

TEACHING ONLINE NEWS IN AN EFL CONTEXT: EXPLORING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON A PROJECT- BASED NEWS ENGLISH COURSE IN A TAIWAN UNIVERSITY

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This study explores student perspectives on the incorporation of online news media in an EFL setting in which integrated tasks—project-based learning—involving all language skills were designed and implemented in a course to improve students' language ability. Thirty-three students at the intermediate English proficiency level were enrolled in a course, conducted at a university in Taiwan. Different types of news were introduced to develop students' content knowledge and to spark their learning motivation. Students were guided to scrutinize the news and reflect on their own interpretations to enhance their critical-thinking abilities. Weekly individual mini news projects and a final group news video project were carried out; a final questionnaire and semi-structured interviews of students' self-reports on their perspectives about the effectiveness of this course were conducted. The results indicate that students perceived learning gains in researching for information; writing news scripts in collaboration; and delivering the news more accurately, fluently, and confidently in completing their final video news project. The EFL pedagogical implication is discussed.

Keywords: news English, online news, project-based learning

Using online news media (i.e., CNN, BBC online news, and video broadcasts) in teaching news English in an EFL context can be both intriguing and challenging—and provide many benefits to students learning English. The authenticity of news media can provide EFL students with timely and thought-provoking themes that can sharpen their cognitive awareness (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990), expand their knowledge in different news channels, and maximize their language exposure with the most up-to-date news in current affairs. In addition, given the audio and visual nature of the online news materials, they provide students with the opportunity to make use of nonlinguistic clues to better understand the news content. Online news stories are also useful examples of language in context, which can serve as excellent models for authentic language input and student production. Finally, given the wide internet availability in Taiwan, students can be easily linked to these resources. To take advantage of online media attributes and maximize student learning, selected online news media have been adopted for the course.

According to Mariani (1997), highly challenging tasks present valuable learning opportunities as long as these tasks are accompanied by the same degree of support. Thus, integrated tasks that involved different language skills were designed for this course to provide the support required for students to interact with the news stories and to develop their English language proficiency.

Within the literature in using news in the ESL and EFL classroom, some researchers made suggestions on the selection of materials (Bell, 2003); others investigated exposure to TV and radio news and their impact on discrete language skill development, such as learners' speaking proficiency (Bahrani & Tam, 2011) or vocabulary learning (Mohammed & Adam, 2016). Among these studies, however, very few of them specified how online news could be incorporated into the EFL curriculum and used to explore students' perspectives in their self-assessed learning outcomes. Because online news broadcasts can be

daunting if students are not equipped with tools to sort out the news content for authenticity, this study aims to illustrate how a variety of tasks can be incorporated into the EFL curriculum to optimize students' content knowledge and overall English language development.

Literature Review

Incorporating Online News Media in the EFL Classroom

To get beyond the inherent limitations of textbooks and to incorporate authentic material in ESL/EFL classrooms, the use of online news media allows students to simultaneously engage with the material by viewing the news stories that are happening in the world at that moment. The immediacy and authenticity of the news material also provides ESL students with a wide range of vocabularies and sentence structures, which is extremely beneficial for learning language in context (Moglen, 2014). In addition, the extra-linguistic information in the news media can have a dramatic and positive effect on student comprehension. In analyzing L2 vocabulary learning techniques, Oxford and Crookall (1989) noted that most learners can associate new information with concepts already in memory through compelling visual images. Online news media, with their vivid representation, can thus help learners package information more quickly and meaningfully than they might not be able to do by using words alone.

The literature regarding using online news as content material in the EFL classroom, however, has been relatively sparse. The study by Bahrani and Tam (2011) investigated the effectiveness of exposure to TV and radio news materials in improving the speaking proficiency of 60 intermediate language learners in Iran. The experimental group in the study was exposed to authentic (not graded readers) materials from news media while the control group was exposed to non-news materials. While the groups started with comparable speaking proficiency, the results of the study indicated that the group with news media exposure outperformed the group with no exposure to non-news programs in the final speaking proficiency test. The authors thus concluded that greater exposure to mass media news could improve speaking fluency: the recurring vocabulary used in TV news and the smoothly spoken news report helped facilitate learners' speaking fluency.

Abu-Al-Sha'r (2009) investigated in Jordan the effect on university EFL students' English reading skills of reading local online English newspaper headlines. A group of 47 students was divided into two experimental and one control group—three groups in all. The first experimental group was trained to read and analyze the grammatical features of online English news; the second experimental group was taught to read and translate the English news into Arabic news and then compare the result with its equivalent in a local Arabic newspaper; the control group followed the regular syllabus and did not receive these treatments. The result of the achievement test administered at the end of the semester revealed that both experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group in demonstrating their reading skills. The author concluded that using the online news headlines for advanced EFL students was effective in promoting an environment of learner-centeredness, enhancing student learning motivation, improving student reading skills, enriching student vocabularies, and gaining cultural knowledge.

