Using Literature Circles to Promote the English Speaking Skills of Engineering Students in English for Specific Purposes Classrooms

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to study whether the use of literature circles improved the English speaking skills of engineering students in the English for Specific Purposes classroom; and 2) to examine students' attitudes towards the use of literature circles in teaching English speaking skills. The study sample consisted of 60 third-year electrical engineering students who were enrolled in the English for Specific Course at a public university in Thailand. The instruments used for this study were eight lesson plans using literature circles activities to promote English speaking skills, the English speaking test, criteria for evaluating speaking ability, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The t-test was used to compare the subjects' English speaking ability before and after using the literature circles in the English for Specific Purposes classroom. The mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire scores and content analysis were used to explore the students' attitudes towards the use of the literature circles. This study found that the students' English speaking ability improved significantly following use of the literature circles and that the students' held highly positive attitudes towards the use of the literature circles in teaching English speaking skills.

Keywords: Literature circles, English speaking skills, engineering students,
English for Specific Purposes

Introduction

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was officially established in 2015 and serves as a significant platform for qualified workers who aim to advance their professional careers abroad. Under the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA) agreement, skilled workers and graduates from eight specified fields: engineering, nursing, architecture, surveyance, medicine, dentistry, accountancy, and tourism can work freely across all AEC member countries (University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2012). In response to the geocentricism in human resource management, companies currently tend to look for potential candidates from diverse backgrounds rather than restrict their selection to home country candidates only. In this respect, the most competent applicants gain great benefits when applying for job vacancies (Daniels, Radebaugh, & Sullivan, 2011). In order to achieve the AEC integration, the free flow of skilled labor is essential to provide opportunities for skilled workers and graduates, particularly those in the eight nominated professional fields, to relocate to work in AEC countries with a higher salary and a potentially more rewarding experience.

Among the eight AEC careers, the "engineering" profession plays a key role in advancing the social and economic development of a country; electrical engineering in particular. Thailand is one of the ASEAN's largest producers of electronic goods, with total export value at US$55 billion, which accounted for 24 percent of Thailand's annual export revenue in 2014 (Thailand Board of Investment, 2014). Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say

that Thai engineers will receive countless benefits from the prospect of employment in the electronics industry.

The free flow of skilled labor creates both opportunities and threats for Thai skilled workers. For instance, there are more opportunities to work in other ASEAN countries in a higher position in the workplace and for more pay than there are in Thailand. On the other hand, competition for job positions is also demanding because employers have more choices from which to recruit the best qualified employees (Joungtrakul, 2013). This situation is critical for Thai engineers because they must compete against other candidates from ASEAN member countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Sureeyatanapas, Boonma, & Thalangkan, 2016). Despite survey research results from the Center for International Trade Studies, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (2012) showing that Thai engineers have the potential to be leaders in the field compared to Singaporean and Pilipino engineers, the latter two have the advantage in terms of generally higher standard of English language proficiency. This aligns with the findings reported in studies by the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (2011), Panglilars (2012), Pisarnvanich and Nukprach (2012), Wongboonsin, Srisaengnarm, & Sermcheep (2012), and Sureeyatanapas et al. (2016). These studies reported that Thai skilled workers including engineers often lack the English language competency requirement of employers. Due to this drawback, Thai engineers need to develop their English language skills to be more competitive for job positions in the AEC marketplace.

The ASEAN itself acknowledges the importance of English language as evidenced in Chapter 10, article 34 of the ASEAN Charter, which states that the working language of ASEAN shall be English (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2007). Moreover, it is clearly indicated in the ASEAN strategic objective for human development that there is the need to enable the citizens of member states to communicate with one another regionally and internationally by supporting them to be proficient in the English language (ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint, 2009). Therefore, promoting skilled workers and graduates to be competent in English language skills is crucial as they are to compete in the ASEAN job market and global economy.

Driven by the demand to produce engineering graduates whose English standards meet employers' requirements, education institutions must meet the challenge to develop suitable English courses to enable engineering students to successfully communicate in both the AESAN and international settings. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in higher education settings are designed to equip students with the English language skills required in their professional field. ESP refers to "the teaching and learning of English as a second language or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain" (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014, p. 2). The core of an ESP course lies in the content and objectives of the course, which focus on the specific needs of the students. Furthermore, it emphasizes language skills development including the genres appropriate for the tasks and activities undertaken by the students in the classroom (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014).

