How Work and Travel Program Enhance Students' English Language Proficiency

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Article info

Abstract

The study delves into the impact of the U.S. Work and Travel (WAT) program on the English language proficiency of Thai University students, situated within the global prominence of English as a lingua franca. Recognizing the pivotal role of oral communication skills in career advancement—particularly in multinational contexts—the research evaluates the effectiveness of the WAT program, an initiative by the US Department of State promoting international cultural exchange. Adopting a descriptive qualitative case study design, the study assessed students' speaking performance before and after program participation. Key dimensions such as fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation were examined to evaluate proficiency in English as a second language. Data were collected through semi-structured oral interviews and analyzed using qualitative content analysis and rubric-based scoring by three evaluators. Statistical methods were employed using Microsoft Excel. Findings reveal a notable improvement in pronunciation following the WAT experience, while changes in fluency, grammar, and vocabulary were not statistically significant. These results suggest that while cultural immersion may benefit pronunciation, findings related to overall speaking proficiency remain inconclusive. The implications of these results are discussed concerning English language acquisition and the role of experiential learning in international education.

Introduction

English proficiency is paramount in a globalized world, particularly in multinational settings where it functions as a common medium for effective communication. Mastery of English promotes career advancement and opens numerous personal and professional opportunities, especially in industries that rely on international collaboration and innovation (Ahamed, McManus, & Turner, 2023). English language skills encompass listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all of which can be developed through continuous learning and deliberate practice. Communication ability is typically classified into five levels: at Level 1, an individual can communicate at an elementary level; Level 2 involves comprehension of key content; Level 3, reflects the use of grammatically correct English in

workplace settings; Level 4, demonstrates the use of idiomatic expressions with consistent accuracy; and Level 5 is characterized by fluent, near-native speech and the use of specialized vocabulary (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020).

According to Thatthong (2004), learners must develop speaking and writing competencies while utilizing reading and listening as supportive channels. Fitriani, Apriliaswati, and Wardah (2015) emphasized that linguistic barriers are a major factor contributing to poor academic performance. Effective language integration can occur through three main pathways: combining speaking with listening and reading skills; blending writing with listening and reading skills; and integrating both speaking and writing across varied communicative contexts. The integration process is inherently cognitive, involving the learner's active engagement in tasks that foster comprehension and interaction with learning materials.

The complexity of human communication is underscored by Harmer (2007) and Gilakjani (2016), who argue that language is governed by context-specific goals and requires the ability to both listen and speak effectively. Of the four core language skills, speaking is widely regarded as the most challenging for language learners. Despite extended periods of study, many students report frustration over their inability to speak English fluently and intelligibly (Bueno, Madrid, & Mclaren, 2006). Beyond mastering grammar and vocabulary, learners must be equipped to apply the language in context—functionally and appropriately—which remains a critical yet often underdeveloped aspect of language education (Hinkel, 2011).

One prominent avenue for enhancing English proficiency through cultural exchange is the United States Summer Work and Travel (WAT) program—an initiative administered by the U.S. Department of State and open to university students globally. The program offers participants opportunities to explore American culture, improve their English communication skills, gain work experience, earn income, and establish international networks (U.S. Embassy Bangkok, n.d.). In Thailand, the WAT program has become one of the most sought-after international experiences among university students. It enables participants to stay in the United States for three to five months during their summer break, engage in full-time employment with a legal work permit, covering living expenses, and immerse themselves in American society and workplace norms. Through real-time language use and exposure to diverse cultural contexts, students enhance their spoken English and enrich their professional portfolios with U.S.-based experience.

Although the WAT program offers a wealth of cultural and experiential benefits, it is essential to critically assess its impact on participants' English language development—particularly in the domains of listening and speaking. Dragomir, Todorescu, and Stroe (2019) found that the Romanian participants were motivated not only by the allure of the American dream and cultural curiosity but also by a desire to improve their English proficiency. Reardon (2015) similarly reported that the WAT program broadened students' cultural awareness and positively influenced their attitude and skill sets, thereby contributing to foreign language enhancement. Zhang (2012) further demonstrated that Chinese youth engaged in U.S.-based internships via the WAT initiative showed marked improvement in intercultural communication and made substantial progress in English listening and comprehension.

