

國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士在職專班碩士論文

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主題式教學法對台灣國小學生英語口說溝通能力之成效研究

The Effects of Theme-based Instruction on Oral Communicative  
Competence of EFL Young Learners in Taiwan

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
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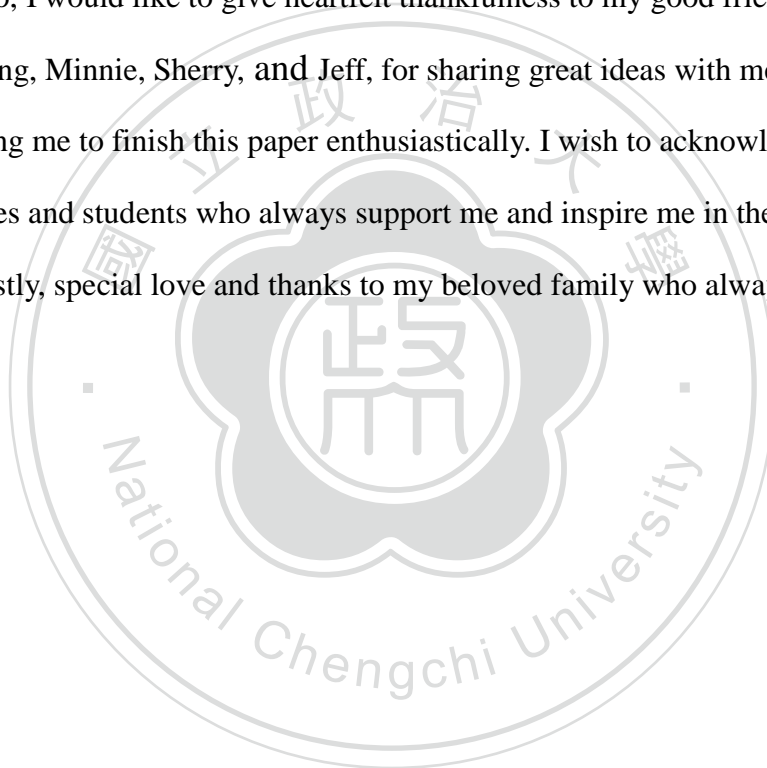
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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Chinese Abstract.....	ix
English Abstract.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Background and Motivation.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Significance of the Study.....	6
Definition of Important Terms.....	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	9
The Origins of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI).....	9
Theoretical Foundations.....	10
Key Elements of TBI.....	14
The Benefits of TBI.....	17
Related Studies on TBI.....	19
Critiques on the Previous Research.....	22
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	24
Subjects.....	24
Instruments.....	25
English Oral Proficiency Test.....	25
English Learning Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire.....	27
Procedure.....	29
Theme-Based Oral Instruction (TBOI) for EG.....	31
Instruction Procedure.....	31
Teaching Process.....	32
Traditional Oral Instruction for CG.....	40
Data Analysis.....	41
Chapter Four: Results.....	42
The Effects of TBOI and Traditional Oral Instruction on Learners' Communicative Competence.....	42
The Comparison of the Learners' Attitudes and Motivation towards English Learning.....	43
The Results of the Three Components of the Learning Attitudes Factor...	45

The Results of the Anxiety Factor.....	53
The Results of Instrumental Factor.....	54
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	57
Research Question 1: What are the Effects of Theme-Based Instruction on oral Communicative Competence for EFL Elementary School Students? .....	57
Research Question 2: Are There Any Changes in Learners' Attitudes and Motivation towards English Learning After the Implementation of Theme-Based Instruction? If Yes, in What Ways? .....	60
Learning Attitudes Factor.....	61
Anxiety Factor.....	63
Instrumental Motivation Factor.....	63
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	65
Pedagogical Implication of the Study.....	65
Limitation of the Study.....	66
Suggestions for the Future Research.....	67
References.....	69
Appendixes.....	79
Appendix A: English Oral Proficiency Test.....	79
Appendix B: English Oral Proficiency Test Scoring Criteria.....	81
Appendix C: English learning Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire (Chinese Version).....	82
Appendix D: English learning Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire (English Version) .....	84
Appendix E: The Categories of Three Factors for the 25 Questionnaire Items..	86
Appendix F: Materials of the Pilot Study.....	88

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 Four Basic Types of Texts Used in Theme Units.....	15
Table 2.2 Two Types of Transitions.....	16
Table 2.3 The Summary of the Main Elements of the Previous Studies.....	22
Table 3.1 The Four-theme Contents of EOPT.....	26
Table 3.2 Threes Factors for the 25 Questionnaire Items.....	28
Table 3.3 The Time Table and the Main Activities of Each Theme for EG.....	31
Table 3.4 The Activity and Task around the <i>School Subject</i> Theme.....	34
Table 3.5 The Activity and Task around the <i>People Who Help Us</i> Theme.....	36
Table 3.6 The Activity and Task around the <i>Fruit Salad</i> Theme.....	38
Table 3.7 The Activity and Task around the <i>Go Shopping</i> Theme.....	39
Table 3.8 The Time Table and the Main Activities of Each Theme for CG.....	40
Table 4.1 Paired T-test on Pre- and Post- EOPT of EG and CG.....	42
Table 4.2 Independent Sample T-test on Pre- and Post-EOPT of EG and CG.....	43
Table 4.3 Paired T-test on Pre- and Post- Questionnaires of EG and CG.....	44
Table 4.4 Independent Sample T-test on Pre- and Post- questionnaires of EG and CG.....	45
Table 4.5 The Changes of EG Learners' Affective Component of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire.....	46
Table 4.6 Comparison of Learners' Affective Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire.....	47
Table 4.7 The Changes of EG Learners' Cognitive Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire..	48
Table 4.8 Comparison of Cognitive Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire.....	49
Table 4.9 The Changes of EG Learners' Behavioral Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire..	50
Table 4.10 Comparison of Behavioral Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire.....	52
Table 4.11 The Changes of EG Learners' Anxiety towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- questionnaire.....	53
Table 4.12 Comparison of Learners' Anxiety towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire.....	54
Table 4.13 The Changes of EG Learners' Instrumental Motivation towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire.....	55

Table 4.14 Comparison of Learners' Instrumental Motivation towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire.....	56
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## List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Flow Chart of the Research Procedure.....	30
Figure 3.2 <i>School Subject</i> Thematic Brainstorming Web.....	33
Figure 3.3 <i>People Who Help Us</i> Thematic Brainstorming Web.....	36
Figure 3.4 <i>Fruit Salad</i> Thematic Brainstorming Web.....	38
Figure 3.5 <i>Go Shopping</i> Thematic Brainstorming Web.....	39





國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士在職專班

碩士論文摘要

論文名稱：主題式教學法對台灣國小學生英語口說溝通能力之成效研究

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研究生：蕭雅慈

論文提要內容：

本研究在探討主題式教學法對台灣國小學生英語口說溝通能力之成效以及此教學法對學生英語學習態度與動機的影響。此研究以來自雲林縣某國小五年級二個班級學生為研究對象，這兩班級隨機指派為實驗組跟對照組。實驗組實施主題式口語教學法而對照組則實施傳統口語教學法，每週均上課一次。經過 12 週的教學後，兩組皆進行英語口說能力測驗並施以英語學習態度與動機問卷。研究結果顯示學生受過主題式教學法學習後在口說溝通能力有顯著進步，而且其英語學習態度與動機也有正向的改變。希望本研究結果能為英語老師在教學實務上提供助益。

## Abstract

The present study mainly aimed at investigating the effects of theme-based oral instruction (TBOI) on elementary school students' oral communicative competence. Meanwhile, this paper also aimed at examining learners' perceptions of the use of TBOI, and the changes of learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning after the implementation of TBOI.

Two fifth-grade classes in a public elementary school in Yunlin County were randomly assigned to be the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received TBOI, while the control group took the traditional oral instruction once a week. After the 12-week treatment, an English oral proficiency test and an English learning attitudes and motivation questionnaire were administered to examine learners' oral communicative competence and their learning attitudes and motivation respectively.

The findings showed that TBOI had helped learners gain significant progress on oral communicative competence, and that the learning attitudes and motivation towards English learning had changed positively after the treatment of TBOI. Hopefully, the findings of the study may provide English teachers with some useful pedagogical implications.

**Keywords:** theme-based oral instruction, oral communicative competence

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter serves as an overview of the whole study, and is divided into five sections. The first section states the background and motivation of the study concerning the problems that most English teachers encounter at elementary schools in Taiwan and introduces the possible solution, followed by a description of the purpose of this study. The third section presents the research questions. The significance of the study is presented in the fourth section. The definitions of important terms are listed in the final section.

#### **Background and Motivation**

In the past two decades, the English education, especially for young learners, has been varied widely across the world from Europe to South America, from China to India. Trim (1997) claimed in the Council of Europe Press that the importance of English language education in primary schools has grown rapidly due to the global communication and technology revolution. Nowadays, the English language serves as one of the critical modern foreign languages in Europe. In many South American countries like Colombia and Uruguay, English has been considered a required subject for most local primary schools curriculum (Cadavid, 2003; Fleurquin, 2003). With the trend of globalization, Krashen (2003) and Graddol (2006) foresee and further predict that the English language will be a world language, not merely a foreign language anymore. To keep an advantageous position in the competitive global economic arena, both official and private sectors of most Asian countries are devoted to the promotion and implementation of English language teaching and learning for young learners.

Since the English language has been serving as the world's lingua franca for many decades and the importance of English proficiency has increased, acquiring communicative competence in English has become one of the crucial factors to be successful in international business, politics, academy or science (Krashen, 2003). Aware of the importance of English competence and in respond to the challenge of globalization, the English education policy has been modified and English education has been implemented from the primary level in The Nine-year Curriculum Educational Reform since the year 2002. Moreover, the Taiwan government also placed a high priority on English education in the Challenge 2008 National Development Plan (the Ministry of Education, 2002).

In the process of conducting the new English education policy, however, most elementary English teachers encountered three major problems. The first and most frequently discussed problem was that the majority of parents were not satisfied with the schedule of the new English education. It is generally believed among most parents that the earlier learners start learning English the better they will do in the future, and as a result, they sent their children to private English learning institutions (Crawford, 2001). Apparently the term *English fever*<sup>1</sup> coined by Krashen (2003) also revealed that most Taiwanese parents have placed too much emphasis on their children's English learning and their over-expectations on their children's English test scores also gradually increased children's high learning stress and lowered their learning interest. Nevertheless, what parents was concern should be on how English is taught and what English competence should be acquired instead of merely focusing on when their children should start to learn English as well as on how

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<sup>1</sup>Selected papers from the Twelfth International Symposium on English Teaching 2003 in Taipei, Krashen (2003) defined the term, English fever, "the overwhelming desire to (1) acquire English, (2) ensure that one's children acquire English, as a second or foreign language" (p. 100).

many scores they should get (Lee, 2007).

The second major problem widely mentioned was that many elementary English teachers were frustrated with the difficulty they had with children's low motivation and interest in learning English, though the Ministry of Education MOE has announced that arousing interest in English learning was one of the three main objectives in introducing the new English language policy for elementary level. According to the MOE (2009), the problem in the twin-peak distribution of students' English scores has been found at the primary level, which caused many lower achievers to give up learning English from very young age. Meanwhile, some recent studies pointed out that the fifth and sixth graders also gradually lost enthusiasm for attending school's English classes due to the lack of learning challenge, less relevance to their life experiences and the authentic environment (Chen, 2004; Crawford, 2001).

The third problem was that most students failed to acquire adequate oral communicative competence at elementary level (Chang, 2006). Although MOE's first major objective of elementary English language education was to develop learners' aural and oral skills, both parents and school officials still paid high attention on learners' test scores instead of focusing on the whole learning process of learners' acquiring oral communicative competence (Crawford, 2001; Lee, 2007). In addition, the large class setting and short lessons (40 minutes per lesson) in public elementary schools forced students to work exclusively as a whole class with limited opportunity to provide them with organized tasks, which would allow students to learn English efficiently, cooperatively, and actively (Bowler & Parminter, 2002).

In order to overcome those problems, the adoption of appropriate and effective teaching approaches was inevitable.

Since 1990s, the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach has been widely adopted in Europe and has been gradually applied to foreign language classes in some Asian countries recently, like Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan due to its positive impact on improving learners' various facets of language learning, as well as positive attitudes towards learning English (Chung, 2004; Juez, 2006; Kiziltan & Ersanli, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2008; Osman, Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009; Seo, 1998; Yang, 2009). Research findings have shown that learners benefited greatly from participating in the CLIL approach, and the reported improvements are to help prepare learners for internationalization, to boost motivation to learn foreign language, to enhance learning skills and to elicit high levels of communications (Coyle, 2008; Lasagabaster, 2008; Marsh, 2008; Marsh, Mehisto & Frigols, 2008; Tuula, 2007). According to European Commission (2005), the definition of CLIL is that "Within CLIL, language is used as a medium for learning content, and the content is used in turn as a resource for language learning" (p. 4). Based on Brinton, Snow, and Wesche's (1989) identification, three major models of CLIL have been developed for different instructional contexts: sheltered, adjunct and theme-based. Among them, the first two driven by content usually occurs in first language (L1) contexts for helping English as a second language (ESL) university students, while the last driven by language is usually found in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989; Davies, 2003). Particularly, theme-based instruction (TBI) had been applied to foreign language classes at primary level in some EFL countries for its flexible implementation, such as Hong Kong, Korea, and Turkish (Kiziltan & Ersanli, 2007, Seo, 1998; Yang, 2009). Given the fact that the focuses of the English instruction in Taiwanese primary schools are mainly on training learners' oral ability, arousing learners' motivation and interest in learning English, developing learning

skills, and cultivating learners' intercultural awareness, TBI seems to be an appropriate approach to the EFL context in Taiwan.