Review of Literature

A review of the literature (Maria, 2009; Musikhin, 2016; Riemer, 2002; Rajkhowa and Borah, 2015) reveals that ESP courses emphasize the essential vocabulary, disciplinary knowledge and communicative competence required of engineering students to effectively communicate with colleagues and specialists from other countries. Additionally, authentic materials are also preferred in ESP courses because they provide language examples and scenarios the students will encounter in real life (Benavent and Penamaria, 2011; Klimova, 2015).

In terms of English language teaching, literature is regarded as a valuable source of authentic material for use in the classroom. Books provide a good resource for correct vocabulary use and sentence patterns which are useful for language learning. Indeed, the students become familiar with the language used in different situations in real life (Collie and Slater, 2001; Ghosn, 2002; Hadaway et al., 2002; Hismanoglu, 2005; Keshavarzi, 2012). Moreover, in terms of speaking skills development, conducting discussions of the themes and topics in the literature encourages students to express their ideas and feelings in English. Therefore, students can develop their speaking ability by expressing their opinions towards significant issues presented in texts through oral discussion (Carrison & Slavit, 2005; Fisher, 2003).

Upon realizing that literature has the potential to support students to develop their English communicative competence, many ESP instructors have attempted to incorporate literature into their ESP or English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms (Hirvela, 1993; Iva and Jasna, 2014; Kelly and Krishnan, 1995). Nevertheless, the integration of literature into ESP courses appears to be limited as ESP course designers tend to select content which reflects the specific language and skills the students require for their particular area of study. Thus, learning materials not related to the occupation or academic disciplines are often excluded from the ESP curriculum. In this respect, there appears to be limited opportunities for literature to be included in ESP courses (Hirvela, 1993).

Despite the benefits that literature can provide for language development, ESP instructors seem to hesitate to add literary contents in the ESP courses as the connections between literature and ESP are not clearly evident. For this reason, research related to the use of literature in ESP courses, especially for engineering students, is rather rare. Most previous studies have devoted the research focus to either surveying the students' needs, analyzing English proficiency levels or developing ESP materials to improve English language skills for engineering students. For example, there has been a survey of the communicative needs of Thai civil engineering students conducted by Kaewpet (2009), an investigation of English proficiency requirements for engineering graduates at private organizations in Thailand was undertaken by Sureeyatanapas et al. (2016), and the development of ESP materials to improve language skills for teaching English for science and technology by Musikhin (2016).

Therefore, this study attempts to demonstrate how to incorporate literature into ESP courses using literature circles activities to improve the English speaking ability of engineering students. Literature circles are peer-led discussions of written texts in which the students, especially L2 learners, express their opinions and ideas about the story they have read in English. Each member of the group is responsible for reading the text according to their assigned role before reuniting as a group. They then share their ideas and feelings about the text in the group dynamic based on their given role (Furr, 2004). Furr (2004) and Daniel (2002) suggest six major roles in a literature circles activity: group leader, summarizer, connector, word master, passage person, and culture collector. Importantly, the students should be encouraged to rotate their roles to ensure that they each have an opportunity to experience and learn from the different roles.

Two prominent characteristics of a literature circles activity to contribute to the dialogic discussions are authenticity and responsiveness. The students are encouraged to be active group members by learning to listen to their peers and asking them questions through authentic and responsive interactions (Myonghee, 2004). Additionally, in a non-threatening atmosphere, students feel free to express themselves and to share their personal feelings and experiences (Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000). In brief, by responding to and discussing literary texts in their assigned roles in a low-anxiety atmosphere, literature circles have the potential to enhance students' speaking skills and to encourage them to be more confident in expressing their voices in the authentic conversation.

Previous studies have shown the many benefits of using literature circles in the English language classroom. For example, Carrison and Ernst-Slavit (2005) found that using literature circles helps to strengthen students' literacy skills and confidence. In addition, the findings reported by Graham-Marr (2015) suggest literature circles can improve students' vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, collaborative learning through literature circles can motivate students' to participate in social interactions (Balone, 2015; Bedel, 2016) and enhance their critical thinking skills (Anurit, 2016). Literature circles have also been found to increase students' reading comprehension and motivation towards reading (Jacobs, 2015).

However, a review of the literature related to literature circles reveals only a limited number of oral communication competency studies, particularly in ESP classroom contexts. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the potential for using literature circles to enhance students' English speaking ability. Two research questions are proposed: 1) Does the use of literature circles improve the students' English speaking skills of engineering students in the English for Specific Purposes classroom? and 2) What are the students' attitudes towards the use of a literature circles activity in teaching English speaking skills?

