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# Using Indigenous Folktales as EFL Materials to Increase the Foreign Language Enjoyment and Learning Motivation of Indigenous Taiwanese Students

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**Abstract**

This study seeks to determine whether or not using indigenous Taiwanese folktales as materials in EFL classes could help to improve the learning outcomes of indigenous Taiwanese high school students by increasing their foreign language enjoyment and motivation. Indigenous high school students in this study used two types of classroom materials: A graded reader set in a generic western milieu and then a series of indigenous folktales that had been translated into English. After each intervention, the students were asked to fill out a questionnaire that evaluated their enjoyment, interest, motivation, and self-perceived efficacy. Interviews and focus groups followed. The study found that students enjoyed the indigenous stories more by a statistically significant margin. The indigenous stories were also more effective in motivating students, while students perceived both types of material to be equally effective in terms of helping them learn new words and improve their proficiency. Implications for practitioners and policy makers are discussed.

**Keywords:** EFL, foreign language enjoyment, localized materials, Taiwanese indigenous

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## 1. Introduction

The question of whether it is preferable to use learning materials that are localized or that reflect the target culture is debated in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature. Byram (1997) argues that language teachers should use materials from the target culture because language and culture are inextricably linked, whereas other researchers suggest materials should be localized to help with students' comprehension (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2009) and capture their interest (Aminullah, 2019; Mahabadi, 2013). Resolving this debate is important in general, but it is particularly critical for teachers of indigenous Taiwanese students, since these students, on average, underperform in English as compared to non-indigenous Taiwanese students (Lin, 2012; Yang, 2007). The need to enhance English proficiency among the indigenous population has been mentioned in official government policy documents in the past (Price, 2014).

Because Taiwan aims to become a bilingual country by 2030, students who do not speak English will find it increasingly difficult to get higher-status jobs. There is already an economic disparity between indigenous people and the general population of Taiwan (Chen, 2015; Liu & Tsung, 2007), and if the gap in English ability between indigenous Taiwanese and the rest of the population is not closed, this disparity could grow. A previous study (Tsai, 2010) found a correlation between English proficiency and socioeconomic status in Taiwan, and found that fluency in English played a greater role in advancing socioeconomic status than fluency in Mandarin. Given that English ability is a commodity in Taiwan which can be purchased in the form of supplementary instruction, this could create a cycle where students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are able to afford higher proficiency, which in turn grants them higher status.

Conversely, students from poorer backgrounds cannot afford supplementary instruction and are thereby relegated to lower status jobs with lower incomes. One researcher (Price, 2014) describes the problem thus: "The imposition of a foreign language, such as English, into compulsory—and competitive—education systems potentially has particularly damaging effects on educational equality and thus socioeconomic mobility" (p. 568). Price goes on to argue that government English Language Education (ELE) policy in Taiwan has "increased the value of English as a cultural capital that could be used to access educational and employment markets, and thus be transformed into economic capital" (p. 574). Even physical access to supplementary education could be a problem for those from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas; cram schools, for example, are virtually non-existent in rural areas (Price, 2014). Thus, it is important to find ways to ensure indigenous students get the maximum benefit from the limited time they spend in English classes at school and, if possible, to motivate them to improve their English ability independently, without the aid of expensive or difficult-to-access supplementary options.

Until recently, issues related to the Taiwanese indigenous academic achievement gap had not been thoroughly researched (Hou & Huang, 2012), making it an area worthy of further study. While the Taiwanese government has tried to address the problem by lowering the standards necessary for indigenous students to gain access to tertiary education, this might only delay—rather than solve—the negative consequences of the achievement gap, as indigenous students have a higher drop-out and deferment rate in universities (Hou & Huang, 2012). Indigenous students likely find it frustrating to be in classes where the material is geared to students who have a 25 percent higher average than they do. This gap is especially significant in language classes, where material must be comprehensible to enable acquisition (Krashen, 1982). As such, surely raising indigenous students' English proficiency would be a better long-term solution than lowering admission standards. Thus, helping indigenous students to improve their English learning outcomes by using learning materials rooted in their own cultural heritage would be a meaningful approach.

Furthermore, the Taiwanese government has acknowledged the importance of preserving Taiwanese indigenous culture and including it in education practices. For example, The ROC Education Act for Indigenous Peoples (1998) states that indigenous education "shall have as its aim… boosting indigenous people's sense of collective pride in their identity" (Article 2). It further states that schools should "incorporate the histories, cultures, and values of the various indigenous ethnicities into relevant courses and teaching materials" (Article 27). Finally, it states that schools should provide students with opportunities to learn about indigenous cultures (Article 29). A white paper on indigenous educational policy from the Taiwan MOE (2011) ...emphasized localization to conserve and spread indigenous culture… (Chen, 2015).