Though TBI have caught more and more attention in various English language teaching programs, most previous studies on TBI were conducted to ESL/EFL students at higher level, i.e. junior high school or above in most countries (Chung, 2004; Douglas, 1996; Juez, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2008; Osman, Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009; Wu, 1996). There are only some studies focusing on EFL elementary level and even fewer or no relevant studies in Taiwanese elementary school setting. Whether TBI could contribute to a successful learning outcome in Taiwan EFL elementary context, it was needed and worthwhile for the researcher to conduct the present study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As mentioned in the previous section, the objectives of the ten-year implementation of English education program at elementary level were not fully accomplished. Seeking any possible and effective solutions is needed. After investigating the English fever in Taiwan, Krashen (2003) suggested that "we acquire language when we receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation" (p. 102), which pointed out two essential elements of successful language learning, meaningful learning and low affective filters. In addition, Lee (2007), serving as a teacher educator, claimed that providing children with plentiful input and guiding them through a spiral learning method in the meaningful context are essential to children's English learning.

In order to offer a possible solution for the current teaching and learning situation in elementary schools, this study mainly focused on two purposes. First, this research aimed to examine whether TBI could facilitate learners' oral communicative

competence in Taiwan EFL primary school setting. Second, this study attempted to explore whether TBI could arouse learners' interests and motivation towards English learning.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the aforementioned motivation and purpose, there is a necessity to study the effects of TBI on elementary school students' oral communicative competence. As Enright and McCloskey (1988) suggested, TBI was one of the most effective ways to assist English language learners at various levels of education. Hence, this paper applied TBI as the syllabus guidelines to foster learners' oral communicative competence. Meanwhile, the researcher also aimed at examining learners' perceptions of the use of theme-based instruction, and the changes of learners' attitudes and motivation toward English learning after the implementation of TBI. The study asked the following two primary questions.

1. Does the theme-based instruction have positive effects on EFL elementary students' oral communicative competence?
2. Are there any changes in learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning after the implementation of theme-based instruction? If yes, in what ways?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was constructed to explore the effects of TBI on elementary learners' oral communicative competence and the influence on their learning attitudes and motivation. The results of the research provided the following contributions to English language learning. First, from the perspectives of the



pedagogical implementation, TBI has helped learners improve their oral communicative competence in the elementary school setting. This finding may provide English teachers with a useful teaching model for developing learners' oral communicative competence in the mixed-level setting. Second, TBI can arouse young learners' motivation and can meet their needs for and interests in learning foreign languages. This result may give elementary English teachers some insights into adopting TBI to enhance learners' learning motivation and interests. Third, concerning the course book design, the results may offer textbook publishers a new vision on innovative and creative course design.

### **Definition of Important Terms**

To help readers clarify the focus and gain better understanding of the study, important terms are defined as follows:

#### **1. Oral communicative competence (OCC)**

According to Dell Hymes (1972; as cited in Brown, 2000), the term communicative competence can be defined as “that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts” (p. 246). In other words, communicative competence was relatively a dynamic and interpersonal communication (Savignon, 1983). Communicative competence can be divided into four major components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

#### **2. Theme-based Instruction (TBI)**

Being the most common adopted model of the content-based instruction (CBI),

theme-based instruction refers to the teaching method in which the course is organized around a certain theme or topic (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). In a theme-based course, the theme or topic serves as a connecting thread which makes a variety of activities integrated around meaningful content (Cameron, 2008).

TBI in the present study is defined as a course in which learners work with a theme that is ripe with ample potential for discussion. Then, various oral activities revolving around the theme and the language focus were implemented in the course.

### 3. Theme-based Oral Instruction (TBOI)

In the theme-based classroom, Wachs (1996) claimed that learners tend to get involved in the discussion of the theme or topic. Students focus on the meaning and the issues related to their real life instead of sentence structures, vocabulary or tenses learning. Different from the traditional oral lesson with little cohesiveness, theme-based oral instruction puts emphasis on learners' prior knowledge, individual interests and living experiences leading them to discuss in meaningful ways.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study explored the effectiveness of theme-based instruction (TBI) as a teaching method of developing elementary students' oral communicative competence. Firstly, this chapter introduced the origins of TBI and its theoretical foundation. Then, the key elements and benefits of TBI on children's language learning were illustrated. Next, related previous studies were discussed.

#### **The Origins of Theme-Based Instruction (TBI)**

Theme-based instruction (TBI) is one of the three main approaches under the broader model of the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) / the content-based instruction (CBI), which emphasizes the integration of content learning with language teaching aims by creating a highly contextualized language learning environment (Wesche & Skehan, 2002). These three models are sheltered, adjunct and theme-based instructions. Sheltered instruction was applied to content courses designed for the ESL learners and taught by a content area specialist (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the adjunct instruction model, learners are enrolled in the linked content and language courses, in which students have to complement the coordinated assignments (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Theme-based instruction refers to "a language course in which the syllabus is organized around themes or topics...language analysis and practice evolves out of the topics that form the framework for the course" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 216). Different from sheltered and adjunct models applied in ESL immersion programs, TBI usually occurs in EFL contexts, for the lack of complex implementation. In TBI, themes are the central ideas that construct the language courses, and the language teacher, not

the subject specialist, takes responsibility for teaching content. Besides, TBI is organized around theme or topic rather than a subject, which meet the different needs of various EFL contexts (Kiziltan & Ersanli, 2007).

By definition, TBI is a language course which is constructed around themes or topics, with the linguistic forms integrated in the syllabus (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). Different from traditional language instruction, the selected themes or topics provide the content from which teachers extract language learning activities (Osman, Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009). While general language courses may also involve a variety of themes, the content acts individually as a meaningful context focusing on the language skills being taught. Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) pointed out that, “in a theme-based course, in contrast, the content is exploited and its use is maximized for the teaching of skill areas” (p. 26). Additionally, TBI provided learners with coherence and continuity across different subject areas and offered training on higher-level language skills (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). The notion of TBI is to integrate a variety of activities generating from the meaningful content and to avoid offering learners fragment knowledge and unconnected exercises (Berry & Mindes, 1993).

### **Theoretical Foundations**

TBI is based on five major theories of language learning: scaffolding theory (Buner, 1983), the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978), comprehensible input theory (Krashen, 1984), comprehensible output hypothesis (Swain, 1995) and schema theory (Anderson, 1977; Bartlett, 1932; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

First, from the perspectives of cognitive psychology, Bruner (1983) introduced

scaffolding as a useful framework provided by adults to support children, which can help them to complete more difficult tasks beyond their independent efforts. The scaffolding theory in TBI involves linguistic, cognitive and affective aspects. In terms of linguistic scaffolding, as language teachers set target language learning points for a new lesson, children have been struggling with using the needed language forms to solve the tasks or problems. With providing systematic language learning, what Bruner refers to as formats, the language teacher implemented constrained and familiar activities in order to equip children with essential language patterns though they are not familiar with those language points at the beginning. The linguistic aspect is characterized during the process in which children gradually borrowed language forms or patterns needed. This scaffolding made the language teacher act as instructor, helping and supporting children till the moment children can automatically participate in real communication without the assistance of the adults. Further, both cognitive and affective scaffolding can be integrated in small group activities, games or tasks which require cooperation, discussion, and imagination. In TBI, learners are assisted by skillful teachers or more capable peers in their development. Wu (2007) indicated that one of recommended strategies for the implementation of TBI is cooperative learning which allows learners to learn from other capable learners. Since the more students know about the language, the more easily they can learn content and assist others with the content and language.

Second, by moving forward to one's ultimate learning situation, this scaffolding notion chimed with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory. In terms of second language acquisition (SLA), ZPD theory is one of the important concepts in the social constructivist model. Different from other schools of SLA, Vygotsky observed children's language learning under the social context instead of individual learning.

Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD theory as:

*The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p.86)*

TBI can provide learners with ample communicative stretching for language learning. Motivated by high interest in a theme or topic, children may be eager to work out the meaning of unfamiliar language. With the support of meaningful content, children may struggle to communicate to others with limited knowledge. These precious moments when children are stretched to their limit may push them into the ZPD (Cameron, 2008).

Third, among Krashen's (1982) theories of second language acquisition, the input hypothesis is the most important one. The input hypothesis put emphasis on comprehensible input which can help learners acquire a second language (Zheng, 2008). For Krashen (1982), an essential "condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understands input language that contains structure a bit beyond his or her current level of competence" (p. 100). In other words, the suitable language level for learners should not be too much far beyond learners' current competence. That is to say, learners can acquire most of it but they may feel challenged to make progress (Brown, 2000). In TBI classrooms, children are interested in the content or have understood some parts of the content which is presented in new or a slight difficult linguistic structure. They use the target language as a medium of communication rather than an object of analysis. As for comprehensible input, Krashen claimed that to learn a second language effectively, acquisition should be emphasized on meaning rather than form. For an English teaching class, it is essential to occupy class time with acquisition tasks or activities

rather than to focus on linguistic forms or drills practicing (Zheng, 2008). In the implication of TBI, the teacher provided comprehensible input based on learners' interests and needs,

Fourth, in a view of Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis (1985), the development of learners' communicative competence not only relies on comprehensible input, but it also needs to provide learners with ample opportunities to use the target language productively. Moreover, De Bot (1996) also claimed that output plays a crucial role in second language acquisition "because it generates highly specific input that the cognitive system needs to build up a coherent set of knowledge" (p.529). Based on Swain's (1985) definition, comprehensible output means "a message conveyed precisely, appropriately and coherently" (p. 249). In the TBI classroom, thematic learning activities can provide learners with opportunities to negotiate meaning and to trigger coherent output since they focus on learners' living experiences, background knowledge and contextual language forms.

Finally, according to schema theory (Anderson, 1977; Bartlett, 1932; Piaget, 1969), all human beings can utilize schema, the categorical rules or scripts, to interpret or to predict situation occurring in the environment. Corresponding to instructional strategies, the most effective implication of schema theory is the prior knowledge in processing information (Armbruster, 1996). To help learners to process information effectively, the teacher needs to focus on learners' existing schema and to help them make connections to the new content. In the learning process of TBI, learners' background knowledge acquired through their mother tongue is quite influential to assist them in linking what they have known with the new topics, and to help children learn the foreign language confidently (Seo, 1998).

In conclusion, through the implication of scaffolding and ZPD theories,

learners can receive supports from their teachers and peers, and can be beneficial from the interaction. Having related to comprehensible input and schema theories, the meaningful learning in TBI can create an environment where learners can comprehend the instructional input and construct framework of knowledge. As Long (1996) mentioned, interaction and meaningful input are the two essential and important features in learning languages successfully. Theoretically, TBI equipped with these two essences, interaction and meaningful input, serves as a successful approach to language teaching and learning.

### **Key Elements of TBI**

Regarding key elements of TBI, Stoller and Grabe (1997) outlined the Six T's Approach (pp.5-7) as a systematic framework for organizing the content resources and selecting appropriate activities for broadly interpreting TBI as follows:

1. Themes are the main ideas that construct essential course units. They are selected considering the appropriateness to students' "needs and interests, institutional expectations, program resources, and teacher abilities and interests" (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 5).
2. Texts are content resources including both written and aural materials which determined the basic design of theme units. Text selection followed some decisive criteria, such as students' interests, learners' language proficiency, format styles, coherence and relevance to other materials and so on. Stoller and Grabe (1997) defined four basic types of texts (as specified in Table 2.1) for using in theme units.



Table 2.1 Four Basic Types of Texts Used in Theme Units

Types of texts	Examples of content resources
Instructor-compiled content resources	Readings of various genres, videos, audiotapes, maps, graphs, software
Instructor-generated content resources	Lectures, worksheets, graphic representations, bulletin board displays
Task-generated content resources	Student free writings, discussions, problem-solving activities, graphic representations, library searches, debates, surveys/questionnaires
External content resources	Guest speakers, field trips

3. Topics are “the subunits of content which explore more specific aspects of the theme” (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 5). By considering students’ interest, content resources, teacher preferences, and curricular objectives, topics are appropriately selected. In general, topics should be “organized to generate maximum coherence for the theme unit and to provide opportunities to explore both content and language” (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 5).
4. Threads are defined as the linkages across themes which provided greater curricular coherence. General speaking, threads are not “directly tied to the central idea controlling each theme unit, but are rather relatively abstract concepts that provide natural means for linking themes” (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 6). In particular, the function of thread is to review and to recycle essential content and language focus across themes, and to reinforce selected learning strategies. Further, threads can connect themes that appear quite different on the surface in order to foster a cohesive syllabus. Various thematically different contents can be linked through some threads, which provided opportunities to integrate language knowledge and content aspects from new perspectives.
5. Tasks are the day-to-day basic units in which instructional activities and

techniques are utilized to teach content, language, and strategy in language classrooms, such as note-taking, extracting main idea and information from the texts, problem solving, and critical thinking. In the Six-T's Approach, "tasks are planned in response to the texts being used. That is, content resources drive task, decisions and planning" (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 6).

6. Transitions are "explicitly planned actions which provide coherence across tasks within the topics. Transitions create links across topics and provide constructiveness entrees for new tasks and topics within a theme unit" (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 7). Two effective types of transitions suggested by Stoller and Grabe (1997) are briefly introduced as follows (See Table 2.2) (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 7).

Table 2.2 Two Types of Transitions

<b>Transitions</b>	<b>Sample transition activities in a theme unit on demography</b>
Topical transitions	A deliberate shift in emphasis from global population trends, to trends in developing countries, to trends in developed countries, to trends in students' home countries. Students are explicitly made aware of these transitions.
Task transitions	Students are asked to (a) interpret a graph depicting population trends; (b) create a new graph with raw data obtained from a classroom survey; (c) write an interpretation of the new graph; (d) reconstruct the graph into a research paper, bulletin board display, or oral presentation.

Unlike other communicative approaches (e.g. structural or task-based approaches) aiming at language teaching, the Six T's Approach framework makes learners more interested in and motivated toward learning English by providing

them with unique concepts and effective techniques for developing a coherent theme-based instruction in the whole process of learning language.

### **The Benefits of TBI**

The potential of TBI to provide realistic and motivating uses of the language has high connection to the features of children's language learning, i.e. meaningful learning, learner-centered and cooperative learning. Basically, there are five essential benefits of TBI on children's language learning listed as follows (Enright & McCloskey, 1988; Mumford, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 1997):

1. Creating a meaningful conceptual framework: Brown (2001) indicated that “whenever a new topic or concept is introduced, attempt to anchor it in students’ existing knowledge and background so that it gets associated with something they already know” (p. 57). Peregoy and Boyle (1997) pointed out that TBI creates a meaningful conceptual framework for content learning and effective language acquiring. To make learning meaningful, students are engaged in authentic tasks or activities, which are connected to their real life experiences. The teachers also provide learners with authentic themes which revolve around learners’ background experiences from home, previous instruction, and prior knowledge.
2. Meeting learners’ needs and interests: As Freeman and Freeman (2006) suggested that learners will try harder to understand and to maintain focusing on the lesson if the content is relevant and interesting. In the process of organizing theme-based teaching, children can be involved in the discussion of topics selection, and their needs and interests are the key criteria for the course design. Children will learn and are willing to talk when the content is interesting to them and is related to their experiences (Seefeldt & Galper, 1998). Mumford (2000) suggested that “by

building on learners' interests and life experiences, young people's attitudes, skills, and knowledge are developed in meaningful ways" (p. 4). According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, TBI can provide children with a low anxiety learning environment since children's interests, need and attitudes have been taken into consideration as the top priority.