In a study cited above, Mohammed and Adam (2016) investigated how TV breaking news had an impact on enriching EFL university students' vocabularies in Saudi Arabia. Fifty EFL students were divided into experimental and control groups; the former had access to video clips on network breaking news but the latter did not. The results indicated that students with access to English media video clips outperformed the control group, and concluded that viewing English TV news facilitated vocabulary building for EFL learners. Moglen (2014) found that the inclusion of a current affairs course in the EFL environment could not only improve students' receptive skills and vocabulary learning but also enhance their critical-thinking skills. In Moglen's study, outlining different aspects of critical thinking (i.e., prediction and interest-raising, identification, and analysis of arguments) helped guide students from passively receiving the information to actively verifying and analyzing the news content and providing feedback on the news.

Within the limited literature on including online news media in EFL classrooms, most studies did show the impact of news media on a specific area of learners' language development (i.e., vocabulary learning, speaking, literacy training). To further understand how online news media could be incorporated into the EFL classroom more extensively, this study created a variety of integrated tasks, weekly mini projects, and a final project to improve students' overall English language skills and enhance their content knowledge.

Project-Based Learning

A great deal of research literature has shown the usefulness and efficacy of project-based learning (PBL) in promoting both language and content learning in the EFL classrooms (Beckett, 2005; Beckett & Miller, 2006; Haines, 1989; Hedge, 2000; Tseng, 2008, 2013). The PBL proposed by Stoller (2007) included such features as (a) focusing on a process and product orientation, (b) assigning work that requires a final product, (c) encouraging student ownership of a project from start to completion, (d) maintaining a commitment to both language and content learning, (e) supporting both collaboration and individual work, (f) facilitating the natural integration of skills, and (g) concluding the project with students' reflections on the process and product of their project. Stoller (2002) reported that the most widely espoused advantages of PBL included improved language abilities, content knowledge, authenticity of experience, motivation and creativity, ability to work collaboratively and independently, improved decision making and critical thinking abilities and enhanced self-confidence. In addition, PBL is student-centered. Students are encouraged to take on their own learning responsibilities in working with their team members. At the same time, each student also needs to accomplish his or her own negotiated tasks independently—in other words, both "cooperative learning" (Crandall, 1999, p. 226) and "autonomous learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 86) are involved in students' progress toward project completion, leading to enhanced student motivation and ownership of the project.

According to Moss and Van Duzer (1998), project-based learning can be defined as "an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop" (p. 1). Incorporating project work in second language and foreign language settings has been reported as beneficial for language learners; Fried-Booth (2002), for example, posits that the process allows students to develop their independence and confidence. When students are given the choice of topics and are able to actively engage in project planning, their autonomy is enhanced (Skehan, 1998), and their self-esteem and motivation are increased (Stoller, 2006). In addition, Stoller notes, project-based learning provides students with opportunities for "the natural integration of language skills" (p. 33); Dornyei (2001) cites the value of combining project-based learning and meaningful activities with real-world relevance, thus increasing learners' linguistic proficiency in the target language.

To explore, then, the many merits of project work, this study introduced online news into an EFL classroom within the framework of a project-based curriculum that was intended to: (a) outline the design and implementation of using online news in an EFL context, (b) examine students' self-reports on their perceived effectiveness in terms of the content and language learning, (c) investigate students' perceived effectiveness in conducting and evaluating project work, and (d) examine students' perceived difficulties and coping strategies while taking this course.

To employ the merits inherent in project-based learning, such an approach was thus adopted in this study by having students complete the weekly individual mini projects and produce a final group video news group project. This project requirement was "a natural extension of what is already taking place in class" (Stoller, 2002, p. 109), and thus served as the integration of a meaningful authentic output.

Method

The design of the curriculum included these elements: subjects, course objectives, syllabus design, course implementation, a final video news project, and evaluation and assessment.

Subjects

. The course, which met two hours a week for 18 weeks, was offered as an elective for students from the School of Education and Applied Linguistics; 33 students (10 male and 23 female) enrolled. They had been studying English for more than 10 years; their English proficiency levels (TOEIC scores) fell between 560 to 840, with an average of approximately 710, indicating their linguistic proficiency was between intermediate to high-intermediate level.

Course Objectives and Syllabus Design

The course objectives were twofold: (a) content and (b) language learning objectives (Appendix A). The syllabus design, which integrated content and language learning, is presented in Appendix B. To achieve these goals, the course focused on developing students' content knowledge of news English with a variety of topics. It also sought to enhance students' English language abilities through designed tasks and assigned projects.

Course Implementation

The content used for this course comprised online news and online broadcasts from the following sources:

News Briefs—Websites

<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/>

http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/index_en.php

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/news/>

Online News Broadcasts:

<http://edition.cnn.com/>

<http://www.bbc.com/news>

<http://www.foxnews.com/>

Each class usually began by activating background knowledge of the news to be explored with the introduction of some brainstorming questions in relation to the news topic. For example, when introducing the news broadcast in relation to the American presidential election, some basic information on the candidates, such as their background, political affiliations, the policies they promoted, controversial positions, and other personal aspects was provided, which students then discussed in groups. This was followed by an enumeration and examples from the teacher of the basic elements of the news (i.e., timeliness, conflict, consequence, prominence, proximity, human interest) and key components in a lead paragraph—such as what, when, where, who, why, and how (5Ws1H)—in addition to the differences between print vs. broadcast news script writing and between hard news and soft news.

