Improving Thai Teenage Students' Confidence to Speak English

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Abstract

This practitioner research report focuses on 19 ninth-grade students in a rural area of Chiang Mai province, Thailand. The study addresses the prevalent issue of student reluctance to perform speaking tasks in a secondary school classroom setting. The authors employed an Exploratory Action Research approach where the exploratory phase was followed by an intervention involving the application of the Know-Want-Learn (KWL) strategy and the use of an online collaborative whiteboard platform (Miro board). The research study sought to find answers to how students perceive speaking tasks in the target language and what kind of speaking activities they prefer and whether effective instruction regarding speaking activities improves oral performance. Data was gathered through focus group discussions, peer observations, and students' self-evaluation forms. Findings from the exploratory phase suggested that students' reluctance to speak was due to low levels of self-confidence and the inadequate manner in which speaking activities were introduced and managed. The intervention improved students' confidence and engagement, resulting in more active class participation.

Keywords: speaking confidence; conversation enhancement strategies; peer conversation; collaborative speaking tasks

Introduction

Students' confidence in speaking English is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it enhances communication by enabling clearer and more fluent expression (Ananda & Hastini, 2023). Secondly, it boosts motivation and engagement, fostering active participation and language improvement (Gustaman, 2015). Lastly, confidence in English creates opportunities, such as better job prospects and global competitiveness due to its status as a lingua franca (Patel et al., 2023). Consequently, the aim of the present research project was to find ways to boost students' confidence and create the conditions for enhanced oral performance. An Exploratory Action Research (EAR) approach (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) was chosen to systematically explore the root causes of the issue and then to find effective solutions.

The present project grew out of the first author's personal experiences and difficulties while instructing English language learners. The challenge he faced was that his students lacked confidence to engage in oral communication activities, such as speaking in front of the

whole class or participating in group discussions. The whole project was facilitated and scaffolded by the second author in a mentorial capacity, but the current report has been written up in the first person by the first author, namely, the teacher-researcher. The exploratory and the action phase of this piece of EAR was carried out from October 2022 to January 2023 in pursuit of answers to the overall research question: "What speaking activities should I use to enhance students' confidence in speaking English?" When looking for answers to the research question, the teacher-researcher and their mentor's core objective was to identify and employ effective methods for the enhancement of English-speaking skills in the context that is described below by the first author, Anek.

Context and background

I teach English to Grade 7–9 students aged between 13 and 16 years in a rural government school in Chiang Mai province, Thailand. Many of the students belong to various ethnic groups, including Shan, Hmong, Hlahu, and Karen, and they use English as a third language (their second language being Thai). In my own classroom, there were six Thai and 13 minority-language students. The educational and cultural context of minority-language students differ significantly from those whose first language is Thai. Their educational and social background is more distant owing to a different ethnic-cultural heritage, making their English learning journey more intricate and challenging compared to Thai speaking students. As a result of the ethnic composition of my class, I had to pay extra attention to the challenges my minority-language students were facing, whose English proficiency was assessed as significantly deficient in the previous semester's final exam (September 16, 2022). Their scores ranged from approximately 21 to 30, averaging at 23, which is considerably below the A1 beginner level. While I was considering how I could provide extra support to my students in speaking English, a unique opportunity for being trained in EAR (as part of my Continuing Professional Development) arose. * [end note]

Literature Review

Before discussing how the research project was designed and accomplished, there are three related topics that merit some consideration for language learning in the context of the investigation that was carried out: Exploratory Action Research (EAR), the Know-Want-Learned (KWL) strategy and the online collaborative whiteboard platform known as Miro board.

Exploratory Action Research is a 'branch' of Action Research (AR) together with Collaborative Action Research (CAR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Hanks, 2021). For the whole 'family tree' of Practitioner Research (PR), see Figure 1 in the Appendix. EAR itself is based on the work of Smith and Rebolledo (2018), who define it "as a way to explore, understand and improve our practice as teachers" (p. 22). It consists of two phases, the exploratory phase and the action phase (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018, p. 27). These can be perceived as steps of a staircase where, in certain cases, one can decide to stop after the first three steps that are denoted as *plan to explore*, *explore*, *analyse and reflect*. In most cases, however, the research process continues with action defined as plan to change, act, observe and reflect. The present research project involved both phases, namely, it included an initial exploration followed by an action phase aimed at improving the teacher-researcher's practice for their own benefit and that of their students.

The action phase employed the Know-Want-Learned approach, which goes back to Blachowicz and Ogle's key work (2008) on how reading comprehension can be improved in order to create strategies for independent learners. 'KWL' stands for 'Knows, Wants to Know, and Has Learned'. For the purposes of reading, KWL involves three cognitive steps. First, learners access what they know (prior knowledge). Second, they discover what they want to learn and third, they recall what they learnt as a result of the learning process. Even though the KWL approach has mainly been employed for reading comprehension (Macartney, 2023; Usman et al., 2018), it has also been used to enhance speaking skills (e.g., Mantra, 2016). Lubis (2019) also applied the KWL strategy to enhance students' speaking skills successfully. Her research indicated that students' speaking performance improved significantly compared to the pre-test, which measured their baseline knowledge before the KWL strategy was employed.

Lumbangaol (2019) also explored the impact of the KWL technique on students' speaking skills. Conducted using a Classroom Action Research design, it involved 40 English education program students. The study found that the use of the KWL technique did enhance students' speaking skills, as evidenced by increased average grades in the action phase. Data analysis based on the responses in a survey questionnaire further confirmed the positive effects of employing the KWL technique in learning speaking skills. Altogether, this strategy serves as a valuable tool for teachers to help their learners process, understand, and retain newly presented material in the context of language instruction.

