiwan.

CURRENT CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES

The university that I am associated with has the following objectives for its three-semester oral training program for students enrolled in the Department of English (2018) according to the current curriculum guide published by the department.

Semester One

Oral Training Goals: The goal for the first semester is to acclimate students to the use of English as a communicative tool. First, students should be comfortable speaking in English in extended informal settings. Then they should be able to recognize, respond and converse in the appropriate register when interacting in social contexts which require more formal levels of communication. Next, students can be placed in situations where English is needed to successfully accomplish a task. Students should be able to informally present their decisions upon completing the task. Finally, students should be comfortable speaking in front of an audience and should be able to give simple directions, express opinions, and finally be able to make impromptu speeches in front of the whole class.

Listening Goals: Students are expected to be able to improve their ability to comprehend various types of listening passages, which include short dialogues, casual conversations, current issues, broadcast news, academic discussions, and academic lectures. The material will progress in difficulty. They may be exposed to EFL material at the beginning, but they should be exposed to authentic material by the end of the semester.

Semester Two

Oral Training Goals: The goal of the second semester is develop competence in using English to present information in in informal and formal settings. Students must be able to organize and deliver formal and informal presentations in front of an audience. They should be able to quickly organize an informal presentation when asked to share thoughts, information, or opinions on the spot. When given time to prepare, they should be able to make organized and effective presentations that include the use of visual aids that meet the required guidelines for informative and persuasive speeches.

Reading Goals: The general goal of the course is to improve the students’ ability to converse on subjects in a variety of content areas. Students may also acquire specific knowledge on the hows and whys of constructing specific types of speeches or participate in discussions. The reading component should focus

on articles in these and other related subject areas and on readings from speech and communication textbooks. Authentic materials intended for native English speakers will be adopted as the major source of material for student readings.

Semester Three

Oral Training Goals: The goal of the third semester is to build upon skills from the first two semesters while further guiding students into language use, critical thinking, and cultural understanding as citizens of the world. Students should learn to present information in formal and informal situations with the intention of advocating a point of view, changing minds, or demonstrating understanding of a topic. They may be placed in simulations where they have to improvise and adapt with little preparation. They should learn to evaluate and critique the viewpoints of others and effectively use evidence to support their ideas. Students may be encouraged to develop the ability to use the English language to persuade, influence and create change.

Reading Goals: The general goal of the course is to improve the students' ability to discuss subjects in a variety of content areas. The reading component can focus on articles needed to provide evidence for a point of view. Students will be expected to evaluate and critique the readings to find flaws and weaknesses in the points of view. Students can also be expected to research and discover their own evidence when necessary so that they are able to effectively discuss or debate a topic. Authentic materials intended for native English speakers will be adopted as the major source of material for student readings.

ANALYSIS OR CURRENT CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

The three semester arc of Oral Training courses shows a progression that moves from acclimating first semester freshman students to a learning environment that will be conducted totally in English and where they will also be expected to interact in English, to a second semester that prepares students to speak professionally while delivering formal public presentations, to finally being able to think critically in order to be more effective at advocating and changing minds – all while speaking in a culturally appropriate manner even with little time to prepare in advance in their third semester. All three semesters also include listening or reading goals which I have not focused on.

What is missing from these guidelines is any explicit mention of digital literacy objectives. The NDC (2018) highlights the need to improve digital literacy in their Blueprint's section on "making effective use of digital technology and promoting individualized learning." The methods for making effective use of digital technology in the Blueprint are by

- Creating an online digital learning platform
- Making use of digital distance learning
- Making efficient use of emerging technology like AR (Augmented Reality) and AI (Artificial Intelligence)
- Partnering with private resources

In light of these policy intentions, modifying our department objectives by including new objectives related to digital literacy can facilitate meeting the national education goals presented in the Blueprint. Therefore I will present a new syllabus design for one course and reflect on experimentation with making these changes in my own classes as a start to an investigation on how our course objective can be modified.