To develop students' critical media literacy and judgment, media texts were introduced in class for them to evaluate the varied perspectives posed by different media. Students were encouraged not only to comprehend and analyze, but also to evaluate the media texts by providing their reflections or perspectives on the news. News stories could be inadequately sourced and different media could take on different perspectives in reporting the same news. Students were guided to explore such questions as: How well sourced was the news story? How did the news follow up on leads and use anonymous sources? Did the news deliberately appear to take quotes out of context to serve its own perspective and not perhaps report the accuracy of what actually happened? Did different news channels report the same news differently? These questions encouraged students to think independently and be less likely influenced by media manipulation. Students were required to keep learning logs when not in class in which they could jot down new-to-them vocabulary items, analyze the structure of the news stores, write summaries, and provide their perspectives for every news story covered in class.

For the in-class task-based activities, such as maintaining in-class task sheets for reading comprehension, vocabulary work, discussion questions, and reflective feedback, students were encouraged to complete the tasks in groups. For the news broadcast in class, students were instructed to take notes while watching the news clips, and then, in groups, discussing, analyzing, and reporting on the key elements of the news via verbal or written work. Combining different types of input (i.e., both visual and auditory) in class aimed to provide students with different means for arriving at comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), encourage students to actively interact with the news to negotiate meanings in the tasks, and maintain meaningful communication with classmates (Met, 1991).

For the out-of-class weekly mini projects, students were required to choose news of the week about their interests. They first examined the basic structures of the news, such as headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraph, and keywords. They also analyzed the key components of the news, and specified the basic elements of lead paragraphs (i.e., 5Ws1H). In their own words, students summarized the news and provided their own personal feedback. Students also listed new-to-them vocabularies and phrases of these news stories, looked them up, and wrote down definitions or explanations. Every week, students verbally reported the news in class.

Final Video News Project

According to Dornyei (2001), project work encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, reduces anxiety, and promotes effort-based attributions. Thus, to maximize learning outcomes and integrate all the learned skills into a meaningful output, the subjects in the current study completed a final video news project by choosing a topic reflecting their and their peers' interests and concerns. Students, arranged in groups with varied language proficiencies, were required to do research for the chosen news topic by exploring related information, interviewing their peers, synthesizing information, and writing and editing their news scripts. Finally, each group had to produce a video clip (10 to 15 minutes) in reporting the news story and uploading it on YouTube to complete the final project. Topics such as university policies, curfews in college dorms, cellphones in classrooms, same-sex marriage, cultural shock experienced by the international students, and perspectives about tattoos were chosen by the students. Each member of the group took on a different role (i.e., as anchor, reporter, correspondent).

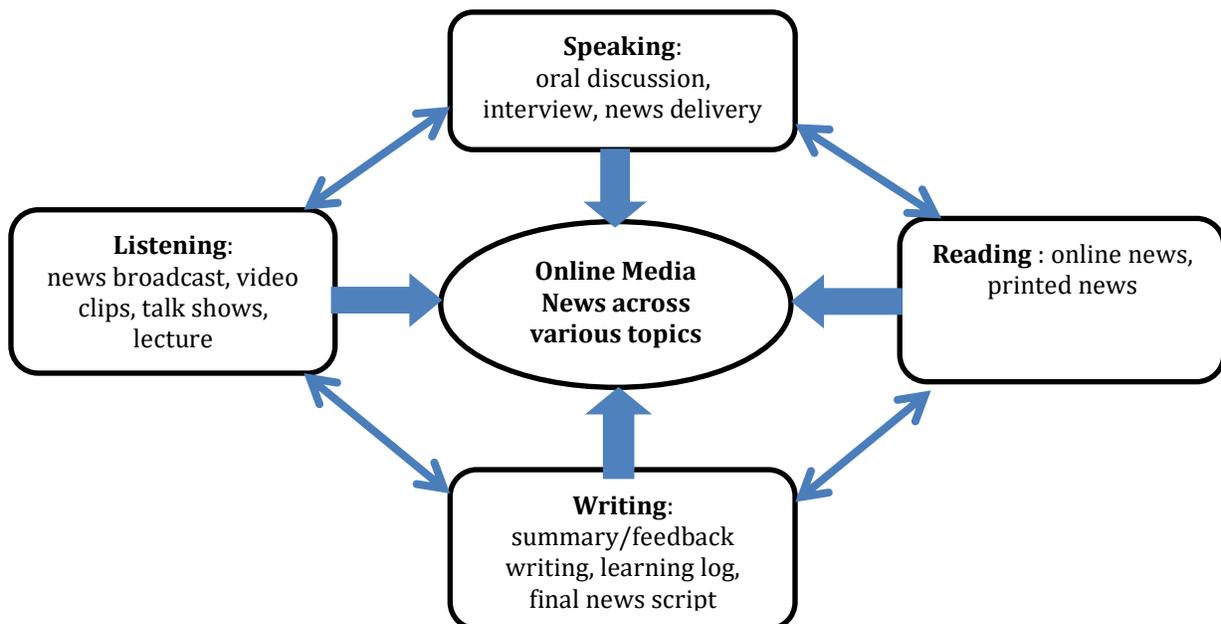
An oral presentation on the final video news project was performed for teacher and peer evaluations. This task focused on providing students with opportunities to make the best use of their English language abilities for comprehensible speaking and reporting (Swain, 1993). The peer evaluation was conducted so students could observe their peers' work and reflect upon their own performances. Figure 1 shows how a news topic is usually introduced in this course, and Figure 2 shows how different language tasks are integrated for students to acquire content knowledge and at the same time enhance their linguistic abilities.

