# Global Perspectives, Local Initiatives

## Reflections and Practices in ELT

edited by
Radhika Jaidev
Maria Luisa C. Sadorra
Wong Jock Onn
Lee Ming Cherk
Beatriz Paredes Lorente

Centre for English Language Communication
National University of Singapore

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# Foreword

At CELC's third international symposium, a total of 93 papers were delivered along the theme of *Global Perspectives, Local Initiatives: Reflections and Practices in ELT*. The selection of papers in this publication represents just 17% of the range of ideas disseminated in all papers presented during the two and a half-day event which brought participants from 22 countries together.

An aerial perspective on directions in paradigms, policies and positioning is absolutely necessary as local initiatives in classroom approaches and practices must be strongly rooted in and rationalized by a clear understanding of these directions. The careful balance between the global and the local is well-reflected in the range of topics represented in the selected list of papers. These papers present insights gained from second language learning research, changing emphases in governmental policies, progressive trends in popular culture and changing patterns in English language varieties—some examples of global trends that are crucial to English language teaching. These trends cannot be separated from local issues such as how ELT practitioners can harness technology, how learners' strategies can be optimized or what the best practices are in assessing learner skills accurately.

The complexities in the teaching and learning of English are multifaceted, thus requiring investigations that are sensitive to multidimensional ways of understanding issues. Among the many challenges, one of the most pertinent issues lies in contextual factors that make each teaching and learning situation unique. Yet, there is also a level of same-difference that contributes to meaningful characterization of how similar groups learn best. As such, there is always a need for a platform to discuss issues that are pertinent to individual contexts of learning as well as factors that seem to transcend such an individualistic stance towards learning. It is precisely the aim of this collection of articles to provide that platform for discussing contextual differences and synergizing on the underlying sameness to enhance ELT. A selective list of such issues represented in this volume includes the following:

- Learning trends amongst non-native English speakers
- Social and psychological factors in learners' use of learning strategies
- Factors that enhance the use of technology for learning
- Effective training programmes for the English language teacher
- Factors in facilitating effective collaborative writing
- English language development at the tertiary level

It is not possible to represent the many interesting ideas discussed during the symposium in a volume such as this. However, it is hoped that the selection may present a useful resource and reference that captures pertinent issues that will facilitate the management of the impact of global factors on local initiatives in ELT classrooms.

***Wu Siew Mei***
Director
Centre for English Language Communication
National University of Singapore

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# Non-Native English Students Learning *in* English:

## Reviewing and Reflecting on the Research

Allan B.I. Bernardo and Marianne Jennifer M. Gaerlan
De La Salle University, Philippines

**ABSTRACT:** *As more countries adopt English as the language of learning in schools, more non-native speakers of English are learning English so that they can learn in English. In this paper, we review studies (mostly involving Filipino-English bilinguals) that look into the experiences of bilingual learners as they undertake learning activities in English, which is a second or a foreign language for them. Studies that investigate these experiences using a psycholinguistic approach point to (a) different effects of using the bilingual learner's first and second language on different specific cognitive processes in various learning tasks, and (b) particular cognitive resources of the bilingual learner that can facilitate learning. Complementing these psycholinguistic studies, investigations that use sociolinguistic approaches reveal a range of important personal and social processes and factors that suggest a sense of agency on the part of the bilingual learner as the learner engages learning tasks amidst varying requirements of the social environments of learning. The insights drawn from the various studies reviewed are discussed in terms of how bilingual learners strategically use their multilingual resources to attain their learning goals. The paper ends with recommendations to study the experiences of bilingual learners' experiences learning in English and with some reflections for ESL and EFL teachers, and other teachers of bilingual learners.*

### Introduction

The primary goal of teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) is to develop desired levels of English language communication skills among their non-native English speaking students. But for most students of ESL or EFL, the goal of acquiring desired levels of English language skills is very likely not an end in itself. Instead, learning English is a means towards other personal and social goals. The students' goals may relate to personal dreams of traveling to English speaking countries and experiencing these other cultures. For others, the goals may relate to qualifying for certain jobs or for professional advancement. For many students, acquiring English language skills is a means towards improving their learning in the various subjects in school.

This goal is particularly important in some parts of the world where schools have decided to shift the language of instruction from the mother tongue or local languages to English. Very often this shift occurs in communities where English-language education credentials are perceived to be a means towards gaining access to higher or further education (i.e., in prestigious universities) and eventually to professional opportunities in an increasingly global labor market. In such communities, parents demand English-language education for their children, and more market-driven schools respond to such demands. Without accepting these perceptions as true or valid, we focus on the question of how non-native English speakers learn in English. Our inquiry is not focused on how these students learn English; instead we focus on how these students learn the content of their various non-language focused subjects like mathematics, science, civics and history, among others.

In this paper, we inquire into the learning experiences of non-native English speakers who are learning *in* English. The Philippine educational system is a very good place to start our inquiry as English has been used as the medium of instruction in most subjects for over one hundred years now (Bernardo, 2004), although almost all Filipinos do not speak English as their first language. Thus, we review our research on how Filipino students learn and perform in mathematics, which is taught in English in Philippine schools. Mathematics provides an interesting focus as the content is purportedly abstract, and thus it is conceivable that the language used in the students' mathematics learning activities may not have any effect on the students' learning and performance. In addition to the Philippine studies, we also review studies conducted among bilingual learners in the United States. We do not focus our review only on mathematics learning experiences, however, as we also refer to some studies that look into the more general learning experiences of bilingual learners. In doing so, we hope to suggest that the observations and issues we raise may apply to various domains of learning.

## A psycholinguistic perspective

The first set of studies we review are drawn from our research program that adopts an approach to inquiry that is more psychological. In this paper, we label this approach as psycholinguistic because we look at the underlying cognitive psychological processes that underlie or that relate to language-related behaviours. One of the fundamental assumptions of our approach is that all behaviours (linguistic or otherwise) can be characterised in terms of different cognitive processes. Thus, we view learning in schools as involving the processes of acquiring and constructing knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Bruer, 1993). We do not see learning as a process that merely involves memory-based processes such as the storage and reproduction of knowledge and skills. Instead, we view learning as involving an array of complex cognitive processes that involve the processing of information/input from external sources (i.e., teachers, fellow learners, textbooks and other learning resources, etc.), relating new information with old knowledge and also with other new information, developing understanding and insight regarding this information. Learning also involves acquiring or attaining a level of mastery and automaticity in processing or using this learned information, and communicating the knowledge and skills one has developed to other people.

In complex domains such as learning science, history, and mathematics, learning involves a variety of interconnected processes, and these various processes may be affected by different factors associated with the learner, teacher, learning environment, and learning tasks, among many others. In multilingual learning contexts, language may be a factor affecting these processes. When we refer to language as a possible factor affecting learning in these contexts, we refer to the language used in the task and the language skills of the learner. In the present inquiry, we want to know whether non-native English speakers, who are not likely to be very proficient in English, will effectively learn or perform different learning tasks when these tasks involve materials in their native language or in English.

## Philippine research in the area of mathematics learning

Bernardo (in press) presented a detailed review of recent studies on Filipino bilinguals performing various types of mathematical tasks (those interested in the details of these studies may refer to that review and to the individual studies). The review looked at mathematical problem solving as this has been broken down into different cognitive processing components. Thus, mathematics learning was not studied only as one achievement outcome, but involving several interrelated cognitive processes. The review revealed that the use of English in these various cognitive processes had different effects on how Filipino bilingual learners performed in the tasks.

For example, the bilingual students generally performed better in mathematics word problems which are written in Filipino, compared to those in English (Bernardo, 1999). This advantage in using Filipino is related to another finding which showed that the students were more accurate in comprehending the word problem texts when these were written in Filipino, and they also had more comprehension errors when the problems where written in English (Bernardo, 2002; Bernardo & Calleja, 2005). Moreover, the weaker performance in English is not simply due to problems of comprehension. The students were also better able to understand and apply conceptual knowledge in mathematics when this was presented in Filipino (Reyes, 2000).

However, Filipino bilinguals seemed to perform better when the mathematical problem solving task was in English. For example, the students were faster at retrieving basic arithmetic facts when these tasks were done in English (Bernardo, 2001). They were also more accurate in using the relevant subtechnical vocabulary when the mathematics problems were presented in English (Bernardo, 1996). These observed advantages in doing mathematical tasks in English could be accounted for by the fact that the tasks involved retrieving information that was learned by the students using English. Thus, they were performing better in the mathematical tasks in English because they were retrieving from memory and using information that was learned in English.

This language-consistency effect was also found when the students were given analogical problems in mathematics. They students were more likely to recall or retrieve from memory the relevant analogical problems they had studied earlier, when the new analogical problems they were presented were written in the same language as that used during the earlier study (Bernardo, 1998).

But there were also some studies that indicated that using either Filipino or English had no effect on the mathematical performance of the Filipino bilingual learners. For example, there was no effect of language when students were tested on their computational knowledge (Reyes, 2000), or when they were asked to construct the abstract problem models of word problems (Bernardo, 2005b), or when they were required to instantiate abstract information to analogous problems (Bernardo, 1998).

Bernardo (in press) made sense of these apparently discrepant findings by proposing that Filipino bilingual learners perform better in their native language when the mathematic tasks involve comprehension, understanding, and application of conceptual knowledge in mathematics. But when the Filipino bilingual learners are required to retrieve mathematical knowledge from memory, they are better able to do so when the language used during learning and the language during retrieval are consistent. Finally, in the more abstract and computational mathematical tasks, the Filipino bilingual learners' performance is not affected by language.

## Psycholinguistic studies in other bilingual populations

Different specific findings involving Filipino bilingual learners are consistent with studies conducted with bilingual learners in other multilingual communities (see e.g., Clarkson, 1991; Francis, 1999; Han & Ginsburg, 2001). However, other psycholinguistic studies also found interesting qualities regarding the cognitive learning processes of bilinguals. For example, Marian and Fausey (2006) studied learning of concepts in various school domains such as biology, history, and chemistry when these were presented to Spanish-English bilinguals either in English or Spanish. They found that memory for the concepts was more accurate and more efficient when the language of encoding matched the language of recall (see also Marian & Neisser, 2000). Thus, in a variety of conceptual domains, some type of language-of-encoding effect can be assumed.

Other psycholinguistic research studies suggest that there are some enhanced cognitive functions among bilinguals. For example, in an extensive program of research, Bialystok (2007; Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2008; Emmorey, Luk, Pyers, & Bialystok, 2008; Martin-Rhee & Bialystok,

2008) found that bilinguals have enhanced executive control skills compared to monolinguals. These executive control skills that relate to selective attention are very important in learning and executing complex tasks, and research has shown that indeed, bilinguals tend to perform better compared to their monolingual counterparts in various learning tasks, including non-verbal problem solving tasks (Bialystok 2010; Bialystok & Majumder, 1998).

Blot, Zarate, and Paulus (2003) also found that bilingual students benefit from switching from one language code to the other when performing high level cognitive tasks, such as brainstorming. That is, bilingual students who were told to switch languages half-way through a brainstorming task generated more insights compared to those students who were instructed to use only one language. They argued that switching languages allows the bilingual learner to access a wider range of knowledge representations available through the two linguistic codes, compared to when they are using only one linguistic code.

These psycholinguistic studies, among others, indicate different aspects of the bilingual students' learning experiences. The studies do not just indicate how they learn or perform in one language or the other; more interestingly, they point to how the bilinguals' ability to use two languages may actually serve as important resources in their learning (Bernardo, 2005a).

### Sociolinguistic perspectives

We are mindful of the limitations inherent in psycholinguistic studies of bilingual learning, particularly as the approach focuses only on the cognitive processes related to learning and language. To get a fuller sense of the experiences of non-native English speaking bilingual students learning in English, we need to consider other approaches, such as sociolinguistic approaches. Sociolinguistic approaches provide insights related to other important aspects of the learning experiences of bilingual students, such as how language relates to their identity, affective experiences, relationships, among others. In this section, we discuss a few of sociolinguistic studies involving bilinguals, but focus on the more cognitive dimensions of the sociolinguistic studies that may relate to the psycholinguistic studies in the previous section.

For example, Qi (1998) investigated bilingual learners studying mathematics but used a more in-depth case-study of only a few learners. In one case study which looked into the bilinguals' language preferences when doing mathematical tasks in school, learners were found to often choose to switch languages across the different phases of the various tasks. It was not the case that the bilingual learners switched from English to their native language when their limited English proficiency failed them. Instead, the choice of using English or their mother tongue depended more on how either language facilitated the execution of the mathematical tasks. Thus, language switching during mathematical tasks seems to reflect a learning and/or problem-solving strategy of the bilingual learners.

Similar observations were made by Moschkovich (2005, see also Sanchez, 1994) in her extensive analysis of linguistic discourses during mathematics classes with bilingual learners. Her studies concluded that "code switching from one language to another can serve as a resource for elaborating ideas while expanding, repeating or adding information for another speaker" (2005, p. 137). These sociolinguistic studies give a sense of agency in the bilingual learner, a sense of agency that was not captured in the psycholinguistic studies. Indeed, these sociolinguistic studies indicate that the bilingual learner may be "designing" the use of language in order to better address the complicated cognitive as well as social dimensions of their learning experiences in the mathematics classroom. Such propositions are consistent with other sociolinguistic studies in bilingual education systems (e.g., Lai, 2004; Phillipson, 2005) which show important relationships between bilingual students attitudes about using either their first or second languages in school and their perceptions of their identity and language proficiencies.

At this point, we should note that such patterns of results are found not only in mathematics classes or among mathematics learners. Indeed, research indicates similar patterns of results in other subject areas of student learning. For example, Lee (2008) reviewed related studies with bilingual students learning science at different levels and found similar patterns of results.

In a recent study of successful Filipino bilingual learners in English, Gaerlan (2009) focused on the social factors that influence successful learning in English among non-native English speaking students from the perspective of the students themselves. Using a consensual qualitative research approach, Gaerlan found several important themes, the most frequently mentioned of which were language exposure at home which included: availability of resources at home that expose the students to language, actual languages used at home, and influence of/on family members on use of English. In this domain, majority of the students mentioned that their family positively influenced their learning in English, and that it was typical of them to code-switch when at home. Interestingly, the students in Gaerlan's study were extending the range of relevant social experiences beyond the classroom, as they point to family-related factors as being important in shaping their learning experiences in English.

Another major theme that emerged from Gaerlan's (2009) study was language use in school where it was common for the students to mention that their teachers were "models" of good English use, and that although English was the medium of instruction for most if not all of their subjects, they use both Filipino (their L1) and English (their L2) in classroom-related tasks. In school activities *outside* the classroom, however, the students reported using their L1 more often. Interestingly, only the home and school environment were viewed by the students as having an impact on their learning in English. Most of them do not consider their community as an influence mainly because they describe their communities as being primarily Filipino-speaking. This finding resonates well with earlier assertions regarding bilingual students being able to design their language use to different contexts.

Interestingly, Gaerlan's (2009) study also indicated that successful learners in English seem to draw from their experiences with popular media such as television shows, films, and web sites in English in their experiences learning in English. In addition, the students in the study cited personal factors such as personal beliefs and preferences regarding language use, and various types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as being instrumental in their success in learning in English.

This brief review of selected sociolinguistic studies of the experiences of non-native English speakers learning in English reveal a rich array of factors ranging from the personal (identity, beliefs, preferences, and motivations) to the social (social identity, interpersonal relations, social models and resources) that were not captured in the purely psycholinguistic studies reviewed earlier.

## Discussion

In this paper, we reviewed various studies related to the experiences of non-native speakers of English who are learning in English. The psycholinguistic studies we reviewed assumed that complex learning involves an interrelated array of cognitive processes involving different types and qualities of knowledge, and in an ESL or EFL learning context, specific cognitive processes may be affected by language related factors in different ways. The results of the studies reviewed suggest that conceptual cognitive processes involved in learning may be influenced by learner's proficiency in ESL/EFL, that is, conceptual understanding and comprehension is weak if the student is weak in English, and in contrast, their understanding and comprehension is stronger in their first and more proficient language. On the other hand, computational cognitive processes, may be less affected by language factors given their more abstract nature. The psycholinguistic studies also suggest that for memory-related learning processes, consistency between the language used during encoding and testing is the important factor that determines better performance. Finally, psycholinguistic studies also indicate that the availability of two linguistic codes and representational systems might actually provide bilinguals with additional resources for learning, such as an enhanced executive control system and flexibility in retrieving concepts stored in different linguistic codes.

Sociolinguistic studies, on the other hand, indicate that the bilingual students' use of one language or the other seems to be intentional or by design, based on how the learner perceived one language to be useful or effective for the requirements of particular tasks that are undertaken within specific social contexts. Their efficacy as learners in English also seems to be related to a range of personal affective and social cognitive factors and also social relational variables, that go beyond the social environment within their classrooms. Indeed, the non-native English speakers learning in English seem to be quite aware of how their languages are used in different social environments with different social agents for different purposes and goals. More importantly, they seem to use this understanding to choose and to design how the language(s) used in these different social contexts can be used as resources in their own learning experiences in English.