While existing research presents varied findings regarding students' communicative competence developed through study abroad programs, some studies suggest limited improvement, while others underscore significant gains associated with longer immersion periods. For instance, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009); Wang (2010), observed inconsistent levels of language competence among participants. However, extended programs—such as those spanning 13 weeks—have been linked to more pronounced improvements in language proficiency (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009). In contrast, Lightbown and Spada (2013), through a comprehensive review of pedagogical literature, argued that traditional classroom environments are more effective for teaching about language than for cultivating communicative use. They contend that instruction often fragments language into discrete components rather than presenting it as a holistic, functional system, potentially limiting learners' ability to use language fluently in real-world contexts.

Previous research highlights the potential of WAT programs to improve students' English proficiency; however, much of the existing evidence centers on self-reported satisfaction and perceived language gains. Motivated by the belief that such programs foster language improvement, students often cite personal growth and emotional development as additional benefits. Studies by Dragomir et al. (2019) and Reardon (2015) emphasize the WAT program's positive outcomes; yet,

few focus specifically on measurable gains in speaking proficiency among Thai learners. Although Zhou et al. (2022) and Potts (2023) incorporated pre-and post-tests designs and interview protocols to evaluate language growth and intercultural competence, broader evidence on how such international experiences affect specific communicative abilities remains limited, highlighting the need for further investigation.

For many non-native English-speaking students, access to immersive language environments remains limited, but the WAT program provides a unique context for practicing English in real-world settings. Despite this potential, there is limited data on how effectively Thai participants use these opportunities to enhance their communication skills. This study, therefore, investigates the efficacy of the WAT program in developing English language proficiency among Thai university students.

Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research involves recorded oral interviews evaluated by expert panels to compare participants' speaking abilities before and after engagement in the program during the 2022/2023 academic year. By extending previous findings and exploring factors influencing student participation, this study aims to generate deeper insights into how international experiential programs contribute to language development within English as a foreign language contexts.

The findings of this study are expected to inform educators, policymakers, and institutional stakeholders, encouraging greater support for student participation in international exchange programs. Beyond evaluating program efficacy, the study seeks to provide actionable insights into areas for potential improvement within the WAT framework. The following sections present a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, data analysis, results, and discussion of key findings. By examining the impact of WAT on English language proficiency, this research contributes to the deeper understanding of how immersive cultural experiences function as effective mechanisms for language development and intercultural learning. Ultimately, this study seeks to advance educational practices and program designs to better equip students in their pursuit of English fluency and global competence.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of WAT programs in enhancing English-speaking skills among Thai University students.

2. To examine changes in students' English speaking proficiency before and after participation in the WAT programs.

Literature review

The Work and Travel (WAT) program is widely recognized as an effective means of enhancing English language proficiency and fostering intercultural competence. Alongside similar initiatives such as Erasmus, WAT offers students opportunities for cultural exchange, international exposure, and global networking. By enabling participants to live and work abroad—most notable in the United States—the program provides authentic contexts for practicing English and developing transferable soft skills. Nonetheless, several studies report limited or inconclusive correlations between study abroad experiences and measurable improvements in language proficiency (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Wang, 2014). In contrast, other research highlights the broader developmental benefits of such programs, citing positive outcomes in interpersonal communication, teamwork, and problem-solving capabilities (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Potts, 2015;).

Nunan (2003) emphasized that acquiring spoken proficiency in a foreign language necessitates active engagement and sustained practice beyond the classroom—conditions that experiential programs like WAT naturally promote. Supporting this notion, Zhang's (2012) case study of Chinese participants in the WAT program revealed notable gains in English listening and intercultural communication competencies, underscoring the pedagogical value of cultural immersion. However, the effectiveness of such programs can be shaped by multiple variables including participants' initial language proficiency, duration of stay, and external environmental factors such as host interactions and local context (Ogden, Streitwieser, & Van Mol, 2020).