3. Providing learner-centered activities: Children differ from adults as language learners. Children are willing to listen to or speak of something that interests them for their own reasons, not merely because a teacher has asked them to. TBI provides child-centered activities and real communication for children to complete tasks through discussion or negotiation within a group. When they are working on a given task in groups, they need to communicate for meanings and negotiate for an agreement on solutions. This requires them to work as a group and take responsibility for their language. As Mumford (2000) claimed that "inquiry and real communication are activated by a desire to know more, resulting in enthusiastic participation in the learning process" (p.4), theme-based instruction plays as a vehicle eliciting learners' desire.
4. Developing cooperative learning: According to Slavin (1995) and Duenas (2004), significant progress in students' learning occurred when students worked in groups to reach solutions to the tasks. In additional, Peregoy and Boyle (1997) also suggested that small group motivated students to work collaboratively. As Dupuy (2000) pointed out, small group work can provide learners with ample opportunities in a low-risk environment for cultivating various abilities, such as how to do the peer editing, how to interact with others, how to share ideas, and how to construct knowledge. When the English teacher implemented a theme-based instruction, cooperative learning is one of the recommended strategies (Osman, Ahmad &

Jusoff, 2009), which allows learners to get involved in the learning group, to learn from the capable peers, to share personal experiences with peers, and to perform different tasks or to acquire knowledge together.

5. Providing a language-rich classroom environment: TBI provided much more natural realistic contexts for nonnative speakers to use the target language (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997), and to foster language learning through communicative stretching (Cameron, 2008). Based on Vygotsky (1978)'s ZPD, with the help of teachers or skilled peers, children can do and understand much more than they can on their own. TBI can "produce moments when pupils' language resources are stretched to their limit" (Cameron, 2008, p. 192). Supported by meaningful content, children may be able to work out the meaning of new or unfamiliar language, or motivated by interesting topics; they may be eager to communicate their knowledge to someone else.

In conclusion, TBI allows children to learn in a way which is natural and authentic to them. That is, teachers can create a good deal of language course built on children's interests and prior knowledge, and can provide an environment that helps children link language learning and content knowledge to their real-life experiences.

### **Related Studies on TBI**

TBI, one of the CLIL models, has attracted much attention in the field of foreign language teaching and learning because it was seen as an appropriate curriculum design that can lead to positive gains in acquiring a second language in the English speaking countries. A number of school programs and studies showed that TBI was beneficial in the ESL/EFL context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stoller,

2004; Wesche & Skehan, 2002).

In this section, some previous studies focusing on TBI are discussed first; then, the limitations and suggestions of the related studies are illustrated.

Osman, Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) conducted a study exploring the effectiveness of TBI as a means of honing the writing skills and the motivation for writing of 36 pre-degree ESL learners in a Malaysian tertiary institution. The finding indicated the implementation of TBI and cooperative process writing did to some extent improve the learners' motivation and proficiency in the language, mainly their writing skills.

Douglas (1996) utilized a theme-based approach to design a curriculum to teach an advanced course of Japanese as a foreign language in an American University. This study aimed at developing four skills. Formative and summative evaluation of the program was conducted in order to examine the effectiveness of this approach. At the end of the final term, students filled out the questionnaire to evaluate the program as a whole. The results indicated that the students valued the theme-based approach, and appreciated participating in the instruction.

One successful program involving a TBI in Spain was documented by Juez (2006). In Juez's research, the course instructed legal English, the content of Anglo-American legal system, and the use of audiovisual resources to connect the classroom to the real world. Surveys administered at the end of the course revealed highly positive feedback on perceived progress in both language and content.

Kiziltan and Ersanli (2007) conducted a study of a theme-based course on Turkish young learners. Achievement tests were used at the end of the study, and the results showed that the TBI group performed better than the control group.

Yang (2009) utilized theme-based teaching in an English course for primary ESL students in Hong Kong. However, the study was conducted in a non-school

setting with 76 grade 4 and 5 children, and 12 course tutors were involved. Based on the collected data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the finding indicated that theme-based teaching did not seem to arouse learners' interests in learning English at all since teachers failed to provide learners with interesting activities and suitable materials. It's obvious that more information concerning learners' interests and learners' English proficiency level should be collected before the course begins (i.e. a placement test and a survey on learners' interests could be administered in advance).

Chung (2004) conducted a study to investigate the effects of the theme-based projects on English learning by comparing a computer-mediated communication (CMC) group and a Non-CMC group in a junior high school in Taiwan. The study findings reveal that CMC group did have great effects on improving learners' English reading proficiency, and most of the students in the group also showed positive responses to the theme-based project English learning, expressing that theme-based projects were interesting and they would like to further explore the themes.

Can (2009) implemented a study to investigate the effects of theme-based syllabus on the motivation of freshman students in Turkey. The results showed that students' motivation improves after employing a theme-based syllabus which reflects students' interests in a classroom. The finding also revealed that theme-based syllabus can help learners develop positive attitude towards the course and language learning.

The main elements of the previous studies were summarized in Table 2.3 as follows.

Table 2.3 The Summary of the Main Elements of the Previous Studies

Study	Participants					Focus				Contexts		Empirical Research
	E	J	H	C	S	L	R	W	A	ESL	EFL	
Osman et al. (2009)				✓				✓	✓		✓	✓
Douglas (1996)				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Kiziltan et al. (2007)	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Yang (2009)	✓(non-school)								✓	✓		
Chung (2004)		✓					✓		✓		✓	✓
Can (2009)				✓					✓		✓	

Note. E= elementary school; J= junior high school H= senior high school; C= college; S= speaking; L= listening; R= reading; W= writing; A= attitudes

### Critiques on the Previous Research

Based on the discussions above and the main elements of the previous studies (Table 2.3), the limitations and suggestions of the previous studies are taken into account for the present study as follows.

To begin with, most of the previous studies on TBI were conducted to higher levels, especially to college students. Comparatively fewer studies focused on elementary school students. Yang's (2009) study was conducted to primary level; however, it was implemented in non-school setting in the ESL context. Although Kiziltan and Ersanli's (2007) study was on Turkish young learners in the EFL context, the teaching and learning situations were different from those of Taiwan. Doye and Hurrell (1997) pointed out the fact that the implementation of the English language education at primary level differs from one country to the others due to the differences in social, economic and educational conditions.

In addition, though Chung's (2004) study was conducted to EFL setting in Taiwan, it focused on junior high school level and stressed on learner's reading



proficiency through the aid of Computer-Mediated Communications instead of oral proficiency.

Last, most of the previous studies are not empirical studies. For example, in Douglas's (1996) study, student responses were used as the criteria to evaluate the language program. In Yang's (2009) and Can's (2009) studies, an appropriate evaluation should be conducted at the end of the course in order to obtain much more persuasive findings rather than merely using questionnaires and interviews. Undoubtedly, there is a necessity of more empirical studies to investigate the effects of TBI on foreign language learning.

Adding these together, the present study adopted an empirical research and aimed at investigating the effects of TBI on EFL elementary students in Taiwan. Additionally, one of the major goals of the new language policy for elementary level set by the MOE is to enhance learners' oral communicative competence; however, few previous studies focused on oral aspect. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of theme-based oral instruction (TBOI) on learners' oral communicative competence. Also, the attitudes and motivation toward English learning through the implementation of TBOI were investigated in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter consists of six sections. The first section briefly introduces the characteristics of the subjects. In the second section, instruments used in this study are illustrated. The whole procedure of this study is presented in the following section. The theme-based oral instruction (TBOI) for experimental group and the traditional oral instruction for the control group are described in the fourth and fifth sections. The final section deals with data analysis.

#### **Subjects**

The participants consisted of two fifth-grade classes in a public elementary school in Douliou City, the capital of the Yunlin County. All the participants had completed more than two years of formal English instruction in the public school with an average of two 40-minute English lessons per week. Moreover, 80% of them attended extra English instruction after school. The students in this study had similar educational background to most of the other students in the EFL context of Taiwan.

The two classes were randomly assigned to experimental group (EG) and control group (CG). The experimental group comprised 30 students who received the TBOI. Another 31 students served as a control group receiving the traditional oral training. An English Oral Proficiency Test (EOPT) was conducted to examine whether the two groups were at the similar language proficiency level at the beginning, and there was no significant difference in the results ( $p = .898$ ). In addition, both groups were taught by the same instructor, the researcher, using the same textbook.

## **Instruments**

This study employed two instruments to measure the achievement of this study: an English oral proficiency test (EOPT) to exam learners' oral communication skill and a questionnaire to assess learning attitudes and motivation.

### ***English Oral Proficiency Test (EOPT)***

In order to measure the effects of theme-based oral instruction (TBOI) on subjects' oral communicative competence, this study adapted Lee's (2008) English oral proficiency test as the pre-test and the post-test. The pre-test was also used to examine whether two groups were at similar English oral proficiency level in the beginning of the research (mentioned in the section Subjects).

Due to the context differences, the questions and pictures had been modified based on the themes and the learning contents in this study (see Appendix A). The English proficiency test (EOPT) in this study included 16 questions which are categorized into four major themes, with three components: linguistic competency (6 questions), interactive competency (9 questions) and sociolinguistic competency (1 question) (Bachman, 1990; Lee, 2008; Nakamura, 2005), as shown in Table 3.1.

Since the focus of theme one was on school subjects, the context was set on campus with pictures concerning the timetable and different subject lessons. The distribution of questions in School Subject Theme was from question 2 to question 5.

The topic for theme two was regarding People Who Help Us, and the questions were distributed from question 6 to question 9. Since family members and their jobs have much more influence on learners' daily life, the family context has been selected for this theme.

Theme three was dealing with Fruit Salad, and the questions distribution was from question 10 to question 12. The main activities of this theme were around “Making Fruit Salad”, so it was also chosen as the context.

The topic of theme four was Go Shopping, and the questions were distributed from question 13 to question 16. Since all the learners shared the same experiences of participating in the school flea market every semester, the context for this theme was shopping in a flea market.

Table 3.1 The Four-theme Contents of EOPT

Theme / Context	Item No.	Language Competency
Greeting	Q1	Sociolinguistic Competency
Theme1: School Subjects Context 1: On Campus	Q2	Interactive Competency
	Q3	Linguistic Competency
	Q4	Interactive Competency
	Q5	
Theme 2: People Who Help Us Context 2: My Family	Q6	
	Q7	
	Q8	
	Q9	
Theme 3: Fruit Salad Context 3: Making Fruit Salad	Q10	Linguistic Competency
	Q11	
	Q12	
Theme 4: Go Shopping Context 4: Let's Go Shopping	Q13	Interactive Competency
	Q14	
	Q15	Linguistic Competency
	Q16	

Due to the lack of language laboratory, the oral tape-recording test format in Lee's study was not considered in the present study setting. Therefore, both the

pre-and post-oral tests were all administrated by the researcher using a face-to face oral test format in which one oral examiner assessed individual student privately, i.e. one to one format (1:1 format). According to the Research Notes of the Cambridge Young Learners' English Test, the examiner did serve as the student's partner, comforting students' stress, interacting with the examinee, demonstrating, and ensuring the smooth continuum of the test (Wilson, 2005). Considering the potential stress during the test process in which children would generate, the oral test was implemented in the English classroom where students would feel more familiar, natural and comfortable in producing oral performance. The examiner's role was to ensure that all the students understood the content of test and answered freely. In addition, the whole testing procedure was recorded for later scoring. In order to measure learners' oral outcome appropriately and objectively, two raters, the researcher and an English teacher in the same school, assessed participant's oral performance respectively based on the rating scale adopted from Lee's (2008) scoring criteria (see Appendix B). That is, four points were given to each correct answer and the total score was 64 points.

### ***English Learning Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire***

Adapting from the framework of Carreira's (2006) Motivation and Attitudes toward Learning English Scale for Children (MALESC), an English learning attitudes and motivation questionnaire (see Appendix C, D & E) was used to investigate the changes of learners' attitudes and motivation after the experiment. Moreover, this study aimed at measuring learners' oral communicative competence from the perspective of learning attitudes and motivation. The contents of the questionnaire were much more focused on learners' speaking performance. To

assess the face validity, the questionnaire has been judged by two English teachers working at the implementing elementary school.

The contents of the learning attitudes and motivation questionnaire in the present study were categorized into three main factors including learning attitudes factor, anxiety factor and instrument motivation factor, with 25 items as shown in Table 3.2. There were 17 items (from item 1 to 17) concerning the learning attitudes factor, and were subcategorized into three attitude components, the affective, cognitive and behavioral components (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The anxiety factor consisted of item 18 and 19, and instrumental motivation factor is distributed from item 20 to 25.

Table 3.2 Threes Factors for the 25 Questionnaire Items

Factor	Content		No. of items
1	Learning Attitudes	Affective Component	1, 3, 4, 15, 16
		Cognitive Component	2, 5, 7, 9, 10
		Behavioral Component	6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17
2	Anxiety		18, 19
3	Instrumental Motivation		20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

In addition, taking Dörnyei's (2001) suggestion into consideration, this study applied an even-number response options to avoid the possibility that some respondents often tended to choose the neutral alternative, (i.e., "neither agree nor disagree", "not sure", or "neutral"). Thus, this study adopted a four-point Likert scale (i.e. strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1).