What should be very apparent at this point is notion that there is no singular way by which one can describe how the bilingual learners' languages shape learning in English. Indeed, the bilinguals' languages influence specific components of learning tasks in different ways, and bilinguals seem to be aware of that. To reiterate an earlier point, bilingual learners can mindfully utilize the two (or more) linguistic resources at their disposal to better effect their learning strategies. However, we should point out that the studies we reviewed mostly involved bilingual learners with relatively adequate levels of proficiency. We wonder whether similar strategic uses of language would also be observed among learners who are not adequately proficient in English. We could also inquire into whether those bilingual students who are less successful in learning in English would also report similar experiences. These possibilities should be the focus of future studies.

As we point to the need for further studies in the experiences of non-native speakers of English as learners in English, we should emphasize the need to approach this inquiry in a multidisciplinary way. Clearly the psycholinguistic approaches reveal very nuanced insights into the specific cognitive processes and outcomes of the learning activities of these bilingual learners, but the sociolinguistic approaches also bring to light the range of personal, affective, social, and relational factors that are important in characterising the full experience of these bilingual learners in English. Other researchers have looked at these experiences using the lens of critical theory (Tupas, 2001), and still others have studied the ideological and political facets of the larger environment within which these bilingual learning experiences are being constructed (Bernardo, 2007; Bernardo & Gaerlan, in press; Tupas, 1999; 2007). Still other researchers investigating these bilingual learning experiences use a cognitive neuroscience approach (see e.g., Bialystok et al., 2005; Dehaene et al., 1997). All these approaches are necessary to provide a complete understanding of the experience of bilingual learners in English.

Even as the studies we reviewed only draw from two such approaches, the insights we derived from studies related to the experiences of non-native speakers of English who are also learning complex subject matter in English have important implications regarding the teaching of the subject matter and the teaching of English for academic or learning purposes. First, we suggest that ESL and EFL teachers should set learning objects that are not just related to the acquisition of English communication skills. Instead, ESL and EFL teachers should aim to help ESL and EFL students to develop the ability use their English language skills for the different types of learning activities they will have to engage in their academic experiences. Our suggestion goes beyond the prescriptions of using "English for Specific Purposes" or "English for Academic Purposes." As the studies we reviewed suggest that bilinguals effectively utilize their various languages for different learning purposes, then it is important the ESL and EFL teachers find ways to support and to develop the intentional and strategic use of both English and the native language in the students' learning activities.

For starters, we suggest that teachers of ESL and EFL should signal to the students that their various languages can play different but equally important roles in the learning processes required in the different subject areas. Thus, ESL and EFL teaching should not be construed as being an English-only advocate or being against the use of bilingual students' mother tongue in their learning experiences. This point is particularly important, as the use of English has been shown to have some negative consequences to bilingual students' learning (Bernardo, 2008). Instead, ESL and EFL teaching should affirm the importance of using languages strategically or by design, depending on the requirements of the different learning tasks or activities (Bernardo, 2007).

We also have some reflections for the teachers of these bilingual learners, who might have different perspectives on how language should be used in their own classrooms. We suggest that these teachers should consider their bilingual students' linguistic competencies as possible resources for complex learning. Given the findings of the various studies we reviewed, teachers should support and encourage the bilingual learners' attempts to use their different linguistic codes in so far as they support learning in their subject or discipline. Aside from using the mother tongue and English, the bilingual learners' linguistic repertoire involves the ability to spontaneously and/or intentionally mix or switch language codes (Grosjean, 1992; 1998). This reflection and suggestion could be applied to what they will allow and encourage in terms of their students' language behaviours in their classrooms, and to their own language use when teaching and facilitating the learning of these students. The final point is particularly salient in those educational systems where teachers are also bilingual or multilingual.

In many respects, ESL and EFL teachers have much in common with all the other teachers of bilingual students. So perhaps ESL and EFL teachers should reconstruct their roles as teachers in ways that converge with or that are continuous with the roles of teachers in the various subject or disciplinary areas. They are after all not just teachers of English; instead, they are teachers of students who need to learn using English. As such, the accountabilities of ESL and EFL teachers are not just to the English language. Indeed, their accountabilities are to their bilingual students who will need to draw from their bilingual or multilingual resources in order to attain whatever learning goals they have defined for themselves.

As we make these suggestions for the ESL and EFL teachers, we should acknowledge that we did not directly address the problem of how these students learn English. As we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the issue of how students learn English as a second or a foreign language is a very big issue that we do not confront in this study, and thus, our suggestions for the ESL and EFL teachers may be limited in this regard. Indeed, more thoughtful prescriptions for the ESL and EFL teachers would need to take into consideration how the specific processes and problems of ESL and EFL learning may interact in complex ways with the processes of learning in English. Indeed, it is possible that learning in English may actually help students learn English, and future reflections and research should address these complex relationships between the two learning processes. Nevertheless, we hope that our own reflections motivate or even inspire other scholars and practitioners in the field of ESL and EFL learning and teaching to reflect on this other dimension of the non-native English speakers' learning experiences.

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# 2 A Principled Approach to Incorporating Second Language Acquisition Research into a Teacher Education Programme

Rod Ellis
University of Auckland and Shanghai International Studies University

**ABSTRACT:** *Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have not been slow to assert the importance of SLA research for language pedagogy (LP). There is, however, no consensus on the nature of the relationship between SLA and LP. A number of sometimes conflicting positions can be identified, ranging from a super-cautious "don't apply" to a confident "go ahead and apply" while also claiming that the relationship should not be one-way but symbiotic. In this paper, the relationship in terms of a framework that links (1) SLA researchers, (2) classroom researchers, (3) teacher educators, and (4) language teachers is probed. Using this framework, I propose a set of general principles that can inform the SLA/LP relationship and serve as basis for designing a course as part of a graduate programme in TESOL or foreign language teaching. The principles concern both the "what" and the "how" of the relationship between SLA and LP, that is, what SLA topics are of relevance to teachers and how technical knowledge drawn from SLA can interface with the practical knowledge that informs actual teaching. These principles are then applied to examine one particular aspect of teaching—corrective feedback—and how this is informed by SLA.*

## Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have not been slow to assert the importance of SLA research for language pedagogy (LP). There is, however, no consensus on the nature of the relationship between SLA and LP. A number of sometimes conflicting positions can be identified, ranging from a super-cautious "don't apply" to a confident "go ahead and apply" while also claiming that the relationship should not be one-way but symbiotic.

I probe the relationship in terms of a framework that links (1) SLA researchers, (2) classroom researchers, (3) teacher educators and (4) language teachers. Using this framework, I propose a set of general principles that can inform the SLA/LP relationship and serve as basis for designing a course as part of a graduate programme in TESOL or foreign language teaching. The principles concern both the "what" and the "how" of the relationship between SLA and LP, that is, what SLA topics are of relevance to teachers and how technical knowledge drawn from SLA can interface with the practical knowledge that informs actual teaching.

Finally, I apply these principles to the examination of one particular aspect of teaching—corrective feedback—and how this can be informed by SLA. I then review the theory/research that has addressed the role of corrective feedback in L2 acquisition as well as various pedagogic proposals for tackling corrective feedback. Finally, I present an example of a unit on corrective feedback from a masters' level program and discuss how this unit reflects the general principles.

**A framework for examining the SLA-language pedagogy nexus**

The framework shown in Figure 1 is based on the assumption that the relationship between SLA and language pedagogy needs to be specified in terms of the actors involved rather than, abstractly, in terms of the kinds of actions they perform. A second assumption of the framework is that it is classroom researchers and teacher educators who mediate between SLA researchers and teachers. Of course, actors can assume more than one identity. For example, SLA researchers often also function as teacher educators while teachers can act as classroom researchers.

*SLA researchers*

Two kinds of SLA researchers can be identified (Kramsch, 2000)—those who engage in "basic research", which focuses on the general principles and processes of L2 acquisition and is directed at constructing a general theory, and those who engage in "applied research", which focuses on the teaching and learning of specific L2s in classroom or naturalistic settings. A characteristic of much basic research is the "internecine feuding and fragmentation" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 165) that arises as researchers seek to promote and immunize their own preferred theories and epistemologies over those of their rivals. It is basic research that commentators such as Freeman and Johnson (1998) and Allwright (2005) had in mind when they argued that "academic research ... is of negligible value to current classroom participants, who need their understandings now" (Allwright, 2005, p. 27). More promising for building a nexus with practitioners, then, is applied research. Applied researchers take as their starting point questions of pedagogical significance and also are cognizant of classroom realities (Han, 2007).

*Classroom researchers*

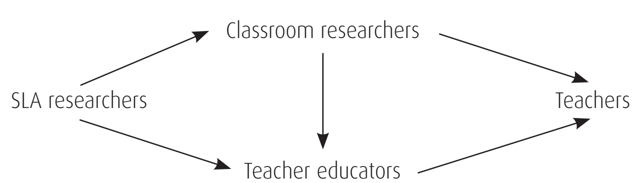
Many applied SLA researchers elect to conduct their research in a laboratory setting, seeking to make a connection with teachers by selecting participants (learners and teachers) drawn from real-life classrooms. Other applied researchers, however, investigate learners and teachers within classroom contexts. There are advantages and disadvantages of so doing. The main advantage is that research carried out within classrooms has high ecological validity and thus is more likely to be heeded by practitioners. The main disadvantage is that usually it is necessary to make use of intact classes, which precludes the possibility of forming randomized groups for experimental studies.

Research conducted in classrooms need not necessarily be any more applicable to language pedagogy than research conducted in laboratories. As Wright (1992) noted what is really needed is research on classrooms rather than research in classrooms. Nor does it follow that research conducted in (or on) a specific classroom can be transmitted to teachers in the form of recipes for effective practice, as research findings from one classroom setting may not be applicable to a different classroom setting.

*Teacher educators*

Teacher educators can adopt a number of different roles (Wallace, 1998). They can function as transmitters of information about SLA. As Wallace noted, this role assumes an applied science

**Figure 1**: A framework for examining the second language acquisition–language pedagogy nexus



theory-to-practice model of education. Teacher educators can also function as mentors, as in a craft or apprenticeship model of education. Finally, they can function as awareness-raisers, encouraging teachers to examine their own teaching practice as in a reflective model of education. According to Crandall (2000), there has been a gradual shift in the role played by teacher educators. While the mentor role has always been evident in programmes that include a practicum, teacher educators have increasingly abandoned the transmitter role in favour of the awareness-raising role. Crandall's own view is that teacher education requires teachers to engage with teachers in all three roles depending on the specific needs of individual teachers.

Somewhat surprisingly, there have been relatively few studies of how teacher educators approach SLA when functioning in these different roles and even less of what impact they have on teachers. Studies that have attempted this include McDonald, Badger, and White (2001), Lo (2005), Angelova (2005), Erlam, (2008), McDonough (2006), and Busch (2010).

All these studies demonstrate that knowledge of SLA can have an effect on trainees' beliefs about language learning. In the case of McDonald et al., a fairly traditional course, where they functioned mainly as transmitters of knowledge about SLA, brought about changes in the students' beliefs. In the case of Angelova, Erlam, and McDonough, more innovative educational practices (mini-lessons in an unknown language, awareness-raising activities based on published research and an action-research project) were also found to have an impact on trainees' beliefs. Busch's SLA course, which included an experiential component (i.e., the students were asked to undertake 10 hours of tutoring an ESL student), also reported clear evidence of changes in the students' beliefs about how an L2 is learned—in particular, with regard to the role that errors play in learning and the length of time it takes to learn an L2. Only one study (McDonough, 2006), however, investigated whether teacher education had any effect on trainees' actual teaching. There is clearly a need for more research on the roles that teacher educators can play in mediating between SLA researchers and teachers.

### *Teachers*

A distinct pendulum swing has taken place in applied linguistics over the last thirty years or so. Where the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a focus on the learner and a concern for ensuring that teaching took account of how learners learn, the 1990s and the first decade of this century have been more concerned with teacher cognition and teacher-learning (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Teachers are no longer seen as technicians implementing methods prescribed by researchers but as individuals with their own sets of beliefs about teaching, formed in large part by their prior experiences of classrooms as learners and as trainee teachers, and with their own theories of action that guide the decisions they make as they teach. Thus, the key question has become not "What do teachers need to know about SLA?" but "How can SLA contribute to teacher-learning?" This question can only be answered if teachers are allowed to articulate the specific issues relating to learning that they see as important and in need of attention.

There is, however, a problem in this. What if teachers, lacking in any knowledge of SLA, identify issues in need of attention that have nothing to do with L2 acquisition? McDonough (2006) in the action-research study referred to above listed the topics her students elected to investigate. They were the effectiveness of specific teaching practices (e.g., grammar instruction), ways of encouraging class participation, techniques for transitioning between classroom activities and broader issues to do with course assessment and syllabus design. None of these were specifically concerned with L2 acquisition. Teachers, understandably, are concerned with teaching rather than learning. If this is so, then teachers may need some input about SLA to help them "theorize" their problems in relation to learners and learning. As Widdowson (1990) pointed out, teacher research cannot take place unless teachers engage in the process of conceptual evaluation.

However, as Widdowson went on to argue, any input must be "client-centred". Thus, the question arises as to which SLA topics should figure in an SLA course/guide for teachers. Pica (1994) provided an answer to this. She took as her starting point not SLA but the questions that teachers had asked her "both in the privacy of their classrooms and in the more public domain of professional meetings" (p. 50). These questions covered such topics as the relative importance of comprehension and production, the role of explicit grammar instruction, and the utility of drill and practice. Interestingly, one topic that figures strongly in SLA textbooks—the order and sequence of acquisition—did not figure in the list of questions.

This framework for examining the SLA-language pedagogy nexus enables us to see the importance of examining the roles of the various actors involved—SLA researchers, classroom researchers, teacher educators and teachers. It suggests that the key roles are those played by classroom researchers and teacher educators, who function as mediators between SLA researchers and teachers. It also suggests that the topics that classroom researchers choose to investigate and teacher educators choose to include in their courses need to be filtered through teachers' own ideas about what is important for learning but that these ideas need to be fine tuned by a better understanding of SLA. Building on these insights I will now attempt to formulate a set of general principles that can guide how SLA can be effectively used in language teaching.

**SLA research and language teaching: Some guiding principles**

Cook (1999) proposed six requirements that, in his view, any use of SLA research for teaching must meet:

1. The research to be applied should be valid (i.e., have a sound methodology, adequate data, and sound conclusions).
2. The research must be ethical (e.g., it is not appropriate for the research to have exploited learners by placing them in a context where they are not expected to succeed).
3. The research must be of sufficient generality to allow for extrapolation to different contexts.
4. There needs to be a match between the language(s) investigated in the research and the language being taught.
5. There needs to be a match between the profiles of the learners being investigated and the profiles of the students being taught.
6. The coverage of the language learning areas needs to accord with the instructional goals (Cook suggests that the overly narrow research focus on morphosyntax limits the usefulness of SLA for language teaching).

These are a useful set of principles that can guide teacher educators in their choice of specific research studies to include in SLA or methods courses. They can also serve as a set of guidelines to help teachers evaluate the relevance of any pedagogic implications proposed in a research article.

The principles that I propose below—first published in Ellis (2010)—are directed at designing a course in SLA as part of a graduate programme in TESOL or foreign language teaching. They concern the "what" and the "how" of the relationship between SLA research and language teaching—what SLA topics are of relevance to teachers and how technical knowledge drawn from SLA can interface with the practical knowledge that informs actual teaching.

Principle 1: *The overall goal of an SLA course for teachers should be to contribute to teacher learning by assisting teachers to develop/modify their own theory of how learners learn an L2 in an instructional setting.*

A corollary of this principle is that the theory that teachers develop should be explicit. Teachers are likely to come to the SLA course with a set of beliefs about how learning takes place. The purpose of an SLA course is to assist them to evaluate these beliefs and modify them in the light of information from SLA that they find relevant to their own instructional setting.

Principle 2: *The topics covered in an SLA course need to be demonstrably relevant to teaching.*

Relevance can be achieved in two ways. The way often advocated is to invite the teachers themselves to identify the topics they find relevant. However, as noted above, teachers may not be able to evaluate the relevance of some SLA topics until they have information about them. An alternative strategy, therefore, might be to consult handbooks for teachers (e.g., Harmer, 1983; Ur, 1996) to identify pedagogic issues deemed important for teachers and then relate these to SLA topics.

Principle 3: *The topics covered in an SLA course should consist of "ideas" rather than "models".*
For example, it would be preferable to tackle an idea such as "learners inevitably and naturally commit errors" and "learners sometimes make errors and sometimes don't" than to examine models such as Krashen's Monitor Model or N. Ellis' emergentist theory of learning. Theoretical positions should emerge out of the "ideas" discussed in the course.