Finally, as regards one of the main tools that was employed in the action phase, the Miro board used is a versatile whiteboard platform that enhances students' engagement and creativity in the classroom (Allah, 2023). Miro was launched in 2011 and has gained popularity over time. It is a digital tool that facilitates remote work and enhances student engagement (Spruce & Moriarty, 2022). Among the many advantages that make it a useful collaborative whiteboarding platform is the fact that it "enables distributed teams to innovate and work effectively together, from brainstorming with digital sticky notes to planning and managing agile workflows" (Allah, 2023, 78). The software allows students to create designs, move things around, and communicate through embedded video calls or online chats. Its versatility is proven by the fact that it has been used effectively by Ukrainian teachers, whose students are scattered all over Ukraine or are living in European countries (Opryshko, 2022). In sum, Miro in education creates opportunities for students to share and enhance their learning experiences, bridging the gap between theory and practice while encouraging future growth.

Exploratory Research Phase

During the first semester of the 2022 academic year, I assigned a speaking task to my 9th-grade students, which involved giving a mini-presentation in front of the whole class. Many of them appeared nervous and hesitated a lot, even though they practised their presentations beforehand in pairs and groups. I decided to explore the underlying issues so that I could suggest suitable remedial measures. The first task was framing the appropriate research questions.

My mentor, Vanita, guided me through some of the examples in the book Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research (Rebolledo et al., 2016) and helped me formulate the questions for the exploratory phase. She suggested that I create a set of questions to address students' concerns, teachers' perspectives, and the types of speaking activities. I initially listed 17 issues, which were later refined and condensed into three specific questions based on my own context:

1. What are students' perceptions of speaking in the target language?
2. Which speaking activities do my students prefer while practising speaking in the classroom?
3. How far do students show an ability to respond in English after being instructed about a task?

We also chose the data collection methods that aligned with each question. We decided on using focus group discussions for the first and second questions and peer observation by a colleague of mine, Kanyaluck Preechaprasit for the third question. She is an English teacher who observed my classes both in the exploratory and the action phases. After that I made a comprehensive data collection plan to tackle the various aspects of my research, dividing the process into several distinct phases. The first step involved communicating the purpose of my EAR project to both my students and the fellow teacher mentioned above. Right at the beginning of the exploratory stage, I informed the students about my intention to conduct EAR from October 2022 to January 2023. The purpose of the research was to determine the most effective method to enhance their English-speaking skills. I explained to them that their sole responsibility was to actively participate in every activity provided. Additionally, I assured them that any video recordings or transcribed spoken words would not be shared on any other platform. Subsequently, explicit consent forms were distributed to the students for their understanding and agreement, and their parents were asked to sign them. In addition to ensuring the students' understanding and agreement, I also had a discussion with Kanyaluck Preechaprasit, explaining to her the rationale behind conducting this study and the tasks she needed to perform while she observed my class.

The second step entailed teaching a speaking skill module named 'Explore the Moon'. The main purpose of this exercise was to establish my students' English-speaking abilities as a starting point (benchmark). Even though I had been aware that my students were struggling when having to express themselves in small groups and even more when they had to speak in front of the whole class, I wanted to focus on how my students performed on an occasion when I was paying special attention to aspects of speaking skills and students' apparent self-confidence issues. The third phase entailed enlisting the help of Kanyaluck Preechaprasit to observe my English classes, which occurred twice for an hour on 7th and 14th of October 2022. These observations were designed to focus on specific criteria, including the relevance of the speaking topic to the students' lives, their ability to respond to teacher queries, their use of the target language, the extent of mother tongue use, and their engagement and feedback during speaking activities. Any unanticipated challenges encountered by the students were also meticulously documented. These observation guidelines (see Appendix 2) were devised by the teacher-researcher to align with the experiences, interests, and societal context of the students.

My colleague's feedback highlighted that I utilised questions to stimulate students and incorporated a few instructional checking questions to assess their comprehension. I involved volunteer students to demonstrate how a given task was to be accomplished, but only a small number could immediately engage in English; the majority required time to contemplate their answers, often resorting to using Thai during the activities. Furthermore, only a few students were capable of interacting at the sentence level, with most functioning at the word level during the question-and-answer sessions. During the practice stage, most students made an effort to communicate in English, but if they encountered any difficulty, they tended to switch to Thai. In group discussions, the predominant language used was Thai. Despite this, my colleague observed students making collaborative efforts to support each other in carrying out their speaking tasks.

As a next step, I conducted focus group discussions with the students (see Appendix 3) to gather responses pertaining to my first research question, which encompassed topics such as the significance of speaking in English, opportunities for using English both inside and outside the classroom, preferred speaking activities, motivation for speaking, and teacher feedback and correction of errors. During the focus group discussion phase, students were divided into three groups of five and one group of four. We utilised both English and Thai languages during the discussions, prioritising Thai when it was necessary to overcome any language difficulties. Following the data collection process, I compiled and organised the data to summarise the insights from both my students and my colleague. Figures 1–3 below present the data obtained from the observation notes, focus group discussions, and the teacher-researcher's reflective notes.