A NEW DESIGN TO COMBINE ORAL AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE

Overall Goal

The goal of a new course should be to improve the oral communication ability of English majors in the context of prepared public speaking while simultaneously training them in digital tools that will enhance their presentations and allow them to reach a wider and more diverse audience. The public speaking lessons will be combined with co-taught digital literacy lessons by invited Subject Matter Experts (SME) to introduce students to the tools (presentation, video editing, animation) needed to enhance their presentations. By the end of the course, students should be able to create their own videos and animations on cross-cultural topics of their own intrinsic interest that can be posted to public platforms like YouTube. This course can also meet one of the NDC goals by becoming part of the online digital knowledge network that they are creating, and it can be one of the English taught courses that are accessible to international students.

The course would have the following features:

- is co-taught and collaborative
- provides freshmen university students with training in digital literacies
- is learner-centered and enhances learner autonomy
- increases cross-cultural awareness
- motivates creativity

To accomplish these goals, the course can combine traditional public speaking training with training in the use of digital presentation and content creation tools. During the semester students would practice public speaking as they would do in a traditional class, but in addition Subject Matter Experts (SME) with hands-on experience in professional settings would be invited to the class to train the students to use advanced features of digital tools such as presentation software, video editing software, and animation software.

The course is designed to feature four modules connected to SME lessons and a public speaking activity. Three of the modules will combine training to become literate in a digital tool, training to master one form of public speaking, and an assignment to creatively apply the digital tool to autonomously researched content in order to produce multimedia content that can be placed on public platforms like YouTube.

Here is a descriptions of the four modules:

Module 1: Critical thinking, research, and data collection in a digital world.

Unlimited internet access in our modern world means that anyone who goes online is flooded with information. Some of it is reputable, but much of it is not. We begin by learning to evaluate information from the internet in terms of currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy, and purpose.

Then we will learn to use digital research tools that the students can use to find authoritative information and to process and organize data.

SME or SMEs will be a person or persons familiar with library research tools, and other relevant digital tools for processing and organizing data.

While this module will not be linked to the production of any specific spoken word product, the principles learned will be applied to all the future projects assigned in the class.

Module 2: Presentation Software and the Telling of Legends and Folktales

This module begins the integrations of public speaking skills with the use of digital tools to enhance presentations.

The public speaking content will focus on urban legends and storytelling. Urban legends (Brunvand, 1981; Brunvand, 2003; Fleming, Brunvand, & Boyd, 1994) are a fun way to continue to bolster the critical thinking skills of students as they are commonly spread across in the internet and are often plausible enough to be considered truthful. Urban legends are also constantly evolving to match the current culture and state of technology. We will focus on improving fluency, clarity of speech, and expressiveness by retelling classic urban legends.

The digital literacy content of the module will focus on becoming competent with the use of digital presentation tools. This will include using software like PowerPoint, but at an advanced level. The SME will train students to use lesser known and advanced features, and also introduce new tools and mobile apps that the students can use to enhance a live presentation. The goal here is to train students to impress a live audience by making creative, professional, and attention getting presentations.

Once students are familiar with the digital tools and the public speaking targets, they will deliver their own storytelling speeches that are enhanced with a multimedia presentation tool. All the stories will have a theme. For example, we could focus on telling stories about life in Taiwan, or tell traditional Taiwanese folktales or legends.

When we reach this point of creating content, one benefit is that students can come to a greater understanding of their own culture and also create a story that can be videoed and posted publicly, allowing an international audience to gain exposure and an understanding of Taiwan and its culture.

Modules 3: Video Editing Software and Demonstration Speech Presentations

This module continues the integration of digital tools and training in public speaking.

The public speaking content will focus on training students to deliver a Demonstration Speech, which is also commonly referred to as a Process Speech. In this speech, the goal is to explain how to do something in an organized, informative, and easy-to-understand format. The in-class assignment for this module will be to fluently deliver a demonstration speech in front of the class. This speech can be enhanced using the presentation software from the previous module.

The digital literacy content will focus on training students to use video editing software. The target of this training will be to provide students with the knowledge to create a video similar to the many DIY videos you can see on YouTube and other social media channels. The SME will be a person with experience creating videos, especially videos using mobile apps.