Principle 4: *The texts selected for an SLA course needs to be comprehensible to teachers who lack technical knowledge about SLA.*
In effect, this means that the texts should have been written for teachers and not for SLA researchers or applied linguists (or even for students preparing to become applied linguists). A good example of an accessible text for teachers is Lightbown and Spada (2006). In addition, teachers might be invited to refer to more technical texts (e.g., Ellis, 2008) to research specific topics of interest to them in greater detail.

Principle 5: *Specific research articles used as readings should be selected bearing in mind the criteria proposed by Cook (1999). Ideally, these articles should be reports of classroom research rather than laboratory studies.*

Principle 6: *Any proposals emanating from the SLA "ideas" examined in the course or from the pedagogical implications of research articles should be viewed as "provisional", to be evaluated in the light of teachers' own classrooms and experiences of learning and teaching an L2. This process of evaluation needs to be conducted explicitly.*
One way of facilitating evaluation might be to make use of published responses to articles. For example, Nobuyoshi and Ellis' (1993) study of pushed output elicited a response from Hopkins and Nettle (1994). After reading the original article and the response, teachers can decide to what extent they consider Nobuyoshi and Ellis' pedagogical proposals applicable to their own classroom.

Principle 7: *Teachers can benefit from reflecting on their experience of learning a new language as part of the SLA course. Alternatively, if the course included an experiential component, teachers can be encouraged to relate what they learn in the course to their own experience of teaching an L2.*
As in Angelova (2005), teachers can be given mini-lessons in a new language which have been designed to expose them to specific pedagogical practices (e.g., deductive grammar teaching; task-based teaching), to relate these to "ideas" from SLA introduced in the course, and to evaluate the practices in terms of their own experiences of learning. Or, as in Busch (2010), they can be asked to evaluate a set of belief statements about L2 learning in the light of their teaching experience.

Principle 8: *Awareness-raising tasks based on L2 data or on SLA texts can be used to encourage teachers to evaluate the relevancy of specific "ideas". Such tasks may prove more effective in making the link between technical and practical knowledge than more traditional, transmission modes of teacher education.*
Awareness-raising tasks serve two purposes in teacher education. They guide teachers to the self-discovery of "ideas" and they encourage reflection on "ideas" presented to them in texts. An example of an awareness-task directed at teachers' use of questions in the classroom can be found in Ellis (1994) while a good example of awareness-

raising activities designed to stimulate reflection can be found in Erlam's (2008) report of her in-service workshop for teachers.

Principle 9: *Teachers need opportunities to become researchers in their own classroom as well as consumers of SLA research. This can be achieved in a variety of ways—through collaborative research with an SLA researcher or through action research and exploratory practice.*

In the case of collaborative research, it is important that it is the teacher who identifies the issues to be investigated, not the SLA researcher. That is, the issues must be drawn from teachers' own understanding of language pedagogy as this is practiced in their own classrooms. The role of the SLA researcher should be that of facilitating the teacher's research by providing relevant information from SLA and helping to develop appropriate data collection instruments and procedures.

In the case of action research, teachers will identify problems relating to their own teaching. In the case of exploratory practice they will identify aspects in the life of their classroom that they wish to gain a better understanding of. These problems and issues are not likely to be the kinds of problems and issues that SLA researchers would choose to examine. This is not important. What is important is that teachers are able to relate SLA ideas to their own research questions. SLA is best viewed as a body of technical knowledge that can illuminate pedagogically inspired questions.

It may also be useful to encourage teachers to give public presentations of their research. McDonough (2006) reported that the teaching assistants in her course appreciated the assistance they received in publicly disseminating their research. One advantage of this is that it narrows the gap between "researchers" and "teachers". A variety of ways of reporting teacher-research should be encouraged, including narrative forms of reporting.

Principle 10: *It is always the teacher who ultimately determines the relevance of SLA constructs and findings for teaching, not the SLA researcher.*

As Freeman and Johnson (1998, pp. 409-410) put it:

> Clearly any understanding of teaching must be anchored in examinations of learners and learning. However, teaching as an activity cannot be separated from either the person of the teacher as a learner of the contexts of school and schooling in which it is done.

A corollary of this principle is that it is the SLA researcher who determines the relevance and acceptability of the findings of teacher research for SLA.

These principles are unlikely to be agreed to by every SLA researcher, teacher educator or teacher. They require SLA researchers to be prepared to put aside the requirements of the academy in which they work, at least when they take on the role as teacher educators. They require teacher educators to allow teachers a much greater say in the content of SLA courses than is the norm and also to acknowledge that traditional modes of transmitting knowledge about SLA may not be the most effective way of assisting teachers to develop/modify their own theories of language learning. It requires teachers to accept that technical knowledge is of relevance to their own teaching and to seek ways in which they can make it relevant. These principles are perhaps best seen as a set of proposals for how to design and implement an SLA course for teachers that can be challenged and, hopefully, investigated empirically. Thus, a final proposal is as follows:

Principle 11: *Teacher educators mounting SLA courses for teachers (or including SLA content in methods courses) need to engage in evaluation of these courses in order to establish which "ideas" teachers found useful and which teacher education methods were most successful in helping teachers develop/modify their own theories of language learning.*

**Applying the principles: An example**

Corrective feedback is a good example of a construct that has attracted the attention of both SLA researchers and teacher educators. I will begin by briefly describing how it has been tackled by each of these as a preliminary to describing how it might be handled in a course on SLA for teachers.

*Corrective feedback in SLA*

In SLA there are a number of different positions regarding the role of corrective feedback (CF) in L2 acquisition:

1. A strict Universal Grammar theory views corrective feedback as a source of negative evidence. It rejects any role for CF in the acquisition of linguistic competence as this is seen as dependent entirely on positive evidence (Schwartz, 1993). However, an innatist theory such as UG does allow for CF to contribute to the development of explicit L2 knowledge.
2. Interactional-cognitive theories see CF as making a substantial contribution to the acquisition of both implicit and explicit L2 knowledge. The main interactional-cognitive perspectives relevant to CF are the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996), the output hypothesis (Swain, 1985), and the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1994). CF assists acquisition when learners are focused primarily on meaning in the context of producing and understanding messages in communication and when they produce errors and receive feedback that they recognize as corrective. In this way, learners receive information not just about linguistic form but also about form-meaning mappings (i.e., they are able to see how a particular linguistic form realizes a particular meaning in context). Interactional-cognitive theories seek to account for the universal properties of CF as these relate to L2 acquisition.
3. In sociocultural theory (SCT), CF is also viewed as potentially enabling learners to perform specific linguistic features correctly through the mediation of a more expert other. CF helps the learner to move from other-regulation in the zone of proximal development to self-regulation, where the learner is finally able to use a linguistic feature correctly without assistance. In sociocultural theory what constitutes a facilitative form of correction at one time for one learner might not be so for another learner or for the same learner at a different time, either because it is pitched at a level too far in advance of the learner or because it fails to "stretch" the learner by posing a sufficient challenge (see Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Thus, SCT treats CF as a highly contextualized and individualized phenomenon.

CF has also been the object of numerous empirical studies. Descriptive studies (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997) have sought to develop taxonomies of the different corrective strategies employed by teachers in communicative language classrooms. Experimental classroom studies (e.g., Lyster, 2004) have sought to identify whether CF contributes to acquisition (operationalized typically as statistically significant gains in linguistic accuracy) and also to investigate which type of CF (e.g., input-providing vs. output-prompting and implicit vs. explicit) works best for acquisition. Findings have been mixed. For example, some studies (e.g., Han, 2002) show recasts to be effective whereas others (e.g., Sheen, 2006) have found them ineffective. One way to resolve some of these conflicting findings is through a meta-analysis of published experimental studies. Russell and Spada's (2006) meta-analysis reported that CF results in acquisition but failed to establish which CF strategies are more effective due to the small number of studies that met the conditions for analysis. However, a more recent meta-analysis (Lyster & Saito, 2010) reports that output-prompting CF is more effective than input-providing CF.

In a frequently cited sociocultural study of CF, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) demonstrated the advantages of fine-tuning the feedback to enable learners to gradually achieve self-regulation.

To sum up, SLA does not afford a unifying view of CF. There are theoretical disputations. There are different research findings. In these respects, SLA research on CF is no different from SLA research on many other issues (e.g., fossilization, the critical period hypothesis, and the role of form-focused instruction).

### *Corrective feedback in language pedagogy*

The key issues facing teachers and teacher educators in developing a policy for conducting CF were identified by Hendrickson in 1978. They have not changed today. Hendrickson posed five questions:

1. Should learner errors be corrected?
2. If so, when should learner errors be corrected?
3. Which learner errors should be corrected?
4. How should learner errors be corrected?
5. Who should correct learner errors?

Again, considerable disagreement is evident about what constitutes "best practice" for CF.

Regarding whether errors should be corrected, Ur (1996) noted that positions vary according to the method. In audiolingualism "negative assessment is to be avoided as far as possible since it functions as 'punishment' and may inhibit or discourage learning", in humanistic methods "assessment should be positive or non-judgemental" in order to "promote a positive self-image of the learner as a person and language learner", while in skill theory "the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing" (Ur, 1996, p. 243). She pointed out that in the post-method era methodologists are more likely to affirm the need for oral CF, recognizing the cognitive contribution it can make while also issuing warnings about the potential affective damage it can do. She concluded that "there is certainly a place for correction" but "we should not over-estimate this contribution" (because it often fails to eliminate errors) and suggested that it would be better to spend time preventing errors than correcting them.

Differences in opinions are evident in responses to the other questions that Hendrickson raised. For example, while some commentators argue for immediate correction of errors, even during a communicative activity, others (e.g., Willis, 1996) suggest that in fluency work it is better to delay attention to form until the activity is complete (i.e., carry out a post-activity review of errors). Differing proposals regarding which errors to correct can also be found. For example, teachers have been advised to correct "errors" rather than "mistakes" (Corder, 1967), "global" versus "local" errors (Burt, 1975), and just persistent errors (Ellis, 1993). Nor is there agreement about what teacher educators have to say about how to correct. While some believe that teachers need to be consistent in their method of correcting, others (e.g., Allwright, 1975) argue that inconsistency is natural as teachers need to take account of individual differences in their students. Finally, regarding who should do the correction, teaching methodologists generally favour student self-correction or peer correction over teacher correction but they also acknowledge that this might not always be feasible as students may not be aware they have committed an error or lack the linguistic knowledge to correct it. Students themselves prefer teacher-correction.

Two points emerge from this brief review of pedagogical positions regarding CF. The first is that CF is a very complex issue, with no easy rules-of-thumb available to guide teachers. The second, a corollary of the first point, is that considerable disagreement exists over how best to conduct CF. If, as Hyland and Hyland (2006) point out, CF is "a form of social action designed to accomplish educational and social goals" (p. 10), it would seem to follow that it is not possible to specify a single set of guidelines for CF that is appropriate for all instructional contexts. This has obvious implications for how CF is handled in a teacher education course.

### *Developing a unit on corrective feedback in an SLA course for teachers*

Here I will attempt to apply the eleven principles discussed in the previous section. The teachers I have in mind for the unit have all had experience of teaching in a variety of different contexts and are seeking to enhance their professional status by completing a masters-level course in language teaching (a situation common to many university graduate level programmes). The unit is outlined in Table 1.

In this unit, SLA serves as a resource for exploring a pedagogical issue of importance to teachers. The perspective adopted, therefore, is that of the teacher educator, not that of the SLA

| **Table 1**: Outline of a unit on corrective feedback as part of an SLA course for teachers | |
|---|---|
| **Topic** | **Oral corrective feedback in the classroom** |
| Aim | To assist the teachers to examine their own beliefs about oral CF and to develop an explicit theory of CF relevant to their own teaching contexts. |
| Questionnaire | The teachers complete a questionnaire on CF. The purpose of this is to enable them to state their own beliefs about CF. A secondary purpose is to provide a basis for a final evaluation of the unit by asking them to complete it a second time after completing the unit. |
| Text | Lightbown and Spada (2006)—students read pp. x to x as a preliminary to work on the topic. |
| Research articles | (1) Sheen, Y. (2004). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in communicative classrooms across instructional settings. *Language Teaching Research, 8*, 263–300.<br>The teachers read the article and answer a number of questions designed to help them identify key constructs (such as the types of CF and "uptake") and consider why CF varies from one instructional context to another.<br>(2) Nobuyoshi, J., & Ellis, R. (1993). Focused communication tasks and second language acquisition. *English Language Teaching Journal, 47*, 203-210.<br>Hopkins, D., & Nettle, M. (1994). Second language acquisition research: A response to Rod Ellis. *English Language Teaching Journal, 48*, 157-161.<br>The teachers read the two articles and evaluate the arguments presented in relation to their own classroom. |
| Evaluation of "ideas" about CF | The teachers are presented with guidelines about how to conduct CF in the form of a set of "ideas" about CF. Each idea is discussed and the teachers are invited to agree, disagree with it or modify it. Examples of the "ideas":<br>1. Teachers should ascertain their students' attitudes towards CF, appraise them of the value of CF, and negotiate agreed goals for CF with them. The goals are likely to vary according to the social and situational context.<br>2. CF works and so teachers should not be afraid to correct students' errors. This is true for both accuracy and fluency work so CF has a place in both.<br>3. Teachers should ensure that learners know they are being corrected (i.e., they should not attempt to hide the corrective force of their CF moves from the learners). |
| Awareness-raising task | The teachers are given a number of corrective feedback episodes taken from a communicative language lesson for young adults and are asked to discuss each episode in terms of whether teacher and student appear to have shared goals in each episode, whether the students show awareness they are being corrected, whether the teacher is able to adapt the CF strategies she employs to the needs of the students, whether the students uptake the correction, whether the teacher allows time for this to happen, and whether the students appear anxious or negatively disposed to the correction. They then assess the overall effectiveness of each CF episode. Example of CF episode:<br>S: I have an ali[bi]<br>T: you have what?<br>S: an ali[bi]<br>T: an alib-? (.2.) An alib[ay]<br>S: ali [bay]<br>T: okay, listen, listen, alibi |
| Research project | Teachers are asked to work in groups to plan a small action research project for investigating an aspect of CF of their own choice. They are encouraged to reflect on their own practice as well as researching the literature on CF in order to identify an aspect to investigate. |
| Evaluation | The teachers complete the questionnaire a second time. The questionnaires are collected, and teachers' responses are compared with their initial responses. Initial and final questionnaires are shown for the purpose of examining whether and how their beliefs about CF have changed. Finally, they are asked to identify any issues about CF about which they remain uncertain or would like to learn more. |

researcher. The aim is not "training" but "development". That is, the unit draws on a reflective model of teacher education rather than either a craft/apprenticeship model or an applied science model (Wallace, 1998) and thus accords with Principle 10 (i.e., the teacher needs to determine the relevance of SLA constructs and findings). Such an approach takes account of the fact that the participants are all experienced teachers who have engaged previously with corrective feedback in their own classrooms and hold beliefs about it. A somewhat different approach would be needed for novice teachers.

A key feature of teacher development is that teacher educators should assist teachers to evaluate and further develop their existing beliefs about language teaching, as reflected in Principle 1. This is catered to in a variety of ways in the unit outlined in Table 1, in particular through a comparison of the questionnaire that the teachers complete at the beginning and end of the questionnaire.

Principle 2 concerns the relevance of the topic chosen. Although this topic was chosen by me (as a teacher educator) without consulting the teachers concerned, it is of demonstrable relevance to them as evident in the fact that corrective feedback figures as a topic in just about every published teachers' guide. Also surveys of teachers' beliefs about teaching have shown that teachers typically hold strong beliefs that corrective feedback is necessary (see, for example, Schulz, 2001).

Principle 3 states that the topics covered in an SLA course should consist of "ideas" rather than "models". This is addressed by presenting the teachers with a set of guidelines consisting of statements regarding how CF might be conducted (see Ellis, 2009). These guidelines are based on SLA research and are presented to the teachers for discussion. No attempt is made in the unit to expose teachers to the different theoretical positions regarding the role of CF in SLA as I do not see these as helpful to teachers who need to make practical decisions regarding CF. However, the "ideas" themselves reflect certain theoretical positions.

The text chosen is Lightbown and Spada (2006)—a text on SLA written specially for teachers. It assumes limited technical knowledge and what technical knowledge is required is explicitly presented in an accessible form (Principle 4).

The research articles on CF were chosen with Cook's six requirements in mind (Principle 5). The article by Sheen (2004) is quite technical but it raises the crucial issue about the importance of instructional setting in determining how CF is conducted and invites teachers to consider why CF varies in the ways it does. It also introduces a key technical construct—"uptake"—that the teachers will probably have no knowledge of. The articles by Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) and Hopkins and Nettle (1994) are designed to introduce students to a debate about the applicability of ideas about CF drawn from SLA to actual teaching.

Throughout the unit proposals for implementing CF are presented as "provisional" (Principle 6). That is, no attempt is made to prescribe or proscribe CF practices on the basis of research findings.

Principle 7 (presenting mini-lessons in a new language) was not incorporated into the unit. The reason was that such mini-lessons must necessarily position the teachers as beginner learners and, it can be argued that CF has a limited role to play in the very early stages of L2 acquisition.