The rationale behind assigning the extensive group work derived from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), through interaction with a teacher or more experienced peers, learners were provided with scaffolding, which would support them not only in understanding new information but also in the development of complex skills. In addition, as attention was not fixated on an individual but instead on a whole group, learners' anxiety was reduced (Crandall, 1999), enhancing their content and language learning. An example of this was the in-class group work for completing the task sheets for vocabulary work, finding out the 5Ws1H in groups, and discussing the summary and feedback. The more L2-capable peers are able to establish scaffolding for the less L2-capable counterparts to further develop their content and language learning.

Figure 1. The Implementation of Topics Introduced in the News English Course



Figure 2. The Implementation of Integrated English Tasks in the News English Course



Evaluation and Assessment

For this course, students were evaluated via their in-class group participation (20%), completion of mini assignments (20%), midterm written exam (30%), and final group news video project (30%). Along with these instruments for assessing students' learning outcomes, evaluation sheets specifying different criteria on both content and language (Appendix C) were provided for each group to evaluate their peer groups' final oral presentations. Finally, students' five-point Likert-style self-report questionnaires

(Appendix D) were administered and open-ended semi-structured interviews (Appendix E) were conducted.

Results

In terms of students' perceived effectiveness for this integrated and project-based news English course, the results of students' self-reported questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were presented on (a) students' perceived effectiveness for content learning, (b) students' perceived effectiveness for language learning, (c) students' perception regarding the effectiveness of project work, and (d) students' perceived difficulties and coping strategies.

Students' Self-Reports on Their Perceived Effectiveness for Content Learning

For students' self-reports regarding their perceived effectiveness for content learning, the results of a five-point Likert-style questionnaire and semi-structured interviews (see Appendices D and E) are noted in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean Distribution on Students' Self-Reports Regarding Their Perceived Effectiveness for Content Learning

| Item | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| 1. I have learned the basic structure of English media texts and journalistic writing, such as headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, and images. | 4.52 | .566 |
| 2. I have learned the basic components of news (i.e., timeliness, conflict, consequence, prominence, proximity, and the basic elements in a lead paragraph (5Ws1H). | 4.33 | .540 |
| 3. I have learned new vocabularies and common technologies in different news sections (i.e., international, politics, sports, health, business, technology). | 4.36 | .742 |
| 4. I have learned the basics of writing broadcast news scripts, such as a clear focus, a lead, a body, and an ending. | 4.18 | .635 |
| 5. I have learned the differences between print and broadcast news script writing. | 4.12 | .696 |
| 6. I have learned that different news media could have different perspectives in reporting the same news story. | 4.21 | .650 |
| 7. I have learned how to analyze a news story, such as examining its source and deciding how well the news follows the leads. | 3.94 | .704 |
| 8. I have learned to be more skeptical about the news by questioning how the news media have their own perspectives in how they support their conclusions. | 3.91 | .579 |
| 9. I have learned to evaluate the news and provide my own perspectives on what is being reported. | 4.39 | .556 |
| 10. I have learned how to write a print news script. | 4.33 | .540 |
| 11. I have learned how to write a broadcast news script. | 4.52 | .619 |
| 12. I have learned how to edit news scripts. | 4.15 | .712 |

As displayed in Table 1, positive responses could be found on most of the items. The result of the first two items revealed students' self-reports on their understanding of basic structures and components of news (M = 4.52, SD = .566; M = 4.33, SD = .540). Item 3 indicated that students perceived they learned vocabularies and terminologies of different types of news (M = 4.36; SD = .742). Items 4 and 5 pointed out students' self-perceived abilities in knowing what to include in the broadcast news and the difference between broadcast and print news script writing (M = 4.18, SD = .635; M = 4.12, SD = .696). Item 6

indicated students' reported awareness in the possibly varied perspectives posed by different media channels ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .650$). Items 7 and 8, which measured students' self-accessed critical media literacy, resulted in relatively lower mean scores ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .704$; $M = 3.91$, $SD = .579$), indicating that students were less certain in reading news critically by examining the sourcing and argument of the news. From item 9 to item 12, students reported their perceived gains in providing their own perspectives for the news ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .556$), on knowing how to write print and broadcast news scripts ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .540$; $M = 4.52$, $SD = .619$), and on knowing how to edit news scripts ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .712$).