## Procedure

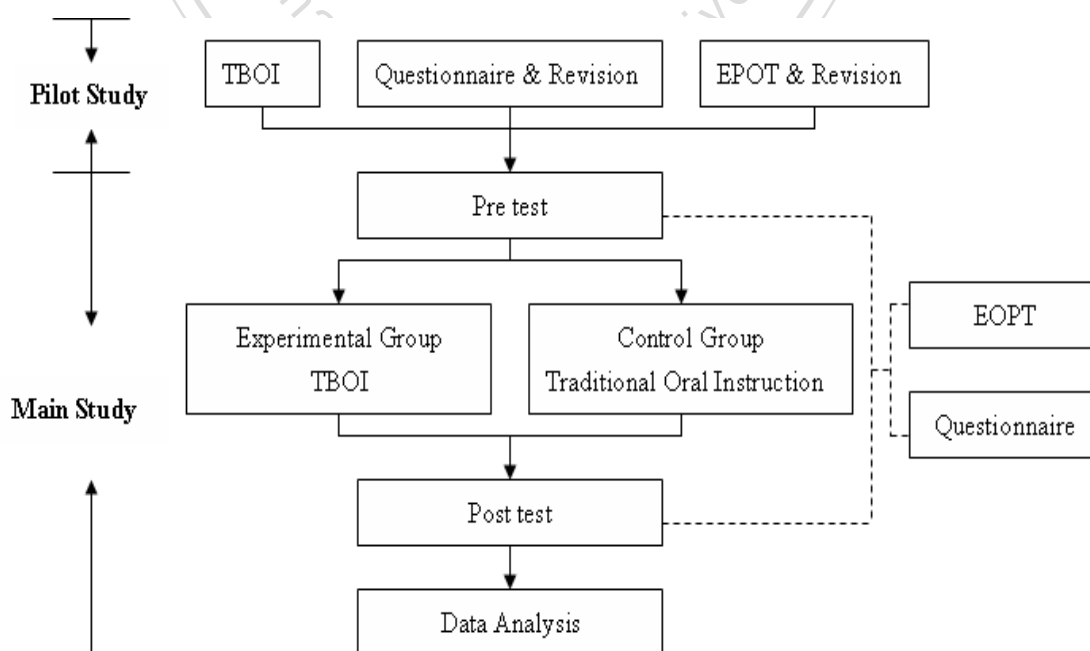
This study was conducted to examine if TBOI could benefit learners' oral communicative competence and to investigate if their English learning motivation and attitudes has changed. The research procedure comprised two stages: pilot study and main study. The pilot study lasted for three weeks at the beginning of the semester, and the main study was running for the following 12 weeks as shown in Figure 3.1.

In the pilot study stage, to make sure that the instruction procedure and the materials were appropriate, the first theme of TBOI was conducted in one fifth-grade class with 33 pupils running for 3 weeks, one month before the main study (in September, 2009). As for the EOPT and questionnaire, to test the face validity, both the EOPT and questionnaire had been evaluated by one university professor and two elementary school English teachers before the implementation of the study. Inappropriate items were revised based on the professor's and teachers' suggestions. For example, the description of Q11 in the EOPT was difficult to young learners. The description was revised and became shorter and easier. The pictures shown in EOPT were colorful rather than printed in black and white after modification. Then, the EOPT and questionnaire were conducted to the fifth-grade class for test reliability measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient, and the internal consistency reliabilities of the EOPT and questionnaire evaluated were .933 and .930 respectively. Meanwhile, an inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was also performed to determine consistency between two raters, and the result was considered acceptable (Kappa =.887 with  $p < 0.001$ ).

At the beginning of the main study stage, the pre-EOPT was used to examine whether the subjects of two groups were at similar English oral proficiency level

two weeks before the main study. Since the EOPT was quite time-consuming, a 40-minute period at noon break-time per day lasting for 2 weeks before the instruction was taken to conduct the test. In each period (40 minutes), there were eight students taking the EOPT. Meanwhile, the pre-questionnaire was conducted to both EG and CG in the class one week before the main study.

The main study was implemented for 12 weeks from the beginning of October 2009 to the end of December 2009. The EG received TBOI and the traditional oral instruction was employed in the CG. Both two groups received one 40-minute period per week. After the main study was finished, the same EOPT were used as the post-test and were taken by the two groups in the following two weeks in order to investigate the subjects' learning progress. With the aim to understand the changes of subjects' English learning attitudes and motivation, the same questionnaire was conducted as the post-questionnaire to the two groups after the instructions were finished. Finally, all the data collected were analyzed and discussed.



**Figure 3.1 Flow Chart of the Research Procedure**



### Theme-Based Oral Instruction for EG

The theme-based oral instruction (TBOI) lasted for 12 weeks, and EG took one 45-minute period of English class per week. Based on the content of the textbook, *Here We Go* (Longman, 2009), four units were chosen as the main themes in the study. These four themes are School Subjects, People Who Help Us, Fruit Salad, and Go Shopping.

With the goal for conducting TBOI successfully and appropriately, the first theme, School Subjects, was employed in the pilot study for three weeks before the main study. Since the first theme has been worked smoothly in the pilot study, the teacher duplicated the instruction procedure in the pilot study to the EG including the implementing process and the main teaching contents (see Appendix F).

In this section, the instruction procedure was described first, followed by instruction teaching process.

#### *Instruction Procedure*

Base on the schedule of school curriculum, each theme has been implemented for three weeks, and the main activities for each week were showed in the following table (see Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 The Time Table and the Main Activities for Each Theme**

Week 1	Theme → brainstorming and webbing → sub-themes → 2 main activities or tasks selection
Week 2	The implementation of the first activity or task.
Week 3	The implementation of the second activity or task.

At the first week, the teacher discussed the theme with students using two basic planning tools, brainstorming and webs. The main theme was put in the center of the

board, and connecting ideas or information was written around it. By asking children for words linked to the theme in the brainstorming and webbing processes, the teacher had done a quick assessment of children's knowledge. This work was done with children in English or bilingually, which allowed children to express their interest willingly around the topic. Guiding questions were also used in the brainstorm activity. The questions guided the sequencing and content of activities. After ideas were grouped into sub-themes decided by students and the teacher, students were divided into small groups, and a group leader and a language assistant were selected by the teacher. Then, students were guided how to discuss and how to make decisions by taking the peer response training following the concepts of cooperative learning principles (e.g. how to ask and answer questions politely, how to respond to peer's blame or to give praise, respect peer's opinions, and so on). After each group presented their ideal task or activity, the whole class has to choose one sub-theme with two tasks and activities for the following two weeks.

At the second and third weeks, the selected tasks or activities were implemented following the procedure: (1) set up warm-up activity to arouse learners' interest; (2) explain the task/activity goals to the whole class and inform them what have to be done later in their group; (3) at first, the teacher guided and supported children as they spoke in the group; gradually, children would feel confident to speak English using learned sentences or questions to discuss with group members; (4) finally, group oral report or presentation would be evaluated by peers and the teacher.

### ***Teaching Process***

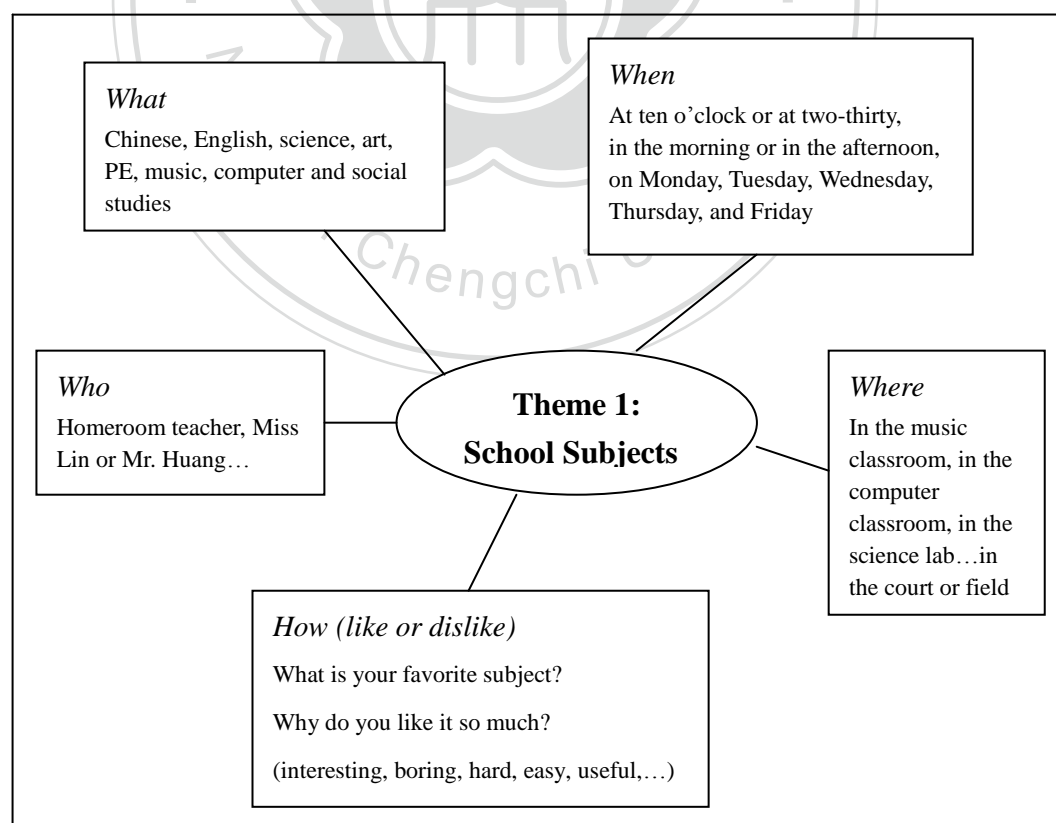
This section recorded the implementing process of the four themes including

teacher's instruction and the contents.

### ***Theme One: School Subjects***

Following the steps of the TBOI procedure (shown in Table 3.3), the thematic brainstorming web was briefly introduced in Figure 3.2.

In the process of brainstorming and webbing, the researcher found that most students were highly motivated and involved in the discussion; however, the researcher also noticed that some students had difficulties in using target language to express why they like or dislike a specific subject due to their limited vocabulary. Inevitably, the researcher needed to support them now and then with some proper vocabulary written on the board, such as interesting, boring, useful, exciting, hard, easy, and so forth.



**Figure 3.2 School Subject Thematic Brainstorming Web**

In the second step, all the students were assigned to a mix-leveled group within which the group leader and the language assistant were responsible for later group discussion. Obviously, various kinds of difficulties to some degree would exist in conducting group discussion in English. At the beginning, the teacher's role was to demonstrate how to implement group discussion in target language; then, group leader and language assistant helped other group members to participate in discussion. Within group discussion, students might use target language or talk bilingually with teacher's guidance simultaneously. After each group presented their ideal tasks or activities, the whole class then chose My Favorite Subject as the sub-theme with an activity and a task for the following two weeks (shown in Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4 The Activity and Task around the School Subject Theme**

<b>Sub-theme: My Favorite Subject</b>	
<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Task</u></b>
<i>At first, visual and audio materials regarding "my favorite subject" were displayed; then, each group was given the scripts for group reading and discussion. Each group needed to take notes on the report format and students was evaluated by the teacher in the discussing process and performed their discussion at the end of the class.</i>	<i>Each group created an introduction to their favorite subject and the subject teacher, and then demonstrated it orally as a guessing game. At first, the other students had to work out what the subject is and who the subject teacher is. Then, the group kept completing their presentation.</i>

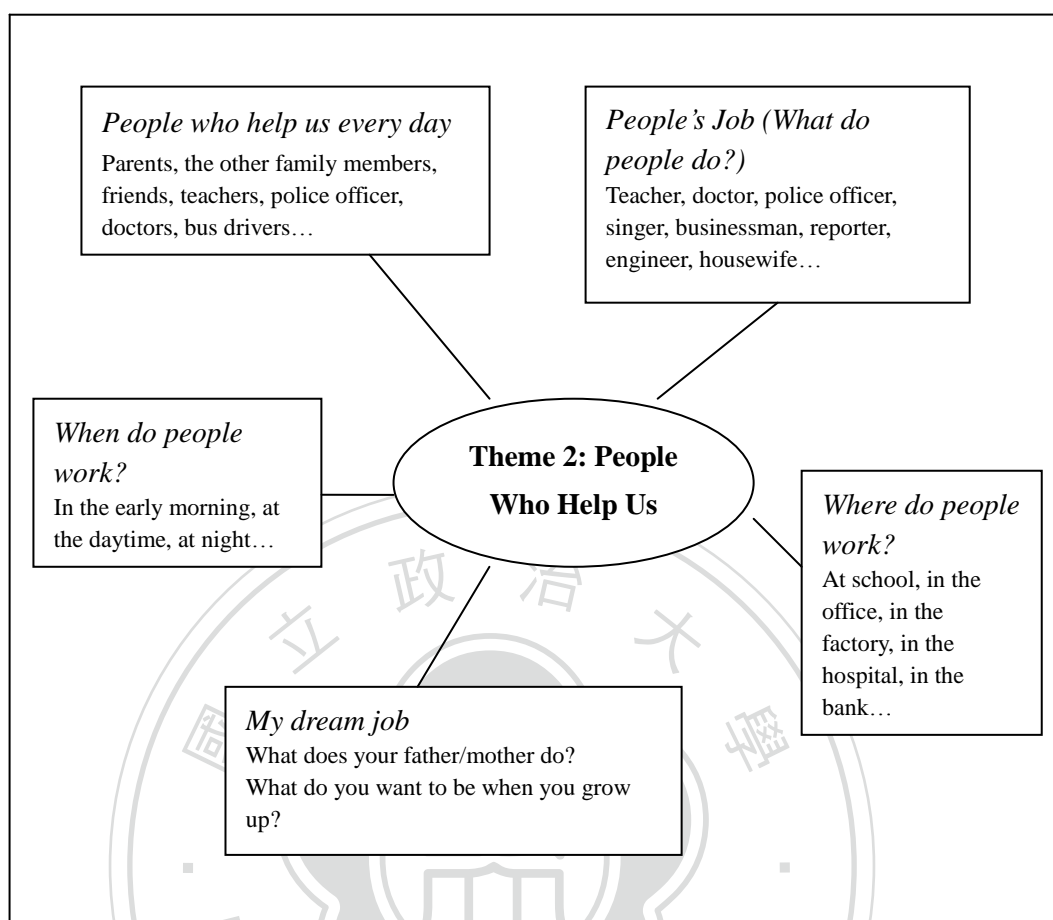
Based on students' existing schemata, interest and background knowledge, the researcher selected the most appropriate content resources, set appropriate language learning objectives and prepared suitable materials for the tasks or activities, such as worksheets, internet sources, and authentic materials.