### *1.1 Research Goals*

Three research goals were planned for this action research project. The researcher hoped to determine whether using

localized learning materials in the form of indigenous folktales could improve indigenous Taiwanese senior high school students' learning motivation, FLE, and self-perceptions of efficacy.

Some indigenous students in Taiwan might lack both instrumental and integrative motivation, as they do not intend to work in a field where English is required, and they do not interact with any second language (L2) social groups. However, motivation is not purely an innate quality that a student has or does not; it can be influenced by environmental factors, one of which is learning material; "The exact nature of the social and pragmatic dimensions of L2 motivation is always dependent on who learns what languages where" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 275). As such, finding suitable teaching materials that foster motivation among a particular group of students should be a priority for EFL teachers.

The effect of FLE is significant. Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) found that the positive impact of FLE is even greater than the powerful negative effect of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). It is thus important for teachers to ensure students enjoy the time they spend acquiring the target language. Therefore, the goal of determining whether students enjoy the indigenous texts more than foreign texts has practical significance.

Since language learning motivation and FLE have been found to be closely related (Zhang, Dai, & Wang, 2020), and student motivation is closely linked to second language achievement (Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009; Dörnyei, 1994), we can deduce that positive results in the form of increased motivation and enjoyment will have a positive impact on acquisition. It has been posited in the literature before that materials which produce "impact" (attract students' interest, curiosity, and attention) have a greater chance of bringing language acquisition benefits (Tomlinson, 1998). Finally, when students enjoy the language learning process, they are more likely to continue the process over the long term (Zhang, Dai, & Wang, 2020). Because impact is variable and subjective, the challenge of the language teacher is to identify material that will have the greatest impact for the greatest number of students in the class (Tomlinson, 1998). Therefore, finding teaching materials that indigenous students find enjoyable will bring significant benefits to practitioners and students alike.

Finally, since student attitudes towards the learning process are correlated with language acquisition success (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003), the researcher sought to evaluate the students' perceptions of efficacy to ensure that any potential pedagogical benefits of using localized texts would not be derailed by skeptical attitudes about the process.

### *1.2 Research Questions*

The research questions for this project are as follows:

1) Does using localized materials affect indigenous Taiwanese students' motivation to learn English?
2) Does using localized materials affect indigenous Taiwanese students FLE?
3) Does using localized materials affect indigenous Taiwanese students' self-reported perceptions of efficacy?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Indigenous Students' English Learning Challenges—Empirical*

Indigenous people in Taiwan have historically had a lower level of education than the average. Less than 20 years ago, the percentage of indigenous peoples with university education was 6.2 percent as opposed to 26 percent among the general population of Taiwan, while 67.5 percent had only a junior high school education or below (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2002). The situation has improved steadily. In 2010, 82.95 percent of indigenous students enrolled in high school (Hou & Huang, 2012), a number which has recently risen to 95 percent (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2018); however, their university enrollment rate is still lower than that of non-indigenous Taiwanese students at 54 percent (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2018), and their dropout rate is higher (Hou & Huang, 2012). Taiwanese studies that evaluate English proficiency based on ethnicity have found that indigenous students perform lower than their Han counterparts (Yang, 2007).

Lei and Huang (2012) carried out a study that found indigenous Taiwanese had heightened motivation to learn English when involved in a musical program. These researchers did not do a pre-test on the intervention group, but rather compared a post-test with a control group. Thus, the relatively small (n=15) control group is the only non-intervention sample which can tell us about English learning motivation within the general indigenous student population, which was found to be moderate. To the statement: "Even [if] I have trouble learning English, I will keep on trying", they

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answered an average of 2.5 on a four-point Likert scale; to "Learning English make[s] me more self-confident", they answered 2.53; and "Learning English make[s] me more capable of pursuing my dream", got an average response of 3.0. Based on these findings, we can deduce that the English learning motivation of indigenous students has room for improvement.

*2.2 Indigenous Students' English Learning Challenges—Theoretical*

Taiwan was colonized by successive foreign powers (Dutch, Spanish, Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty, and Japanese) for almost 400 years (Jacobs, 2013). These tried to oppress and assimilate the native people of Taiwan. Most recently, when Taiwan was ceded by the Japanese in the mid-twentieth century, the ROC tried to assimilate the local population, including indigenous Taiwanese, by enforcing a Sino-centric policy in education (Chen, 2008); in fact, it was only in 1987 that the government officially banned the practice of punishing students for speaking local languages in schools (Sandel, 2003). More recent studies have found Taiwanese indigenous culture is still under-represented in Taiwanese language textbooks (Ho, 2018). This could be a particularly sensitive issue in language education because language and culture are so closely connected. In fact, concern has been raised in the literature before that English devalues Taiwanese indigenous identities in educational markets (Price, 2014). Because the era of colonization is recent, within living memory, using teaching materials that ignore the existence of indigenous cultures could breed further resistance from students who are already reluctant to learn a foreign language, or who feel English is a further threat to their cultural survival.