Integration of Constructivism Theory

The constructivism theory, as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), posits that learning is an active process wherein individuals construct knowledge through experience and social interaction. This theoretical lens offers a valuable framework for interpreting the effectiveness of WAT programs. By engaging in authentic communication with native speakers and immersing themselves in culturally diverse environments, participants undergo meaningful learning experiences that build upon prior knowledge and promote the development of both linguistic and intercultural

competencies (Schunk, 2012). This experiential process aligns closely with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, which emphasized the integration of newly acquired insights into existing cognitive schemas through reflection and application. Accordingly, the WAT program's emphasis on real-world engagement and cultural immersion supports the constructivist principles and facilitates deeper language acquisition and communicative competence.

Conclusion

While the WAT program provides immersive learning experiences aligned with constructivist principles, its effectiveness in enhancing English language proficiency remains contested. To address this gap, the present study examines the English-speaking performance of Thai university students before and after program participation. The findings aim to deepen understanding of how authentic, experiential contexts influence language acquisition and communicative competence, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings such as Thailand.

Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to evaluate the English-speaking proficiency of Thai university students who participated in the Work and Travel (WAT) program in the USA. Anchored in the interpretive paradigm, the research emphasizes understanding participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they assign to those experiences. The approach is particularly appropriate given the study's aim to explore the lived experiences and language development outcomes of students who participated in the WAT program. By examining participants' reflective accounts, the interpretative framework facilitates the extraction of rich, contextually grounded insights into how immersive international exposure influences spoken English proficiency and overall communicative competence.

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy, targeting Thai university students who had participated in the WAT program. Interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms to ensure convenience and confidentiality for both researchers and participants. Employing in-depth, open-ended questions, the researchers explored the participants' English-speaking skills and gathered insights into their experiences before and after program participation. The oral interview protocol included two academic prompts designed to elicit reflections on language development. A voice recorder, along with written documentation, was used to capture responses and facilitate accurate transcription and analysis. Data saturation was reached by the eighth interview, within a total sample of twelve participants, indicating sufficient thematic coverage and consistency in responses.

Population and samples

The target population consisted of 12 third-year Thai students from the English for Business Communication (EBC) and Event, Hotel, and Tourism Management (EHTM) programs at Naresuan University International College, Phitsanulok. These students, aged between 20 and 22, participated in the 2023 U.S. Summer Work and Travel Program. All participants held full-time F-1 visas and were English-as-a-foreign-language speakers. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select individuals with direct experience relevant to the study's objectives. The sample size of 12 is consistent with Creswell's (2002) recommendation of 3–5 participants for qualitative case studies and is further supported by statistical guidelines for small-sample research involving large effect sizes (de Winter & Dodou, 2010; Fay & Proschan, 2010; Fritz et al., 2012).

Research instrument

The study utilized primary data collected through a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of two sets of questions designed by the researchers. An English-speaking test was developed to assess students' proficiency through both pre-test and post-test formats. The selected topics were practical and commonly encountered in daily life and academic contexts, aligning with conceptual learning areas relevant to international university students as defined by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) requirements.

The speaking test was constructed to evaluate four key dimensions: (1) the ability of participants to produce comprehensible speech for proficient non-native English speakers; (2) their use of appropriate language in everyday social interactions; (3) their capacity to construct coherent discourse consistent with IELTS standards; and (4) their overall performance, assessed using evaluation criteria parallel to the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and IELTS speaking tasks, rated on a scale of 1 to 11 (Liao & Wei, 2010).

To measure speaking efficiency, a 10-minute oral interview was adapted from the IELTS framework. The assessment was divided into two parts. Part 1 included

open-ended questions covering topics such as preferred events or festivals, additional languages spoken, the impact of social media on daily routines, dream occupations, musical preferences, academic programs, student uniform advantages and disadvantages, weather preferences, personal characteristics, communication habits, and travel experiences. These questions aimed to determine how effectively classroom instruction translated into communicative competence and message delivery. Part 2 included follow-up questions related to the topics in Part 1, including prompts such as "What is your dream job? Why?" and "Where do you want to work in the future? Why?". This section was designed to evaluate participants' ability to articulate and justify opinions, elaborate on key points, and engage in speculative discourse, thereby offering a deeper analysis of their communicative abilities in extended interactions.