The awareness-raising task the teachers were given (Principle 8) involved analysing some examples of CF episodes. The idea here was to give the teachers the opportunity to apply the technical constructs about CF they had acquired and also to reflect on the learning opportunities that can arise through CF.

Ideally, teachers need to undertake a study of CF in their own classrooms but clearly this is not possible for every topic covered in an SLA course. An alternative—the one adopted to address Principle 9—was to invite the teachers to collaboratively develop a proposal for an action research project involving CF. Whether the teachers subsequently carry out the research is left to them.

Finally, Principle 11, which addresses the need for teacher educators to evaluate their materials and practices, is reflected in the final questionnaire which the teachers are asked to complete. As McDonald et al. (2001) noted, it is reasonable to assume that "something useful" is coming out of an SLA course if it can be shown that the course has some impact on teachers' beliefs.

## Conclusion

An interesting debate about research and its pedagogical implications took place in *TESOL Quarterly Vol. 41*(3). Han (2007), after reviewing a research article by Kim (2006) which included an implications section, mounted a general criticism of TQ articles on the grounds that they "ostentatiously link the research to practice" by means of an implications section. She noted that "in the domain of SLA not every topic ... is relevant to second language teaching, and the ones that are relevant may bear a direct or indirect, actual or potential, and above all complex relationship to teaching" (p. 391). Responding to Han's concerns, Chapelle (2007) pointed out that there is no such thing as a perfect research design so the limitations of a study should not be a reason for failing to propose implications for teaching. She argued that "if an author can state no implications for teaching and learning, *TESOL Quarterly* is the wrong journal" (p. 405). This debate points to the uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of basing pedagogical recommendations on research, which has marked the field of SLA since its inception (see, for example, Hatch's (1978) article entitled "Apply with Caution").

To my mind there is no danger in researchers proposing implications of their research as long as these are not presented as prescriptions for practice but rather as "ideas" that teachers can experiment with in their own classrooms. The danger, of course, is that the authority attributed to research may lead to a false positivism—researchers find what works and then teachers implement what the researchers tell them to. Implications, applications, and proposals are all fine providing that researchers acknowledge that it is ultimately the teacher who must determine the relevance of SLA constructs and findings for teaching.

There is, however, the gap between the discourse of research and the practice of teaching. This gap can be filled in two principal ways. One way is through applied rather than pure research. My perspective has been that of an applied SLA researcher who seeks to make SLA applicable to pedagogy by addressing issues that are of acknowledged relevance to the practice of teaching—such as corrective feedback. The second way is through the mediation of teacher educators, whose job is to facilitate the process by which technical knowledge about SLA can interface with teachers' own practical knowledge of teaching. Mediation, however, has to be principled. In an attempt to show how this can be achieved I have proposed a number of principles that can guide the use that teacher educators make of research.

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# 3 Hip Hop and English Language Learning (ELL): Empowering Youth with Positive English Speaker Identities

■ Angel Lin
University of Hong Kong

**ABSTRACT:** *In this paper some basic theoretical notions that will inform our understanding of youth identities, hip hop and ELT will be introduced. These notions include cultural capital, habitus, structure, and agency. After that the Hong Kong context for ELT will be outlined and the author's experience in piloting an innovative ELT rap project in a school in Hong Kong will be presented and the implications of using hip hop in empowering youth through the development of positive English speaker identities will be discussed.*

**Theoretical notions for understanding youth identities and hip hop cultural capital, habitus, structure and agency**

*Cultural capital* is a concept from Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1984, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) referring to language use, skills, and orientations, dispositions, attitudes, and schemes of perception (also called *habitus*) that a child is endowed with by virtue of socialization in her/his family and community. Bourdieu's argument is that children of the socioeconomic elite are bestowed by their familial socialization with both more and the right kinds of cultural capital for school success (i.e., their habitus becomes their cultural capital in the social field of the school). A recurrent theme in Bourdieu's works is that children from disadvantaged groups, with a habitus incompatible with that presupposed in school, are not competing on an equal footing with children of the socioeconomic elite and thus experience the reproduction of social stratification.

While Bourdieu has sometimes been accused of being a theorist of reproduction rather than transformation (Jenkins, 1992; Canagarajah, 1993). Luke (2009) remarks that Bourdieu's concept of habitus does allow for the possibility of transformation, and Bourdieu seems to have managed to find a way between structural determinism and an over-emphasis on individual agency. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory also seems to provide a solution to overcome the sociological macro-micro, structure-agency theoretical divide by seeing the macro and micro, social structures and agencies, as mutually constitutive and shaping. Giddens (1984) sees social action and interaction as tacitly enacted social practices and discusses how they become institutions or routines and reproduce familiar forms of social life.

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought about by social actors but are continually recreated by them via the very means by which they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities, agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible. (Giddens, 1984, p. 2).

Within structuration theory, Giddens (1984) attempts to integrate human social action with the larger systems, structures, and institutions of which we are a part. It is the continual repetition of social action and interaction that constitute what may appear to be the larger social forms or systems. According to structuration theory, structure is not outside of and imposed on social action, but is both constituted/structured by and shaping/structuring social action. This is in line with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which is postulated as a "structuring structure."

Both Bourdieu's theory and Giddens' structuration theory thus seem to converge in helping to overcome the structuralist determinism that is sometimes attributed to studies which emphasize too much the reproduction tendency of social structures (e.g., Willis, 1980). Precisely because structures and social actions are seen as mutually constitutive and shaping or structuring, there is the possibility of transformation of social structures (such as habitus) through creative, situated social actions. However, this kind of creative agency is not to be over-celebrated as it does not happen easily. In this paper, I discuss the attempts of some education researchers to use an innovative hip hop programme to help change the habitus of some children in a secondary school situated in a working class residential area in Hong Kong, and how the project met with both shares of success and difficulties.

In terms of identity formation, the project aimed to introduce Hong Kong students to a prestigious new English speaker identity, *the young emcee*, by creating an alternative and extracurricular activity based on hip hop. This identity offered the students an opportunity to enhance their English abilities by identifying themselves as capable learners and more importantly, as artists who were using their voices to connect with others. The researchers wanted to motivate students to work hard at learning the English rapping, timing and rhyming skills necessary to become good emcees, rhymers, storytellers and lyricists—all positive and trendy English speaker identities for teenagers unavailable to them before (cf. Lin, 1999). In the following sections, I shall outline the setting, the programme, and our findings. In the concluding section, I discuss what we have learnt that might help us to achieve more success if we are to embark on a similar project in the future.

**Hong Kong: The setting of the story**

Despite its international cosmopolitan appearance, Hong Kong is ethnically rather homogeneous. Over 90% of its population is ethnic Chinese, and Cantonese is the mother tongue of the majority. English native speakers account for a small proportion of the entire population. They had constituted the privileged class of the society until July 1, 1997 when Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China and Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. The English-conversant bilingual Chinese middle class has, however, remained the socioeconomically dominant group in Hong Kong.

Notwithstanding its being the mother tongue of only a minority, English has been the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement; that is, the dominant symbolic resource in the symbolic market (Bourdieu, 1991) in Hong Kong. Even in the post-1997/colonial era, English has remained a socioeconomically dominant language in Hong Kong society. For instance, English remains the medium of instruction in most universities and professional training programmes.

It can be seen that the symbolic market is embodied and enacted in the many key situations (e.g., educational and job settings) in which symbolic resources (e.g., certain types of linguistic skills, cultural knowledge, specialized knowledge and skills) are expected of social actors if they want to gain access to valuable social, educational and eventually material resources (Bourdieu, 1991). For instance, a Hong Kong student must have adequate English resources to enrol and succeed in English-medium professional training programmes and to earn the qualifications to enter high-income professions. Hence, access to English in school acts as a crucial gatekeeper for socio-economic mobility and helps to reproduce class structures in Hong Kong. However, such access has been constrained by a number of factors, including government legislation in 1998 that reduced the number of English-medium public schools, as well as the varying quality of English instruction in both English-medium and Chinese-medium schools (Evans, 2008; Lin, 2000). Public secondary schools in Hong Kong are generally classified into three bands that are based on competitive entry requirements. Band 1 schools admit the approximately top 33% of primary school leavers, Band 2 schools admit the middle 33%, and Band 3 schools admits the lowest 33%. The banding label has been criticized but it has been a well-established administrative part of the Hong Kong schooling system. This paper tells the story of a hip hop project piloted in a Band 3 school located in a working class housing complex in a rural area Hong Kong. The researchers focused on the ways in which hip hop in English provided working class students with new spaces (or, in Bourdieu's terms, a new habitus) for developing their identities as English speakers.

**Piloting an English Language Teaching (ELT) rap project**

We invented the name ELT Rap to indicate to school principals and educational funding bodies that it is a kind of hip hop rap adapted or written for English language teaching (ELT) purposes. Working with a team of English language educators in the Faculty of Education at The Chinese University of Hong Kong from 2006 to 2008, we designed the project as an innovative way of drawing on youth popular cultural resources for English language education.

The linguist, Geneva Smitherman, has highlighted eight features of signification (i.e., meaning-making) in rap lyrics:

1. Indirection, circumlocution
2. Metaphorical-imagistic
3. Humorous, ironic
4. Rhythmic fluence and sound
5. Teachy but not preachy
6. Directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context
7. Punning, play on words
8. Introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected

(cited in Perry, 2004, p. 62)

A glance at the list will show that when adapted, rap has great potential in English language teaching. The rhythmic nature of rap lyrics facilitates the acquisition of the stress-timed rhythm of English. This has special significance in Hong Kong, where the majority of learners speak Cantonese, a syllable-timed language, as their mother-tongue. The play on words that is often a part of rap has great appeal for students when they repeat raps for practice. The rhyming nature of rap lyrics can also heighten learners' phonetic skills and phonological awareness, and practice rapping has the potential to build confidence among these students as English language users.

**Why is ELT Rap potentially appealing to young people?**

In English language education, jazz chants (Graham, 2000) have been some of the activities advocated for improving learners' pronunciation, especially in terms of rhythm and intonation. ELT Rap differs from jazz chants in that it has a much richer musical dimension which appeals to young people: the rhythm is provided by hip hop music in the background. This popular, musical dimension should make ELT Rap especially appealing to teenage students since it is infused in the global popular culture that they consume on a daily basis. Though many of the students in this project were relatively new to hip hop music, it became clear over the course of the project that the appeal of participating in a globally popular youth culture that could easily be localized to represent their experience in Hong Kong struck a chord with the learners.

In addition to the entertainment element, what can also attract teenage students to ELT Rap is its lyrical content: rap is a channel for (young) people to speak out, to unload their personal worries and frustrations, and to speak to and against scenarios of social injustice (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Rose, 1994). The use of rap as a vehicle for voicing one's frustrations or concerns about social problems has been well-documented in rap around the world (cf. Alim, 2006; Mitchell, 2001), but little has been explored with regard to the context of Hong Kong. Given that social class divisions in Hong Kong are often shaped by access to English through education, rap in English became an appealing prospect for connecting to working class students in Hong Kong's secondary schools. Disassociated from the English of their classrooms, and the *ideoscapes* (Appadurai, 1990) that govern the centralized education system, we felt that ELT Rap had the potential to offer them new avenues for creative expression. We developed the project with the idea that many students would find in ELT Rap a space to reconcile their mixed feelings about English: on the one hand they understand the importance of English to their future; on the other hand, they resent the sense of frustration brought by their perceived inability to master a second language that is deemed so necessary for socio-economic mobility. ELT Rap provided them with the potential to reconstruct and transform their society-given identities of "deficient"English speakers by using the language for creative expression that melded their interest in music with opportunities for language learning.

### What is an emcee?—Building positive English speaker identities among Hong Kong teenagers

The title of the ELT Rap lyrics booklet used in our project is "*The Young Emcee Scrolls*". This title is modeled on the trendy title of the 2006 hip hop poetry collection of the famous American urban poet, Saul Williams: *The Dead Emcee Scrolls: The Lost Teachings of Hip-Hop*. In hip hop music culture, the emcee[1] embodies a prestigious identity. An emcee is not only a rapper but also a talented artist and storyteller who specializes in using poetic language with rhythm and music to liven up the atmosphere of a party or a concert. A skilled emcee has to go through rigorous language and music training. A skilled hip hop emcee is also sometimes called a "rhymer" as they are good at spontaneously coming up with "cool" rhyming verses to go with the rhythm of the music on the spot (called "freestyling"). In hip hop music culture, it is important for emcees to frequently engage in animated "battles" (i.e., competitions) to test their spontaneous linguistic, poetic and music talents, as good emcees are skillful in using poetic, verbal signifying (meaning-making) techniques which can be traced back to the oral cultural storytelling discourse practices of African Americans (Lee, 1993). To become a good hip hop emcee, one needs to work on expanding one's speaking vocabulary, remembering a vast number of rhyming words, and needs to read newspapers and books every day to increase one's knowledge about the world so as to be able to rap about a wide range of interesting, contemporary topics. Through introducing Hong Kong students to the concept of the young emcee in our ELT Rap teaching materials, we wanted to provide them with an identity that would resonate with them and which would lead them to invest in English language learning.

### Piloting ELT Rap as an extra-curricular activity in a school in Hong Kong

With the support of the school principal and vice-principal, we piloted a project entitled "ELT Rap resident artist project" in one Band 3 school from September 2006 to June 2007. We started the project with the following set of research objectives: (1) to provide a context in which students would improve their English language proficiency; (2) to enhance students' interest in and attitude towards learning English; and (3) to improve students' self-image and self-confidence through positive interactions with hip hop artists and an English tutor.

#### *Programme implementation*

To introduce the project to the students and to recruit participants, an "Artists' Demonstration Session" was organized in September. Though there were more students interested in hip hop dance, a joint decision between the school and the research team was made to keep the original class arrangements for promoting ELT Rap. Over the course of the project, 68 high school students

[1] Emcee is a word derived from the acronym, MC (Master of Ceremony, or Microphone Controller).

volunteered to join the programme. The students were organized into groups according to grade and met on different days to focus on either ELT Rap or Hip Hop Dance. On Thursdays, Group A (comprised of 28 Secondary (S) S4–S7 students) met after school to participate in the ELT Rap workshops. On Fridays, Group B (23 students from S3–S6 participated in the ELT Rap workshops, 8 of whom also participated in the dance workshops on Thursdays). Group C (25 S3–S6 students) met on Thursdays to learn hip hop dance styles.

The workshop team consisted of a team of local hip hop artists as instructors (MC Yan, MC Chef, MC ADV, MC Double T). A research team member, Margaret Ting, served as the English language tutor working closely with the local artists. Together they led a series of afterschool ELT Rap workshops during which they taught seven rap songs (see Table 1). Another local break dance artist, Big Mouth, served as the instructor of dance workshops for students.

As the project progressed, the students worked with the workshop team to develop a finale performance programme. The finale show was hosted in February in the school hall and was attended by over 800 students, teachers and parents. A final count of 38 students performed in the February finale show. Based on the focus group interviews, the 56% participation rate could be attributed to conflicts in scheduling with other school activities and different expectations of the programmes. The performers enjoyed and took pride in their work, while the audience gave positive and encouraging feedback.

**Table 1**: English language learning during Rap ELT

| Rap focus | ELT focus | Description of group interaction |
|---|---|---|
| Workshop 1: Rapped "How are you?" and Group Names | *Lecture:* Introduced letter-sound relationships, and the "Final E" Phonics Rule as in "How are you?" | Used "How are you?" to greet each other |
| Workshop 2: Rapped "Bee-lee-blah-lah Boom Boom"; watched "Freestyle" DVD; introduced hip hop components (rapping, breaking, DJ-ing, Graffiti) | *Lecture:* Introduced "26 Letter Sounds" as in "BLBLBB". Worksheet with letter shape design was used. | Awarded letter shape design winners for motivation; distributed Halloween sweets to create a relaxing atmosphere |
| Workshop 3: Students rehearsed previous raps and created their own lyrics | *Group Work:* Reviewed the 26 letter sounds with groups of 3–4 students. Students read out some nonsense words to practice blending. | Arranged group practices of letter sounds. |
| Workshop 4: Rapped "B-A-Bay" | *Lecture:* Introduced the "Two Vowels Go Walking" phonics rule as in "B-A-Bay" | Encouraged students to use their body as metronome to feel the beats |
| Workshop 5: Students rehearsed previous raps and designed ELT Rap logo | *Worksheet:* Finished long vowel worksheet while tutor conducted focus group interviews | Conducted focus group interviews |
| Workshop 6: Rapped "Rapper's Delight" and "Chinese Poems Can We Rap?" | Lyrics of "Rapper's Delight" and "Chinese Poems Can We Rap?" | Moved to the hall and joined the dance group group to feel more about rhythm |
| Workshop 7: Watched "Def Society" and "Make You Look" DVDs; rapped "I Have Promises To Keep" | Lyrics of "I Have Promises To Keep" | Brainstormed with students about the performance; provided snack to create a relaxing atmosphere |
| Workshop 8: Reviewed all raps and confirmed programme rundown | Reviewed programme | Awarded ELT Rap button design winner for motivation |
| Workshops 9-11: Rehearsals for finale | Reviewed programme | Distributed ELT Rap buttons and performance props to student performers |

*Research methodology*

We used a battery of research instruments for collecting data that would allow us to both assess students' linguistic competence in English and to understand the identities they were developing in response to the ELT Rap project. Pre-and post-workshop questionnaires were completed by the students in October 2006 and February 2007 respectively. We conducted mid- and post-workshop focus group interviews with high, medium and low involvement students in November 2006 at the fifth rap and sixth dance workshops, and subsequently in March 2007 at the reunion gathering. Based on the data collected in the mid-workshop interviews, some programme implementation strategies were adjusted. For example, we integrated groups of students who were focusing on raps with those focusing on hip hop dance styles in order to create a more authentic experience. We also modified the original curriculum by adding Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" to the workshop, with less language focus and more focus on music appreciation in order to engage students in the project more fully.