Other factors have been posited to explain the academic achievement gap. One researcher, (Lin, 2012) attributed indigenous Taiwanese students' poor performance in English to social deprivation and poor regional employment, which in turn leads to "dysfunctional family structures, often characterized by single parenthood and alcoholism" (p. 49). Lin further argues that education is undervalued in indigenous communities as compared to the rest of Taiwanese society due to the emphasis placed on athletic prowess and indigenous culture, resulting in students who are "disillusioned" (p. 53) in learning English. Furthermore, indigenous students who grow up in remote communities in the mountains, or on islands, might not be interested in school because it does not seem relevant to their daily lives (Lin, 2012; Yang, 2007). As such, using learning materials that directly connect to their culture might help "bridge" the cultural gap and be a way to increase their interest. This hypothesis is supported theoretically by Dörnyei (1994), who identified course-specific motivational factors in language classes. Two of these, interest and satisfaction, are particularly relevant to the current study. Interest refers to "the individual's inherent curiosity and desire to know more about him or herself and his or her environment" (p. 277). Satisfaction refers to the outcome of an activity, including intrinsic rewards such as enjoyment. Since FLE has been found to be correlated to Foreign Language (FL) proficiency (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jin & Zhang, 2021; Li, 2020), it can be assumed that using learning materials which allow indigenous students to learn more about their own culture, and which they enjoy using, can increase their learning motivation.

*2.3 Western vs. Localized Content for EFL Classes—Empirical*

Sumaryono and Ortiz (2004) found that teachers showing an active interest in their students' culture can help to forge a strong teacher-student relationship and win the trust of students who come from marginalized groups. This can improve students' academic performance "[I]t is essential to find meaningful ways to incorporate the richness of students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum (p. 17)."

Mahabadi (2013) found that Iranian French-as-a-foreign-language students performed better on comprehension tests when reading French translations of stories written by an Iranian writer than when reading stories written by a French author. Mahabadi suggested that one of the reasons for this was that the Iranian students felt they were using another language to value their own culture and traditions, which in turn raised their motivation.

Conversely, one study (Rodliyah, Imperiani, & Amalia, 2014) suggested that Indonesian tertiary students slightly preferred using materials from the target culture to using materials from the local culture because they felt culture and language cannot be separated, but most of these students (80%) also appreciated using the local materials because it would give them confidence to talk about their own culture with foreigners, while others believed it would help preserve their local culture and traditions.

*2.4 Western vs. Localized Content for EFL Classes—Theoretical*

There are two views on using localized content in EFL classes. The first argues that EFL students should use texts

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from the target culture because language and culture are inextricably linked (Byram, 1997), and given that language is about communication, learners of a language cannot ignore the culture and norms of those they are likely to need to use the target language to communicate with; therefore, language teachers should also teach the target culture (Byram, 2009).

The other school of thought argues that using localized materials makes learning more accessible to students because cultural familiarity aids with comprehension (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2009) and incidental vocabulary acquisition (Pulido, 2004), and that learning material related to their own culture is more likely to capture students' interest (Aminullah, 2019; Mahabadi, 2013) and reduce FLCA (Tomlinson, 1998). Some researchers have gone even further, suggesting that a language learner's cultural identity can be threatened if the student is exposed entirely to learning materials from the culture of the target language (Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2014). This would presumably be of greater concern to indigenous students in Taiwan than to their Han counterparts, given they might already feel their cultural identity is under threat from the dominant culture in their country.

These two views have, at times, been reflected in the conflicting priorities of Taiwan's language education policies, which sometimes seem to struggle between indigenization (Local Language in Education) and internationalization (English in Education) (Chen, 2006). However, perhaps both indigenization and internationalization have a place in language education. Clouet (2006) suggested that while learning about the target culture is an essential part of language education, it is best done by comparing and contrasting with the local culture in order to give students a way to understand the new world, and a new lens with which to examine their own.

### *2.5 Foreign Language Enjoyment—Theoretical*

Student emotion is one of the most under-researched areas of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Dewaele, 2011). Traditionally, what research there was tended to focus on the negative effect of emotions like FLCA, but recently the positive psychology movement has begun to have an influence in the field, and this has caused researchers to begin examining the benefits of positive emotions like FLE (Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, & Lake, 2019). Although the negative effect of FLCA is significant (Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017; Horwitz, 2010), the positive effect of FLE has been found to be even more powerful (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). MacIntyre and Gregerson (2012) suggested that positive emotions can open a student to absorbing the target language. Positive emotions have been found to promote acquisition (Saito, Dewaele, Abe, & In'nami, 2018). Higher levels of FLE are correlated to positive attitudes towards the language and the teacher, active class participation, and higher relative proficiency (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017). These researchers suggested that foreign language teachers should focus more attention on raising students' FLE than on lowering their FLCA.