As for the questions on semi-structured interviews listed on Appendix E, question 1 asked about student perceptions on their engagement with the news content; question 2 accessed students' ability to retell a story. Some additional comments expressed by students in the informal interviews were:

- "Some of the topics are not so interesting, such as politics and business; other topics such as sports and health are easier to understand."
- "The news in class covered different types of content, such as politics, health, technology, sports, etc. I learned different vocabularies with different kinds of news."
- "I think analyzing the basic elements in the news story makes me understand better of the content of the news."
- "I've learned the basic components of a lead paragraph such as 5Ws1H, and I look for them while watching or reading news stories."
- "Although it is not easy, the summary practice helps me force myself to tell the news story again in my own words."

Though their interest in a range of topics varied, most students reported their learning of vocabularies with different types of news, they also noted that they would actively seek out 5Ws1H in a lead paragraph while watching a news broadcast or when reading news stories. Some students noted that analyzing basic elements of the news story helps them understand the news content better, while others indicated that doing a practice summary after watching a news broadcast motivated them to retell the story in their own words, which pushed them to improve their speaking skills.

As for the actual performance of retelling the news during the interview, most students had no problem in completing this task, and could answer and elaborate on the basic elements of news. Students pointed out that they had many opportunities practicing this task during the semesters (as weekly mini project assignments). Most students were quite fluent in delivering the news stories in their own words, and the majority of them could cover the basics of news while retelling their news stories.

Students' Self-Reports on Their Perceived Effectiveness for Language Learning

For students' self-reports on their own perceived effectiveness for language learning, the results of a five-point Likert-style questionnaire and semi-structured interviews (Appendices D and E) were revealed. The questionnaire aims to find out student perceptions in relation to course goals for their language development. The frequency statistics on mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean Distribution on Students' Self-Reports Regarding Their Perceived Effectiveness for Language Learning

| Item | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 13. I can understand the news broadcast better (listening). | 4.15 | .712 |
| 14. I can identify the 5W1H from the news broadcast (listening). | 4.18 | .683 |
| 15. I think my English listening ability has improved after the intensive listening to the news broadcast (listening). | 4.30 | .529 |
| 16. I can understand the print news story better (reading). | 4.12 | .696 |
| 17. I can find the gist and scan for the necessary information for answering reading comprehension tasks (reading). | 4.33 | .645 |
| 18. I have learned to read for the differences between print and broadcast news (reading). | 4.00 | .661 |
| 19. I have learned to orally summarize a news story (speaking). | 3.85 | .566 |
| 20. I have learned to express my point of view regarding a news story (speaking). | 4.12 | .696 |
| 21. I can speak more fluently in English (speaking). | 4.15 | .712 |
| 22. I can summarize information from the news in a written paragraph (writing). | 4.00 | .750 |
| 23. I can write a print news script (writing). | 4.00 | .661 |
| 24. I can write a broadcast news script (writing). | 4.21 | .740 |
| 25. I think overall my English ability has improved. | 4.30 | .529 |

As shown on Table 2, most students reported that they perceived their overall English ability was improved, as noted in item 25 ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .529$). Items 13 to 15 reported on students' perception regarding their improved listening abilities, from general listening ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .712$) to the more specific 5Ws1h ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .683$) to listening in general ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .529$). Items 16 to 18 revealed students' perceived improvement with reading ability, from the comprehension of the print news stories ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .696$) and scanning for necessary information to complete reading tasks ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .645$) to understanding the differences between print and broadcast news scripts ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .661$). In students' self-perceived speaking ability (items 19–21), most reported that they perceived their English fluency had improved ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .566$), they learned to express their ideas orally ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .696$), and could orally summarize a news story ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .712$). In the informal interviews, some students still found it hard to orally summarize a news story within the limited time frame, as they indicated it took time to process the information in retelling the story in their own words. Finally, for students' perceived improvement with writing (items 22–24), most students reported their gained ability in writing a news summary ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .750$), writing print news script ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .661$), and in particular writing broadcast news scripts ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .740$).

As for the semi-structured interviews, question 3 accessed students' perceptions on their own language development. Some additional comments expressed by students in the informal interviews were:

- "I think watching broadcast news frequently makes my listening improve a lot. When I do not understand the news broadcast too well in class, I just watch the news video again at home."
- "I think my pronunciation has improved because of the weekly oral report."
- "I am doing better in my English writing since I have to write summaries and feedback every week."
- "Mmm, I think my writing ability is improved because of writing news scripts for my final project. I have to make sure my content is organized and grammar is correct."
- "Ahh, when reading online news, I can understand better of the news content."

As shown in Table 2, students reported they perceived that their English listening had improved because of the frequent exposure on watching online news broadcasts. In addition, completing the weekly assignments and writing news broadcasts in the final project were reported to be helpful for their English writing. Some students noted the benefit of practicing news broadcasting because they perceived that their oral English became more fluent and their pronunciation improved. Others noted an improved ability in reading online news because they could comprehend news stories better. In general, most students reported on their perceived language improvement with different subskills, although some tasks (e.g., orally summarizing news) were reported to be more challenging than others.