## Language learning benefits of ELT Rap

For the many limited-English-proficiency participants at the school, rapping seemed to be easier to approach as a "speaking" rather than "listening" activity as it requires "speaking" or "spitting the words" at a fast speed; hence, words are often not very clear and comprehension can be difficult. Students with higher English proficiency would take less time to rehearse and could rap at a much faster pace, whereas students with lower English proficiency would have a much slower pace in rapping. Some felt discouraged seeing others rapping so fast when they rapped together.

In spite of these difficulties, the rap songs created a fun, meaningful context for the use of English and seemed to be appealing to the students. The artists' demonstrations had a strong modeling effect, both in learning ELT raps and in creating positive attitudes toward learning. It became clear throughout the project that the students bonded well with the artists and showed respect for their talents. It was also clear that the English tutor was only able to build credibility if she expressed knowledge about hip hop and rap. Since she lacked knowledge about these musical styles, students would only seek language support from the ELT tutor; however, they identified more closely with the artists as role models for their own language learning.

The participating students expressed positive views towards ELT Rap as a way of learning English. Some said that they learned useful phonics skills which they can transfer to their regular English learning (e.g., they can now sound out new English words). Most reported that they increased their self-confidence through performing their songs in the finale show. After the project ended, some students continued their friendships with the artists, regularly joining in the artists' local hip hop gigs in community centres. A few of them continue to write Chinese and bilingual raps on their own. Some students have also asked the English tutor to teach them more rhyming words so that they can have more words to write their rap lyrics.

## Constructing positive identities as English learners through lyrics

In this section, excerpts from the workshop participants' lyrics will be illustrated to see how emergent positive identities are being constructed. These are corroborated with excerpts from interview data to illustrate how the experience through the hip hop programme has helped some participants construct identities as better English learners.

Excerpts (1) through (3) are taken from lyrics produced by the students during their third workshop, which was the first time they had the opportunity to create their own raps. The lyrics demonstrate how the students are experimenting with rhyme, syllable structure and beats per line. In addition, these three examples show some positive expressions of identity. In (1), the students voice their enthusiasm for hip hop and their extracurricular activities connected to this 'school' practice; (2) reveals how the students link writing hip hop lyrics to an act that requires them to "use your brain"; and (3) arguably presents an attitude of confidence with English through their chosen alias "C-A-N" and their ability to "scare" others with their raps (and with their English).

(1) *Workshop 3: Ka-hei & Friends*
We all like hip hop
Always go to the CD-shop
When I go back home
The door is tightly locked.

(2) *Workshop 3: Tom, Key & Kin*
Pick up your pen and
Use your brain!

(3) *Workshop 3: Carrie, Apple & Nadia*
My team name is C-A-N
Carrie, Apple and Nadia Tang
Double T is our friend
We are making a horrible plan
Hey! Are you scared?

In the finale show, a group of workshop participants had written a "Thank You Artists" song to express thanks to the artist instructors of the workshops. The song was written mainly in Cantonese and performed in the finale show by the students. Below are excerpts from the song lyrics which illustrate their newfound confidence about their campus and school life. English translations of the lines are provided in the right column:

(4) *"Thank You Artists!"*

| | |
|---|---|
| 電腦設備又係度 | There are computer facilities here |
| 不斷更新 | Always upgrading |
| . . . | . . . |
| 呢個地方唔可以缺少嘅一份子 | They (referring to students) are all indispensable here |
| 努力認同求學習就個個都 | All are working hard studying diligently |
| . . . | . . . |
| 唔再俾人砌低 | No longer beaten by others |
| 唔再做一頭縮頭烏龜 | No longer chicken out like a shy tortoise |
| . . . | . . . |
| | Thank you Artists! |

The expression of confidence and self-worth in these lyrics is very significant, given the habitus of these working class students. Traditionally in Hong Kong, students from low banding schools, which are frequently in low-income housing areas, are stigmatized in society and labeled as "losers" in general. In this song, the students are expressing a message of self-assertion—both asserting the good facilities of the school (the ever-upgrading computer equipment) and the new self-image of students: everyone is hardworking and hence becoming indispensable; they are no longer feeling like losers beaten by others nor chickening out like a shy tortoise who has to hide its head in its shell. They are using metaphors to express a new powerful identity that they are constructing both for their own school and the students in this school. It is significant that they are not referring to themselves directly but addressing this message to everyone in the school, as they are performing this song to all students and teachers in the finale show in the school hall. Coming from the students' own creative self-expression, this message is significant.

It might be said that the hip hop music and the rap genre and the self-reliant, self-assertive attitude as embodied by hip hop culture and the artists themselves seem to have inspired these students to feel a renewed confidence about their own school and the students in this school. This newly found confidence is echoed by some other participants in the interview data, which were done right after the finale show by a research team member. The interviews were done in Cantonese and below are English translations of excerpts of the interview data.

Many excerpts illustrate how the students recognized their own learning and that they felt their English had improved over the course of the project. Though some of them had not previously been familiar with hip hop, their comments show that they found this medium of learning to be highly motivating and beneficial to their command of English.

(5)
Interviewer: What do you think of ELT Rap?
S6 student: It was fun!
Interviewer: Fun...
S6 student: I've learnt English...
Interviewer: Learnt English...
S6 student: And got to know hip hop culture.

(6)
S4 Student: At first I'd no idea about hip hop and rap. But after attending these sessions, I learnt that hip hop and rap are so broad! As we usually rap in English, so I also have learnt more English.

(7)
S4 Student: I think I'm much better now (勁咗). When we first tried to rap "How are you?" I couldn't even rap one sentence! But now I can even rap the more difficult ones.

Excerpt (8) also acknowledges the linguistic benefits of the programme, but perhaps more importantly, documents the sense of an empowering habitus that came into being as a result of the project. As an "alternative" curriculum carried out in the form of an extracurricular programme, ELT Rap provided the students with a new space for identification. In contrast to their "deficient" identities in their mainstream classrooms, ELT Rap gave them the chance to identify positively as members of an English-speaking community who enjoyed each other's company and formed close social bonds.

(8) (A group of S5 students becoming good friends)
Girl 1: We've learnt so much!
Girl 2: The most important thing is Margaret teaching us English.
Girl 3: We've learnt more about phonics.
Girl 4: It was fun! Really fun!
Girl 2: Yeah! It was fun! And we also got to make new friends! I didn't know them before. And now we've known each other and could even hug each other!
Girl 3: And even to share the same piece of cake! (girls laughing)

Excerpt (9) shows how the students gained confidence by performing in front of their peers, which also enhanced their sense of agency over their learning since they witnessed the practical benefits of "involving themselves" in what they were learning.

(9) (A group of students who performed hip hop dance in the finale show; the students were from different grade levels, from S4-S6):
Dancer 1: At first I wanted to stop dancing because I didn't want to perform on stage. But actually it's not that frightening on stage. It was fun!
Dancer 2: It's us who are benefitting... it's like learning a new skill and you feel good if you can perform.
Dancer 3: I think if you involve yourself in dancing, you'll enjoy it. And have fun with these good tutors.
Dancer 4: At first when I started practicing it was a mess. But it's ok at the end. Even today's performance wasn't a perfect one, but it's not like [as bad as] the rehearsal.

The artists were also interviewed (together with some of their workshop students who hung around them) right after the finale show. Below are English translations of excerpts from the interview data. Many of the excerpts show that the workshop team observed changes in the students' willingness to express themselves across time, an important factor in both rapping and speaking English. In (10), MC Chef points out how the students seemed to have developed a new sense of self through the project as they cultivated a hip hop persona.

(10)

MC Chef: I've noticed the students... because of hip hop, they would actually pick up a pen and start writing their own raps. And they've changed so much! Maybe this thing [rap]... Because hip hop has changed my whole life, so I want more people can get to know it. In the first lesson, they knew nothing, and now, after they the tenth lesson, they had a show, and create raps at home; I noticed that they've put hard work into it. They are not playing but serious about it. They can express their feelings and opinions through raps. It's good... it's a means to let others get to know them. Sometimes teachers don't understand their students' feelings. But through this chance now... the teachers can notice that the students have turned into someone else on the stage, becoming more confident... Although the time given was limited, the students showed great dedication and effort. Their performance... you can see the result! I really think they are superb!

This new, more confident self showed up in classrooms as well, as reported by the students. Importantly, the students felt they improved not only in their English literary skills, but also their abilities in Chinese. One of the Secondary 5 student mentees reported that he received praise from his English teacher, which afforded him the important opportunity to identify as a "good" English speaker in the context of school, as well as in the extracurricular ELT Rap programme.

(11)

S5 mentee: After learning raps from MC Chef, my Chinese composition improves. And now during the English lessons, when there are words that are a bit challenging, because of the phonic skills learnt in the programme, I know how to decode the words. And get more praises from teachers! My English teacher... I used to be unable to decode the words and pronounce them correctly, but because of the method (referring to phonics) I learnt, I know how to pronounce the words and my teacher praises me for this improvement.

The students frequently reported that they worked very hard once they committed to the project, a behavior often not attributed to working class schoolchildren from low-banding schools. It appeared that the ELT Rap project provided the students with the chance to identify as very capable learners, an identity that is not commonly attributed to working class children (Lin, 1999; Willis, 1980). By receiving steady encouragement from the artists, whom they admired, they invested in their learning despite it being "hard work."

(12)

S4 student: Extremely hard work! When they (referring to the artist instructors) comment, "Your rap isn't good enough, go home and practice many times", and I went home and practiced a hundred times! I almost died because of it! (laughing as she spoke this)

(13)

S4 student: At first my friends wanted to join it, so I joined it. But after really joining it, I'm the only one who has stayed on, not wanting to quit. I have become the one who doesn't want to quit most.

(14)

S6 student: When the programme first started, we were with the lower form students. I didn't know them and I feel strange and bored about it. But after the show, because all of us have put in many efforts and worked together, the bonding became strong, and it was fun!

This hard work was also noted by the workshop team artists who were impressed with the students' capacity to learn new things in a relatively short period of time. Their comments characterize the students as "quick learners", "hard workers", and "highly capable" English speakers and rappers.

(15)
Big Mouth: At first the students were not attentive and they only came to play. But when time progressed... Some of them got more serious and could keep on [practicing]. I could notice the result of practice between the workshops. Not just breaking for a while during the workshops, but practicing outside of the workshops. I could notice their improvement in the following session.

(16)
KDG: I've watched them rehearse, and I noticed their hard work. What a big difference between the first rehearsal and the show! They've shown high collaboration. I just hope more schools can accept this kind of teaching programme, letting more people understand hip hop.

(17)
MC Yan: It involved many students this time... The more people the harder to control. But as they worked together as a team, working very hard... It shows that students in Hong Kong have great learning capacity, apart from memorizing textbooks or rote learning! Actually, their skills can improve in a short period of time... they can absorb and learn much faster and better than we can imagine. They have benefitted a lot from it in the end.

One of the artists who worked on the project, MC Double T, linked the students' progress with their confidence in "speaking up" in English, an important factor in identifying as English speaker who have the "power to impose reception" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648) despite exhibiting working-class language features.

(18)
MC Double T: It's very important not to be afraid of speaking English. After the workshops, I noticed they are more willing to speak up. They realize that isn't difficult. They might be shy. Their pronunciation might be incorrect. But now through raps and music, they can rap with ease or speak English with ease.

The school's teachers and administrators were also interviewed after the finale show, and their comments revealed similar observations regarding the students' growing confidence and their willingness to express themselves in English. Below are English translations of excerpts from the interview data:

(19) School Vice-Principal
Mr. Poon: I'm so proud of my students. They gave their best performance. Although the abilities of our students are not that high, they might not be very good in language or other aspects, but you can notice their confidence on stage and I'll give them 100 marks for their performance. What makes me the happiest is their self-confidence!

Though Mr. Poon draws attention to what the student lacks academically, which potentially constructs an identity for them as "deficient," he remains proud of what they have achieved, noting growth in their confidence. More praises come from the teachers, who noted the quality of the students' performances and the importance of performing successful academic identities in front of their school population.

(20) School Teacher
Mr Hon: It's like working very hard all the times and getting paid off now. The students performed very well, and I expected a good show but I didn't expect it to be that excellent! Very coherent, and very confident! I'm so happy about the show.

(21) School Teacher

Miss Jie: During the whole event, the students were so engaged, much more engaged than their usual selves. To them, English poems are quite difficult, but they tried very hard to master the lyrics and rap with rhythm. It's so encouraging for the students. And it gave them a sense of achievement. They can present themselves to others.

Importantly, the principal acknowledged the benefits of ELT Rap as a productive space for the students to showcase their linguistic skills and to be treated as successful learners.

(22) School Principal

Mr. Yan: I believe teenagers need channels to express themselves, and we need to give them room for building self-confidence. So raps, hip hop, performing on stage, are really good opportunities. We really hope that our teaching profession can support this kind of teaching approach, letting more students benefit from it.

**Coda: Transforming youth identities through the hip hop experience**

Upon the completion of this pilot project, 10 students of the school were invited to perform their ELT Rap songs at the English Festival 2007 kick-off ceremony. They performed three English and one Chinese raps. This was a glorious moment for the school and the students and boosted the overall morale of the school. The Hong Kong Education Bureau was planning to close down the school at one stage due to its decreasing new student enrollments. However, this event enhanced the school's public image and has partially contributed to the cancelation of the government's plan to close it down.

Overall, using hip hop music to engage students in using English to express their own voice, and to enhance their phonological awareness and rhyming and creative verbal skills, is promising. Further curriculum research is needed to refine the curriculum for different learning styles, interests and school contexts. Based on the data, however, we have identified the challenges of capitalizing on students' desire for and investment in pop cultural artistic identities in transforming their habitus, in particular, their attitude towards and relationship with English. The central difficulty experienced in this pilot project seems to be that the local hip hop artists participating in this project themselves have limited English capital. Our research team has sought to compensate for this with the provision of an English tutor who worked closely and collaboratively with the artists. However, when it comes to identification with their role models, students tend to identify much more readily with the "cool" local artists than the English tutor.

This difficulty notwithstanding, three of the Form 7 (Grade 13) female workshop participants were highly motivated to learn rapping and started to write their own lyrics for the artists to comment on. They stayed in contact with the artists long after the end of the programme and even participated in the artists' music gigs in community centres. Two Form 4 (Grade 10) boys, notwithstanding their limited English proficiency, were eager to rap for fun in their daily conversations with their friends (although mainly Cantonese is used), and expressed an interest in joining an ELT Rap Society at school if such a society is formed. Some students also tried to freestyle on their own (i.e., to come up with rap lyrics on the spot, without pre-drafting them), for instance, by rapping and adapting paragraphs from their geography textbook.

It thus seems that some of the students are acquiring the new identity of a creative language user through developing a hip hop rapper identity—in Cantonese, English or bilingual rapping. The transformation and development of such new self-identities and self-understandings seem to be a result of their informal interactions with the artists and the modeling of such new translocal hip hop identities by the artists. We argue that when these working class students are doing hip hop they are also acquiring new, empowered, youth rapper selves that hip hop culture seems to be offering to them. When learning and honing their creative verbal skills in writing and performing Chinese, bilingual and English raps, they also seem to be transforming their social class habitus and are acquiring new cultural capital (e.g., rhyming and rapping skills, knowledge of letter-sound relationships, new attitudes and dispositions towards English).

However, the actual translation of these ideas into a feasible, workable youth empowerment curriculum in the schools still needs further research, exploration, trial and error. Challenges notwithstanding, the observations and lessons that we have learnt from this pilot project have led us to believe that if given the right role models and scaffolding (e.g., hip hop artists with bilingual cultural capital who can share with students both rapping and creative bilingual verbal skills), students coming from working class backgrounds can be helped to break through the learned helplessness acquired through years of negative experience with language learning in the local schooling system that tends to favour students already endowed with the kind of family habitus for school success (Lin, 1999, 2005). Through transforming their own identities and acquiring empowered identities such as those of creative rapper-artists, working class students can engage enthusiastically in language learning, including the learning of English which is, otherwise, not a daily language for them. We, therefore, need to continue to research and explore the possibilities that trans-local hip hop cultures can offer to young students, especially those coming from social classes without the habitus and cultural capital required by mainstream schools for literacy success, so that they can exercise their agency to change their habitus and acquire new cultural capital and new identities for empowerment.