While there is evidence supporting the effect of internal student variables, teachers (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998), and peers (Dewaele, 2011), on students' emotions, subject matter has also been cited as playing a powerful role (Dewaele, 2011). Since the other factors mentioned above are, to a large extent, beyond the control of policy makers and are more the purview of individual teachers, they inherently entail a great deal of variability; however, finding material that students find interesting and enjoyable seems one area that could improve systemic shortcomings in the English language education of indigenous Taiwanese students.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1 Research Design*

This action research was designed to evaluate whether using indigenous folktales as English learning materials would improve indigenous Taiwanese high school students' English learning motivation, FLE, and self-perceptions of efficacy. To achieve this, a standard graded reader was used during the control classes, followed by the intervention where indigenous folktales were used as the learning materials. The reactions of the students were then compared.

### *3.2 Participants*

Eight classes of grade 10 and 11 students at a Taiwanese senior high school participated in the study. Four of the classes were from a special indigenous arts program that consisted entirely of indigenous students, and four were from a specialized physical education program that consisted almost entirely of indigenous students. The classes were made up of a total of 51 students; however, three students from the PE classes were not included in the study because they did not self-identify as indigenous. Due to high absenteeism in these classes, only 36 of the remaining students were present at both classes when the surveys were completed, thus the final sample size was 36 (N=36).



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Of these students, 11 were Amis, 10 were Bunun, seven were Paiwan, three were Tao, two were Pinuyumayan, and three were of mixed descent (more than one tribe).

*3.3 Instruments and Materials*

Four stories were used as learning materials. One was a starter-level graded reader from a well-known series. The graded reader (Johnson, 2009) did not explicitly state the location or culture of its setting, but it clearly took place in a generic western milieu. The other three were indigenous folktales which were taken (with permission) from an in-house National Taitung University publication called Indigenous Cultural English Textbook (原住民文化英語教材) and rewritten by the (native-English-speaking) researcher to have a language level similar to that of the graded reader. Modification of authentic localized materials to suit the students' abilities is a recommended practice (Yusra, 2019). The three indigenous stories that were used were: The Ten Suns (Amis), Pali's Red Eyes (Paiwan), and Baleng, the Snake Bride (Rukai).

The preliminary data were collected by way of two short researcher-created surveys consisting of 10 Likert-scale questions, a ranking question, and an open-ended question. In the first questionnaire, students were asked to evaluate the truth of five statements with regard to the graded reader on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree. The questions were as follows:

1. I enjoyed reading the story
2. The story was interesting
3. I would like to read more stories in English like this
4. I learned new words by reading the story
5. I think reading the story helped my English

The second questionnaire consisted of the same statements, but with regard to the indigenous stories. This survey also included an additional question where students were asked to rank all four stories (three indigenous and one western) in order of preference. The students were then invited to share any thoughts about any of the stories they had read. The instructor walked the students through the process of filling out the questionnaires using simple English and illustrations to ensure comprehension.

The researcher consulted two experts to establish the face validity of the surveys. Afterwards, the reliability of the survey was tested using a control group consisting of an intact class of mixed indigenous and non-indigenous students who also read all four stories. As expected, items 1 and 2 were found to load onto the same factor, which was determined to be the subjective quality of the reading experience, or enjoyment. The responses to these items for the graded reader had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.8544, which is considered good, and the results for these items on the indigenous stories were 0.9798 which is considered excellent.

The validity of the enjoyment-factor items was further assessed in comparison to the ranking question. The responses to questions one and two were added together, and the totals for the Western story were subtracted from the totals for the indigenous stories. The result was compared to the students' rankings of the stories. This comparison received a Cronbach's Alpha of .6974, which is considered acceptable, suggesting that students accurately ranked the stories and self-assessed their relative enjoyment of the respective materials.

Also as expected, items 4 and 5 were found to load onto the same factor, which was identified as student self-perception of language acquisition benefits. They had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.8842 for the graded reader, and 0.7805 for the indigenous stories, both of which are considered good.

The reliability of the survey was further supported by the fact that the Cronbach's Alphas from the control group and the test group were similar. Then the totals for the Western story were subtracted from the totals for the indigenous stories, and the result was compared to the students' rankings of the stories. It received a Cronbach's Alpha of .6936, as compared to .6974 for the control group.

*3.4 Procedure*

This was an action-research-based investigation using the following methods: Two questionnaires, the instructor's

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instructional and research notes, three focus groups, and two interviews. The study took place over ten weeks during the spring semester 2020, and each of the 8 groups of students in the study met with the instructor once per week for 50 minutes. For five weeks, the teacher used a graded reader as the teaching material. The following week, students were asked to fill out a short survey regarding their experience. For the next three weeks, they read a different indigenous folktale every week, each one from a different tribe. Then, they were once again asked to fill out the same survey, but this time with regard to their perceptions of the three indigenous stories. Additionally, they were asked to rank all four stories (the graded reader and the three indigenous folktales) in order of preference. The students' tribal affiliation was also noted.