Students' Perception Regarding Project Work

Question 4 in the semi-structured interview list recorded students' perceptions on the project work (i.e., weekly mini projects and a final video project) employed in this study. Some answers elaborated on by students' reports in the informal interviews were:

- "Mmm, I think doing weekly small project on news of the week makes me practice writing up summaries, and giving my opinions. I also learned many vocabularies."
- "Although I feel nervous to do weekly oral news report, I think it is a good practice. I speak more fluently now."
- "I think doing weekly mini project is helpful for me to understand better of the news. And, it helps a lot for preparing for final project."
- "Ahh, it is not easy to write up the news script for the final news project. It took us a long time to write, revise, and edit the news script."
- "Doing interview is not easy. Even writing up interview questions is hard."
- "I think the final project is a lot of fun. We can do the news topic we are interested in. We can also help each other with the difficult parts."

As indicated above, some students believed that doing mini projects every week helped them understand news content better and prepared them for the final news project. Students pointed out that tasks, ranging from working on good interviews to writing clear and concise news scripts, took time and effort. Many students reported that conducting the final project allowed them to learn the vocabularies and terminologies in relation to the topics that interested them. Some gains from cooperative work were reported in the interviews; students stated that working in groups made them less nervous, and they were able to solve their language problems with help from their peers.

Regarding students' responses to peer evaluation on question 5 in the informal interviews, most participants reported that they could listen attentively for the news content and pay close attention to fluency and pronunciation of their peers' news reports. This was particularly evident in the specific criteria provided on the evaluation sheet (Appendix C), where students reported they could focus on the listed components, provide their feedback to their peers' work, and reflect upon their own performances. Most students also believed they acquired significant knowledge on different news topics from their peers' projects, and many as well admired the creativity of their peers' work.

Students' Perceived Difficulties and Coping Strategies

Question 6, the last informal interview question in Appendix E, explored students' perceived difficulties and coping strategies with this course. Some students reported that the news broadcast was too fast for them to catch the meaning in their initial exposure. They pointed out, however, that after they learned the basic elements of the news stories, they started looking for the supporting information to comprehend them. Other students indicated that they would log on to the website and watch the news repeatedly for clarification if they did not understand the content in class or browse through the domestic and international news headlines in Chinese first before the class. According to them, the background

knowledge in Chinese helped them follow up better with the English news broadcast in class. In addition, the learning log where students kept new vocabularies and wrote up summaries and reflections was reported to be useful for their understanding of the news content. Students pointed out that the vocabulary work made them understand better how the word(s) were used in the news article and how they could also use them in their summary writing.

Though a few students reported that speaking accurate and fluent English in recording the final news video was often difficult, most students observed that from repeated practice and the help of their peers in correcting their pronunciation and delivery, their performance improved. The final oral presentation was also reported to be stressful for some students. When asked about their coping strategies, students revealed that they would practice, rehearse their oral script in groups, get feedback from their peers and teacher, and make adjustments accordingly. These strategies helped them lessen their apprehension and allowed them to complete the necessary tasks for their final news project.

Discussion

From the results of students' self-reported questionnaires and the answers to informal interviews, incorporating online news broadcasts and project work in improving students' content knowledge of news and their language skills can be perceived as positive and beneficial. Along with learning content knowledge, students also demonstrated their improved abilities to actively engage with the news by analyzing its components, examining how the news story was presented, and providing their own summaries and perspectives for the news stories. Furthermore, the authentic immediacy of the news provided students with renewed interest and increased motivation to contextualize language learning (Gebhard, 1996). These findings indicate that authentic online news, particularly topics that are of interest to students, can be introduced in EFL classes. When appropriate tasks are provided, authentic online news can be incorporated effectively in enhancing students' content knowledge of different types of news. In addition, when lessons focus more on comprehending the news content (i.e., 5Ws1H) and meaning rather than solely on language forms, such as grammar, students are exposed to comprehensible language input, which allows them to master skills and strategies needed to access and comprehend information.

In addition to acquiring content knowledge, a variety of linguistic tasks such as listening to the key elements of the news broadcast, reading the news text in completing the task sheets, and summarizing news stories in oral and written assignments allowed students to activate their receptive and productive language skills in completing a variety of integrated tasks and mini projects in and out of class. Students found immediate relevancy using their language skills in comprehending and responding to the news content, and interacted easily and meaningfully with the language for genuine communication (Oxford, 2002). This functional use of language thus allowed students to activate all language skills, to stretch beyond their current linguistic comfort zone, and to persist in getting their meanings across for effective acquisition and communication of the target language (Brown, 2007).

In regard to students' reported benefit from their final news video project, their committed interest in presenting the final project of their selected news topic was apparent. Students demonstrated their abilities in engaging in a group project, conducting research, interviewing their peers and evaluating their work, and synthesizing and writing coherent broadcast news scripts. They learned as well to edit the script to make it both fluent and accurate. The repeated oral practice in making a final news broadcast video was perceived to improve their spoken language dramatically. As is evident from the tangible student projects shown on YouTube, students established their abilities to complete a news project with informational, up-to-date, and concise content and fluent and accurate language delivery. The potentially motivating, empowering, and challenging nature of project work resulted in building learners' confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy as well as enhancing learners' language skills, content skills, and cognitive ability (Fried-Booth, 1997; Skehan, 1998; Solomon, 2003; Stoller, 2006).