To ensure credibility and high content validity, the researchers developed speaking test topics aligned with the college curriculum and language-learning materials, incorporating authentic communicative scenarios reflective of both academic and real-life contexts. The rubric, adapted from Harris (1969), provided a structured and reliable framework for evaluating speaking proficiency.

Three qualified raters—each with a minimum IELTS score 7, native English-speaking backgrounds, and over five years of teaching experience—were engaged to conduct assessments. To mitigate bias during evaluation, the oral interview recordings were anonymized and not labeled as either pre-test or post-test. After completing the data collection phase, the researchers enlisted these rates to independently evaluate the students' speaking skills based on the recordings.

For dependability, standardized testing procedures and consistent scoring criteria were maintained throughout the study. Raters adhered to clearly defined evaluation guidelines, and inter-rater reliability analysis confirmed scoring consistency across the assessments.

To establish confirmability, the researchers thoroughly documented the evaluation process, preserved evidence including test topics, rubrics, and recordings, and relied exclusively on independent raters to reduce researcher bias.

In terms of transferability, the study employed a standardized methodology closely aligned with curriculum, enhancing its replicability and relevance for similar educational contexts.

Data collection

Qualitative data for the study were obtained through face-to-face interviews with student participants. The research was conducted over a five-month period and organized into three distinct phases:

Phase 1: Pre-program assessment. Students completed a pre-test and provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Phase 2: Post-program assessment. After returning to Thailand, participants completed a post-test to measure changes in their English-speaking proficiency following the Work & Travel program.

Phase 3: Data analysis. Interview recordings were anonymized and independently scored by three qualified raters with expertise in English language evaluation, ensuring high inter-rater reliability.

Interviews: Conducted face-to-face in private settings, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. Participants had five minutes to prepare answers for the assigned questions prior to each interview. The interviews took place in an empty classroom or a laboratory, ensuring a quiet and uninterrupted exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Each interview was recorded using a voice recorder to support accurate transcription and evaluation.

Data analysis

This study employed qualitative content analysis to interpret verbal data derived from transcribed interview recordings. To prevent data loss, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. A pre-test and post-test design was used to assess students' English-speaking proficiency, with results analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, and a paired-samples t-test to examine the impact of the Work and Travel (WAT) program. Statistical significance was interpreted at the 0.10 level.

To evaluate the changes in speaking proficiency, oral interviews were conducted before and after program participation. The recorded scores reviewed by a committee of three evaluators: two native English-speaking specialists in business communication and one Indian business lecturer. All assessments were guided by a rubric adapted from Harris (1969), ensuring consistent and structured evaluation across pre- and post-test responses.

Table 1 Scoring rubric

Criteria	Score 9	Score 7	Score 5	Score 3	Score 1
Pronunciation	Speaks clearly and naturally with excellent enunciation and minimal errors	Pronounces most words clearly with some minor errors	Pronounces some words incorrectly, but is still generally understandable	Pronounces many words incorrectly, making it difficult to understand	Pronunciation is very poor and makes it almost impossible to understand
Vocabulary	Uses a wide range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic with precise and accurate word choice	Uses a good range of vocabulary with some minor errors and occasional word repetition	Uses some vocabulary but tends to repeat words and make errors in word choice	Has a limited vocabulary and repeats words frequently	Has a very limited vocabulary and struggles to express ideas clearly
Grammar	Uses complex structures accurately and fluently with very few errors	Uses a variety of structures with occasional errors that do not impede communication	Uses simple structures with some errors that occasionally impede communication	Has frequent errors in grammar and sentence structure that make it difficult to understand	Grammar is very poor and makes communication impossible
Fluency	Speaks fluently and naturally with few pauses or hesitations	Speaks reasonably fluently with some pauses and hesitations	Speaks with frequent pauses and hesitations, but is still generally understandable	Speaks haltingly with long pauses and hesitations that make it difficult to follow	Speech is very halting and disjointed, making it almost impossible to communicate
Content	Fully addresses the topic with well-organized and coherent ideas that are supported by relevant examples	Addresses the topic with some organization and coherence, but may have some off-topic remarks or lack supporting examples	Has some relevant ideas, but is disorganized and lacks coherence and supporting examples	Struggles to develop ideas and stay on topic, with little coherence or supporting examples	Does not address the topic or has incoherent and irrelevant ideas