The focus groups were conducted the following semester and took about 40 minutes each. The interviews were conducted casually at the convenience of students and researcher. Student responses were recorded by the researcher. In order to minimize the impact of non-material-related variables on student responses, the same instructor was used to guide the students in reading and understanding all four stories, and the same format was used for follow-up discussions. The instructor used body language, illustrations, and frequent comprehension checks to ensure students understood the stories.

The first questionnaire was administered after the students had studied the graded reader for five weeks, in May 2020. The second questionnaire was administered after the students had studied the indigenous folktales for three weeks, in June. The instructor kept instructional reflective notes throughout the process, which are cited as IN 20200503. This stands for instructor's reflective note on May 3, 2020.

Three focus groups were held in total. These all involved grade 11 students who had participated in the project the previous semester, when they were in grade 10. The first focus group, held on September 1, 2020, involved seven indigenous students. Of these, five males were Amis, one female was Tao, and another female was Bunun. The responses from this focus group are coded as FGA1 20200901 (Focus Group A, Student 1, Date). The second focus group was held on September 4, 2020. It involved three students, including one female Amis student, one male Tao student, and one male Paiwan student. The responses from this focus group are coded FGB1 20200904. The third focus group was held on September 9, 2020. Nine students participated, including two male and three female Bunun students, one male and one female Amis student, one male Pinuyumayan student, and one female student of mixed Pinuyumayan/Paiwan heritage. It is coded as FGC1 20200909.

The student interviews were conducted casually at the convenience of students and researcher. The researcher kept notes. The interviews are cited using an anonymous code; S1I 20200911 stands for student interview conducted on September 3, 2020.

*3.5 Data Analysis*

SPSS software was used to run a paired samples t-test in order to show whether there was improvement of one group in a different administration. The researcher then read, examined, extracted, and categorized the supporting reasons provided by the student answers to open questions, focus groups interviews, and research notes.

**4. Results**

Due to high absenteeism in these classes (perhaps another symptom of low interest and low motivation), only 39 of the 51 students completed both of the questionnaires, and three of those were not included in the study because they did not self-identify as indigenous students. This left 36 (N=36) eligible students.

To evaluate data normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was conducted on all data sets. All were found to have normal distributions except the learning enjoyment set for the indigenous stories, and the student self-perception of language acquisition benefits for the graded reader. However, both of these data sets could be brought within the normal range by eliminating two outlying values, so they were deemed to be within an acceptable range for using a statistical approach.

The response to the question about enjoyment drew a mean response of 4.97 for the graded reader with a standard deviation of 1.424. The range was 6, the median was 5 and the mode was 6; the same question for the indigenous stories had a mean of 5.81 with a standard deviation of 1.167. The range was 4, the median was 6, and the mode was 6; Interest in the graded reader garnered a mean response of 5.06 with a standard deviation of 1.530. The range was 6, the median was 5, and the mode was 4. For the indigenous stories the interest had a mean of 5.50 with a standard deviation of 1.207. The range, median, and mode were all 6 respectively; the question about motivation for the graded

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reader got a mean response of 5.00 with a standard deviation of 1.586. The range was 6, the median was 5, and the mode was 5; for the indigenous stories the motivation question got a mean response of 5.44 with a standard deviation of 1.206. The range was 3, the median was 5, and the mode was 4; for vocabulary improvement with the graded reader students gave a mean response of 5.64 with a standard deviation of 1.268. The range was 5, the median was 6, and the mode was 6; for vocabulary improvement on the indigenous stories the students gave a mean response of 5.53 with a standard deviation of 1.298. The range was 5, the median was 5.5, and the modes were 5 and 7; to the question about proficiency improvement with the graded reader the students gave a mean response of 5.92 with a standard deviation of 1.442. The range was 6, the median was 6, and the mode was 7; for the same question regarding indigenous stories the mean was 5.75 with a standard deviation of 1.105. The range was 4, the median was 6, and the modes were 6 and 7.

*4.1 Improving Students' English Learning Enjoyment*

The indigenous students enjoyed the indigenous stories more than the graded reader by an average of almost a full point on a seven-point Likert scale. When the students were asked whether they enjoyed the stories, the average response to the western story was 4.97 out of seven, whereas the response to the indigenous stories was a 5.81. This means the students preferred the indigenous stories by an average difference of 0.84 out of 7. This result is considered to be highly statistically significant (see Table 1).