The initial findings from the exploratory research phase indicated that most students were aware of the significance of English owing to their city's status as a tourist destination. This circumstance can open up greater opportunities for them to engage with foreign tourists and improve their quality of life in the long run. Some students said that English would only be important to them in terms of recreational activities, such as playing games or chatting with peers. However, most of the students, despite having opportunities to speak English in class, were hesitant to do so in front of their peers and were reluctant to participate in speaking activities.
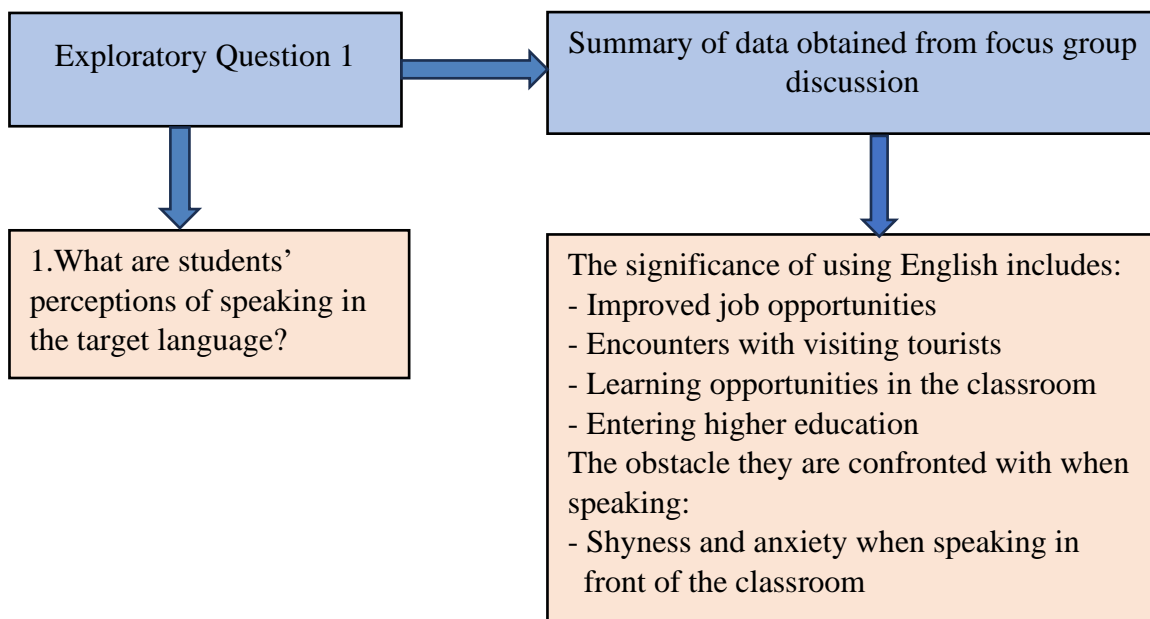

Figure 1.
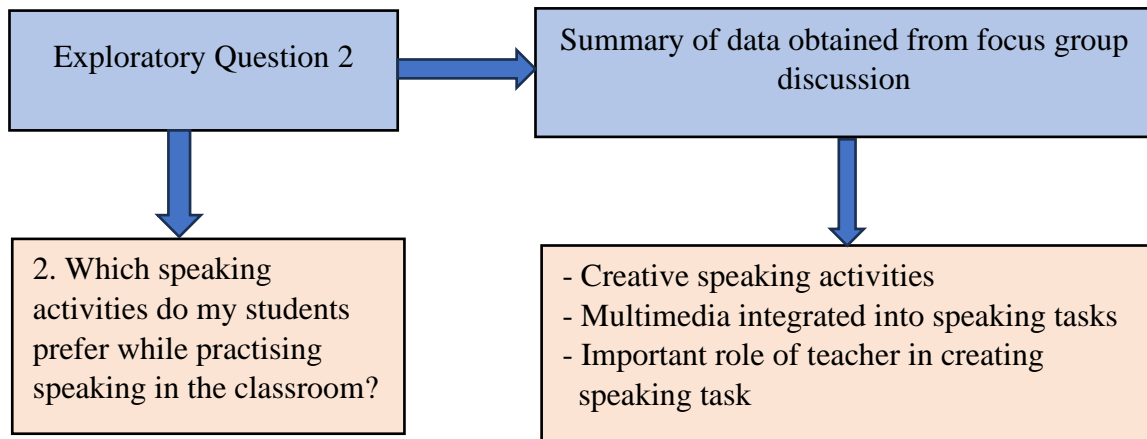**Main findings of the exploratory phase related to Question 1**

Figure 2.
Main findings of the exploratory phase related to Question 2
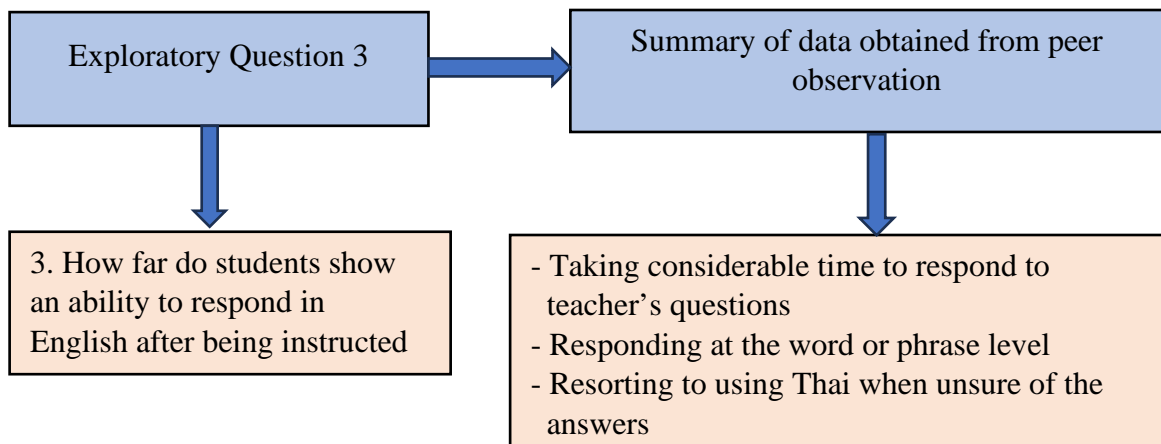