Source: Adapted from Harris (1969)

According to Table 1, five key criteria were used by the raters to evaluate students' speaking performance: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and content. To interpret the scores, the researchers applied arithmetic scale to classify overall proficiency levels. The score ranges were defined as follows: 1.00–2.60 indicated 'Very Poor,' 2.61–4.20 denoted 'Poor,' 4.21–5.80 represented 'Fair,' 5.81–7.40 reflected 'Good,' and 7.41–9.00 corresponded to 'Very Good' performance.

Results

Three evaluators assessed the students' speaking skills based on the recorded interview transcriptions. The evaluation focused on key linguistic domains, including fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Each assessment was conducted across two topic sets: (1) general themes related to daily social interactions, and (2) an extended response involving in-depth expression and discussion connected to the first topic. The evaluation process included both pre-tests,

conducted prior to participation in the Work and Travel (WAT) program, and post-tests, administered after students returned from the program. These assessments were used to examine improvements in speaking proficiency among participants in the experimental group.

The results are presented in Table 2, which compares the students' pre-test and post-test scores across various dimensions of English-speaking proficiency: fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and overall performance. Each dimension includes mean scores for both test periods, accompanied by the number of participants (N), standard deviation (SD), t-scores, and two-tailed significance values (Sig.). This comparative analysis highlights measurable changes in students' oral communication skills following participation in the WAT program at Naresuan University.

The overall speaking proficiency scores revealed no statistically significant improvement from pre-test (M = 37.966, SD = 3.079) to post-test (M = 39.611, SD = 4.644), with a mean score difference of 2.355 and a p-value of .198. This suggests that participation in the WAT program did not result in a significant overall enhancement in students' speaking skills.

When analyzing individual dimensions using a paired-samples t-test, no significant differences were observed in fluency (p = .723), vocabulary (p = .130), or grammar (p = .209). Although vocabulary and grammar scores showed slight increases in the post-test, the fluency score demonstrated a minor decline, indicating no significant change in these areas.

Table 2 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Part 1 Speaking Task Across Linguistic Dimensions

Dimensions	Pre-test			Post-test			
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p
Fluency	16	9.983	1.012	9.833	1.459	0.359	0.723
Vocabulary	16	8.755	0.829	9.833	1.491	-1.590	0.130
Grammar	16	8.944	0.758	9.277	0.906	-1.308	0.209
Pronunciation	16	10.283	1.231	11.111	1.209	-2.297*	0.034
Overall	16	37.966	3.079	39.611	4.644	1.339	0.198

* Significant at p< .05 (2-tailed)

However, a statistically significant difference was found in the pronunciation dimension (p = .034), with the mean score rising from 10.283 to 11.111. This result suggests that the program may have positively impacted students' pronunciation, even though other domains remained relatively stable.

The research hypothesis, grounded in prior literature, posited that students' English-speaking skills—specifically fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—would show measurable improvement from the pre-program phase to the post-program phase. However, the results revealed no statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores (t = 1.339, p > 0.1), indicating that the intervention did not produce a broad enhancement in students' overall speaking proficiency.

Discussion

The paired-sample analysis comparing pre-test and post-test scores across four dimensions of English-speaking skills—fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—revealed higher post-test mean scores in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, with fluency showing a slight decrease. Although slight improvements were observed in most areas, only pronunciation demonstrated a statistically significant improvement. This indicates that, among the evaluated dimensions, pronunciation was the only skill showing significant improvement following participation in the program.

The data indicate that participation in the Work and Travel (WAT) program did not result in statistically significant improvements in students' overall English-speaking skills. While post-test scores were slightly higher across most dimensions, only pronunciation showed a significant increase. Accordingly, the null hypothesis—stating that the WAT program does not significantly enhance students' speaking abilities—was not rejected. These findings align with previous studies by Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014); Wang (2014), all of which reported no substantial correlation between study-abroad experiences and measurable gains in language competence. Similar conclusions were drawn by Amuzie and Winke (2009) further substantiating the nuanced and context-dependent nature of language development in immersive programs.