Table 1. Students' learning enjoyment (N=36)

| Variable | Foreign-text M(SD) | Indigenous-text M(SD) | *df* | *t* value | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enjoyment change | 4.97 (1.424) | 5.81 (1.167) | 35 | -3.511 | .001 |

The question as to whether the students found the stories interesting also produced a win for the indigenous stories. The students rated the western story at 5.12 and the indigenous stories at 5.50 (see Table 2); however, given the small sample size, this difference is not large enough to be considered statistically significant.

Table 2. Students' learning interest (N=36)

| Variable | Foreign-text M(SD) | Indigenous-text M(SD) | *df* | *t* value | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interest change | 5.06 (1.530) | 5.50 (1.207) | 35 | -1.598 | .058 |

The preference for the indigenous stories was most noticeable when the students ranked the four stories; the western story was the least popular by a significant margin. Of the 36 students in the sample, only three students ranked the western story as their favorite of the four, whereas 20 (more than half) ranked it as their least favorite. One male grade 10 Paiwan student said: "I like Pali's Red Eyes because this is my Paiwan story, and this is a true story."

A male grade 10 Amis student said: "I like them because I'm indigenous, so I feel this is very close." There was not a statistically significant correlation between the tribe of the student and appreciation of stories from that particular tribe, although Paiwan students ranked Pali slightly higher than their non-Paiwan classmates, whereas the Amis students ranked Ten Suns almost identically to their non-Amis counterparts. There were no Rukai students in the class, so there was no such comparison to be made for the Rukai story.

A male Amis student said that it did not matter to him whether the stories were from his tribe or another indigenous Taiwanese tribe because all indigenous Taiwanese are "like a family" (FGA1 20200901). There appeared to be a consensus among those present that this was the case (IN 20200901). A female Bunun student (FGC1 20200909) said that all indigenous Taiwanese people are on the "same team." A male Paiwan student (FGB2 20200904) said he did

not care what tribe the story was from; they were all interesting. However, a dissenting female Amis student said she would prefer to read Amis stories (FGB1 20200904).

*4.2 Improving Students' English Learning Motivation*

When asked whether they would like to read more stories in English like this one, the students gave an average response of 4.97 out of 7 to the western story, and 5.44 to the indigenous stories, suggesting they were more motivated to continue reading in English if the stories were indigenous (see Table 3). While the margin of difference is not considered to be statistically significant for such a small sample size, the written and oral responses of the students clearly showed they found the indigenous texts more motivating, as did their level of classroom participation (IN 20200610).

Table 3. Students' motivation change (N=36)

| Variable | Foreign-text M(SD) | Indigenous-text M(SD) | *df* | *t* value | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation change | 5.00 (1.586) | 5.44 (1.206) | 35 | -1.776 | .084 |

Some of the indigenous student feedback related directly to motivation: A female grade 11 Paiwan student said: "I hope we can read more stories like the Ten Sun story in the future. I like it more because I feel it is more interesting" (Written response on questionnaire).

A female grade 10 student of mixed Pinuyumanyan/Paiwan descent said: "It is suitable for English. I hope you have more interesting stories in the future to tell us" (Written response on questionnaire). One male Amis student (FGA2 20200901) said he wanted to read more indigenous stories because he felt it was important to learn about their culture. When asked whether he thought it was important to learn about other cultures as well, he agreed that it was, but still said he preferred to read the indigenous stories. A female Amis student (FGB1 20200904) said she liked reading the indigenous stories because she thought it was important to learn about the cultures of other indigenous tribes, but still said she preferred to read Amis stories.

One female grade 10 Bunun student expressed an interest in studying a Bunun story in class in the future (IN 20200602), and a Pinuyumayan student took it upon herself to write out a Pinuyumayan folktale in English for the instructor to use in future classes (IN 20200610). She then later met with the instructor to discuss the story in English for nearly a full hour outside of regular class time.

A female Amis student said in an interview that she wanted to study more indigenous stories (S1I 20200911). Out of seven students in Focus Group A (FGA 20200901), five said they would like to study more indigenous folktales in the following semester, whereas none of them said they would like to read more western stories. All three of the students in Focus Group B (FGB 20200904) said they would like to read more indigenous stories in the coming semester, whereas none of them wanted to read more western stories. The reasons given for not wanting to read more graded readers were that it was boring and they did not understand it. In Focus Group C (FGC 20200909), four out of the nine students said they would like to read more indigenous stories this semester, whereas zero said they would like to use more graded readers. Thus, a total of 11 out of the 19 students who participated in the focus groups said they would like to read more indigenous stories in the upcoming semester, whereas not a single student wanted to study another graded reader. An Amis male (FGC2 20200909) who said he would like to read more indigenous stories in the coming semester but not more graded readers offered as his reason that the indigenous stories were interesting because he had never heard them before. When he was reminded that he had also never heard the graded reader before, he said that it was "boring."