Figure 3.
Main findings of the exploratory phase related to Question 3

Most students had only limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Some engaged with foreigners when giving directions or interacted with taxi drivers, while others incorporated English into their daily routine through games. My students pointed out that the tools available for improving speaking skills were outdated and had been used repeatedly. Technology tools employed for a period during the practice stage, such as PowerPoint and Google Translation, were deemed uninteresting. Meanwhile, a number of students thought that creative speaking activities improved their English-speaking skills. They particularly enjoyed collaborative activities such as "Mingling", "Find Someone Who", and Think-Pair-Share. Students also mentioned that, on occasion, they were confused about the steps of accomplishing speaking tasks. This confusion, in turn, affected their ability to actively participate in speaking activities. In summary, students' hesitancy and nervousness did not result from a lack of motivation or the lack of recognising the importance of speaking English for the purposes of communication but rather from insufficient self-confidence and a lack of clarity on how speaking tasks should be managed (e.g., clear instructions).

Action Research Phase

Having drawn these conclusions from the data analysis, I was ready to design strategies and use innovative approaches to address the issues that had been identified. Table 1 below provides an overview of the action plan that was created in order to set up a logical, step-by-step project management timeline.

Table 1.
Taking action

Action to be taken	Reason for action	Knowledge base for action	Tools for action	Objectives
Check the curriculum	The need to stay aligned	Foreign Language Learning Curriculum	Self-study by reading official documents related to the curriculum	To have an understanding of the requirements
Develop new teaching materials	The need to make topics more relevant to students	Own research with the help of a mentor	Mentoring sessions and materials writing	To create engaging speaking activities
Employ new approaches to learning	The need to facilitate learning	KWL strategy	Practical application of the KWL strategy	To use the "what I know", "what I want to learn", and "what I learned" approaches effectively
Employ new IT tools	The need to engage students	Miro board	Introduction and practical use of this digital tool	For students to become familiar and comfortable with the use of the multimedia tool
Integrate grammar and speaking skills	The need to combine fluency and accuracy	Sources on grammar and speaking activities	Revision and practise of the Simple Past and Simple Present forms	To improve the use of grammatical forms and increase the ratio of sentence-level responses
Employ new strategies for speaking	The need to enhance students' speaking confidence	Dialogue guidelines and prompts	Practising conversations using dialogue guidelines and prompts	To improve students' confidence in speaking

The process of accomplishing the action plan involved multiple steps. Initially, I familiarised myself with the English strands and indicators outlined in the Foreign Language Learning subject of the Thai Education Curriculum (Basic Education Core Curriculum BE 2551 (AD 2008). The learning objectives, outcomes, and evaluation criteria for each unit are aligned with these strands and indicators. The document highlights the importance of foreign language skills both for communication and accessing knowledge within the Thai education system. It stresses that proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing is essential for effective communication and building relationships. Teachers are urged to help students develop these language competencies as outlined by the Education Ministry. I was keenly aware that my students' speaking skills were not up to the indicators and that I needed to take steps to improve the situation.

Subsequently, I developed two units: 1) tourist sights in Thailand, and 2) renowned festivals in Thailand. Each lesson plan spanned two hours, resulting in a total of eight hours for both units. The choice of the first unit stemmed from the students' recognition of how significant their home town was as a tourist destination. The second unit, focusing on Thai festivals, was selected due to students' interest in such events, particularly those occurring at the time of the intervention (the Loy Krathong festival). These topics were seamlessly incorporated into the speaking lesson plans, employing the pre-while-speaking stages of the learning process (for a lesson plan, see Appendix 7). Choosing these particular units aligned with the information gathered during the focus group discussions. As mentioned above, during this stage, participants emphasised the importance of utilising English to shape their future professional paths, citing their city's main sights as attractive destinations for visitors.

In the third step, I examined the initial grammatical concepts in the curriculum and opted for the present and past simple tenses to integrate them into the two topics. The rationale behind selecting these tenses was to build on students' prior knowledge and familiarity with these grammatical structures. Simultaneously, I introduced prompt dialogues to prepare students and boost their confidence in practising speaking. The dialogue guidelines followed the Wh-question format, featuring 10 questions and responses. Sample questions included inquiries like "Where did you go on vacation?" and "What were the challenging activities you could do there?" Corresponding responses were structured, covering aspects such as the destination, companions, duration, and challenging activities. Based on the results of a focus group discussion with students during the exploratory phase, it was discovered that a significant proportion of students spent time responding to both teacher and peer inquiries. Due to their uncertainty about the correct answers, they frequently switched to using Thai. As a result, incorporating prompt dialogues at this stage helped students better prepare to articulate their thoughts accurately.

The fourth step involved seeking input from an experienced teacher, Phakakrong Ruksakrit, who works at the same school and has offered to look at the appropriateness and accuracy of the speaking lesson plans. Finally, I implemented these speaking lesson plans in my English classroom on November 7th, 9th, 14th, and 16th, 2022.