During the process of conducting the activity and the task, the role of the teacher primarily played as a coordinator or facilitator, which meant that teachers' roles were not diminished, but altered. Although, students have been given greater opportunities for decision making and strategies using, they are still young and need the teacher's guidance and support for helping them connecting prior and new knowledge together, providing different contexts for language skills practicing, and maintaining a whole picture of the learning focuses that the students have to require through the activities and tasks.

### ***Theme Two: People Who Help Us***

While the second theme has been implemented, learners have learned some common occupations in the previous classes, such as teachers, doctors, police officers and so on. As shown in Figure 3.3, the teacher led them to extended thinking, such as the topics concerning “When do they work” “Where do people work” and “My dream job”. Through the discussion, learners connected their daily experiences to language learning.

After EG selected two sub-themes “People who help us every day” and “My dream job” as shown in Table 3.5, the research collected related materials from internet, resources books and authentic information to support learners' group discussion. While conducting the second activity “My dream job”, learners had to prepare the answers in advance regarding their parents' job and their dream job. The teacher needed to provide learners with a variety of job categories for learners' reference. Although words for some of the occupations are difficult to learners, they learned those words with enthusiasm and memorized them without hesitating because those occupation words were meaningful to them.



**Figure 3.3 People Who Help Us Thematic Brainstorming Web**

**Table 3.5 The Activity and Task around the People Who Help Us Theme**

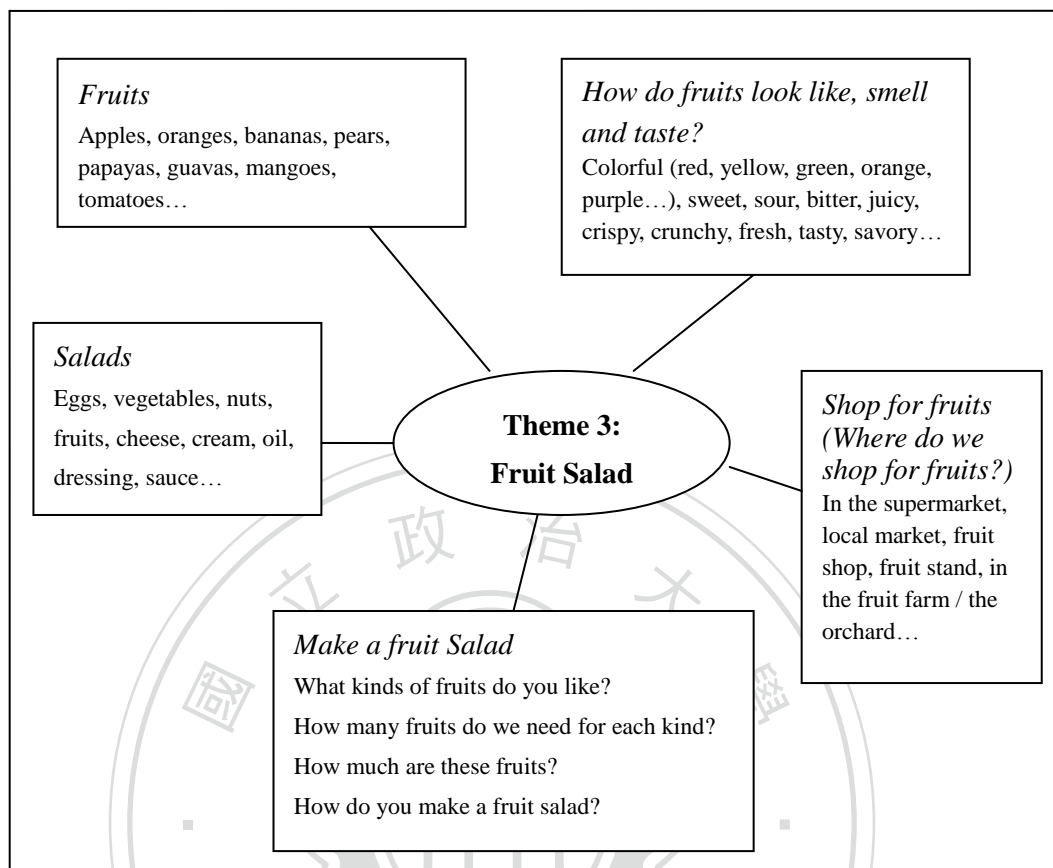
<b>Sub-theme: People who help us every day</b>	<b>Sub-theme: My dream job</b>
<p><b><u>Activity</u></b></p> <p><i>At first, the teacher introduced some examples of those people who help children every day, such as parents, teachers and bus drivers to connect them to students' experiences. Then, each group discussed and made a list of people who help them in their everyday living following the temporal sequencing. All the details were written in a report format for later group report.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Activity</u></b></p> <p><i>Before the class, each student had to prepare the answers for the two questions.</i>  Q1.What does your father/mother do?  Q2.What do you want to be when you grow up? And why?  <i>At first, every one shared their answers with the other group members. Then, all students participated in the activity entitled "My Dream Job" to interchange personal information with the other group members.</i></p>

### ***Theme Three: Fruit Salad***

As shown in Figure 3.4 and Table 3.6, theme three “Fruit Salad” was the most attracting topic among the four themes for learners. All the EG learners were so excited while getting involved in discussion, and they made a decision to make fruit salad without hesitating. Before undertaking to make a fruit salad, learners needed to learn how to make an attracting and delicious fruit salad. In the group discussion, learners need to consider many elements concerning the fruit salad, such as the tastes, the colors, the prices and so on. In this theme, most of the materials were authentic collected from the local market. Learners need to learn where to get the fruits, how much price they need to pay, which kinds of fruits were available at this season and so on. At the beginning of conducting this theme, students still used first language to refer to the fruits; however, they gradually used English words to say those fruits in later activities.

### ***Theme Four: Go Shopping***

As shown in Figure 3.5, the fourth theme of the present study was “Go Shopping” with sub-themes related to it. Learners discussed the topics and shared their experiences together, such as where to get much cheaper stationery, books or toys. To respond to school’s “Flea Market” activity to be held at the end of each semester, learners put emphasis on how to prepare a wonderful stand for the flea market. They discussed their dream store and how to make it a realistic stand. As the information indicated in Table 3.7, learners had experiences in their real life regarding shopping and selling in the flea market. All they need to learn was how to complete it in English. The teacher provided learners with language supports and designed activities for learners’ practices.

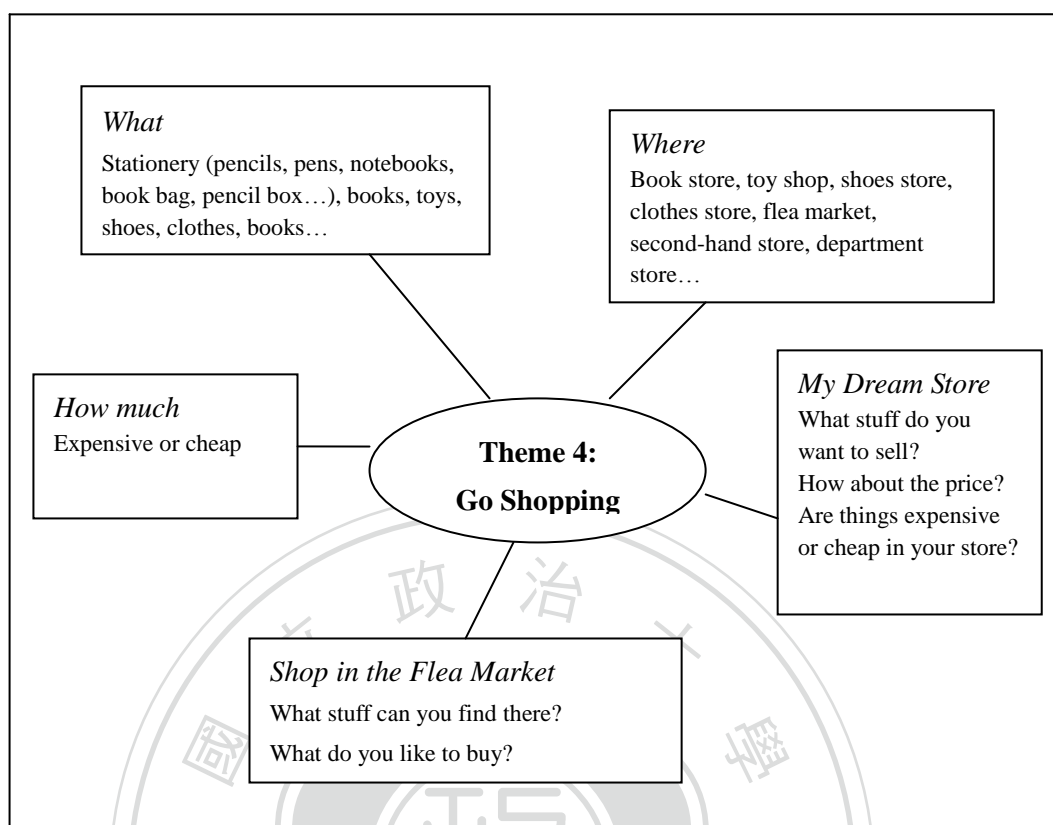


**Figure 3.4 Fruit Salad Thematic Brainstorming Web**

**Table 3.6 The Activity and Task around the *Fruit Salad* Theme**

Sub-theme: Shop for fruits	Sub-theme: Make a fruit salad
<p><b>Activity</b></p> <p><i>At first, each group discussed what sorts of fruits they would like to sell and made up the prices for each kind of fruits. Then, group members took turns to act as customers and the fruit stand owners. Each group had NT\$500 for shopping the fruit. Finally, each group had to record the amount and the cost of each item of fruits that they bought for group oral reporting.</i></p>	<p><b>Task</b></p> <p><i>Initially, each group discussed and made the recipe for their fruit salad. Then, each group member had to prepare an item of ingredients for making the fruit salad before the class. In the class, following the teacher's guidance, every group completed their fruit salad. Then, each group invited other group members to taste the fruit salad. Finally, the class conducted a taste survey for their favorite fruit salad.</i></p>





**Figure 3.5 Go Shopping Thematic Brainstorming Web**

**Table 3.7 The Activity and Task around the Go Shopping Theme**

Sub-theme: My dream store	Sub-theme: Shop in a flea market
<p><b>Activity</b></p> <p>Firstly discussed in group the topic, where those stuffs and things come from; then, worked with group members for selecting particular things or stuff with prices for sale in their dream store. In addition, each group had to take notes regarding selected items with prices and pictures on a poster. Finally, each group released an oral report.</p>	<p><b>Task</b></p> <p>(Usually, there will be a flea market at the end of each semester at school.) At first, students shared experiences concerning shopping in the school flea market with their group members. Then, discussed and reconsidered the prices they had set for their dream store stuffs in the previous activity. After modification of the items or prices, each member took turns to play sellers and buyers interacting with other members.</p>

### Traditional Oral Instruction for CG

The instruction lasted for 12 weeks, and CG took one 45-minute period of English class per week. During the instruction, the same 4 units in the textbook, *Here We Go*, were used. Based on the schedule of school curriculum, each theme was implemented for three weeks. The instruction mainly focused on the content of the textbook; therefore, the activities were implemented following the textbook course designs. As Table 3.8 showed, the time table and the main activities of each theme were introduced as follows.

At the first week, after warm-up drills of the language focus had been practiced, students worked in pairs practicing the ‘Activity’ part for reinforcement. Finally, there was an assessment to evaluate student’s oral performance in pairs. At the second week, the whole class reviewed the dialogue of the ‘Story’ part through repetition. Then, they would do the role play in pairs or in group. At the end of the class, each pair or group needed to present the dialogue to the student assistants. At the third week, songs and chants were reviewed first; then, there would be an activity for extended learning, such as create a new song or chant by replacing the key words. Finally, the whole class practiced together for reinforcement or each group had a performance for assessment.

**Table 3.8 The Time Table and the Main Activities of Each Theme for CG**

Week 1	Warm-up drills → Textbook activity (work in pairs) → Oral assessment (in pairs)
Week 2	Reviewed the dialogue of the Story part in the textbook → Role play in pairs or groups → Evaluated by the student assistants in pairs or group
Week 3	Review songs or chants → Extended activities → Evaluated by groups

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data in this study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 12.0). All the data were classified into two types: the first was collected from the EOPT pre-test and post-test, and the second pre- and post-instruction questionnaires.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of English oral proficiency test in pre-test to make sure there was no significant difference between EG and CG. To answer research question 1, firstly, paired t-tests on pre- and post- EOPT of EG and CG were conducted respectively. Then, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of both groups in EOPT post-test. The significance level was set at  $<.05$ .

To answer research question 2, the data of the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires were analyzed by two-staged quantitative analysis. Firstly, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of pre- and post-instruction questionnaires for two groups. Meanwhile, paired t-tests were used to compare the mean scores of pre- and post- questionnaires of EG and CG respectively. If there does exist a significant difference between two groups or between pre- and post- questionnaires within the same group; then, independent samples t-tests for each questionnaire item between EG and CG groups and paired t-tests for each question between pre- and post- questionnaires for two groups would be employed to analyze in what way learners' motivation and attitudes did changed in order to reveal details regarding the difference of learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning between EG and CG. The significance level was set at  $<.05$ .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This chapter comprises of two sections. The first section demonstrates the difference in the effects of TBOI and traditional oral instruction on learners' communicative competence. The second section reports the results of learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning after the treatment.

#### The Effects of TBOI and Traditional Oral Instruction on Learners'

##### Communicative Competence

In order to compare the differences in the oral communicative competence between EG and CG after the treatment of TBOI and the traditional oral instruction, a paired t-test was conducted first. As shown in Table 4.1, the results of pre- and post- EPOT in EG and CG showed that both theme-based oral instruction and the traditional oral instruction have significant effects on learners' oral communicative competence. The t-value of EG in the paired t-test is -12.52 with  $p < .005$ , and the t-value of CG in the paired t-test is -7.82 with  $p < .005$ . However, the means of EG has greatly improved from 25.57 to 44.40 after the TBOI treatment, much better than the progress of CG under the treatment of the traditional oral instruction (from 25.26 to 36.32).