*4.3 Student Perceptions of Efficacy*

The responses to questions 4 and 5 were almost identical on both questionnaires (See Table 4). The students rated the graded reader as 5.6 on a seven-point Likert scale for helping them learn new words as opposed to 5.5 for the indigenous stories, and they rated the graded reader as 5.9 for helping them to improve their English, and the

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indigenous stories as 5.8. These results are closest to the answer "agree."

Table 4. Students' perception of vocabulary and general proficiency improvement (N=36)

| Variable | Foreign-text M(SD) | Indigenous-text M(SD) | *df* | *t* value | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary improvement | 5.64 (1.268) | 5.53 (1.298) | 35 | .480 | .634 |
| Proficiency improvement | 5.92 (1.442) | 5.75 (1.105) | 35 | .845 | .404 |

A male grade 11 Paiwan student said: "I think this class helped us learn a lot of words… Even though we have heard some of the stories already, switching them to English makes them fresh for us, so I think this class really helped me a lot" (Written feedback). A female grade 10 student of mixed Pinuyumayan/Paiwan descent said the stories helped the students to learn (written feedback), and a male grade 10 Amis student said the stories helped them to read lots of new words (written feedback).

In Focus Group B (FGB 20200904), all three students said the indigenous stories helped them to improve their English. In Focus Group C, five of the nine said the indigenous stories helped improve their English, with one of these students saying he learned many new words (FGC3 20200909).

One male Amis student directly connected language acquisition to interest level, saying that his English did not improve from the graded reader because he did not find it interesting, whereas he learned a lot from the indigenous folktales because he did find them interesting (FGA1 20200901).

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1 English Learning Enjoyment*

In the field of second language acquisition, there is a consensus that learning materials should satisfy at least two criteria. First, they should be comprehensible (Krashen, 1982; Tomlinson, 2012), and second, they should be interesting to the student (Krashen, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012). More recently, some researchers have begun arguing that material should also be enjoyable (Dewaele, 2011). The first of these three criteria is easy to achieve for an experienced language teacher; the second and third can be a challenge, especially when teachers are trying to bridge cultural divides. As such, identifying a genre of materials that is generally enjoyable for indigenous students could be beneficial to EFL teachers working to close the English proficiency gap.

The students clearly preferred the indigenous stories to the graded reader based on their responses to the question about how much they enjoyed reading the story. They responded more positively to the indigenous story by a statistically significant margin of almost a full point on a seven-point Likert scale. The ranking of the four stories by the students was perhaps the most compelling evidence, with only three students out of 36 ranking the graded reader as their favorite, while a full 20 ranked it as their least favorite. This preference was further supported by the written and oral student responses cited above.

Some might argue that the difference in the packaging of the two stories might have affected the results. However, if anything, the western story had an unfair advantage given that it was written by professional writers whereas the indigenous stories were rewritten by the researcher. Furthermore, the western story was professionally illustrated with color pictures in a glossy-covered book, whereas the indigenous stories were simply printed out in black and white on A4 paper with no pictures. Illustrations in L2 materials have been positively linked to student enjoyment and motivation (Jones, 2010), so it is likely that the margin of victory for the indigenous stories would have been even greater if they had also been professionally illustrated.

Student preference has practical considerations in terms of language acquisition. Tomlinson (1998) posited students who enjoy the acquisition process are more likely to achieve communicative competence. Also, student enjoyment is inextricably linked to student motivation (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Zhang, Dai, & Wang, 2020), and foreign language performance (Wei, Gao, & Wang, 2019).

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Finally, the fact that students found the indigenous stories more interesting is significant from a policy perspective because it is a stated aim of the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples (1998) that schools should foster indigenous students' "growth and development, in accordance with their natural interests…" (Article 17).

*5.2 English Learning Motivation*

Student motivation and FLE are not entirely independent variables. Zhang, Dai, and Wang (2020) argue that FLE plays a mediating role between motivation and proficiency. However, for the purposes of this study the impact of material on FLE and motivation are examined separately.

While the responses to the survey question specifically targeting student motivation showed only a slight win for the indigenous materials, the most significant evidence supporting the claim that indigenous students are better motivated by indigenous material comes from the responses in the focus groups, where 11 of the 19 students who participated in the discussions said they would like to study more indigenous folktales in the coming semester, whereas zero out of the 19 said they would like to study another graded reader. Anecdotally, the fact that a student took it upon herself to write up a story from her own tribe in English indicates that indigenous stories have the potential to motivate students to engage actively with the target language.