Methodology

A mixture methods single group pre-and post-test study in a pre-experimental design was conducted to compare the students' English speaking abilities before and after the implementation of literature circles. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed to obtain rich data sets for analysis. The instruments used in this study were lesson plans using literature circles activities to promote English speaking skills, English speaking tests, criteria for evaluating speaking ability, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, eight lesson plans including literature circles activities to promote English speaking skills were conducted by the researcher. The lessons were approved by three experts who have been working in the fields of English literature and English language teaching for more than 10 years. Based on a need analysis, four main themes were chosen by the students: adventure, fantasy, mystery, and philosophy. In the end, five short stories were selected for use in the literature circles activities: "The Open Window" by Saki, "The Three Questions" by Leo Tolstoy, "Godfather Death" by Brothers Grimm, "The Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury, and "The Knight of the Silver Shield" by Raymond MacDonald Alden. All short stories were approved by the same experts to ensure that the stories corresponded to the students' interest and made them want to discuss and respond as well as the story length and the level of English language used were appropriate to the students' language proficiency levels. In this respect, literary texts expose the students to real examples of different grammatical structures and vocabulary items which engineering students may encounter in real life apart from those technical terms in their field of study.

Table 1: Literary Texts Used in the Study

Literary text	Author	Type	Length
The Open Window	Saki	Mystery	1219 words
The Three Questions	Leo Tolstoy	Philosophy	1563 words
Godfather Death	Brothers Grimm	Fantasy, mystery	1205 words
The Sound of Thunder	Ray Bradbury	Fantasy	3136 words
The Knight of the Silver Shield	Raymond MacDonald Alden	Adventure	2688 words

Secondly, the English speaking tests were designed to assess the English speaking ability before and after implementing the literature circles activity. The topics for the pre- and post-test were "How is English important to your career as an electrical engineer?" and "Myself and my determination," respectively. They were approved by the experts to ensure that the topics corresponded to the students' interest. Thirdly, the criteria for evaluating the students' speaking ability were constructed focusing on four major areas namely fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. The criteria were checked by the experts. Fourthly, a 5-point rating scale questionnaire was developed by this researcher to access the students' opinions towards the use of literature circles. The questionnaire comprised 17 items and was divided into three sections: attitudes toward the literary texts used, attitudes toward the assigned roles in literature circles activities, and attitudes toward the teaching procedures employed in the literature circles activities. Participants were requested to consider each item carefully and to indicate the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement; namely, strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The questionnaire was approved by three English lecturers who were experts in the area of English literature and teaching English as a foreign language.

After revising some of the questionnaire items in accordance with the experts' comments, the pilot questionnaire was tested with 30 fourth-year students studying Electrical Engineering at a university in northern Thailand (this researcher's workplace). Following the pilot study, some parts of the questionnaires were adjusted and modified. Finally, the semi-structured interview questions corresponded to the questionnaire items and were designed to examine the students' attitudes towards the use of literature circles activities in the ESP classroom. The interviews focused on the interviewees' attitudes toward the literary texts used, their assigned roles in the literature circles activities, and the benefits of the literature circles activity. However, additional questions were embedded into each section. After piloting the semi-structured interviews with three fourth-year students enrolled in the Engineering course at the university where this researcher worked, some changes were made to ensure the questions were as clear and simple as possible. Moreover, some leading questions were deleted to avoid bias and to eliminate apparent assumptions by the researcher.

The fieldwork for this study took place from March to May, 2018. Sixty third-year electrical engineering students enrolled in the ESP course at a medium-sized public university in northern Thailand were selected by purposive sampling method during the second semester of the academic year 2017 based on the researcher's assigned teaching course.

The first stage of data collection was to survey the students to discover their interests in reading literature including literary genres and plots. A pre-intervention English speaking test was then conducted on the topic; "How is English important to your career as an electrical engineer?" to assess the students' English speaking ability prior to implementing the literature circles. Next, the students were introduced to the literature circles method to facilitate their understanding of the learning objectives and activities. Following this, eight lesson plans using literature circles were implemented in the classroom over eight weeks; three hours each week for a total of 24 hours. Each week, the students were assigned to read the designated story by focusing on their roles before attending the class. During the class, they were then asked to form a discussion group to share their ideas and feelings of the short story based on their given roles. At the completion of all eight lessons, a post-test was conducted to measure the students' speaking ability on the topic; "Myself and my determination." The students' speaking scores in both pre- and post-test were evaluated by the researcher using the speaking rubric approved by the experts. Finally, the students were requested to complete a questionnaire about their attitudes towards the use of literature circles in improving English speaking skills. Additionally, eight students were randomly selected for

an interview. All interviews were conducted in Thai, took approximately 20 minutes' duration, and were audio-recorded with the interviewee's permission. They were conducted at the interviewee's university and all interviewees were very cooperative, providing very useful information for this study.