**Note**

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# 4 Managing Learning: Authority and Language Assessment

■ Tim McNamara
University of Melbourne, Australia

**ABSTRACT:** *A feature of language assessment internationally is its role in the enforcement of language policies established by governments and other educational and cultural agencies. This trend has led to the near-universal adoption of curriculum and assessment frameworks, the clearest example of which is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). What does this movement represent? What is the source of the authority of frameworks such as the CEFR, and why are they so appealing to governments? The paper argues that the determination of test constructs within policy-related frameworks leads to inflexibility, and considers the case of the testing of competence in English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication, in the context of international civil aviation communication.*

## Introduction

Language assessment, as we are increasingly realizing, is first and foremost a social and political activity (Spolsky, 1995; Shohamy, 2001, 2006; McNamara & Roever, 2006). It is a site where social values are expressed and contested. As the values of a globalized economy have come to occupy and preoccupy many spheres of social and political life, so have they become central to current developments and challenges in language testing and assessment. I will try to argue that the values of globalization are embedded in test constructs through the development of powerful outcome statements and frameworks. I will then argue that this leads to an inflexible situation, where language education, controlled by outcomes assessment in the form of universal standards, is erasing the historical and cultural complexity and specificity of language learning in particular settings, and the meaning of language learning in the lives of individuals. I will also argue that, ironically, standards-based language learning, as currently formulated, makes us less able to respond to another result of globalization, the fact that communication in the globalized workplace takes place using English as a lingua franca. I will illustrate this last point with reference to the role of language testing in the management of the international aviation workplace, whose business depends on successful English as a lingua franca for communication. I will argue that current constructs as articulated in powerful outcomes statements are inadequate to deal with the needs of this increasingly common situation.

## Test constructs and policy

Test scores tend today to be interpreted in terms of real world abilities and skills. In earlier norm-referenced approaches to assessment, an estimate of a candidate's ability, in the form of a test score, was interpretedwith reference to the performances of other test takers, that is, with reference to the scores of the population of test takers for that test. Thus, test score meaning was always relative. In current criterion-referenced approaches, scores are interpreted in relation to pre-determined standards of knowledge and capacity. Such standards are typically couched in practical, functionalist terms, reflecting the functionalist, communicative tradition of language teaching. For example, the widely used and very influential Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001) consists of an ordered set of statements about aspects of communicative ability, grouped into six levels (from lowest to highest: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) according to the complexity of the skills concerned. It is claimed, for example, that a speaker assessed as meeting the standard for level A2

> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

while a speaker at B2

> Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

The wording of these standards is important, as they represent the test construct, the assumed view of language proficiency which is assessed in the test and which is the target of measurement in any individual case. (The reference to the native speaker in the definition of level B2 is crucial to the argument of this paper and will be considered below; cf. Seidlhofer, 2003.)

Increasingly, the design of an assessment and the construction of a test instrument begin with such a set of standards. These may be rather general, as in the case of the CEFR, or more specific, as in standards relevant to a particular workplace or educational setting; we will consider English language standards for the aviation workplace later in the paper.

Policy initiatives expressed in the wording of standards are increasingly central to language testing. The fact the standards set by policy act as the basis for the test has changed the nature of language testing. Previously, test developers, informed by the latest theories of language proficiency, of communicative interaction, and of the way in which language knowledge intersects with and interacts with other aspects of professional or educational competence, defined the test construct themselves in a stage preparatory to the development of a procedure which would provide evidence relevant to that construct. This "thinking stage" of test development has now been removed. Instead, given that the test construct, and its wording, are determined by complex policy procedures, evolving discussions within applied linguistics on the nature of language proficiency and communicative interaction are far less likely to inform test constructs once the standards as initially formulated have been adopted—they are cast in stone. While tests have always been sensitive to policy and market considerations (see Spolsky, 1995, on the history of TOEFL and Davies, 2008, on the history of IELTS), these pressures are now directly and explicitly expressed within the very wording of the test construct, from which everything in a test flows.

The CEFR is a case in point. The wording of the framework inevitably reflects the policies and values of its original sponsor, the Council of Europe, and its current users, governments and educational institutions throughout the world. The CEFR has its origins in the work of the Council of Europe in the early 1970s. The Council was looking for a way of thinking about achievement in language study which was independent of the structural particularities of particular languages, in the interests of labour mobility and readily transportable and interpretable credentials. The policies of the Council at that time were critical in the development of the notional/functional syllabus, and the definition of levels of syllabus in such functionalist terms; the Council was the principal influence on the European version of communicative language teaching. It can therefore be argued that the functionalist orientation of communicative language teaching and the curriculum and assessment frameworks that go with it are a reflection of the values of the Council—broadly, European integration. In other words, the terms in which the outcomes of language education are specified, and which are the construct of language assessment, are expressions of policy. And the formulations of such frameworks, including the way in which they lend themselves to a reduction to simple numbers—A1, A2, etc.—are designed to meet the needs of those responsible for the accountability of educational systems.

The credit transfer ("unit credit scheme": Trim, 1980) and labour mobility motivation of the Council of Europe is explicable in terms of its policy goals, as described on its website in the period in which the CEFR was adopted (they have since been revised to focus more on the promotion of human rights and of democratic governance systems):

> The Council of Europe is the continent's oldest political organisation, founded in 1949 ... [It] was set up to ... develop continent-wide agreements to standardise member countries' social and legal practices [and] promote awareness of a European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures.
>
> Within the area of education, its mission involves carrying out major projects on education policy, content and methods in and out of school ... Special importance is attached to ... the mutual recognition of competences to improve mobility and employment prospects, and lifelong learning for participation in an international society. (www.coe.int/T/e/Com/about_coe/, accessed 10 January 2006)

The cultural context of the goal of an integrated European economy, a regional form of globalization, is clear, and is strongly reminiscent of the mission of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an organization more explicitly committed to furthering the processes of globalization. It may be worth comparing the actual wording of the goals of the two organizations (the goals that seem shared are shown in bold):

| **OECD** | **Council of Europe** |
|---|---|
| The Organisation's mission is essentially to help governments and society reap the full benefits of <u>globalisation</u>, | ...the mutual recognition of competences to improve <u>mobility and employment prospects</u>, and lifelong learning for <u>participation in an international society</u> |
| while tackling the economic, <u>social and governance challenges</u> that can accompany it. | [It] was set up to... develop continent-wide agreements to standardise member countries' <u>social and legal practices</u>... |

The OECD specifically focuses on economic development, and the Council of Europe on education, but in a deeper sense the goals of the two organizations in the period leading up to the formulation and adoption of the CEFR reflect the same mission. Education is seen as centrally concerned with economic development, and the curriculum frameworks determining the shape of the accompanying assessment regimes for educational achievement, including that for languages, are central to the fulfilment of the goals of each organization. The OECD also has a testing regime, the Program for International Student Assessment or PISA, which is having profound impacts on the educational systems of member countries (McNamara, 2011)—it tests the literacy of 15 year olds in the language or languages used as the medium of education in the member states, as well as their knowledge of mathematics and science.

This linking of language policy to educational goals through processes of examination and certification is, of course, not new. In a discussion of the linguistic unification of France in the eighteenth century, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes:

> But it was doubtless the dialectical relation between the school system and the labour market—or, more precisely, between the unification of the educational (and linguistic) market, linked to the introduction of educational qualifications nation-wide, independent (at least officially) of the social or regional characteristics of their bearers, and the unification of the labour market

> (including the development of the state administration and the civil service)—which played the most decisive role in devaluing dialects and establishing the new hierarchy of linguistic practices. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 49)

### Elaborating the construct

Increasingly, then, test constructs, which are the heart of tests, are dictated to us by policies governing teaching, and hence assessment practices, in educational systems. The wording of the statements of test constructs in standards documents tends to be brief and directed at the audience of those using and interpreting test scores, rather than those responsible for constructing and conducting tests: in other words, the wording is user-oriented rather than constructor- or assessor-oriented (Alderson, 1991). Further elaboration is often provided to help teachers, syllabus developers and test developers interpret the meaning of the standards and to guide them in the development of syllabuses and the operational tests that accompany them.

The CEFR has considerable elaboration of the descriptors set out in the global scale, as described above, in the form of a manual designed to assist in the interpretation of the levels, and the application of the scale in different contexts is set out in a book-length publication (Council of Europe, 2001). More broadly, a great deal of current work in language testing is designed to provide interpretative commentary on the meaning of standards such as the CEFR, and more and more detailed advice to test developers and teachers about relating the necessarily abstract and general statements of standards to the day-to-day realities of test design and classroom assessment. Language testers thus play a mediating role between policy statements and the needs of teachers and learners, though it should be recognized that in many respects the needs of administrators and those of teachers and learners are at odds, placing an impossible burden on language assessment (not to mention on the teachers who have to do the assessing) (McNamara, 2001).

Now the impact of the CEFR will in some respects be positive. The spread of policies favouring communicative methods of teaching for a wide range of languages throughout Europe can be attributed to the influence of the CEFR. A shared framework across languages means that shared professional development of teachers of different languages is possible, at least so far as familiarizing them with the approach of the CEFR is concerned. The articulation of the goals of language education and the course of development of the learner's competence leads to valuable discussion among teachers. There is already some documentation of these benefits (Morrow, 2004).

The policy goals of the CEFR are now dominating language education policy at every level in Europe, in a striking example of policy-driven assessment. It is worth noting in passing that the appeal of this management function of the CEFR to other governmental systems, and of course the power and influence of Europe, mean that it is being used as a crucial reference point—in fact the only reference point authorized by policy—well beyond Europe: for example in North and South America, Australia and Asia. And the impact of the CEFR extends to areas beyond language education. The levels of the CEFR are enshrined in law, in policies incorporating the use of language tests in granting immigrants rights to entry, residency and ultimately citizenship (Van Avermaet, 2009).

### Imposing a common currency: Calibrating tests against the CEFR

The overwhelming political authority of the CEFR means that increasingly, language assessments in many, indeed most, areas of education must be calibrated against it. This is a complex and technically demanding process. Frameworks like the CEFR are like the Euro, or like the European Committee for Standardization (CEN). They make exchange across boundaries easier, but reduce local variation, and render unintelligible other accounting systems, or sets of cultural values, or formulations of the goals of language education, which cannot be directly translated into the language of the CEFR. Moreover, if the construct of a curriculum or an assessment cannot be calibrated against the CEFR, it has no currency.

It is becoming imperative for published tests to be explicitly related to the CEFR. There is a clear commercial advantage for those which can do so. Cambridge ESOL, for example, has linked the levels of its main suite of examinations to the levels of the CEFR in its own words:

> Cambridge ESOL's exam system has developed in interaction with theCouncil of Europe language policy initiatives which have culminated in the publication of the CEFR—a process described by North 2006 and Taylor & Jones 2006. This history of interaction gives Cambridge ESOL a very strong, one might say organic, relationship to the CEFR. (www.cambridgeesol.org/what-we-do/research/cefr/common-scalelevels. html)

This leads to mapping exercises such as that shown on Cambridge ESOL's website at www.cambridgeesol.org/assets/img/exams/cefr-diagram-large.jpg; this is also included as supplementary material on this journal's website (http://journals.cambridge.org/lta).

But linking is no simple matter. The question of the calibration of individual tests to the CEFR is very demanding and very complex, even for an organization like Cambridge. Recent changes to immigration law in Britain tie admission under certain visa categories to the applicant's demonstration of a certain level of proficiency on the CEFR (www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/immigrationlaw/immigrationrules/appendixb/).This means that the calibration of levels on a widely available test such as IELTS becomes hugely consequential. Cambridge itself is unclear about the correct calibration. On the one hand, it states

> Our recent work to align the Cambridge tests within the CEFR suggests that a CAE pass and IELTS Bands 6.5/7.0 are located at Level C1 of the Framework.

but on the other,

> In 1998 and 1999 a research project examined the relationship between IELTS and the Cambridge Main Suite Examinations, specifically CAE (C1 level, Common European Framework) and FCE (B2 level). Under examination conditions, candidates took both IELTS and tests containing CAE or FCE items. Although the study was limited in scope, the results indicated that a candidate who achieves an overall Band 6 or 6.5 in IELTS would be likely to pass CAE.
>
> Further research to link IELTS and the Cambridge Main Suite Examinations/ALTE levels was conducted in 2000 as part of the ALTE Can Do Project. Can-do responses by IELTS candidates were collected over the year and matched to grades, enabling Can-do self-ratings of IELTS and Main Suite candidates to be compared. The results, in terms of mean "can-do self-ratings", supported the findings from the earlier work.
>
> Both these studies support the placing of IELTS Band 6 to 6.5 at NQF Level 2 along with CAE. (www.cambridgeesol.org/assets/pdf/ielts-research-faqs.pdf)

So what is C1 on IELTS? 6? 6.5? 7? 8? These differences are very important for implementing an immigration policy where C1 is a crucial level for admission decisions. There is evidence from other carefully conducted linkage studies of competitor tests to IELTS such as TOEFL iBT and the new Pearson Academic test that there may be significant problems with the IELTS calibration. For as long as it lasts, Cambridge has a significant commercial advantage over its competitors, as it is far easier to meet the C1 standard in terms of the claimed IELTS equivalence than it is to meet the same C1 standard by using TOEFL iBT or Pearson Academic. This discrepancy needs to be resolved urgently.

## The costs of a "common currency"

Even if it were possible to impose a common currency for standards in language education, such a development would come at enormous cost, the discussion of which has barely begun (Fulcher, 2004). The quote from Bourdieu reminds us of what this cost might be. The cost of unification is the devaluing of the local interpretation of the goals of education. One issue is that the limiting of the goals and meaning of language learning to functional, communicative objectives ignores the role of language learning in the subjective experience of the learner as an individual with a history, both personal and cultural.

Research in applied linguistics is beginning to address the meaning of language learning to individuals. The theme of identity and second language learning is currently being explored in a number of major publications (for a survey; see Block, 2007). In particular, Pavlenko's studies of literary autobiographies (Pavlenko, 2007) have shown how language learning is deeply embedded in the life trajectories of the authors; functionalist accounts are inadequate to deal with the complexities revealed in these accounts. Her work on language learning and emotions (Pavlenko, 2005) has extended the scope of this research into other autobiographical accounts of language learning, language use and language loss. Kramsch's discussion of subjectivity in language learning (Kramsch, 2009) interprets narratives of bilinguals and other learners within contemporary social theory, and shows how 'individual' experience is constructed within the operation of larger social forces. Judith Butler's work on desire in the construction of subjectivity (Butler, 1997) points to a new framework for understanding such tired concepts as attitudes and motivation in language learning, which have lacked an appropriate social theory to guide research in this field.

Although recent work on language learning and individual identity is increasingly located within contemporary social theory, and adopts a social perspective, it is still focused on interpreting individual experiences of language learning, albeit in the light of social forces. We have yet to give an account of how language learning in different societies and cultures will have specific social meanings, and hence potential meanings for individuals, within the history of contact, cultural and political, of those societies with the societies and communities in which the target language is spoken. These historical conditions will mediate the encounters of individuals from different societies with the same language, so that the learning of a particular language may have different meanings according to the specific social and cultural background of the learner.

The imposition of a single set of cultural meanings and social and political values for language education, for each setting in which the CEFR is adopted, eviscerates the traditions of language teaching which are incompatible with the CEFR. In cultural and historical terms, learning English is simply not the same for a Singaporean, an Indonesian, a Vietnamese, a French person, a Dutch person, or a Hungarian. And different languages are indeed different, and vary in socio-political role, range and purpose of use, and carry very different histories of contact, often violent, between speakers of the speech communities involved. The CEFR puts all foreign languages into one and the same category, thereby erasing the fact that they are "foreign" in very different ways. Learners from those backgrounds may be aware of the cultural and political significance of the act of learning the language of a cultural group with a particular historical relationship to their own, unless they are invited, in an act of collective historical amnesia, to wipe the slate clean and re-identify themselves as citizens of the new globalized world.

While the CEFR, in other words, is conceived of as something like the Euro, the currency of language is not simply convertible. Managers love the CEFR and other standards-based frameworks all over the world because they make available a certain kind of quantitative accountability in a way that was not possible before. But this all-too-ready surface translatability denies the untranslatable, the part of language and language learning which gives the enterprise value beyond labour force mobility. And being capable of "participation in an international society" is not best achieved through historical amnesia, tempting though that may be given the horrors of the previous century.

A further problem with the imposition of universal language test constructs by managerial systems is that the constructs cannot easily be changed or challenged, because researchers and theorists of language testing are no longer responsible for determining the test construct. The evolution of notions of language proficiency will only slowly be reflected in test constructs, for two reasons. Firstly, because the test construct is embedded in policy processes, it is only through policy processes that the construct can be challenged or updated. Academic researchers are not necessarily very good at influencing policy debates. Secondly, because existing accountability frameworks such as the CEFR are deeply embedded in existing administrative procedures, there will be a natural reluctance to change them because of all the administrative and even legislative work that is entailed.