I also decided to design new-style speaking activities in my English classes. Drawing from the findings of peer observation during the exploratory phase, it was clear that a notable number of students exhibited a preference for activities that could generate the conditions for engagement over passive ones. Consequently, I opted for the KWL strategy, recognizing its effectiveness in application, which can sequentially contribute to enhancing students' speaking abilities with increased confidence and retention of the material learned. KWL was combined with the use of a collaborative whiteboard application called Miro board whose merits have already been discussed in the Literature Review section. My aim was to employ this multimedia tool to support students' confidence, since this had been indicated as lacking in the exploratory phase. It needs to be pointed out that even though connectivity can be a problem at times in our region in Thailand, overall, my learners were able to work with Miro without serious connection problems and found the application fairly easy to use.

The following graphic (Figure 4) summarises how the KWL strategy and Miro work in a speaking class.

Figure 4.
The implementation process of the KWL strategy combined with the Miro board as set up by the teacher-researcher

During speaking tasks, I implemented the following steps:

In the pre-speaking phase, I introduced unknown words for students to find meanings in groups. I also introduced the KWL chart to gather background knowledge.

In speaking lessons, students were grouped into four or five members and were given individual KWL charts. I explained the KWL chart and the instructions in English, but when students appeared confused, I used Thai for clarification. The lesson involved introducing new vocabulary and questions to activate prior knowledge. The function of each KWL column was explained, and students collaborated in groups to discuss and exchange their knowledge on the topic.

Finally, volunteers from each group presented their findings to the class.

Figure 5.
Teacher input during the pre-speaking phase
Note: Photo used with students' permission

In the speaking phase, students listed questions about the topic, discussed them in groups, and shared their questions. They practised constructing and answering questions. During the practice stage, students actively engaged in questioning their classmates using the questions generated within their groups. They freely moved around the classroom, exchanging answers and sharing personal experiences related to the content, fostering lively and motivating dialogues. The majority of students participated naturally, displaying ease and comfort while partnering up for discussions. The teacher's role involved circulating around the class, noting successes and challenges in students' speaking delivery. Additionally, less proficient students received assistance from more capable peers when facing difficulties in expressing themselves. Overall, the activity created a positive and supportive learning environment, as was evident from the students' smiles and laughter during the process.

During the practice phase, I predominantly employed English to provide instructions, assess comprehension, and ask questions. Essentially, English was utilised for 100 percent of verbal communication during this stage. As the speaking activity commenced, I circulated around the classroom and noticed that 13 out of 19 students utilised English to converse with each other. I endeavoured to monitor and tally the number of pairs effectively communicating in English. However, in instances where students encountered difficulty responding in English, they reverted to using Thai. Similarly, when attempting to construct new sentences outside of the previously learned structures, Thai was employed instead of English.

Figure 6.
Students talking to each other during the while-speaking phase
Note: Photo used with students' permission

In the post-speaking phase, students summarised what they had learned, shared ideas using the Miro board, and presented in small groups as well as to the whole class. I used the Miro board for visual mapping to expand their understanding and provided a checklist for speaking confidently. In this phase, they mostly used English, with some Thai incorporated during the sharing activity.

In the final stage, students shared their experiences on the topic using a Miro board. Firstly, I created the template that corresponded to the topic, and then I assigned each role for students to complete their data. Secondly, I asked each student to provide their personal views. Then, students created individual bulletins, transferred data from their KWL columns, and incorporated video recordings with their opinions. Classmates could engage through spoken language, emoji stickers, and video responses on the Miro board. This helped increase students' speaking ability because they could rehearse their speaking tasks. Moreover, this also raised students' confidence in speaking with peers because they could see their peers' tasks and also reflect on their peers' opinions through spoken or written platforms. A 5-minute mini-presentation was conducted after completing the process, where each group summarised their initial knowledge, their questions, and the information obtained within 5 minutes. The lesson concluded with the distribution of a self-reflection form that the students were asked to fill out. In this step, English was used exclusively throughout the post-speaking phase.

These activities were implemented over two weeks between the 7th to 16th of November, 2022.

Action Research Findings

To evaluate the effectiveness of the KWL strategy and the multimedia Miro board application the following data gathering tools were used: focus group discussions, a self-reflection checklist, and peer observations. The focus group discussion (see Appendix 4) was conducted at the conclusion of the intervention and helped the teacher-researcher get the views of all 19 students. The data revealed that the implementation of the KWL (knows, wants to know, and learned) method had a noticeable positive effect on learners' confidence in speaking English. Specifically, during the speaking stage, when students engaged in peer interviews, a majority of students proficiently employed the supplied dialogue prompts to pose and respond to questions accurately and confidently. Moreover, they could share their own experience while replying to peers. Furthermore, at the stage of the post-speaking task, students again had a chance to present their group mini-presentations in the classroom. They could exchange ideas and give feedback on their peers' presentations while their own self-evaluation allowed them to learn about their progress and performance. Ultimately, the majority of the students felt that they had gained confidence in speaking English.

Below are a few students' quotes that were derived from a focus group discussion. The quotes are my translations into English, as the students gave their feedback in Thai:

"I felt confident talking to my peers because I had sufficient knowledge for meaningful discussions. Furthermore, if I wasn't sure about structuring the conversation, my classmates were supportive and assisted me in improving."

"The KWL technique boosted my self-assurance in speaking English. It allowed us to express ourselves freely and confidently without any hesitation."