This finding is significant given that low motivation has been identified as one of the reasons for the English proficiency gap, and the fact that indigenous students do not see the relevance that English has to their lives is considered to be a cause of this low motivation (Yang, 2007). Some Taiwanese students lack both integrative and instrumental motivation to learn English; they lack a community of English speakers that they seek to communicate with, and they do not plan on using English to advance themselves in the future. Using materials from a foreign, unfamiliar culture could exacerbate this feeling of irrelevance. Conversely, using indigenous folktales in the classroom might give students a desire to participate in the conversation. If the conversation is being carried out in English, it could give these students some degree of integrative motivation. Meanwhile, some students might feel a desire to preserve or spread some knowledge about their local culture, and they might begin to appreciate that English is a way to reach a wider audience, thus giving them some instrumental motivation to acquire the language.

Finally, students might be resentful of the high status English enjoys in their native country, as compared to the relatively lower status of their mother tongues (Chen, 2006). This could breed resistance to learning the language. Using indigenous content could help compensate for this by putting indigenous culture in a position of high respect.

The fact that the students rated the indigenous stories as more interesting is also significant in terms of motivation, given that student interest has been identified in the literature as a key factor in motivating second language students (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Krashen (2011) goes so far as to state that compelling input eliminates the need for motivation.

*5.3 Student Perceptions of Efficacy*

The questions on efficacy were included to measure student perceptions, not actual language acquisition benefits. During such a short intervention, it is unlikely that any measureable improvement was made using either set of material, and it is less likely that the subjective self-assessment of these students is accurate for any purpose other than evaluating student perception. The fact that students agreed that both western and indigenous stories helped them to learn new words and improve their English suggests that they were not skeptical about the pedagogical benefits of using indigenous folktales as English learning materials. This is significant because student attitudes towards the learning situation have been found to be positively correlated with second language achievement (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Therefore, negative attitudes regarding efficacy could indicate that an approach would meet with significant challenges.

It has been noted in the literature before that studies on materials development often set the criteria for success as student enjoyment or high grades rather than language acquisition (Tomlinson, 2012), and this study is no exception. However, the results of this preliminary study are promising enough to suggest that further studies involving larger sample sizes with longer interventions using pre- and post-tests to evaluate actual language acquisition benefits would be well worthwhile.

**6. Conclusion**

The challenge of bringing about economic opportunities without further assimilating Taiwan's indigenous people has

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been discussed in the literature before (Hipwell, 2009). Using indigenous folktales as the learning material in EFL classes might go some way to help counterbalance the negative impact of a foreign language playing a dominant role as compared to traditional languages.

While this preliminary study is by no means conclusive, the results are certainly encouraging enough to merit further investigation, especially given the lack of research in this area, as well as the potential benefits to indigenous students and the risks of doing nothing. Everything possible must be done to level the educational and socioeconomic playing field for this traditionally disadvantaged group in Taiwan, and using traditional indigenous content as learning materials in EFL classes could be one small part of the solution.

As the sample size was small, and the questionnaire was short, this action research should be seen as a preliminary exploration to suggest directions for further research. Future research should involve a larger sample size and more rigorous methodologies. However, based on these preliminary findings, the researcher humbly offers the following suggestions.

*6.1 Using English Translations of Indigenous Texts to Improve Students' Learning Enjoyment and Achievement*

One criticism that has been leveled against using localized materials is that students should study the culture of the target language in order to become "intercultural speakers" who can interact appropriately with speakers of the target language from various cultures (Byram, 2009). However, it can be argued that for low-proficiency learners, acquiring the linguistic fundamentals of English should be the priority; gaining intercultural competence can be achieved later. Because student enjoyment is a key consideration in selecting learning materials, teachers should make every effort to choose materials that students are likely to enjoy. Given that indigenous students seem to prefer using indigenous materials over imported ones, and provided that learning outcomes do not suffer, Taiwanese EFL teachers who are working with indigenous students should consider using indigenous texts as their learning materials.

*6.2 Encouraging Students to Share Their Indigenous Experiences in Class*

Non-indigenous EFL teachers in Taiwan should use this opportunity to create a classroom dynamic where students enjoy sharing their traditional knowledge with the teacher. This can help foster opportunities for communication where the students feel empowered by becoming the disseminators of information. By using material that the students might be familiar with, it allows them to demonstrate expertise. The teacher can pretend ignorance and ask questions about the stories, which can create an artificial knowledge gap, which the students must bridge using English, finding ways to negotiate meaning, thereby satisfying the requirements of Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis.

*6.3 Allowing Teachers and Students to Decide on Culturally Relevant Learning Materials*

EFL teachers should not be restricted in their choice of classroom material, but should be allowed to select material that is best suited for their specific students. This will allow teachers of indigenous students the freedom to choose material that is most engaging for their students. As noted by Tomlinson (2012), "Every target group is different and needs materials to be specially developed for it" (p. 271). Furthermore, using localized materials can also help accomplish other educational goals not directly related to English acquisition, such as promoting "Taiwan consciousness" (Chen, 2006).

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