**Table 4.1 Paired T-test on Pre- and Post- EOPT of EG and CG**

Group	M	df	t
	Pre-post		
EG (n=30)	25.57-44.40	29	-12.52**
CG (n=31)	25.26-36.32	30	-7.82**

\*\*  $P < .005$

In the second step, an independent sample t-test was conducted in order to get more clear findings of the comparison in the effects on oral communicative competence between these two groups. As displayed in Table 4.2, at the beginning of the study, both EG and CG students took the pre-EOPT and the results of an independent sample t-test indicate that there was no significant difference in the scores for EG and CG. The t-value in the independent sample t-test is 0.13 with  $p > 0.05$ . According to the results in Table 4.2, however, after the different oral instructional treatments and the administration of the EOPT, the mean score of EG in the posttest is significantly higher than that of CG. Meanwhile, the results of the independent sample t-test show that there was a significant difference between the groups. The t-value is 2.32 with  $p < 0.05$  as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Independent Sample T-test on Pre- and Post-EOPT for EG and CG

Test	M	df	t
	EG-CG		
Pre	25.57-25.26	57.27	.13
Post	44.40-36.32	58.92	2.32*

\*  $P < .05$

### **The Comparison of the Learners' Attitudes and Motivation towards English Learning**

This section presents the results of the pre- and post-instruction questionnaires concerning the second research question: Are there any changes in learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning after the implementation of theme-based instruction? If yes, in what ways? To answer this research question, firstly, paired t-tests were implemented to EG and CG respectively through the comparison between the pre- and post questionnaires. As Table 4.3 indicates, the result of paired t-test of CG shows that there is no significant difference between pre- and post-

questionnaire. However, there did exist a significant difference between pre- and post- questionnaire of EG as shown in Table 4.3. After the treatment of the traditional oral instruction, there is only slight positive change in learners' attitudes and motivation towards learning English. Nevertheless, the treatment of theme-based oral instruction has aroused learners' positive attitudes and motivation towards learning English.

Table 4.3 Paired T-test on Pre- and Post- questionnaires of EG and CG

Group	M	df	t
	Pre-post		
EG (n=30)	2.87-3.29	29	-2.94**
CG (n=31)	2.75-2.97	30	-1.51

\*\* P<.005

To gain more details regarding the changes of learners' attitudes and motivation towards learning English, there is a necessity to utilize independent sample t-tests between these two groups. As shown in Table 4.4, the results of the independent samples t-test between EG and CG show that there is no significant difference between EG and CG in learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning at the beginning of the study. Meanwhile, both of the means scores of EG and CG are lower than 3.00, which showed that the students in these two groups hold a slightly negative attitudes and motivation towards learning English. After the twelve-week application of TBOI and traditional oral instruction respectively in EG and CG, there are significance changes in learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning by comparing the scores of the independent sample t-test on post-questionnaire of EG and CG as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Independent Sample T-test on Pre- and Post- questionnaires of EG and CG

Test	M	df	t
	EG-CG		
Pre	2.87-2.75	58.99	.67
Post	3.29-2.97	58.71	2.73*

\*  $P < .05$

To further see in what ways learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning changes do occur, there is a necessity to probe into the essential components of learning attitudes and motivation. As displayed from Table 4.5 to Table 4.14, the comparison of 25 items of learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning between EG and CG on the post-questionnaire, and the changes between the pre- and post- questionnaires for EG were listed individually based on three factors, each of which refers to three factors including the three components of the Learning Attitudes factor.

### ***The Results of the Three Components of the Learning Attitudes Factor***

#### **1. Affective Components**

As the results of the changes of EG learners' affective components of the learning attitudes towards English learning between the pre- and post- questionnaire showed in Table 4.5, learners hold negative learning attitudes at the beginning of the study in most of the affective component items with mean scores lower than 3.00. After the treatment of TBI, learners' attitudes changed significantly and positively in most of the affective components items.

Table 4.5 The Changes of EG Learners' Affective Component of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>				
<i>Affective Components</i>				
Item (n=30)	M (pre-post)	SD	t	df
1. The English classes at school are very interesting.	3.10-3.50	.19	-1.69	29
3. I am always looking forward to the English classes.	2.53-3.27	.87	-2.95**	29
4. I hope that there will be more English classes.	2.47-3.10	1.14	-2.52*	29
15. I think that almost all of the classmates optimistically join the activities in English class.	2.70-3.37	1.21	-2.37*	29
16. When attending English class, I enjoy speaking English through English teacher's guidance.	2.70-3.37	1.18	-2.76*	29

\*  $P < .05$ ; \*\*  $P < .005$

As the results of the *Affective Components* of the Learning Attitudes Factor items showed in Table 4.6, the students in EG group hold positive learning attitudes with the mean scores higher than 3.00. Most of the students feel the English classes at school are very interesting, and they are always looking forward to the English classes. Meanwhile, most of the EG students hope that there will be more English classes at school. They feel that almost all of the classmates optimistically join the activities in English class, and they also like English teacher's guidance which helps them enjoy speaking English while attending school English class.



On the contrary, after twelve-week traditional oral instruction in CG, students' learning attitudes still maintained slightly negative towards learning English with the mean scores lower than 3.00. There is only one exception: both EG and CG students similarly thought that English teacher's guidance let them enjoy speaking English while attending English class. In conclusion, the learners' affective components of learning attitudes towards learning English were significantly more positive in EG than in CG.

Table 4.6 Comparison of Learners' Affective Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>							
<i>Affective Components</i>							
Item	EG/CG	N	M	SD	t	df	
1. The English classes at school are very interesting.	EG	30	3.5	.68	3.65**	53.79	
	CG	31	2.94	.51			
3. I am always looking forward to the English classes.	EG	30	3.27	.87	2.21*	57.16	
	CG	31	2.81	.75			
4. I hope that there will be more English classes.	EG	30	3.10	.88	1.33	58.28	
	CG	31	2.77	1.02			
15. I think that almost all of the classmates optimistically join the activities in English class.	EG	30	3.37	.72	2.64*	58.00	
	CG	31	2.90	.65			
16. When attending English class, I enjoy speaking English through English teacher's guidance.	EG	30	3.37	.72	2.04*	58.60	
	CG	31	3.00	.68			

\*  $P < .05$ ; \*\*  $P < .005$

## 2. Cognitive Components

As the results indicated in Table 4.7, learners' cognitive components all revealed positive in the post- questionnaires. Especially, in item 5, learner didn't think that the contents of English lessons were highly connected to their daily life at the pre- questionnaire; however, they perceived that the contents of English lessons were related to their daily life in the post-questionnaire. Learners also showed significant changes in item 9 with the thought that learning English is not difficult.

Table 4.7 The Changes of EG Learners' Cognitive Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>					
<i>Cognitive Components</i>					
Item (n=30)	M (Pre-Post)	SD	t	df	
2. The English lessons of school are helpful to my English learning.	3.23-3.47	1.01	-1.05	29	
5. The contents of English lessons are highly connected to my daily life.	2.87-3.13	1.04	-1.22	29	
7. I believe that if I practice English more, then I can learn it well.	3.20-3.67	1.16	-1.96	29	
9. I don't think that learning English is difficult.	2.80-3.40	1.13	-2.10*	29	
10. I think it's an important thing to learn English.	3.10-3.57	1.00	-1.96	29	

\* P < .05

From the results of the *Cognitive Components* of the Learning Attitudes Factor displayed in Table 4.8, the mean scores of EG and CG were higher than 3.0 which revealed positive attitudes towards English learning, with the exception that two

mean scores of CG were lower than 3.00, which showed negative attitudes towards learning English. Both of EG and CG students believe that the English lessons at school are helpful to their English learning. They perceived that practicing English more can gain better learning results, and they also noticed that it's important to learn English. The results indicated the differences between these two groups in learning contents and learning difficulty. EG students believe that the contents of English lessons are highly connected to their daily life, and they don't think it is difficult to learn English. For CG students, however, they don't think that the contents of English lessons are highly connected to their daily life and they don't think it is easy to learn English, neither.

Table 4.8 Comparison of Cognitive Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>						
<i>Cognitive Components</i>						
Item	EG/CG	N	M	SD	t	df
2. The English lessons at school are helpful to my English learning.	EG	30	3.47	.73	1.29	51.95
	CG	31	3.26	.51		
5. The contents of English lessons are highly connected to my daily life.	EG	30	3.13	.78	2.40*	57.97
	CG	31	2.68	.70		
7. I believe that if I practice English more, then I can learn it well.	EG	30	3.67	.66	2.59*	58.97
	CG	31	3.23	.67		
9. I don't think that learning English is difficult.	EG	30	3.40	.89	2.31*	58.61
	CG	31	2.84	1.00		
10. I think it's an important thing to learn English.	EG	30	3.57	.82	2.08*	58.30
	CG	31	3.10	.94		

\*  $P < .05$

### 3. Behavioral Components

As shown in Table 4.9, EG learners presented positive behaviors towards English learning with all the mean scores of post-questionnaire higher than 3.00. And the results also indicated that there existed significant changes between EG learners' pre- and post- questionnaires.

**Table 4.9 The Changes of EG Learners' Behavioral Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire**

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>				
<i>Behavioral Components</i>				
Item (n=30)	M (Pre-Post)	SD	t	df
6. The contents of English lessons are very interesting, which make me like to speak English in the class.	2.57-3.33	1.01	-3.29**	29
8. I will try to use the English I have learned.	2.90-3.43	1.16	-2.15*	29
11. Since attending English Class is quite interesting, I would like to answer teacher's questions.	2.90-3.27	1.06	-1.55	29
12. I like to have a conversation with my classmates by using the learned English.	2.57-3.20	1.04	-3.06**	29
13. I am willing to demonstrate or to perform in English class.	2.17-3.00	1.12	-3.12**	29
14. The activity-designing of English class makes me love to discuss with other classmates.	2.83-3.43	1.05	-2.43*	29
17. I am willing to do my English homework because it is helpful to my English learning.	2.87-3.37	1.17	-2.14*	29

\*  $P < .05$ ; \*\*  $P < .005$

As illustrated in Table 4.10, the findings of the *Behavioral Components* of the Learning Attitudes Factor also showed that learners in EG revealed positive behavioral learning attitudes towards English learning as the mean scores were all higher than 3.00, while most of the mean scores of CG were lower than 3.00 which showed that learners in this group held a negative behavioral learning attitudes. The EG students perceived that the contents of English lessons were very interesting, which make them like to speak English in the class. Meanwhile, they felt attending English class is quite interesting, so they would like to answer the teacher's questions. They also like to have a conversation with their classmates by using the learned English, and they were willing to demonstrate or to perform in English class. Furthermore, the EG students like the activity-designing of the English class, so they love to discuss with their classmates. In particular, both EG and CG students all perceived that they would try to use the English they have learned, and they are to do their homework because it is helpful to their English learning.

Table 4.10 Comparison of Behavioral Components of the Learning Attitudes towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire

<b>Factor 1: Learning Attitudes</b>						
<i>Behavioral Components</i>						
Item	EG/CG	N	M	SD	t	df
6. The contents of English lessons are very interesting, which make me like to speak English in the class.	EG	30	3.33	.71	2.23*	58.64
	CG	31	2.94	.68		
8. I will try to use the English I have learned.	EG	30	3.43	.90	1.80	58.37
	CG	31	3.03	.84		
11. Since attending English Class is quite interesting, I would like to answer teacher's questions.	EG	30	3.27	.64	2.68*	58.78
	CG	31	2.81	.70		
12. I like to have a conversation with my classmates by using the learned English.	EG	30	3.20	.71	2.17*	58.86
	CG	31	2.81	.70		
13. I am willing to demonstrate or to perform in English class.	EG	30	3.00	.95	2.04*	55.80
	CG	31	2.55	.77		
14. The activity-designing of English class makes me love to discuss with other classmates.	EG	30	3.43	.77	2.59*	58.47
	CG	31	2.94	.73		
17. I am willing to do my English homework because it is helpful to my English learning.	EG	30	3.37	.72	1.33	53.68
	CG	31	3.06	1.03		

\*  $P < .05$

### *The Results of Anxiety Factor*

As shown in Table 4.11, most of the learners felt anxious while attending English class, and were nervous if they need to answer in front of the class at the beginning of the study. After the treatment of TBI, the results of the post-questionnaires showed that they felt much more comfortable while attending the English class and they were not so afraid to answer or reply publicly.

Table 4.11 The Changes of EG Learners' Anxiety about English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire

<b>Factor 2: Anxiety</b>				
Item (n=30)	M (Pre-Post)	SD	t	df
18. I always feel anxious while attending English class.	3.03-2.60	1.18	2.091*	29
19. When in English class, I am nervous if I answer or reply in front of the class.	3.03-2.70	.81	1.72	29

\*  $P < .05$

As displayed in Table 4.12, the mean scores of EG were particularly lower than those of CG. The mean score of EG in item 18 was 2.60 and 2.70 for item 19, whereas the mean score of CG in item 18 was 3.06 and 3.13 for item 19. The results indicated that EG students did not always feel anxious while attending English class, and they would not be nervous if they need to answer or to reply in front of the class. On the contrary, CG students always felt anxious when attending English class, and they would be nervous while they had to answer or to reply in front of the class.

Table 4.12 Comparison of Learners' Anxiety about English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire

<b>Factor 2: Anxiety</b>						
Item	EG/CG	N	M	SD	t	df
18. I always feel anxious while attending English class.	EG	30	2.60	.67	-2.24*	54.79
	CG	31	3.06	.93		
19. When in English class, I am nervous if I answer or reply in front of the class.	EG	30	2.70	.70	-2.53*	57.55
	CG	31	3.13	.62		

\*  $P < .05$

### *The Results of Instrumental Motivation Factor*

As Table 4.13 shows, EG has perceived much higher instrumental motivation with significant difference by comparing the results of pre- and post- questionnaires. EG learners strongly believed that learning English can help them understand more about foreign cultures, and they perceived that cultivating English oral fluency would be very helpful for their future career. The EG learners were also convinced that the English they had learned at school can be applied to their future life, and that they were willing to attend English classes though they seldom use English in their daily life.