Students reported difficulties keeping up with analyzing and authenticating news broadcasts, which was perceived to be challenging at first. Nevertheless, once students became familiar with the basic elements of a news broadcast, they could actively built up their background knowledge. Using different channels (i.e., through their native language), they acquired the processing strategies required for comprehension and thus their understanding of the news content improved greatly (Bacon & Finneman, 1994). Students also claimed difficulties in delivering the news with both fluency and accuracy for their news project. With the training on delivering the weekly news report, however, and with the help of their peers and teacher in modifying their speech, these students reported that they became more fluent and increasingly confident in delivering their individual oral presentations and final group video news project.

From the reported benefit on group project work in this study, students were supported by their peers, indicating that Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) was taking place, as less linguistically capable students got the help they needed when interacting with more capable members in their group. Peer support was working effectively, as students reported they had a better understanding of their news content from the group work, and were able to produce the final project together—an accomplishment they could not have achieved on their own. It was evident that students reached the zone of proximal development with peer support in their final project, a result in line with previous findings (Hattie, 2009; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Wilkinson, 2015). Group work also helped alleviate anxiety about making errors (Slavin & Karweit, 1981), as students noted that they were less nervous while working with their peers.

According to Fisher (2001), critical thinking is the active interpretation and evaluation of observation, information, and argumentation. In addition to cooperative learning, students' reported gains on their critical-thinking ability could be observed from their skill in analyzing and reflecting upon their perspectives on a variety of new stories and providing feedback for their peers. Students were able to observe, attend to, and reflect upon the content and linguistic elements of their work and the work of their peers—all while they activated their critical-thinking skills. As a result, they could improve the effectiveness of their own learning, in both content and language.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication

This paper reports on the design and implementation of an integrated and project-based news English course and explore students' self-reported learning outcomes on both content information and language improvement from their perspective. Because, however, the effectiveness of this study is based on the students' self-reports, it is thus tentative, preliminary, and limited in drawing any definite conclusions regarding students' actual improvement in both content and language. It is therefore suggested that future studies adopt pre and post assessments in measuring students' actual language improvement to assess the effectiveness of the course more objectively.

The findings from students' self-reports indicate that a few essential elements appear to have accounted for the perceived success among students throughout this news English course in an EFL context and could have some implications in EFL classrooms: (a) the authentic and intriguing online broadcast news media and news topics as challenging and motivating input, (b) the integrated tasks that interweave all language tasks, (c) a project-based context for comprehensible output, and (d) effective cooperative work for students to reach their zone of optimal development. Students' self-reports make clear that online news media, when adopted sensibly with well-planned curricula and tasks, can provide students with comprehensible input that activate their genuine interest and motivate them to actively seek to understand the content knowledge. Online news media also create the best method for students to acquire and enhance their language skills by pushing them to perform coherent and increasingly accurate target language. Online news media, when appropriately implemented, bring real-world experiences into the language classroom and allow students to be motivated, confident, well informed, discerning, and contributing citizens of this global village.

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Appendix A

Content Knowledge and Language Learning Objectives

| Content Knowledge Objectives | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| A | Familiarize students with the structure of English media texts and journalistic writing (e.g., headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, images.). |
| B | Introduce the basic elements of news (i.e., timeliness, conflict, consequence, prominence, proximity and human interest), and key components of a lead paragraph (i.e., 5Ws1H). |
| C | Introduce the differences and similarities between print and broadcast media. |
| D | Help students to read, comprehend, and analyze English media text. |
| E | Develop critical media literacy on issues covered in the English news. |
| F | Get acquaintance with different terminologies in different sections of online news (i.e., news, sports, entertainment, business, technology, health, science, the arts).. |
| Language Learning Objectives | |
| A | Enhance students' reading ability (i.e., via reading online news text and textbook). |
| B | Improve students' writing ability (i.e., via writing summaries of news stories and final news report). |
| C | Develop students' aural/oral fluency, and presentation skills (i.e., via watching online news broadcast, video clips, listening to podcast, conducting oral report and news project). |
| D | Provide students with opportunities for cooperative learning (i.e., via group work tasks and a final group project). |
| E | Develop students' critical thinking skills (i.e., via reflecting upon the media text, examining different perspectives from different news media on the same news, evaluating their peers' and their own final project). |