## The need for change: English as a lingua franca

It seems to me that there is a great need for re-thinking the construct involved in language assessment. I think we are at a moment of very significant change, the sort of change that only comes along once in a generation or longer—the challenge that is emerging in our developing understanding of what is involved in ELF communication (Jenkins, 2000, 2006, 2007; House, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2005, 2006; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pizl, 2006; Canagarajah, 2007; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2009; Pitzl, 2010). I feel that this will be as big a change for language testing as the communicative revolution was for language teaching and for language testing 35 years ago.

Let me explain what I mean. Hyejeong Kim is currently completing a Ph.D. at Melbourne on the policy of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) governing English language testing, which has recently introduced English proficiency standards to be met by pilots and air traffic controllers working in international aviation settings (Kim & Elder, 2009). Kim's study investigates attitudes to this policy within the aviation industry in Korea, which has in various ways resisted and sought to weaken the policy, through, for example, controversially revealing material from the English test used in Korea on the web well in advance of test dates, to assist those facing the test to pass. She has gained access to recordings of interaction between Korean air traffic controllers at airports in Korea (non-native speakers of English), and the pilots with whom they are communicating (a mix of non-native and native speakers of English). In some of these interactions, difficulties of mutual understanding emerged, which had potentially dangerous implications. Among the situations she studied are the following: a conversation with the Russian pilot of a Russian passenger plane who wanted to change course because of a technical problem, and who needed permission to do so; a conversation with an Australian pilot, a native speaker of English, whose plane had suffered a mechanical failure after landing and who had no power to leave a busy runway, and needed his plane to be towed to safety; a conversation with a French pilot who misheard an instruction and had therefore made a runway incursion, disrupting the landing path of incoming planes. I think we can agree that in all these situations, the communication breakdowns which occurred, but which were ultimately resolved, were potentially significant for airline and passenger safety.

What is the nature of the miscommunication in these incidents? Kim played recordings of the incidents and showed transcripts of the recordings to two groups of informants, Korean air traffic controllers, and Korean pilots, and using a form of think-aloud methodology, elicited their perspective on these incidents. The informants were asked to articulate their understanding of what was going on, and the nature and sources of the miscommunication, as the situations unfolded. These comments form the main data for the thesis. Kim then coded the data to see what they focused on. (The subject of study is thus informants' attitudes to examples of lingua franca communication in this setting.)

The main conclusion from the analysis is that while the language proficiency of some of the Korean air traffic controllers is an issue in some of the situations, the reasons for the communicative breakdown go far beyond the language proficiency of one of the participants. A number of factors come into play. First, the professional competence of the pilot and the air traffic controller is a crucial factor in avoiding or successfully resolving miscommunication. Professional competence is an important factor in shaping discourse, to the point that it is difficult to separate them. Second, and most relevant here, the responsibility for communication in English as a lingua franca is a joint responsibility, and failure is rarely the fault of the second-language speaker alone. The rules of communication in the aviation industry set out clear procedures for routine communication, involving the required use of set phraseology for routine requests, situation reports and explanations, and required procedures for reading back what has been heard, and confirmation that what has been read back is in fact what was originally said. For less predictable situations, spontaneously formulated "plain English", that is, the ordinary code, is permitted. Kim's informants commented on two aspects of ELF communication. First, the native speaking or fluent non-native speaking pilots did not observe the rules about using routine phraseology, and unnecessarily used ordinary conversational English with the Korean air traffic controllers in entirely routine and predictable situations, which sometimes resulted in miscommunication. Second, the native speaker pilots did not know how to accommodate to their ELF interlocutors in terms of accent features, lexical choice, speed of delivery, and so on. In turn, air traffic controllers did not always acknowledge their lack of understanding, which subsequently complicated the misunderstanding.

We can see then three features of ELF communication in this example (and these are amply borne out in the extensive existing literature on the subject, a sample of which was cited above):

(1) The interlocutor of the second-language speaker of English will not necessarily be a native English speaker (though he/she may be), but a speaker of another second language.
(2) Factors other than simple language proficiency—for example, professional competence—are an essential component of the communication.
(3) The responsibility for successful communication is a joint responsibility between the participants in the communication—it does not lie entirely with the non-native speaker.

Let us now consider the ICAO English proficiency standards (ICAO, 2004). As you might expect, the wording of standards reflects to a certain extent the demands of the workplace setting. The following is the definition of the operational proficiency required to gain a professional licence:

> Proficient speakers shall:
> a) communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations;
> b) communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;
> c) use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context;
> d) handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and
> e) use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community. (ICAO, 2004, A-2)

Although the ICAOproficiency standards do not refer explicitly to the fact that the relevant work setting involves ELF communication, the mention of the need to "recognize and resolve misunderstandings" is potentially relevant to that construct. In order to further elaborate the meaning of the standard, six levels of proficiency are defined in terms of the degree to which they meet the standard. Air traffic controllers and pilots must reach at least Level 4 in order to get a certificate allowing them to continue working in their chosen profession. In defining the levels, various aspects of performance are identified, and descriptions of performance are provided at the relevant level for each aspect. The following dimensions of proficiency are identified: *Pronunciation*, *Structure*, *Vocabulary*, *Fluency*, *Comprehension* and *Interactions*. Apart from Interactions, this is quite a traditional set of rating categories for the assessment of speaking, and the descriptions within each are informed by understandings of language learning and language pedagogy that are quite general and not necessarily specific to the particular work setting. Here are the definitions of two of these dimensions, *Comprehension* and *Interactions*, at Level 4, the Operational Level:

> Comprehension
> Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.
>
> Interactions
> Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying. (ICAO, 2004, A-8)

Distinctive features of the work setting are acknowledged at various points: note the mention of a "situational complication or an unexpected turn of events", and there is an acknowledgement that communication will be among "an international community of users", that is, that the target of the test is ELF communication as much as, or more than, communication with native speakers of English. The phrase "deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying" again acknowledges the mutual nature of the communication.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that as a matter of policy only one side is subjected to the examination—the native speakers are exempt, although Kim's study shows their contribution to miscommunication. Moreover, the scale of proficiency defines subsequent higher levels in terms of increasing control of the code, not increasing ability to deal with increasingly complex situations of miscommunication.

For example, the distinction between subsequent levels (5 and 6) does not appear to be specifically related to the work setting. The criterion of comprehension at Level 5 refers to ability "to comprehend a range of speech varieties (accent and/or dialect) or registers" whereas Level 6 states "Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties". One might have here expected some further reference to the conditions of communication in terms of greater demand—unfamiliar accent, styles of delivery, and so on. Interestingly, in their actual working life, the pilots themselves are oriented to the demands of lingua franca communication. Kim (personal communication) reports thatwhen flying to a new destination, the pilots listen to tapes of communication in English by speakers of ELF from that region, in order to familiarize themselves with the accent of the air traffic controllers in that destination. They do not listen to more tapes of native speakers in order to improve their comprehension of native speaker speech. Native speaking pilots might be recommended to listen to tapes of local air traffic controllers, but there is no ICAO policy to enforce that—in fact it is never discussed, because of the presupposed privileging of native speaker norms.

There have been several developments in response to the ICAO policy. ICAO's framework and the definition of operational competence are not tied to any particular test; each national system can choose to meet the standard in whatever way it wants. Many national civil aviation authorities have endorsed certain existing tests, usually general proficiency tests, as suitable instruments for eliciting evidence of the standing of individual pilots and air traffic controllers in relation to the standard. These tests are often associated with general proficiency scales that are in turn linked to the CEFR. There are two problematic aspects of this development. The first is that general proficiency scales do not articulate the relevant construct, which is ELF communication. Secondly, they locate the issue in the second language proficiency, narrowly defined, of the non-native speaker. The International Language Testing Association is currently attempting to establish itself as an accrediting agency for the tests being adopted by different national civil aviation authorities. While this has many positive aspects, in that it will deal with aspects of the *fairness* of the test, it will not deal with the lack of *justice* embodied in the construct (McNamara & Ryan, 2011). And because to change the construct involves a complex political process, it is unlikely to change in a hurry. In response to this impasse, the Korean civil aviation industry have taken the controversial position of publishing the test online in advance so that pilots and air traffic controllers can more easily pass it. They are indicating in this way their own disbelief in the construct of the test; it is not that they want to conduct civil aviation in Korea recklessly or dangerously—in fact Korea has an excellent civil aviation record—but they resent the injustice of very experienced and competent air traffic controllers losing their jobs needlessly.

Turning to the CEFR, to what extent is the construct of ELF communication adequately represented? As Seidlhofer (2003) pointed out, it is absent from the framework—not surprising, given its intellectual antecedents in the European version of the communicative movement of the 1970s. Here are the definitions of the two most advanced levels of the CEFR, Level C, Proficient User, divided into two levels, a higher (C2) and a lower (C1).

> Proficient User
> *C2—Overall*
> Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
>
> *C1—Overall*
> Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

For a more detailed understanding of how the levels are defined for the skills of listening and speaking, we can turn to the descriptors in the self-assessment grid:

> Listening
> *C2*
> I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
>
> *C1*
> I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.
>
> Spoken interaction
> *C2*
> I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
>
> *C1*
> I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.

It is clear that the concept of ELF communication does not inform these descriptors. In terms of *Comprehension*,

(1) The interlocutors are assumed to be native speakers. While the wording "provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent" might lead us at first to think that this means non-native speaker accents, we realize that this cannot be right, as the references to "at fast native speed" and "a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms" make clear.
(2) The role of other competences as an essential basis for comprehension is not considered.

(3) The responsibility for successful communication is held to lie entirely with the non-native speaker.

In terms of *Production*, the references in the definition of *Spoken Interaction* are revealing: "I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it". The problem is presumably 'mine' alone, not a problem caused by the competence of my interlocutor. What is required in such a situation is not the ability to "convey finer shades of meaning". Again, the ever more demanding native speaker interlocutor is the presumed target of the communication efforts.

My point here is not only the need for change, the need to challenge the construct, but what it would take to move the mountain of the CEFR in the direction of change. The arguments of applied linguists are unlikely to be persuasive in themselves—policy statements need policy action to alter them.

## Conclusion

Letme make a very brief conclusion. In this paper I have argued that language assessment, like language education more generally, is increasingly serving the goals of policy, and specifically of policies supporting a view of education as primarily preparing learners for participation in a globalized workforce. This view of education, and of assessment within it, seems to me to constitute a serious impoverishment. Moreover, the impact of globalization has had a profound impact on the role of English. As the extensive literature on ELF communication makes clear, the emergence of English as a lingua franca as a key feature of a globalized world presents a powerful challenge to assumptions about the authority of the native speaker, an authority which is enshrined in test constructs; tests are the enforcers of native speaker privilege. Claims to the ownership of English and the privileging of native speaker identity inhibit the appropriation of English to the actual demands of communication in a globalized world. I think we have here a powerful example of the theme of the conference, "Global Perspectives, Local Initiatives". In language education, a core cultural practice, we need to base our capacity for participation in such a world on local histories of the meaning of learning a language such as English. The tension between the global and the local is felt here as in other areas of contemporary life. Moreover,what globalization itself demands is flexibility, and flexibility is precisely what is lacking in universalizing outcome statements such as the CEFR, which are the lever of control of education systems and social policies involving language throughout the world. It is time to engage with the serious re-thinking that has been going on for a decade or more now—but this is not something we can expect to be sponsored within organizations such as the Council of Europe, or testing organizations such as Cambridge, whose interests lie elsewhere, and who we can expect to resist the fundamental reorientation that I believe is required. The levers of change we must seek are initially conceptual, but given the politicization of test constructs that I have outlined, that is inadequate in itself. Here the resistance of the aviation industry in Korea to the demands of the ICAO policy is an example of the complex political work that will be required to achieve change. Applied linguists may not be at the forefront of this kind of work, but we can at least supply the arguments and the understanding to support the activity of those who are in a position to force the policy change that is clearly needed.

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**Notes**

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# 5 From Government Policies to University Practices:

## Experiences and Lessons from the Recent College English Teaching Reform in China

■ Haixiao Wang
Nanjing University

**ABSTRACT:** *A small scale conference held in Beijing Yanshan Hotel in 2002 marked the beginning of a new round of reform in College English teaching in China. Since then a series of government policies and guidelines has been introduced and government funded explorative projects have been launched aiming at setting new objectives for College English teaching as well as introducing new models of teaching and new approaches to testing and assessment at both institutional and national levels. It was the hope of the government that the top-down approach to reform could bring immediate and nation-wide effects in all aspects of College English teaching. Surveys and observations of the current practices in China's colleges and universities do indicate that the reform efforts made by the government have yielded remarkable achievements and many proposed theories and practices have not only been accepted but also put into actual implementation. However, due to the differences in educational resources and local demands, there also exist considerable variations among different types of colleges and universities in China. These variations manifest themselves in all aspects of College English teaching, from the formation of teaching objectives, to the design of the school-based curriculum, the approaches to teaching and learning, and the methods of testing and assessment. This paper will review the changes or the lack of change in College English teaching in recent years. Some reflections will be made about this latest round of reform.*

### Introduction

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a dramatic change in the teaching of College English[1] in China, turning a little-known course into one that was often regarded as determining the fate of tens and thousands of college students. Among the forces that initiated this change were two measures adopted by the Ministry of Education (MOE), i.e., the implementation of the national *College English Syllabus* in 1985, and the introduction of the College English Test (CET) in 1987, the former setting up a nationally unified standard in terms of teaching objectives, academic credit requirements, course structure, teaching methodology and assessment, and the latter providing an objective measure with which students, teachers and even colleges and universities across the nation could be assessed and compared.

Towards the end of the 1990s, as the College English course was gaining attention from all corners of the Chinese society, there was also growing dissatisfaction with the status quo of the program from both inside and outside the College English teaching circle (Cen, 1999; Wu, 2003). The general public was unhappy with college graduates who could not put what they

[1] The term "College English" is used to describe a program of teaching designed for non-English majors in colleges and universities in China.

learned in English classes to actual use, especially in oral communication. Students complained about the monotonous lecture style of instruction and the pressure of the national CET. Teachers were burdened with heavy work load in teaching and could spare no energy for reflection and research, which in turn hindered their career development. Employers were disappointed to find that graduates with high scores from the CET could neither speak nor write in English in most job-related situations. So there was an urgent need to reform College English teaching to meet the needs of the rapidly changing Chinese society.

In 2002, a small scale conference held in Beijing Yanshan Hotel marked the beginning of a new round of reform in College English teaching in China. Present at this conference was not only the Minister of Education but also the leading officials from the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education (HED–MOE). Since then a series of government policies and guidelines have been introduced and government funded explorative projects launched aiming at setting new objectives for College English teaching as well as introducing new models of teaching and new approaches to testing and assessment at both institutional and national levels. The following section of this paper will introduce some of the key measures formulated and implemented by the MOE and then discuss the changes or sometimes the lack of change in College English teaching in recent years. Some reflections will then be made about this latest round of reform.

## The top-down fashion of China's College English reform

In his *Managing Curricular Innovation*, Markee (1997) summarizes five common models of educational change, among which the center-periphery model describes an innovation process in which "the power to promote educational change rests with a small number of senior ministry of education officials who are at the center of the decision-making process. Teachers, who are on the periphery of this decision-making process, merely implement the decisions that are handed down to them" (p. 63). Furthermore, decision makers also "use rewards or sanctions to ensure that subordinates comply with institutional policies and goals" (p. 64). It was almost in this same fashion that the recent reform of China's College English teaching was carried out (Zhang, 2003).

The process of the reform could roughly be divided into three stages preceded by an almost futile trial stage between 1998 and 2002.

### *Pre-reform trial stage: 1998–2002*

In response to the general social dissatisfaction with English teaching in general and College English teaching in particular, the MOE commissioned a group of experts in 1998 to revise the old *College English Syllabus* and allowed nine universities to experiment with the reform of College English in their own ways. However, the year-long project of the revision resulted in a version that was not much different from the old one and the experimentation by the universities also failed to produce any promising new models that could save the program. Part of the reason might be explained by the fact that despite the general dissatisfaction with the teaching program, there was equally apparent resistance to change, given the remarkable achievements made in College English teaching in the preceding two decades.

### *Initiation stage: 2002–2004*

Realizing the lack of real innovative spirit from the grassroots level, the Ministry of Education decided to take charge of the design and implementation of the reform. After the Yanshan Conference in August 2002, the Higher Education Department (HED)–MOE issued a document in December announcing two key projects of the reform. One was to draft the new national *College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR)* and the other to experiment with a new model of College English teaching which called for the combination of regular classroom teaching with computer-assisted self-teaching. In 2003, the HED–MOE listed College English teaching reform as one of the four key components of its "College Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project". As specific measures for the implementation of the reform plan, four publishing companies were commissioned in February to design the Web-based teaching systems and the first meeting of the *CECR* drafting team was held in March to discuss the general framework of the new document. By the end of the year, the four teaching systems were ready for trial use and in January 2004, the *CECR* (for trial implementation) was also completed. In August 2004 the Ministry officially launched the reform of CET. By now the major part of the preparation was done for the subsequent large scale reform of College English teaching.