Table 4.13 The Changes of EG Learners' Instrumental Motivation towards English Learning between the Pre- and Post- Questionnaire

<b>Factor 3: Instrumental Motivation</b>				
Item (n=30)	M (Pre-Post)	SD	t	df
20. Learning English can make me understand more about foreign cultures.	3.07-3.60	1.08	-2.22*	29
21. It will be very useful for my future career if I can speak English quite fluently.	2.97-3.67	.89	-3.03**	29
22. The English that I have learned at school can be applied to my future life.	3.23-3.67	1.14	-2.09*	29
23. I seldom used English; therefore, I don't want to learn English.	3.07-2.30	1.02	3.80**	29
24. The reason I learn English now is with the hope that I can study in high school or at college.	3.00-3.30	.91	-1.22	29
25. The purpose I learn English right now is for the future job.	2.97-3.30	1.23	-1.36	29

\*  $P < .05$ ; \*\*  $P < .005$

From the findings illustrated in Table 4.14, the mean scores of both EG and CG were higher than 3.00 with the exception of the item 23 (the M of EG was 2.30 and 2.58 for CG). These results revealed that learners in these two groups had great instrumental motivation to learn English. Most students in these two groups perceived that learning English can make them understand more about foreign cultures. They thought that speaking English fluently is very helpful for their future career, and the English they have learned at school can be applied to their future life.

One of the reasons for learning English right now is with the hope that they can study in high school or at college in the future. The purpose of their learning English now is also for the future job. Although most of the students perceived that they seldom used English in their real life, they still wanted to learn English in both two groups.

Table 4.14 Comparison of Learners' Instrumental Motivation towards English Learning between EG and CG in the Post-Questionnaire

<b>Factor 3: Instrumental Motivation</b>						
Item	EG/CG	N	M	SD	t	df
20. Learning English can make me understand more about foreign cultures.	EG	30	3.60	.72	2.28*	57.43
	CG	31	3.13	.88		
21. It will be very useful for my future career if I can speak English quite fluently.	EG	30	3.67	.66	3.31**	55.18
	CG	31	3.16	.52		
22. The English that I have learned at school can be applied to my future life.	EG	30	3.67	.66	2.38*	59.00
	CG	31	3.26	.68		
23. I seldom used English; therefore, I don't want to learn English.	EG	30	2.30	.53	-1.81	56.91
	CG	31	2.58	.67		
24. The reason I learn English now is with the hope that I can study in high school or at college.	EG	30	3.30	1.09	.89	57.65
	CG	31	3.06	.96		
25. The purpose I learn English right now is for the future job.	EG	30	3.30	.88	.32	58.99
	CG	31	3.23	.92		

\*  $P < .05$ ; \*\*  $P < .005$

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to exam the effects of TBOI on elementary students' oral communicative competence and to investigate learners' attitudes and motivation towards learning English after the treatment. The goals were achieved through the two research questions asked. This chapter presents the discussion on these two research questions.

#### **Research Question 1: What Are the Effects of Theme-Based Instruction on Oral Communicative Competence for EFL Elementary School Students?**

In the present study, EOPT was employed to examine the effects of students' oral communicative competence after the treatments of TBOI and the traditional oral instruction. The results have produced several findings. First, by comparing the results of pre-and post- EOPT of EG and CG, both groups made significant progress. This result might be related to the learning and practicing effectiveness. Since all the learning contents and materials were totally new for the students in the two groups at the beginning, most of the learners could not answer the questions well; many of them could not even understand the questions. After twelve-week training and practicing, they became capable of understanding questions and making progress in answering the EOPT.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that, as shown in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, TBOI helped learners yield higher scores than those of traditional oral instruction in the post EOPT results. The mean scores of EG has improved greatly from 25.57 to 44.40, while the mean scores of CG only changed from 25.26 to 36.32. The results also indicated that the EG students made a significant progress in producing oral communicative competence after the treatment of TBOI. Such wide a difference

between EG and CG might reflect that while getting highly involved in the process of implementing TBOI, learners can gain advantages of developing their oral communicative competence in several ways. At first, TBOI comprises activities such as brainstorming, webbing, freely discussing, idea listing or clustering, negotiating, and decision-making, which provides learners with numerous opportunities to explore, analyze, construct and evaluate any ideas in their minds by practicing and thinking in English. As Bruner (1985) pointed out that theme-based program allowed learners to get actively involved in the thematic content learning environment, to work cooperatively with their peers, and to gain many opportunities for creative thinking and problem solving. Meanwhile, Fisher (1991) also supported that theme-based instruction created an environment that can foster and encourage all students to get involved in process learning.

Secondly, by building on learners' interests and prior knowledge, TBI focused on topics relevant to children's real-life experiences. In order to successfully complete these challenging tasks or activities relevant to their real life experiences, students need to acquire sufficient and adequate details to enrich the contents of their performance. While searching for detailed language knowledge and content information, learners actually search into their schemata of knowledge or search into their life experiences for support. This provides students with excellent opportunities to link prior knowledge with new content, creates authentic learning environment closed to their real life, and offers them with proper contexts to examine what they need to strengthen to support those areas where their language knowledge and personal experiences are deficient. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning can be defined as a process in which learners interacted with the world outside through reconstructing the new information and reinterpreting its

meaning related to the real world. Similarly, Gardner (1991) also pointed out that a number of today's learners fail to understand what they actually learn due to the lack of connection between what they learn at school, what they need in the real life, and what they expect to learn in their mind. To respond to this predicament, Cooper (1993) provided a good suggestion that thematic-unit teaching and learning framework was one of the effective instructions to help children construct meaning since "the various content areas of the school curriculum are the basis for the authentic experiences students need to become effective constructors of meaning" (p.430). As Heibert (1994) defined, authentic tasks lay emphasis on "student choice and ownership..., promote discussion and collaboration, and build upon students' interests, abilities, background, and language development" (p.391-413). Thus, TBI has created meaningful contexts (Krogh, 1990) which can promote students to engage in authentic tasks and activities learning.

Thirdly, the meaningful conceptual framework of TBI provided learners with various sources of supports, such as the teacher's guidance and feedback, diversified learning materials, and peers sharing, which acted as essential factors for fostering students to yield communicative competence appropriately and automatically. Based on Krashen (1985)'s comprehensible input theory, students need to be exposed to sufficient amounts of comprehensible input for language acquisition to occur. Some related research also suggested that teacher talk can be perceived as one of the main sources of comprehensible input and live target language model in the EFL contexts (Liruso & Debat, 2003). In the process of implementing TBI, students may encounter difficulties in the lack of background knowledge or the limitation of vocabulary span. The teacher can provide them with proper materials displayed in diverse ways in advance or can support them with

timely responses or feedback (Ernst & Richard, 1995). In addition, Kim (2008) indicated that “reading and writing can serve as an effective scaffolding tool to develop oral language skills for young ESL/EFL students with minimal English oral language skills” (p.432). In order to successfully accomplish TBI tasks or activities, students also need some supplementing learning requirements such as practicing reading and writing activities. Since the present study adopted cooperative learning group strategy, peers sharing and collaboration might also offer learners supports for improving their oral communicative competence.

Lastly, cooperative learning and oral interaction in a small group may also enhance learners’ communicative competence. While students participated in the TBI oral discussion tasks or activities, oral interaction played an important role in developing their communicative competence. As Naughton (2006) claimed that “learners are seen to be mutual scaffolders who give and receive support as they interact with their peers” (p. 170), TBI provided learners peer responses training, peer learning, interaction within group, and cooperative learning, which may allow learners to reinforce the use of communicative strategies, meaningful negotiation, decision-making, error-trying, and logical thinking in the authentic environment (Long, 1996; Pica et al., 1989; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

**Research Question 2: Are There Any Changes in Learners’ Attitudes and Motivation towards English Learning after the Implementation of Theme-Based Instruction? If Yes, in What Ways?**

The results of pre- and post- questionnaires of EG and CG have shown several important findings of the changes of learners’ attitudes and motivation towards English learning after the implementation of the present study. Firstly, the

learning attitudes and motivation towards English learning in CG has only changed slightly after the implementation of the traditional oral instruction, and it remains negative as shown in Table 4.3. It might reflect that the traditional oral instruction can not meet learners' needs and interests, so it failed to arouse learning's learning attitudes and motivation. On the contrary, the findings supported the view that learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning changed positively after the treatment of TBOI (shown in Table 4.3), and made significant difference while compared with the results of traditional oral instruction (shown in Table 4.4).

Based on the three factors, as shown in Table 3.2, which constructed the questionnaire in the present study, several main discussions about the changes of learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning has been described as follows.

### ***Learning Attitudes Factor***

As shown in the previous chapter, EG learners' attitudes towards English learning have become significantly positive in affective, cognitive, and behavioral components after the implementation of TBI, indicating that TBI can trigger learners to develop positive learning-oriented attitudes and behaviors as they get actively involved in the thematic activities that meet learner's interests and needs.

In terms of affective components, the findings indicated that EG students perceived much more positive attitudes after the treatment of TBI than CG did.

As for cognitive components, the finding also showed that students in TBOI class revealed better awareness of learning than CG learners. For example, they believed that the contents of English lessons are highly connected to their daily life, and they conceived that practicing English more can result in better learning results. They also believed that learning English is not difficult, and they consider learning

English as an important thing.

With positive affective and cognitive conceptions, pupils in EG consequently performed much more positive behaviors than CG learners did. Believing that the contents of English lessons are very interesting, EG learners liked to speak English in class. Since they felt attending English class quite relaxed, they were not afraid to answer teacher's questions, and they liked to have a conversation with classmates. They loved the activities of English class, so they enjoyed discussing with other classmates, and they were also willing to perform in English class.

The finding mentioned above may fully support Mumford's (2000) claim that theme study approach built on learner's interests and life experiences can help children develop their attitudes in a meaningful way. "The more students become involved in how and what they study, the more interested they become in learning" (Mumford, 2000, p. 4). Since theme-based lessons were developed by learners and the teacher together, driven by students' own interests, innovative ideas, creative activities, learning strategies and meaningful negotiation had contributed to the learning process. Hutechison and Waters (1987) also claimed that authentic materials may help to increase learners' motivation. In theme-based instruction, a variety of authentic materials did arouse learners' motivation towards learning English.

For decades, a great deal of research findings (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Gardner and Macintyre, 1992) supported the claim that learning attitudes have been viewed as crucial variables generating significant influence on learners' language achievement (Finch, 2001). The finding mentioned above also indicated that there was a positive correlation between EG learners' attitudes and the results of EG learners' oral communicative competence.



### ***Anxiety Factor***

The findings in the study revealed that EG learners had much lower anxiety than CG learners did while attending TBI lessons. This might explain that TBI provided learners with a more authentic environment for language learning. While learners were involved in the tasks or activities in which they were interested, their affective filter would be low. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, the optimal learning may occur in environments where the affective filter was weak; in other words, while anxiety was low and defensiveness diminished, learner may acquire language and knowledge naturally and efficiently. In the implementation of TBOI, the teacher's authority diminished as the teacher became a coordinator or facilitator rather than a lecturer, which offered students a low-anxiety learning environment (Mumford, 2000).

### ***Instrumental Motivation Factor***

The instrumental motivation factor results showed that most pupils both in EG and CG were highly driven by the instrumental motivation to their English learning. They perceived that learning English can make them understand more about foreign cultures, that acquiring English fluency would be very helpful for their future career, that the English language knowledge can be applied to their future life, and that learning English well can help them attending a high school or college as well as finding a good job. Nikolov (1999; as cited in Carreira, 2006) pointed out that instrumental motivation appeared in the 11 or 12 year-old children, while pupils' intrinsic motivation started to decrease with age. As getting older, students become more mature and gradually perceive the competitive world in the near future. However, EG learners performed significantly higher motivation than they did at the

beginning of the study after the treatment of TBOI. These findings indicated that TBI treatment can help learners perceive much more content knowledge in the aspect of foreign culture and can make students become better aware that English oral fluency will be useful for their future career.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents three sections in regard to the pedagogical implications of the study, the limitation of the study, and the suggestions for the future studies.

#### **Pedagogical Implication of the Study**

Based on the findings derived from this study, some pedagogical implications are provided to EFL teachers, other related educators, and textbook publishers. Firstly, EFL teachers can apply theme-based instruction to elementary English classes to improve learners' oral communicative competence, and to arouse learners' learning attitudes and motivation toward English learning. The findings in the present study indicated that TBI can be considered an effective method to help learners acquire oral communicative competence due to its natural learning environment and meaningful conceptual framework. Meanwhile, it also contributed greatly to cultivating learners' positive attitudes and motivation towards learning English.

Secondly, in providing training programs for teachers, the related educators may take the notions and concepts of the theme-based instruction into consideration. Since the application of TBI helped children improve oral communicative competence significantly better than the traditional oral instruction, and aroused learners' positive learning attitudes and higher motivation towards English learning, educators in this field may probe deeply into the theoretical and methodological areas of the TBI, and construct and implement pedagogical and practical training programs as well.

Although the government provided guidelines for the textbook publishing firms and had specialists evaluate the textbooks before publication, the majority of

teachers interviewed in the related studies reported that the contents of the textbooks were “rather mechanical and repetitive with very few communicative activities” (e.g. Crawford, 2001, p.12). Subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, most of the school English teachers worked tightly to the topic-based textbooks chosen from limited and similar versions. The contents of the textbook were estimated to account for seventy percentage of the class time; however, the mechanical and repetitive discourse of the textbook can not arouse learners’ interests and fails to help children produce real communication for the lack of individualization that can meet each child’s diverse interests and needs (Crawford, 2001). As displayed in this study, TBI may offer textbook writers new perspectives on designing innovative versions which may focus more on the negotiation of meaning, real interpersonal communication, creative use of language forms, and meaningful learning contents.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Although this study has provided a useful teaching model for the English language learning in the EFL elementary setting, there are some limitations for the present study. First, this research merely involved 94 students in an elementary school located in the central Taiwan, and accordingly, the findings cannot be generalized to all the elementary school students. Besides, there were only four themes constrained to the course book used in the present study. The future studies may explore a wider variety of themes which may meet learners’ interest and needs. Moreover, the present study only focused on learners’ oral communicative competence. Theme-based instruction may also have positive effects on other language skills.

### **Suggestions for the Future Research**

The present study provided the relevant researchers and teachers a teaching model in demonstrating a theme-based oral instruction for helping learners to foster their communication competence as well as arousing learners' positive learning attitudes and motivation towards English learning. Nevertheless, the study also provides some suggestions for the future research.