The project for this module will to create a demonstration video that applies the training the students in video editing, public speaking, and independent investigation and research into Taiwan culture. For example, the students can work in groups to investigate a traditional Taiwanese craft or cuisine.

Modules 4: Animation Software and Informative Speaking

This module completes the integration of digital tools and training in public speaking.

The public speaking content will focus on training students to deliver an informative speech. The goal will be to explain a high value and high interest topic to the speaker's audience. The in-class assignment for this module will be to fluently deliver an informative speech in front of the class. This speech can be enhanced using the presentation software from the previous module.

The digital literacy content will focus on training students to use animation software. The target of this training will be to provide students with the knowledge to create a video similar to the many informative videos you can see on YouTube and other social media channels. The SME will be a person with experience creating animation videos, and possibly with experience doing this with the use of mobile apps.

The final product for this module will be to produce an animated informative video that can be placed on a public platform like YouTube. The students will work in groups to research a topic of their own interest. The goal of the project will be to research a topic of interest to a both a local and international audience that is related to Taiwan's place in a global community. Students could research green energy in Taiwan for example. All the digital tools that students have been exposed to during the semester will be utilized to complete this project.

RATIONALE FOR A NEW COURSE DESIGN

The rationale for this new course design is that by introducing student to these digital tools, they can acquire a toolkit that they can use throughout their years of university study, and often into their later professional careers.

Simultaneously, students will improve their ability to deliver interesting, credible, and professional speeches on topics of intrinsic interest. As they autonomously research these topics, students will develop a global view of Taiwan, and become more aware of cross-cultural issues.

This course is offered during the second semester of the freshman year. At this point, students are often still adjusting to the demands of a university education. How to research, how to learn autonomously, how to present and support their own ideas independently are new competencies that are necessary, but often learned without the direct guidance and support of their faculty. This course hopes to take a learner-centered approach and provide guidance that will allow students to find their own voices, while also challenging them to work autonomously and bring critical thinking into the evaluation and analysis of topic that they are interested in.

An additional benefit of exposing students to new digital tools at this point in their universities careers is that they can continue to learn new tool in the following years. If there are students who feel anxious and too inhibited to tackle the task of learning how to use a digital tool on their own, this course will provide the support and the collaborative environment that can help them to overcome this anxiety. In this way,

the hope is to open a gateway that will lead students to autonomously develop their digital competency in the future. Nguyen (2013) has discussed the advantages that collaboration brings to producing an L2 oral presentation with technological support being the first advantage mentioned. Nguyen (2013) concluded that the class collaboration allowed students to “achieve higher than they could do in an individual presentation.”

In addition, students from humanities departments often have less exposure to digital tools, and lower expectations for their ability to use them. This can result in students who are less competitive in a job market that expects comfort and familiarity with digital tools. Although English department students can have depth and breadth of knowledge in our department’s specialized areas of study (English Literature, English Linguistics, and English Language Teaching), they may not be able to reach a wide audience with their knowledge. Without the ability to make their voices heard in an online digital community, our students will be limited to audiences that can only be met face-to-face in live interactions. By making changes in the course objectives, the hope is that it will provide students with the ability to reach a larger audience, making them more marketable and more competitive upon graduation. Murray and Pérez (2014) have discussed the need to develop holistic digital strategies at the university level. In their study, 72% of students would have failed the digital literacy test designed by the researchers, showing that exposure does not equal understanding. They conclude that universities need to have evolving policies for training students in digital literacy since it has implications for socioeconomic status and social mobility.

TESTING OF A NEW MODULE IN CLASS

I began implementing part of the proposed course design in 2018 by incorporating one module “Module 2: Presentation Software and the Telling of Legends and Folktales” into the syllabus and inviting one SME (Subject Matter Expert) to attend my course as a guest lecturer. The guest lecturer had previously worked for Apple and presented on the use of the Keynote presentation software. While students were familiar with the use of PowerPoint, only students that had MacBook computers had access to Keynote, but these students still rarely used anything but PowerPoint when making in-class presentations.