Appendix B Syllabus Design

| Week | Topics | Tasks/Activities |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | Introduction: Introducing basic elements of the news | Lecture, group discussion |
| 2 | International news: World news | Vocabulary work, watching online world news clips, introducing the elements of a news article, group discussion |
| 3 | International news: World news | Reading print news articles and identifying their main elements, comparing the difference between print and broadcast news, group discussion |
| 4 | International news: Asia | Vocabulary work, watching online Asian news, identifying different elements of the news story, summarizing, group feedback |
| 5 | International news: United States | Background building, watching broadcast news on presidential election, identifying elements of the news, summarizing, group feedback |
| 6 | National News: News on Taiwan | Reading different online news on the same topic, summarizing, analyzing and evaluating the arguments |
| 7 | Sports news | Vocabulary work, watching broadcast news, summarizing, reporting the sports news of interest |
| 8 | Midterm | Written test |
| 9 | Lifestyle: Travel | Watching online video clip, summarizing, group discussion on the most desired travel destination, oral report |
| 10 | Lifestyle: Fashion, style | Reading print news on fashion/style, vocabulary work, summarizing, oral report |
| 11 | Business news | Vocabulary work, reading print news, identifying news elements, group discussion, summary writing |
| 12 | Business news | Vocabulary work, watching broadcast news, identifying news elements, comparing the difference between print and broadcast news, analysis and feedback |
| 13. | Health | Watching news video clip, summary, presenting on the health issues concerned |
| 14 | Culture | Lecture, watching news clip on gender-role stereotypes, group discussion, feedback |
| 15 | Entertainment news | Celeb news and celebrity gossip, watching talk show video clip, reflecting, feedback |
| 16 | Technology | Reading online news text, written summary, oral report |
| 17, 18 | Final project presentation | Peer evaluation, questionnaire, semi-structured interviews |

Appendix C

Peer Evaluation Sheet for Final Video News Project

Evaluation made by: _____

Evaluation sheet for group ____: _____

| | Item | Score |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Content | 1. The main topic is precise, and the news follows the basic structure of news English (i.e., headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, and images). 10% | |
| | 2. The news story elaborates on the basic elements of news (i.e., timeliness, conflict, consequence, prominence, proximity, and human interest). 10% | |
| | 3. The news specified the basic elements of a lead paragraph (i.e., 5Ws1H). 10% | |
| | 4. The news story is well developed and coherent. The relationships between ideas are clear. 10% | |
| | 5. The news story has a clear and well-argued ending/conclusion. 10% | |
| Language | 6. The news is delivered with good fluency. 10% | |
| | 7. The news was delivered with correct grammatical structures. 10% | |
| | 8. The news was delivered with clear pronunciation. 10% | |
| | 9. The speaker's use of vocabularies and phrases was appropriate. 10% | |
| | 10. The speaker has good eye contact with the audiences. 10% | |
| Overall feedback: | | Total score: |

Appendix D

Students' Self-Report Questionnaire

Please evaluate your own learning throughout this course. For the following statement, provide your self-rating from 1–5, using these values: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

| | Item | Rating (1–5) |
|----|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | I have learned the components of English media texts and journalistic writing, such as headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, and images. | |
| 2 | I have learned the basic components (5W1H) in lead paragraph(s). | |
| 3 | I have learned new vocabularies and common technologies in different news sections (i.e., international, politics, business, health, and technology). | |
| 4 | I have learned the basics of broadcasting news scripts, such as a clear focus, a lead, a body, and an ending. | |
| 5 | I have learned the differences between print and broadcast news script writing. | |
| 6 | I have learned that different news media could have different perspectives in reporting the same news story. | |
| 7 | I have learned how to analyze a news story, including examining its source and seeing how well the news follows the leads. | |
| 8 | I have learned to be more skeptical about the news by questioning how the news media have clear reasons to support the conclusions. | |
| 9 | I have learned to evaluate the news and provide my own perspectives. | |
| 10 | I have learned how to write a print news script. | |
| 11 | I have learned how to write a broadcast news script. | |
| 12 | I have learned to edit news and broadcast scripts. | |
| 13 | I can understand the news broadcasting better (listening). | |
| 14 | I can identify the 5W1H from the news broadcasting (listening). | |
| 15 | I think my English listening ability has improved after intensive listening to the news broadcast (listening). | |
| 16 | I can understand the print news story better (reading). | |
| 17 | I can find the gist of a story and scan for the necessary information for answering reading comprehension tasks (reading). | |
| 18 | I have learned to read for the differences between print and broadcast news (reading). | |
| 19 | I have learned to orally summarize a news story (speaking). | |
| 20 | I have learned to express my point of view on a news story (speaking). | |
| 21 | I can speak more fluently in English (speaking). | |
| 22 | I can summarize information from the news in a written paragraph (writing). | |
| 23 | I can write a print news script (writing). | |
| 24 | I can write a broadcast news script (writing). | |
| 25 | I think overall my English ability is improved. | |

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

| |
|---|
| <p>1. What is your opinion about the news material covered in this class? Were you interested in the topics? Why? Why not?</p> |
| <p>2. Are you clear about the basic elements of a news story? What are they? Can you briefly describe a news story you have noticed/watched lately?</p> |
| <p>3. In terms of English language skill development in this course, in which aspect of language skills do you think you have improved? Why?</p> |
| <p>4. What's your opinion about the individual mini project that was required every week? What's your idea about the final group news project? Do you think it is hard or easy? Do you find it interesting or boring? What have you learned from it?</p> |
| <p>5. What is your opinion about doing peer evaluation for others' news project? Did the specified evaluation criteria help or hinder you in evaluating your peers' work? After evaluating others' project, did you compare others' work with your own? If so, was it helpful for improving your project?</p> |
| <p>6. What are the difficulties you have encountered while taking this course (i.e., fast news broadcast, difficult vocabularies, insufficient English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing)? How did you cope with the problems you encountered?</p> |