Results and Discussion

English Speaking Ability

Analysis of the quantitative data from the English speaking tests was performed to answer research question one; "Does the use of literature circles improve the students' English speaking skills of engineering students in the English for Specific Purposes classroom?" A t-test statistical analysis was employed to compare the students' improvement in English speaking abilities following their participation in the literature circles activities.

As seen in Table 2, the students' pre- and post-test speaking scores were compared. The mean scores of the post-test (3.19) were significantly higher than the pre-test (2.54) scores, indicating that the literature circles activity helped the students to improve their English speaking skills. The result confirms the finding of Karatay (2017) that literature circles improve students' speaking abilities and motivates them to share their feelings and thoughts in front of the class.

Table 2: Comparison of Ability in English Speaking Skills Before and After Implementing Literature Circles Activity

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	2.54	60	0.42
Posttest	3.19	60	0.77

Attitudes towards the Use of a Literature Circles in Teaching English Speaking Skills

With regard to research question two; "What are the students' attitudes towards the use of a literature circles in teaching English speaking skills?" the quantitative results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean (M) score and standard deviation (SD), and then translated based on the Likert-scale criteria. In terms of the demographic results, 47 males (78.33%) and 13 females (21.66%) participated in the survey. Regarding the qualitative data, one female and seven males participated in the semi-structured interviews. Content analysis of the students' interview responses was performed using the three main themes addressed in the interview and survey. Table 3 summarizes the students' attitudes towards the literary texts used in the literature circles activities.

Table 3 shows that most participants thought that the stories used in the literature circles activities were interesting and thought-provoking (item 1; M=4.65, SD=0.61), and included vocabulary that could be used in real life (item 4; M=4.65, SD=0.58). This result is similar to the opinions expressed by the students during the interview. As two students explained:

> I really enjoy all of the stories used in class, especially "The Three Questions" as I am interested in morals and philosophy. It makes me know that I should be mindful and pay attention to every moment as well as take great care of the people around me (interviewee no.5).

> I gain lots of vocabulary from reading the stories. When I do not know the meaning of some words or phrases, I need to look up the dictionary. This helps me to acquire new vocabulary that can be used in real life apart from those technical terms in my engineering field (interviewee no.8).

This finding appears to support the opinion of Maley (2001) that literature is a rich resource for teaching language in EFL and ESL settings because the stories and subject matter are of interest and appealing to the learners. Sell (2005) agrees, asserting that compared to typical textbooks, literary texts seem to offer content which is real to the learners' lives.

Additionally, the results presented in Table 3 revealed that the students tended to think that the stories used in class motivated them to develop the English speaking skills (item 3; M=4.62, SD=0.61), included examples of dialogues used in real situations (item 5; M=4.60, SD=0.62), and promoted social and cultural knowledge of native speaking countries (item 6; M=4.57, SD=0.62). These findings correspond to those reported by Hall (2015), Keshavarzi (2012), Hadaway et al. (2002), and Collie and Slater (2001) that reading literary texts help students to develop communicative competence and become familiar with language use in different situations, as well as encouraged students to understand other cultures and norms and learn about people's ideas and attitudes.

Table 3: Attitudes toward Literary Texts Used in Literature Circles (N=60)

Statements	M	S.D.	Level
1. The stories used in literature circles activities are interesting and thought-provoking.	4.65	0.61	Very high
2. The stories are appropriate to my English language proficiency level.	4.55	0.57	Very high
3. The stories motivate me to develop English speaking skills.	4.62	0.61	Very high
4. The stories contain examples of vocabulary that can be used in real life.	4.65	0.58	Very high
5. The stories contain examples of dialogues used in real situations.	4.60	0.62	Very high
6. The stories promote social and cultural knowledge of native speaking countries	4.57	0.62	Very high

The results presented in Table 4 show that most students thought that being a moderator helped them to improve their English speaking ability the most (item 1; M=4.58, SD=0.56), followed by the roles of passage person and culture collector (items 5 and 6; M=4.57, SD=0.62). Most students agreed during interview that being a moderator provided the most help to them to improve their English speaking skills as they needed to be well-prepared to be the moderator. In this role, they had to manage many tasks such as introducing the topic or issue that each member brings to the group, supporting and connecting each member' ideas, and facilitate the group discussion.