The SME began the class by making a short presentation on Keynote that displayed many of the animation tricks that could be created with the Keynote software, and then showing how a basic version of Keynote could be accessed online and used by students without an Apple computer. The class was then taught how to use Keynote to produce each of the presentation tricks that were used in the original introduction to Keynote with the students practicing each step on their own notebook computers.

During the practice phase, the students worked in groups of two to three to complete each of the assigned tasks. In this practice phase the ways that MacBook users were able to assist the non-MacBook users in completing tasks indicated that peer scaffolding (De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000) was occurring. Scaffolding is a term from the Vygotskian sociocultural perspective of language teaching in which assistance from an expert or peer in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) brings about the most effective improvement in ability level (Vygotsky, 1978; De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000; Lantolf & Aljaafreh, 1995; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). The small groups created their own Keynote presentations and then demonstrated their ability by taking turns connecting their computers to the class projector to present the simple Keynotes that they had created.

In the following class groups of students presented an urban legend or a traditional local folktale to the class. Each group also incorporated a Keynote (the insider term for a presentation made with Keynote) into the performance of their story. Six of the ten groups received a score of A- or higher, and the remaining four groups all received scores in the B range, indicating that class performance ranged from excellent to very good, and each group did succeed in animating their presentations using Keynote features. This is slightly higher grade range than in previous years when this activity has been done without the incorporation of Keynotes. While there have always been students who have scored in the A range, what stood out to most is that there were no poor presentations this year. A possible cause for this is that the requirement to enhance the presentation with a Keynote meant that more effort needed to be placed into the assignment. Students could not prepare for their speeches at the last minute on their way to class. Also by using the animation features of Keynote, the students became more aware of movement and motion and the flow of time in their stories.

REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a first trial for a course that combines the instruction of digital competence with instruction on speaking competence, I was quite pleased with the results. Expert instruction by the SME allowed the students to make quick progress in class, which they immediately applied to their presentations in the next class and again later in the semester when doing other presentations.

In addition digital storytelling has been shown to be beneficial in other studies. In the pre-smart phone era, Robin (2006) reports on many advantages when assigning students to create digital stories using tools such as the Windows XP versions of Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Photo Story 3, and a video camera borrowed from the school. These include developing Digital Literacy, Global Literacy, Technology Literacy, Visual Literacy, and Information Literacy. Nguyen (2013) reports on the advantages peer scaffolding (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000) creates during a collaborative oral presentation and includes technological support as one of the benefits that allows students to reach a higher level of achievement than they could achieve alone. At a Hong Kong university, students were assigned to create a digital story, but were provided no explicit in class training on how to use digital software. Yet the students involved in the case study still reached a minimum of basic competence in the areas of digital competence, digital usage, and digital transformation, with most students reaching the higher levels of competent or exemplary (Chan, Churchill, & Chiu, 2017). Digital storytelling has even been shown to benefit the digital literacy of "older people" (Hausknecht & Kaufman, 2018).

These studies show that collaborative digital storytelling can be an effective method for improving both digital competence and oral proficiency for L2 English language learners. In addition, the gains made in Vietnam and Hong Kong were made without the assistance of an expert in digital presentations as was the case in my course. With the SME (subject matter expert) assisting in class, my students were able to become proficient in creating animated presentations in one weekly meeting of the class.

In my course only one module of the modules was tested due to the costs of bringing in a guest lecturer. University regulations allow for a subsidy for only one guest lecturer per course. A possible way to fully implement the proposed course change would be to pool together the resources of more than one course. Thus two courses could combine together for two classes taught by the SME guest lecturer. This would allow two sessions with a SME guest lecturer, or three sessions if three classes join together for the SME lectures. However, the class size would likely grow too large if too many courses are combined. In my

course the SME was able to provide direct hands-on assistance during the class because the class size was capped at 25 students. The study by Chan, Churchill, & Chiu (2017) does show that students can make great progress in digital competence even when working on their own without assistance and training, but for improving in digital competence quickly, having the SME can still be more efficient.

I believe that this proposal show great promise in supporting the 2018 NDC Blueprint to turning Taiwan bilingual, and that it can serve as a foundation for other teachers at other universities that aim to integrate digital competency with spoken language competency, or have the desire to create a more bilingual learning environment.

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