However, the modest impact observed in this study aligns with previous research indicating that students participating in study abroad programs, such as WAT initiative, tend to develop their intercultural communication competencies and show modest progress in English language acquisition (Reardon, 2015; Zhang, 2012). Additionally, studies by Potts (2015); Farrugia and Sanger (2017) have highlighted that international program participants often gain transferable skills, including interpersonal and communication abilities, teamwork, problem-solving, analytical thinking, and foreign language proficiency. One possible explanation for the limited language gains observed in this study may be the academic background of the participants, all of whom were enrolled in an English-language program at their university. Their prior exposure to formal language training may have contributed to a ceiling effect, limiting the measurable impact of the WAT program on their overall proficiency scores.

These findings offer meaningful insights for students, families, and policymakers involved in higher education. While the WAT program may contribute to students' broader experiential development, it does not appear to significantly enhance students' English-speaking efficiency. This suggests that relying solely on such short-term international programs may be insufficient for substantial improvement in oral language proficiency. Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging and essential skills in second language acquisition, with learners often reporting persistent frustration over their inability to speak English fluently and intelligibly despite years of formal study (Bueno et al., 2006). This observation is confirmed by Fitriani et al. (2015), who identified language difficulties as a key contributor to poor academic performance.

To improve English-speaking skills effectively, communicative practice should be integrated through three complementary approaches: (1) combining speaking activities with listening and reading tasks, (2) connecting writing exercises to listening and reading input, and (3) blending both speaking and writing with diverse communicative interactions. These integrated strategies support more holistic language development by engaging multiple modalities of comprehension and expression.

Consequently, programs like WAT, which primarily emphasize spoken interactions, may offer limited impact on comprehensive language improvement when used in isolation. However, such programs do provide students with valuable experiential benefits, including the enhancement of interpersonal communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and analytical thinking—skills that are increasingly vital in both academic and professional contexts.

Implications and suggestions

Future research exploring English language competencies should investigate whether the findings from this study are consistent across institutions within Thailand and internationally. Given that the current results are based on a single university where students study using English, broader sampling would improve generalizability. Additionally, future studies should assess the effectiveness of the Work and Travel (WAT) program in developing specific language skills beyond speaking, such as writing, listening, and reading. Expanding the sample size may help clarify changes in English proficiency before and after WAT participation—an area that this study was unable to fully explore due to the data constraints.

As higher education continues to evolve globally, the importance of employability will likely increase. Integrating work and international study placements into academic curricula may help students develop essential transferable skills. Such integration could enhance student preparedness for both career pathways and further academic pursuits. Moreover, these programs present opportunities to cultivate comprehensive foreign language proficiency, underscoring the need for meaningful curricular reforms that reflect the demands of an increasingly interconnected world.

Study contribution

This study makes several important contributions to both academia and practice. By analyzing the changes in students' English-speaking proficiency before and after participation in the Work and Travel (WAT) program, this research provides meaningful insights into the impact of experiential learning on oral language development. The findings hold relevance for a range of educational stakeholders in Thailand, including students, families, university administrators, and policymakers, who can use this evidence to inform decisions about curriculum design, international exchange programming, and language instruction strategies.

Historically, the WAT program has been viewed as a valuable pathway for improving English-speaking proficiency across educational contexts. However, the findings of this study indicate that participation in WAT does not significantly improve students' speaking proficiency, despite non-significant post-program gains in performance. This absence of statistically significant outcomes suggests that the WAT program alone may not be sufficient for developing oral language skills to a meaningful degree.

Importantly, this study underscores the need to examine additional dimensions of English language development—such as reading, listening, and writing—within the context of experiential programs. Such exploration opens new avenues for future research across diverse learner populations and supports a more comprehensive understanding of language acquisition. Given these findings, students, families, and educational stakeholders may benefit from reconsidering reliance on the WAT program as a standalone strategy for improving English-speaking competence. Instead, alternative or supplementary approaches should be explored to better achieve holistic language learning outcomes and align with broader educational goals.

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