First, the present study only explores learners' oral communicative competence; future studies are recommended to investigate the effects of TBI on other language skills, such as writing, reading, and listening. Further, the researchers are also suggested to probe into the effects of TBI on learners' vocabulary learning, communicative competence strategies or cooperative learning.

Secondly, although the findings of this study indicated the positive influence of TBI on learners' learning attitudes and motivation towards English learning; however, the statistical results could not fully illustrate the whole process of learners' attitudes and motivation changes toward TBI or learning English. Qualitative studies regarding the influence of TBI on learners' learning behavior changes or other affective changes are suggested to be further implemented. In particular, classroom observation can be included to delve into what aspects of attitudes and motivation resulted in learners' successful learning experiences.

In the present study, the main themes were restrained to the textbook for practical reasons since both EG and CG learners have to take monthly exams. Consequently, the researcher applied the main themes in the textbook to the present study. However, as Cameron (2008) suggested, the optimal situation for the implementation of theme-based instruction mainly focused on involving learners' interest and needs. The future studies are recommended to conduct theme selection

based on learners' interests and needs.

Finally, the subjects of the study were from one elementary school in the central Taiwan. It is suggested that future studies can take regional variables into consideration by enlarging the sample size, including participants from different elementary schools in different areas of Taiwan.



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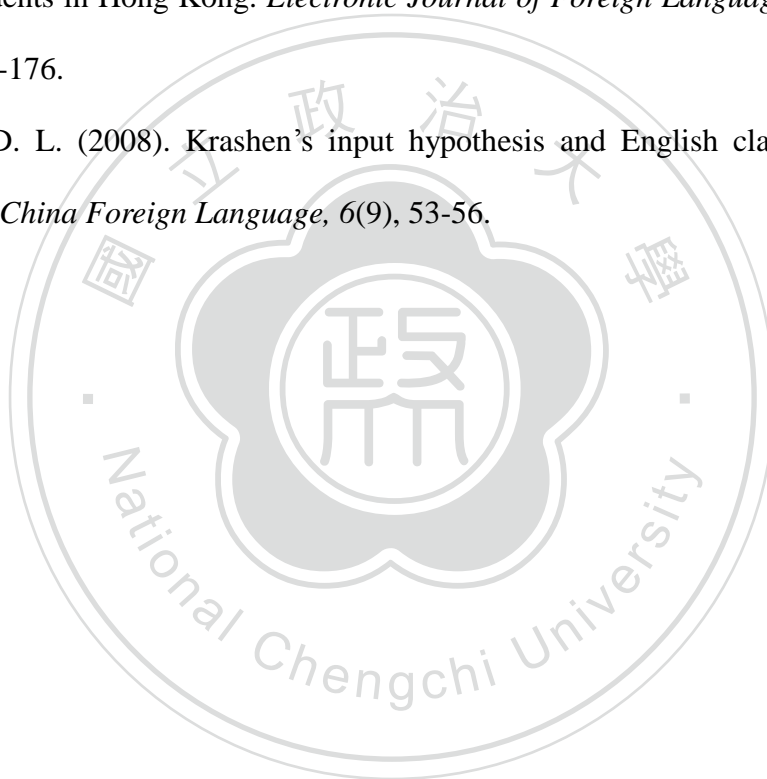
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## Appendix A

### English Oral Proficiency Test

Item	Item Content	Picture
Q1	Hello! I'm Eva. What's your name? How are you today?	(Greeting! No picture!)
Theme 1: School Subjects		
Q2	What do you see in the picture?	
Q3	What time is your PE class?	
Q4	What's your favorite subject?	
Q5	Why do you like it so much? (Talk about the subject teacher or the class.)	
Theme 2: People Who Help Us		
Q6	I have a brother. Do you have any brothers or sisters?	
Q7	My mother is a housewife. How about your mother? What does she do?	
Q8	What does your father do?	

Q9	What do you want to be when you grow up?	
Theme 3: Fruit Salad		
Q10	Look at the fruit salad. You can see many fruits. What do you like?	
Q11	Let's make some fruit salad. What do we need?	 \$100  \$60
Q12	How much are the pears?	 \$40  \$50
Theme 4: Go Shopping		
Q13	Look at the picture. What are they doing?	
Q14	There is a flea market. Let's have a look! Do you like to buy things at the flea market?	
Q15	Look at the book bag. How much is it?	 \$220  \$79 
Q16	What would you like to buy at the flea market?	 \$56  \$48

## Appendix B

### English Oral Proficiency Test Scoring Criteria (Lee, 2008)

Level	Scores	Descriptions
Level 4	4	Use sufficient vocabulary to describe the topic and express grammatically. Adequate level of details and creativity. Clear, natural pronunciation. Can vary intonation and stress for emphasis. Can express fluently and spontaneously with a smooth flow of language.
Level 3	3	Sentences can be understood though with some grammatical mistakes. Response to the topic; may lack some details or creativity. Clear pronunciation and intonation. Does not make errors that cause misunderstanding. Can express fluently with few noticeably long pauses.
Level 2	2	Incomplete responses; lacks some important information. Pronunciation and intonation are often inaccurate, but can be understood. Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts, and reformulation are very evident.
Level 1	1	Provide little utterance to the topic. Using isolated words or sentence fragments make comprehension quite difficult. Pronunciation is not clear enough to recognize the utterances. Much pausing to search for expressions to articulate less familiar words.

## Appendix C

(Chinese Version Questionnaire)

No. \_\_\_\_\_

### 國小學童英語學習態度調查問卷

親愛的小朋友：

這份問卷是為了瞭解你學習英語的態度及動機。你的意見是作為學校英語教學的參考，請小朋友看清楚題目，仔細作答。這不是考試，請依照你的意見作答。如有不瞭解的地方請舉手發問，謝謝你的幫助。

作答說明：請你依照對句子的同意程度，在最符合你的意見下面的格子打 v。  
每題只能打一個 v。

- |                                | 非常<br>同意                 | 同<br>意                   | 不<br>同<br>意              | 非<br>常<br>不<br>同<br>意    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. 學校的英語課很有趣。.....             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. 學校的英語課程對我的英語學習有幫助。.....     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. 我總是很期待英語課那天的到來。.....        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. 我希望有更多的英語課。.....            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. 英語課學習的內容與我的生活是相關的。.....     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. 英語課的內容很有趣，讓我上課時想說英語。.....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. 我相信只要多練習就可以學好英語。.....       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. 我已學會的英語，我會試著拿來使用。.....      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. 我覺得學好英語並不困難。.....           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. 我認為學習英語是一件很重要的事。.....      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. 上英語課很自在，我樂意回答老師的問題。.....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. 我喜歡和同學用學過的英語對話。.....       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. 我樂意在英語課中示範或表演。.....        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. 英語課的活動設計讓我樂於參與討論。.....     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. 我覺得同學們都能積極參與英語課的教學活動。..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. 上英語課時，老師的引導方式讓我樂於說英語。..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

17. 我樂意做英語作業，因為對我的學習有幫助。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
18. 上英語課總是讓我感到焦慮。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
19. 上英語課時當我在全班面前回答或表達，我會緊張。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
20. 學習英語可以讓我多了解其他國家的文化。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
21. 當我的英語變得流利時，對我的將來是有幫助的。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
22. 學習英語可以應用在我將來的生活上。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
23. 目前我很少用到英語，所以不想學。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
24. 我現在學習英語是希望將來能進入高中或大學就讀。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
25. 現在學習英語是為了將來的工作。.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



## Appendix D (English Version Questionnaire)

### English learning Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire

Fill out the following questionnaire, checking the box which best describes whether you agree or disagree with each statement. This is for yourself not for anyone else, so answer as honestly as you can.

Strongly agree = **SA**, Agree = **A**, Disagree = **D**, Strongly Disagree = **SD**.

	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
Q1. The English classes at school are very interesting. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q2. The English lessons at school are helpful to my English learning. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q3. I am always looking forward to the English classes. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q4. I hope that there will be more English classes. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q5. The contents of English lessons are highly connected to my daily life. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q6. The contents of English lessons are very interesting, which make me like to speak English in the class. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q7. I believe that if I practice English more, then I can learn it well. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q8. I will try to use the English I have learned. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q9. I don't think that learning English is difficult. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q10. I think it's an important thing to learn English. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q11. Since attending English Class is quite interesting, I would like to answer teacher's questions. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q12. I like to have a conversation with my classmates by using the learned English. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q13. I am willing to demonstrate or to perform in the English class. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Q14. The activity-designing of English class makes me love to  
discuss with other classmates. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q15. I think that almost all of the classmates optimistically join  
the activities in English class. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q16. When attending English class, I enjoy speaking English  
through teacher's guidance.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q17. I am willing to do my English homework because it is  
helpful to my English learning. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q18. I always feel anxious while attending English class. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q19. In English class, I am nervous if I  
answer or reply in front of the class. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q20. Learning English can make me understand more about  
foreign cultures. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q21. It will be very useful for my future career if I can speak  
English quite fluently. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q22. The English that I have learned at school can be applied  
to my future life. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q23. I seldom used English; therefore, I don't want to learn  
English. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q24. The reason I learn English now is with the hope that I  
can study in high school or at college. .... ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- Q25. The purpose I learn English right now is for the future job.....☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## Appendix E

### The Categories of Threes Factors for the 25 Questionnaire Items

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Item

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#### Factor 1: Learning Attitudes

##### Affective Components

1. The English classes at school are very interesting.
3. I am always looking forward to the English classes.
4. I hope that there will be more English classes.
15. I think that almost all of the classmates optimistically join the activities in English class.
16. When attending English class, I enjoy speaking English through English teacher's guidance.

##### Cognitive Components

2. The English lessons of school are helpful to my English learning.
5. The contents of English lessons are highly connected to my daily life.
7. I believe that if I practice English more, then I can learn it well.
9. I don't think that learning English is difficult.
10. I think it's an important thing to learn English.

##### Behavioral Components

6. The contents of English lessons are very interesting, which make me like to speak English in the class.
  8. I will try to use the English I have learned.
-



- 
11. Since attending English Class is quite interesting, I would like to answer teacher's questions.
12. I like to have a conversation with my classmates by using the learned English.
13. I am willing to demonstrate or to perform in English class.
14. The activity-designing of English class let me love to discuss with other classmates.
17. I am willing to do my English homework because it is helpful to my English learning.
- 

### **Factor 2: Anxiety**

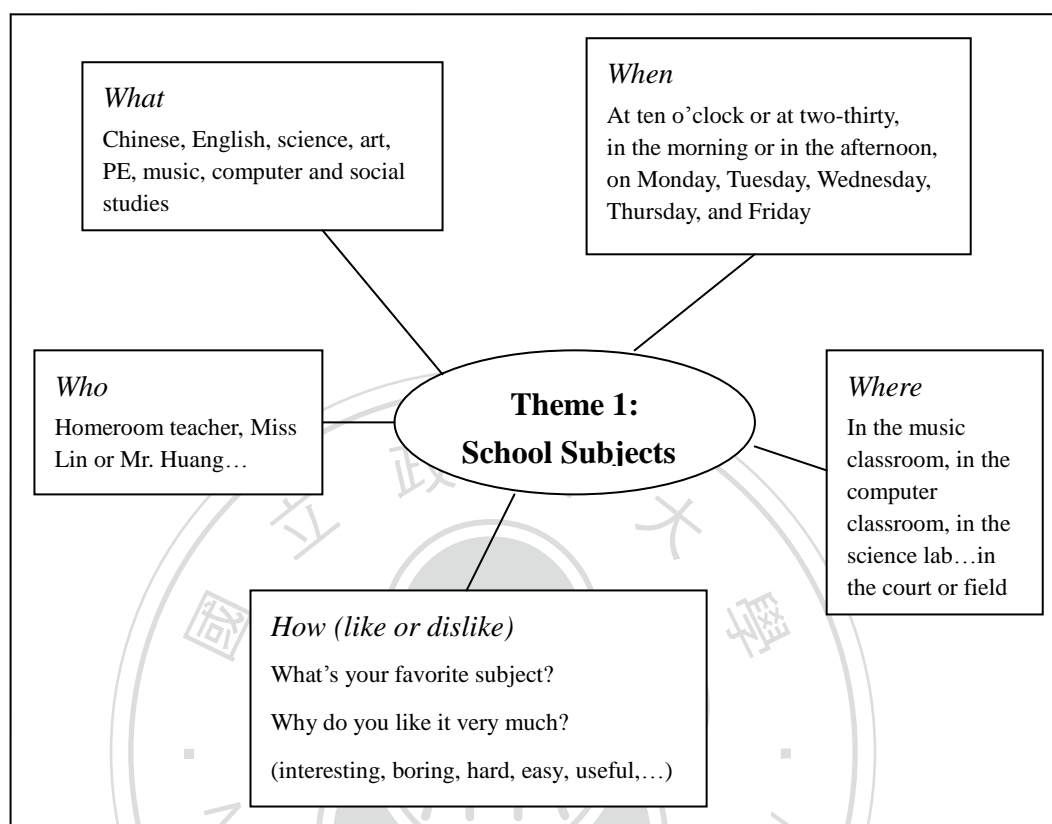
18. I always feel anxious while attending English class.
19. When attending English class, I am nervous if I answer or reply in front of the class.
- 

### **Factor 3: Instrumental Motivation**

20. Learning English can make me understand more about foreign cultures.
21. It will be very useful for my future career if I can speak English quite fluently.
22. The English that I have learned at school can be applied to my future life.
23. I seldom used English; therefore, I don't want to learn English.
24. The reason I learn English now is with the hope that I can study in high school or at college.
25. The purpose I learn English right now is for the future job.
-

## Appendix F

### Materials of the Pilot Study



**Figure F-1 School Subject Thematic Brainstorming Web**

**Table F-1 The Activity and Task around the School Subject Theme**

Sub-theme: My Favorite Subject	
<u>Activity</u>	<u>Task</u>
At first, visual and audio materials regarding to “my favorite subject” were displayed; then, each group were given the scripts for group reading and discussion. Each group needed to take notes on the report format and students was evaluated by the teacher in the discussing process and finally, performed an oral report on their discussion.	Each group created an introduction concerning their favorite subject and the subject teacher and then demonstrated it orally as a guessing game. At first, the other students had to work out what the subject is and who the subject teacher is. Then, the group kept completing their presentation.