Following the two-week implementation of the KWL strategy and the Miro tool, I asked the students to respond to a self-observation checklist (see Appendix 6). The survey was introduced in English to the students and they were encouraged to use a translation application if they were unclear about any of the questions. The information derived from the students' observation checklist indicated that their participation in speaking activities was deemed satisfactory. A total of 16 students (84%) out of 19 indicated that they felt that they actively participated in meaningful discussions and presentations during group activities, demonstrating good listening skills and appropriate responses to their peers.

Furthermore, the proficiency of students in English speaking also seemed to have improved with the incorporation of the KWL strategy and the Miro tool. A majority of 15 students (78%) out of 19 acknowledged that these tools had boosted their confidence in speaking. These enhancements contributed to making their English learning experience more engaging and meaningful, particularly in the practise of speaking. Additionally, 13 students (68%) out of 19 affirmed that they were able to articulate their thoughts without undue pauses or hesitations. This was attributed to their utilisation of expressions and vocabulary from the intervention materials, allowing them to present their ideas in a logical, organised manner and apply appropriate sentence structures.

Peer observation took place three times in November 2022, on the 9th, 14th, and 16th. I asked my colleague to observe the classroom and note down their remarks under the headings of students' apparent preferences and participation while carrying out a speaking activity. Kanyaluck Preechaprasit, the same person who was involved in the exploratory stage, observed

my English class from the beginning to the end of the lesson. She had the option to remain stationary or move around, but it was emphasised that she should not disrupt students. She had the freedom to approach students to assess their participation in speaking tasks and their willingness to engage in group work. If she required additional information or wanted to delve deeper, she was free to ask questions. After the lesson, she provided me with detailed information that she had noted down in each column of the observation form (see Appendix 5).

The findings from the peer observation indicated that several students actively participated in pair and group activities. Additionally, the majority of students displayed heightened confidence and ease while collaborating in group settings. Many students highlighted that the KWL strategy played a crucial role in enhancing their understanding of expectations. The dialogue prompts contributed to more meaningful interactions with classmates. Consequently, these students demonstrated increased enthusiasm and a greater willingness to engage in well-structured speaking activities. This enhanced motivation and confidence were attributed to the organised approach facilitated by the KWL strategy. The three-stage speaking activities—pre-, while-, and post-speaking—were set up and managed systematically. Especially in the while-speaking stage, students had a lot of opportunities to discuss and share their group's opinions. Furthermore, a prompt dialogue was provided to practise sentence construction. My colleague and I observed that they tried to rehearse, ask and respond whenever they had to perform in pairs or in groups. Moreover, when I did a survey of the group's collaboration, they all aided each other; even weak students were assisted by more able students. When asked about their satisfaction using the KWL strategy, they all emphasised that learning through this type of speaking activity helped them speak in English more confidently. It was evident that while the KWL teaching sequences supported students' speaking ability, the multimedia programme, namely, the Miro board, helped students collaborate with each other.

Learning and Reflections

My involvement in Exploratory Action Research has deepened my understanding of student development, teacher practices, and pedagogical approaches. Specifically, it has enhanced my knowledge of:

1. Student Progress: Understanding students' responses to different instructional methods, their learning preferences, strengths, and challenges.
2. Teacher Methods: Identifying effective teaching strategies and recognizing areas where teachers need additional support and training.
3. Pedagogical Strategies: Expanding my knowledge of various pedagogical approaches and their impact on learning outcomes.

This newfound knowledge has empowered me to adapt and improve my teaching methods for better results. Considering the experiences described above, in the future I will aim to promote Exploratory Action Research and encourage other teachers to participate in research studies. This can contribute to the development of effective pedagogical approaches, fostering a culture of inquiry and reflective practice that benefits teachers and students alike. I aspire to assist not only English teachers but instructors of various other subjects by sharing my personal EAR experiences from my classroom, offering practical insights, tips, and lessons learned in order to facilitate successful EAR implementation and enhance the professional development of the teacher community (e.g., Ministry of Education, Sierra Leone, 2021).

The contributions of my mentor were very valuable throughout the process. Vanita assisted me in selecting and designing the necessary tools through individual meetings and webinars. Additionally, she recommended that I familiarise myself with the EAR process from the handbook titled *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research* (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). This process aided me in identifying qualitative tools that aligned with our research questions. During our meetings, Vanita provided numerous examples and demonstrated how to design items related to various tools. Her constructive feedback proved instrumental, enabling me to refine and ultimately finalise my data collection tools after several iterations. This achievement filled me with pride and delight.

I believe that my experience may have wider implications: teachers who are confronted with the issue of low confidence levels in students when they are asked to speak English, can resort to innovative learning techniques and applications. Future research on oral performance in naturalistic classroom contexts may result in further insights and lead to other innovative solutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has shown that teachers need to provide a variety of speaking activities to enhance students' motivation levels. It is also useful for teachers to be familiar with the use of technological tools to facilitate language skill development in a classroom. Here, KWL combined with the Miro board significantly enhanced students' speaking skills.

For me, this was a remarkable experience in my overall career to date, where I implemented the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) process to address the learning issues of my students and modify my ways of teaching speaking. Through this, I gained a deeper understanding of how to effectively conduct research by aligning it with the two phases of EAR. As a result, my students displayed increased enthusiasm for learning English, as they recognised that this process was designed to bring about positive changes in their learning progress. Furthermore, I am proud of my continuous aspiration to develop myself as a dedicated and professional classroom researcher.