Interestingly, a majority of the students also indicated that the role of culture collector helped them to develop both their English language skills and their critical thinking skills. As one student claimed during interview:

> I think that the role of culture collector helps me to develop critical thinking skills because I have to analyze cultural issues embedded in the story and compare with Thai culture. I need to understand the story thoroughly and investigate issues relating to the cultural background presented in the text. So, in this way, it requires more than just English language skills to complete the task (interviewee no.6).

This finding corresponds to the studies of Anurit (2016) and Bunsom et al. (2011) which reported that reading literary texts encouraged students to think critically about the story as they needed to analyze and interpret the texts in a reasonable way. Furthermore, as expected, the role of word master or vocabularian gained the lowest mean score (item 4; M=4.52, SD=0.62) as most students expressed during the interview that this role was the easiest to fulfil because they could consult a dictionary without having a deep understanding of the story.

In the literature circles activity, occupying a role gives each student responsibility to explore the text from a different perspective and to prepare for a group discussion. Each member engages in a close reading which focus on his or her own assigned role. Then, the students get into groups and share their ideas and feelings based on their responsible roles. Each member brings their own experience and view of the world to the group through the discussion. In this respect, the assigned roles give the students a clear and meaningful purpose for their reading. They will be able to express their opinions with confidence as they know what they are going to talk about in the discussion (Furr, 2004).

Table 4: Attitudes toward Assigned Roles in Literature Circles activity (N=60)

Statements	M	S.D.	Level
1. I think that being a moderator helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.58	0.56	Very high
2. I think that being a summarizer helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.53	0.57	Very high
3. I think that being a connector helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.55	0.57	Very high
4. I think that being a word-master helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.52	0.62	Very high
5. I think that being a passage-person helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.57	0.62	Very high
6. I think that being a culture-collector helps me to improve my English speaking ability.	4.57	0.62	Very high

The main finding to emerge from the data analysis on the participants' attitudes toward benefits of using literature circles activities (Table 5) is that most students believed that the literature circles activities provided them with the opportunity to practice speaking English in authentic situations (item 3; M=4.57, SD=0.65). As one student explained during interview:

> Normally, I am quite familiar with academic English used in my engineering courses. However, they are short technical terms. I have never read anything in English written in long sentences like the story that I read in this class. I can see examples of words and sentences used in real-life situations. I can say that the activity enabled me to practice speaking English by using real-life language (interviewee no.8).

Moreover, the students claimed that they have improved their English speaking skills as a result of adopting the different roles in the literature circles activity (item 1; M=4.52, SD=0.60) and that the activity helped them gain the confidence to speak English and express ideas (item 2; M=4.50, SD=0.62).This is in accordance with the views expressed by the students during interview. They indicated that they felt their English speaking skills were improved and that they gained more confidence to share opinions in the classroom, as illustrated in the following claim from one interviewee:

> I think that my English speaking skill is improved after doing the literature circles activity because this is the first time that I have the opportunity to speak English in front of my friends. Normally, I am quite shy and my English language proficiency is at a very low level. When I attend the class, I have to prepare myself a lot, such as reading the text and practicing pronouncing some unfamiliar vocabularies. Luckily, I feel more relaxed when I am with my friends. I think I am now more confident to share my ideas and discuss with my friends (interviewee no.2).

Table 5: Attitudes toward Benefits of Using the Literature Circles Activity in Teaching English Speaking Skills (N=60)

Statements	X	S.D.	Level
1. I think that I have improved my English speaking skill from different roles in literature circles activity.	4.52	0.60	Very high
2. I think that literature circles activity helps me gain more confidence to speak English and express ideas.	4.50	0.62	Very high
3. I think that literature circles activity gives me the opportunity to practice speaking English in an authentic situation.	4.57	0.65	Very high
4. I think that literature circles activity helps me to speak English in a non-threatening and relaxing atmosphere.	4.47	0.65	Very high

In a literature circles activity, the students are encouraged to be active group members by listening and asking questions through authentic and responsive interactions (Myonghee, 2004). Besides, by the process of sharing and discussing their response and personal interpretation when doing different roles, students can broaden their perspectives on the text and will be able to see where their own positions are in relation to the group. Learning from different eyes and speaking with their own voices can encourage them to be more confident in oral communication. Additionally, in a community-like setting, students will be able to interact with one another in a non-threatening atmosphere and share their personal feelings and experiences. This can be very useful for the students with low English language proficiency or low self-confidence as they can see many different models for sharing, talking about, and interpreting literature (Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000). In this respect, creating a non-threatening atmosphere where students can openly reflect and develop their responses is the key factor to make the implementation of literature circles successful.