End Note

* My students' struggles and reluctance to engage in English communication prompted me to participate in a British Council Thailand project, which recruited 40 English teachers across the country in 2022 to be trained in Exploratory Action Research. Within this project, a consultant with British Council India, Vanita Chopra, became my teacher-research mentor, and our collaboration continued beyond the official end of the training programme.

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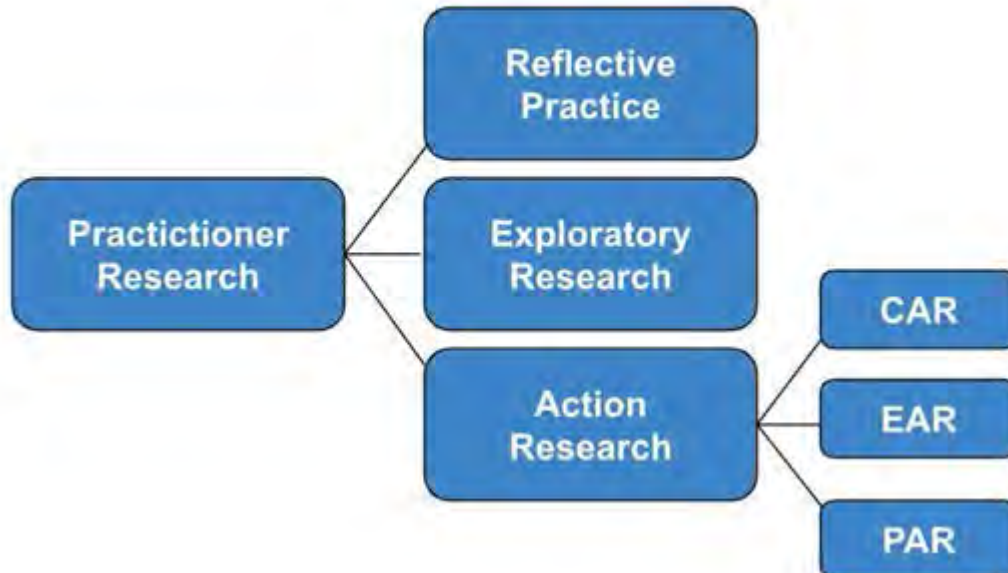
Acknowledegments

Appendices

Appendix 1

Types of Practitioner Research

Note. From Hanks, 2021, p.464.

Appendix 2

Observation form for the exploratory phase

Observe the lesson and make annotations under the specified category, predominantly focusing on the third question.

Descriptions	1st observation (7th October 2022)	2nd observation (14th October 2022)
1. How did the teacher give instructions to the students to perform a speaking task?		
2. How does the teacher first demonstrate the speaking activity before having students practise?		
3. How is the speaking topic made meaningful and relevant? For example, is the topic related to their life to practise speaking in the target language?		
4. How many students could reply to the teacher's questions as a follow up task?		
5. To what extent were students able to express themselves in the target language, for instance using a word / sentence?		
6. How much mother tongue did the students use to perform in a speaking task?		
7. What kind of feedback and support did students extend to each other while performing a speaking task?		
8. Were there any unanticipated challenges faced by students while responding in the target language? Please mention what kind.		

Appendix 3

Focus group discussion form for the exploratory phase

These questions were given to 19 students primarily focusing on question items 1 and 2.

Descriptions	Ss1	Ss2	Ss3	Ss4	Ss5
1. Do you think speaking in English is important? Please explain.					
2. Do you have the opportunity to use English in the classroom or not? Why or why not?					
3. What opportunities do you have to use English outside the classroom and why?					
4. How much English do you think you are using at home and why?					
5. What types of speaking activities in the class do you enjoy? Why?					
6. Do you think that English speaking activities contribute to your speaking skills?					
7. What can improve your speaking abilities the most?					
8. What kind of English learning environment do you like? Why?					
9. Do you understand the teacher's instructions clearly when you are engaged in a speaking activity? Why/ or why not?					
10. If you outperformed would your teacher compliment you? How?					
11. Do you think you are motivated to speak both inside and outside the classroom? Why or why not?					
12. If you mispronounce would your teacher correct that mistake? How?					
13. Does your teacher give you feedback at the end of the lesson? How?					

Appendix 4

Focus group discussion form for the action phase

These topics were discussed by the 19 students (in small groups) at the end of the intervention.

Steps of speaking tasks	Descriptions	Ss 1	Ss 2	Ss 3	Ss 4	Ss 5
Pre-speaking step	1. What support did the teacher provide before having you write on K column? 2. What is your opinion on whether KWL could indeed affect your speech?					
While-speaking step	3. What kind of support from the teacher could help you deliver your speaking tasks in the classroom confidently? 4. How did working collaboratively support you to speak during the tasks? Please share an example. 5. What other types of assistance do you think you need while you are doing a speaking activity? 6. Did you have unanticipated challenges come up with every speaking task? Please provide details.					
Post-speaking step	7. To what extent did using the multimedia aid you in speaking English confidently? Please share an example. 8. What is your opinion regarding your own self-evaluation of speaking performance at the end of the task? Please provide details. 9. Do you think you have made sufficient progress to speak in English? Why or why not? 10. Do you feel more confident now to speak out individually? Please provide details.					

Appendix 5

<u>Observation form for peer observation in the action phase</u>

Direction: Keep an eye on the classroom and take notes on what happens during the speaking lesson.

Steps of speaking tasks	Descriptions	1st observation (9th November)	2nd observation (14th November)	3rd observation (16th November)
Pre speaking stage	1. How did the teacher demonstrate the use of KWL to facilitate students' learning? What do you think about it?			
	2. How did the teacher elicit the students' background knowledge from the picture on the board? Please share examples.			
	3. What support did the teacher provide to students before a speaking task? Please share an example.			
	4. How did the teacher facilitate and encourage students to work in collaboration? Please share an example.			
While speaking stage	5. To what extent could students ask questions to be written under W after they shared what they already knew? How many questions were formed and were they relevant?			
	6. Did they use a substitution table? How?			
	7. Did the students face unanticipated challenges while they were interviewed by peers as a speaking activity? Please provide details.			

	8. While students were doing an interview, how did they supplement extra information in their opinion? Please share an example.			
	9. Did the feedback provided by the teacher help students improve their performance when speaking? Please provide details.			
Post-speaking stage	10. What kind of feedback and support did the students extend to each other while practising speaking?			
	11. How did the use of multimedia encourage the students to speak with confidence?			
	12. To what extent were the students able to express themselves fluently in the target language based on the feedback and support provided by the teacher? How do you feel about it?			

Appendix 6

<u>Self- observation checklist for students after the action phase</u>

Directions: After implementing the KWL and multimedia tool, observe yourselves and rate the following statements according to how accurately it describes what went on.

1. Can the KWL and Multimedia tools enhance your confidence in speaking English?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

2. Do the KWL and Multimedia tools make your English learning more interesting and meaningful?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

3. Is the Miro tool beneficial in your speaking practice?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

4. Did you use relevant vocabulary from the intervention materials in your spoken responses?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

5. Do you speak confidently and without excessive pauses or hesitations?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

6. Do you present your thoughts in a logical and organized manner, using appropriate sentence structures?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

7. Can you effectively incorporate relevant multimedia content into your speaking, such as referring to images, videos, or audio clips?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

8. Are you able to analyze the content, making connections between what you already knew, what you wanted to know, and what you learned?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

9. Are you able to ask thoughtful questions related to the content, and can they elaborate on their responses?

       1   2   3   4   5   n/a

10. During group discussions or presentations, do you actively listen to your peers, respond appropriately, and engage in meaningful dialogue?

        1   2   3   4   5   n/a

Appendix 7

<u>**Lesson plan form**</u>

This lesson plan was created by the teacher-researcher using the pre-while-post speaking format, with each lesson lasting 2 hours.

Daily lesson plan

Foreign Language Department (English Language)   **Secondary 3**
Unit: 1   **Theme:** Attractive Places in Thailand   **Time:** 4 hrs.
Lesson Number: 1   **Topic**: Where did you go for your latest vacation?   **Time:** 2 hrs.

1. Strands and Indicators
Strand 1: Language for Communication
Standard F1.2: Endowment with language communication skills for exchange of data and information; efficient expression of feelings and opinions
Indicators F1.2 M3/5. Students speak and write to describe their own feelings and opinions about various matters, activities, experiences, and news/incidents with proper reasoning.

2. Core competences
1. Communication capacity
2. Capacity for applying life skills

3. Specific competences
1. Students expressing their opinions and feelings towards a situation. (CEFR A2)

4. Desirable Characteristics
1. Public-mindedness

5. Competent learning objectives
Students should be able to incorporate the issue into their daily lives by keeping up with current events or following their interests. They then communicate their task using communicative skills, as well as the data provided by the application of technology and the information sought. They also participate in group activities.

Objective Analysis
Knowledge – Skills – Attitude (KSA)
1. Students can construct sentences in the present and past simple tense formats. (Knowledge) Express ideas to each other on the Miro board.
2. Students can use questions and responses to express their opinions or experiences. (Skills) Observed through their speaking activity.
3. Students engage in group activities. (Attitude) Rotated group activity to ensure accuracy.

6. Learning Procedures

Step 1: Pre-speaking step

- Write unknown words and let students find meanings via an online dictionary in a group of four.
- Present the KWL chart on the board and describe how it works. Also, place a picture on the board and ask questions related to the topic to elicit their own background knowledge.
- Exchange ideas, discuss, write down on the board, and list down what they know in the K column.

Step 2: While-speaking step

- Ask them to list questions about what they want to know about this topic, discuss it in groups, and note it down in their own W column. Also, let a representative of each group share their own group's questions, which can be supplemented in classmates' W columns.
- Next, a substitution table with prompts will be provided to practise constructing the questions and how to respond.
- After having been rehearsed by a pair or group, they will have the chance to interview their classmates. In this stage, extra general ideas can be supplemented thanks to the prompted dialogue and comfortable atmosphere, which lead them to think and share without hesitation.

Step 3: Post-speaking step

- Let them write down what they have learned in the L column, then they will be asked to use the Miro Board to format the KWL chart and share their ideas in groups (mini-presentation) and in front of the class, respectively.
- Attribute the checklist containing aspects related to speaking with confidence to them at the end of the lesson.
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7. Evaluations

- Observe students' confidence while participating in speaking activities with classmates.
- Ask students about their progress in speaking English after completing the activity.

8. Evaluation tools

- Peer observation form
- Self-reflection form

9. Feedback:

School Director's feedback

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Achievement of learning objectives:

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Recommendations for increasing achievement levels and enhancing activities:

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Appendix 8

KWL Chart

In the first column, write what you already know about the topic. In the second column, write what you **w**ant to know about the topic. After the lesson, write what you learned in the third column.

Name_____ Number_____ Class_____

Date_____ School name_____

What I Know	What I **W**ant to Know	What I Learned