The interview data also aligns with the findings in the study by Karatay (2015) which revealed that literature circles enabled the students to share their feelings and ideas with self-confidence in front of a group or with each other, especially the students who typically do not participate in class. As reported by Karatay (2015), these students began to express their opinions and to take part in the group discussions. Additionally, the student's interview responses support Kaewpet' (2009) claim that EFL classes in Thailand tend to be the only opportunity for most students to practice speaking in English in work-like situations.

Conclusions

The study presented in this paper aimed at incorporating literature circles into ESP classroom activities to develop the English speaking skills of engineering students. Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from the study findings as follows.

Firstly, it determined that implementing literature circles activities can enhance the ability of electrical engineering students to speak English in authentic settings. The results of this study showed that literature circles contributed to the students' English speaking ability as their pre-test mean score prior to using literature circles activity was 2.54; whereas, their post-test mean score after engaging in the literature circles activity was 3.19. The difference in mean scores was statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$), suggesting the English speaking skills of the students improved following their participation in the literature circles activity. Moreover, the analyses of the survey and interview data revealed that the students felt more confident to discuss and share opinions in groups and in front of the class, particularly those who did not typically take the opportunity to speak English to express their ideas in class.

Secondly, this study helped to bridge the gap in our academic understanding of the role of literature in ESP courses. The findings of the study confirm that incorporating literature into the ESP classroom is achievable and that the literature can potentially develop the students' English communicative competencies. That is, from reading literary texts and

participating in literature circles activities, the students' English speaking ability may be improved significantly. Moreover, the students' confidence to express opinions in English also increased as a result of participating in the literature circles activity. Thus, the use of literature in learning activities should not be limited to the Humanities subjects. Science students could also gain benefits from engaging with literary contents and aesthetic experiences. This is in spite of the claims that learning materials which are not related to the students' occupation and academic discipline should be excluded from the ESP curriculum as indicated in the literature review.

Thirdly, this study reflected the vital role of literature in English language learning by demonstrating how the use of literature enhanced the English for communication skills of engineering students in authentic context both inside and outside the classroom. This was particularly evident for students who have already acquired professional English such as vocabulary and specialized content related to the engineering field. The research findings suggested that the majority of students in this study were already acquainted with professional English from their major courses of study. Moreover, they became aware that the professional English gained from ESP courses only may not reflect the real English usage that they need to use in the competitive workforce. In this respect, literature is a useful language source for familiarizing the students with meaningful language patterns used in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, the opportunity for practicing communicative English in real settings was rather limited since the only place for them to practice speaking English tended to be during English classes (Kaewpet, 2009). Therefore, educational institutions should provide more opportunities for students to develop their English communicative competencies. Regular activities such as English camps and English clubs for non-English major students are necessary. Furthermore, establishing a community which includes students from different fields of study which convenes monthly to provide speaking activities is also recommended. This will provide the students with a place to be more frequently exposed to communicative English in authentic setting.

Finally, despite some positive findings identified in this study to support the role of literature circles for enhancing the English speaking skills of engineering students in an ESP course, some limitations and recommendations of this study should be noted before the results can be generalized. First, the literature circles activity was time consuming and the teacher will, therefore, need to ensure the learning activity is well-manage by allocating the time suitable for each procedure. Additionally, it is crucial that the teacher conduct a student needs analysis to ensure that the design of the lessons and the selection of literary texts is appropriate to the students' language proficiency levels and learning interests. Moreover, the plot and length of the story need to be considered very carefully as most students may not be familiar with how to read literary texts. It is possible that they will be discouraged from participating by an uninteresting plot or a story that is too long. Another consideration is that the research results gained from the small sample in this study indicated the specific needs for English usage in communicative settings rather than English for use in professional fields and thus may not reflect the needs for all electrical engineering students across all universities.

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