***Experimentation stage: 2004–2006***

In February 2004, the HED–MOE selected 180 colleges and universities across China for trial experimentation. To provide more incentive for the reform effort and to generate more innovative measures from the local institutions, the department provided funds to support over 400 reform projects in the 180 experimental colleges and universities in the following two years. In the reform of the CET, a series of changes was made in 2005 in its content and format, the weighting of different skill components, and the method of score reporting, introducing new sub-skill components and more subjective test items, giving more weight to the listening component and converting the original full score of 100 to 710 for score reporting. A cutoff score of 60 for "Pass" has been regarded as a norm in Chinese educational practices. With the full score changed to 710, it was hoped that different universities could adopt different passing scores according to the actual English proficiency of their students.

Based on the practices of the 180 experimental colleges and universities, in 2006, the HED–MOE started to select the first group of 31 schools and provided each with 200,000 yuan so as to build them into models whose experiences could then be copied by other experimental and eventually non-experimental colleges and universities across China. This group was later expanded to 65 so as to better represent the different types of colleges and universities in different parts of China. During this period of time, the HED–MOE also organized several short-term programs for the training of provincial and university administrators and college English teachers.

***Expansion stage: 2006 onward***

When commenting on the achievements of the new round of College English teaching reform in May 2006, the Minister of Education said that the endeavor was of strategic significance and asked that further efforts be made to deepen the reform and to disseminate the experience to all colleges and universities in China (Wu & Liu, 2008). Following the Minister's remark, the MOE issued a government decree mandating a formal and full scale implementation of the *Curriculum Requirements* across China. The Minister's remark and the government decree thus started the expansion stage of College English reform.

In 2006, the HED–MOE invited experts to revise the *CECR* (for trial implementation) and a year later, the *CECR* was officially issued. In the same year, further measures were also introduced for the reform of the CET and more training programs were held for teachers as well as administrators.

## Major changes brought by the reform

It was the hope of the government that this top-down approach to reform could bring immediate and nation-wide effects in all aspects of College English teaching. Surveys and observations of the current practices in China's colleges and universities do indicate that the reform efforts made by the government have yielded remarkable achievements and many proposed theories and practices have not only been accepted but also put into actual implementation. However, due to the differences in educational resources and local demands, there also exist considerable variations among different types of colleges and universities in China. These variations manifest themselves in all aspects of College English teaching, from the formation of teaching objectives, to the design of the school-based curriculum, the approaches to teaching and learning, and the methods of testing and assessment.

The data presented in the following discussion were mainly drawn from the author's onsite observations of the experimental universities and a questionnaire survey of 530 universities the author conducted in 2010. During the discussion, distinctions will be made of different types of universities in China. In the mid 1990s, the Chinese government started a project which aimed at enhancing the quality of one hundred colleges and universities in China in the 21st century, hence the name Project 211, by providing extra funding and setting higher standards for their education and academic research. Consequently, the colleges and universities of Project 211 often enjoy higher ranking in university appraisal systems. Towards the end of the 1990s, in answer to the call of President Jiang Zemin to promote several top Chinese universities to the internationally renowned status, the Chinese government started Project 985 which would provide further funding from the state and provincial governments. Those universities naturally would enjoy even higher status in official and social evaluation.

Another distinction will be made among colleges and universities which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, provincial and or local governments because the difference in jurisdiction often means difference in funding, with those under the jurisdiction of the higher level government enjoying more favorable funding. Furthermore, these government run institutions are also differentiated from private colleges which tend to have shorter history and lower social status. In the analysis of the practices of College English reform, these distinctions will be made to reflect the different practices in different types of higher educational institutions.

### *Changes relating to teaching objectives*

According to the old *College English Syllabus*, the College English course aimed at building in the students a strong ability in reading and fair abilities in listening, speaking, writing and translating so that they could exchange information in English. Students were also expected to lay a solid linguistic foundation and have a good command of the methods of learning, which in turn would contribute to their all-round development. In the new *Curriculum Requirements*, the objectives are to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way so that they could use English to communicate effectively. The course also aims at enhancing students' intercultural communication competence and autonomous learning abilities.

Observations made in the experimental institutions revealed that the *Curriculum Requirements* was comprehensively adopted, with the new teaching objectives accepted and basic requirements generally reached. However, when the experimental and non-experimental institutions were grouped together, the situation was not the same as was expected. The survey of 530 colleges and universities (which included 180 experimental and 350 non-experimental institutions) showed that 321 of them claimed complete compliance with the national *Curriculum Requirements* while 192, or more than 1/3, of them admitted to partial compliance. When it comes to different types of universities, a greater percentage of ministerial colleges and universities claimed complete compliance than other types of schools (Table 1). Similarly, more Project 211 colleges and universities complied completely with the CECR than non-Project 211 schools (Table 2).

The answers to two other survey questions might explain why complete compliance to the *CECR* was not as what would be expected by the authorities. One question asked about the importance of the different components of the teaching objectives set in the *CECR* and another asked to select the most important skill as the teaching objective. Table 3 shows most universities regarded the "basic knowledge and skills of English" and the "practical skills of English" as the most important and gave second place of importance to "English learning strategies" and "cross-cultural communication competence". On the other hand, the aspect of "English grammar and vocabulary" still received a fair amount of attention from the universities surveyed. Table 4 shows how universities ranked the five basic English skills. Again, contrary to the greater emphasis the

**Table 1**: Whether following the *CECR* (for universities of different administrative jurisdiction)

| | Types of Universities | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ministerial | Provincial | Local | Private | Others | |
| **Complete compliance** | 65 (81.3%) | 179 (59.1%) | 29 (55.8%) | 41 (59.4%) | 5 (62.5%) | 319 (62.3%) |
| **Partial compliance** | 15 (18.8%) | 124 (40.9%) | 22 (42.3%) | 28 (40.6%) | 3 (37.5%) | 192 (37.5%) |
| **No compliance** | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (1.9%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (0.2%) |
| **Total** | 80 (100.0%) | 303 (100.0%) | 52 (100.0%) | 69 (100.0%) | 8 (100.0%) | 512[2] (100.0%) |

**Table 2**: Whether following the *CECR* (for Project 211 and non-Project 211 universities)

| | Project 211 universities | Non-Project 211 universities | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Complete compliance** | 69 (82.1%) | 243 (58.6%) | 312 (62.5%) |
| **Partial compliance** | 15 (17.9%) | 171 (41.2%) | 186 (37.3%) |
| **No compliance** | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (0.2%) | 1 (0.2%) |
| **Total** | 84 (100.0%) | 415 (100.0%) | 499 (100.0%) |

**Table 3**: Importance of teaching objectives

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basic knowledge and skills of English | 62.6% | 34.8% | 2.0% | 0.6% | 0.0% |
| Practical skills of English | 62.6% | 34.4% | 2.3% | 0.4% | 0.2% |
| English learning strategies | 29.8% | 54.5% | 14.3% | 1.4% | 0.0% |
| Cross-cultural communication competence | 22.5% | 57.6% | 17.8% | 2.0% | 0.2% |
| English grammar and vocabulary | 15.7% | 59.3% | 22.4% | 2.2% | 0.4% |
| Translation ability | 9.7% | 57.4% | 30.6% | 2.2% | 0.2% |

Note: **A** = Most important; **B** = Fairly important; **C** = Somewhat important; **D** = Not very important; **E** = Not the least important

**Table 4**: Importance of basic skills

| | Listening | Speaking | Reading | Writing | Translating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The most important skill | 35.9% | 16.1% | 44.9% | 2.0% | 1.2% |

HED–MOE attached to listening and speaking, more universities ranked reading before listening and speaking, which was the same as that prescribed by the old *College English Syllabus*.

Further analysis of the survey data shows that although the overall ranking of reading was the highest, more Project 985 and Project 211 universities selected listening as the most important skill while the other universities chose reading as the most important (see Tables 5 and 6). This indicates that the change in the teaching objectives better reflected the actual needs of the elite

[2] 530 participated in the survey but not all respondents answered all the questions. So the totals of this and the following tables may not be 530.

| **Table 5**: The most important skill selected by Project 985 and non-Project 985 universities | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Listening** | **Speaking** | **Reading** | **Writing** | **Translating** | **Total** |
| **Project 985 universities** | 15 (42.9%) | 9 (25.7%) | 10 (28.6%) | 1 (2.9%) | 0 (0.0%) | 35 (100.0%) |
| **Non-project 985 universities** | 161 (34.8%) | 71 (15.4%) | 216 (46.8%) | 9 (1.9%) | 5 (1.1%) | 462 (100.0%) |

| **Table 6**: The most important skill selected by Project 211 and non-Project 211 universities | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Listening** | **Speaking** | **Reading** | **Writing** | **Translating** | **Total** |
| **Project 211 universities** | 33 (41.3%) | 13 (16.3%) | 31 (38.8%) | 2 (2.5%) | 1 (1.3%) | 80 (100.0%) |
| **Non-project 211 universities** | 144 (34.7%) | 66 (15.9%) | 192 (46.3%) | 8 (1.9%) | 5 (1.2%) | 415 (100.0%) |

universities while it might be too early to expect the same change happening in less prestigious universities.

*Changes relating to school-based curriculum*

Recognizing the differences in the entry levels of students' English language proficiency and in the teaching resources possessed by different colleges and universities across China, the new *CECR* asks for the design of school-based College English teaching syllabus, "providing different guidance for different groups of students and instructing them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of individualized teaching" (HED–MOE, 2007, p. 23).

The survey of the 530 colleges and universities shows that over 90% of the universities claimed that they followed the *CECR* and designed their own syllabuses. But from the author's observation of the actual syllabuses submitted by the schools, it was found that most of the so-called school-based syllabuses were close imitations of the national *Curriculum Requirements* with some teaching plans based on the particular textbooks adopted by the universities.

There could be several reasons for the difficulty for universities to develop College English syllabuses based on their specific needs and bearing their own characteristics. One reason could be traced to the national *CECR*, for although it encourages colleges and universities to develop their own syllabuses according to their specific situations, the document not only provides general guidelines for College English teaching but also contains specific directions on methodologies which need to be adopted and assessment of teaching and learning. There was not much need for universities to make the additional effort to design drastically different syllabuses.

Other reasons could be related to the new teaching models promoted by the MOE and the nationally unified College English Test, which will be discussed in later parts of the paper.

Concerning the differentiated requirements for students with different entry level English language proficiency, the new *CECR* sets the Basic Requirements as compulsory for all non-English major college graduates, and at the same time puts forward Intermediate and Advanced Requirements so as to "enable those students who have a relatively higher English proficiency and stronger capacity for learning" (HED–MOE, 2007, p. 23-24). In addition to compulsory courses at the three prescribed levels, colleges and universities are required to offer a series of elective courses so as to "ensure that students at different levels receive adequate training and make improvement in their ability to use English" (p. 29).

Observations of the experimental universities show that the concepts of the three-level division and the combination of compulsory and elective courses have been popularly accepted. In actual practice, however, variations also exist among different types of universities.

| **Table 7**: Whether offering different courses for different students (for universities of different administrative jurisdiction) | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Types of Universities** | | | | | **Total** |
| | **Ministerial** | **Provincial** | **Local** | **Private** | **Others** | |
| **Yes** | 72 (93.5%) | 172 (57.9%) | 40 (78.4%) | 38 (55.1%) | 4 (50.0%) | 326 (64.9%) |
| **No** | 5 (6.5%) | 125 (42.1%) | 11 (21.6%) | 31 (44.9%) | 4 (50.0%) | 176 (35.1%) |
| **Total** | 77 (100.0%) | 297 (100.0%) | 51 (100.0%) | 69 (100.0%) | 8 (100.0%) | 502 (100.0%) |

| **Table 8**: Whether offering different courses for different students (for Project 211 and non-Project 211 universities) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Project 211 universities** | **Non-Project 211 universities** | **Total** |
| **Yes** | 76 (91.6%) | 244 (60.1%) | 320 (65.4%) |
| **No** | 7 (8.4%) | 162 (39.9%) | 169 (34.6%) |
| **Total** | 83 (100.0%) | 406 (100.0%) | 489 (100.0%) |

When responding to the question of whether students with different entry levels of English language proficiencies were offered different courses, more ministerial and Project 211 universities gave positive answers while close to half of the other universities were still offering unified courses for all their students (see Tables 7 and 8).

The survey results also revealed that few universities offered the compulsory courses that met the Intermediate and Advanced Requirements. With the improvement in the secondary school graduates' English language proficiency, the *CECR* designers hoped that more advanced English courses could be developed and offered as a compulsory component of their college education. However, many universities seemed to take this as an opportunity to reallocate the academic credits to other subject courses, because they thought that English learning consumed too much of their students' time and affected their subject learning. In this case, it was the ministerial and Project 211 universities that took the lead in reducing the academic credits for College English. Before the reform, the popular practice for almost all the colleges and universities was to allow 16 compulsory credits for College English. But as is shown in Figure 1, the new round of reform has resulted in an obvious decrease in compulsory credits for many of the universities surveyed. Tables 9 and 10 show a more obvious decrease for ministerial and Project 211 universities.

### *Changes relating to the teaching model*

In response to the sharp increase in college student enrolment at the turn of the century and the growing dissatisfaction with the lecturing model of teaching, the *CECR* requires that colleges and universities should introduce a new model of teaching which combines the use of information technology with classroom teaching "so that English language teaching and learning will be, to a certain extent, free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students' individualized and autonomous learning" (HED–MOE, 2007, p. 30). At the same time it was hoped that the new teaching model could relieve some of the heavy burdens of College English teachers incurred by the sudden college enrollment expansion.

Realizing the drastic change from the old model to the new one, the designers of the *CECR* went to such lengths as to provide detailed plans of class arrangement, the design of the online

**Figure 1**: Compulsory academic credits

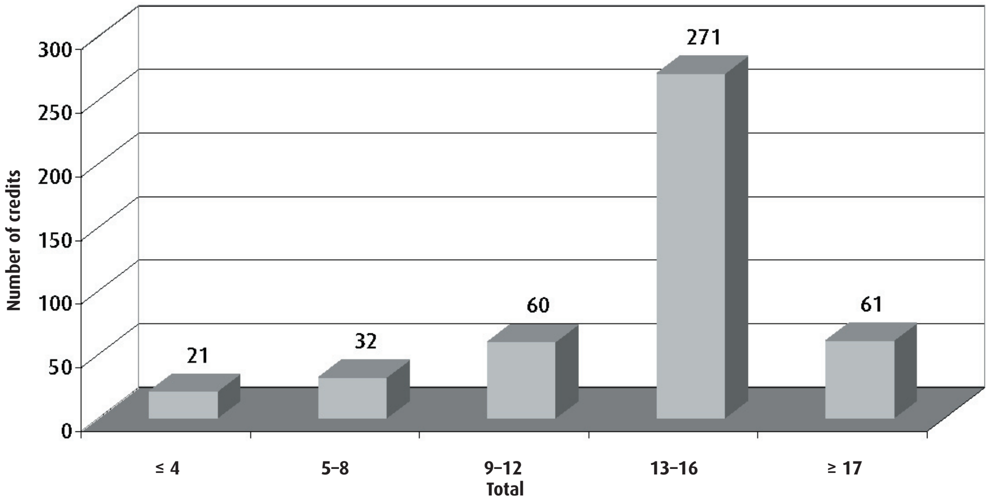



**Table 9**: Compulsory academic credits (for universities of different administrative jurisdiction)

| Number of credits | Types of Universities | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ministerial | Provincial | Local | Private | Others | |
| **≤ 4** | 2 (2.6%) | 17 (6.3%) | 0 (0.0%) | 4 (6.7%) | 0 (0.0%) | 23 (5.0%) |
| **5–8** | 9 (11.5%) | 19 (7.0%) | 2 (4.5%) | 2 (3.3%) | 1 (20.0%) | 33 (7.2%) |
| **9–12** | 20 (25.6%) | 33 (12.2%) | 5 (11.4%) | 4 (6.7%) | 1 (20.0%) | 63 (13.8%) |
| **13–16** | 42 (53.8%) | 163 (60.4%) | 34 (77.3%) | 32 (53.3%) | 2 (40.0%) | 273 (59.7%) |
| **≥ 17** | 5 (6.4%) | 38 (14.1%) | 3 (6.8%) | 18 (30.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 65 (14.2%) |
| **Total** | 78 (100.0%) | 270 (100.0%) | 44 (100.0%) | 60 (100.0%) | 5 (100.0%) | 457 (100.0%) |

**Table 10**: Compulsory academic credits (for Project 211 and non-Project 211 universities)

| Number of credits | Project 211 universities | Non-Project 211 universities | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **≤ 4** | 3 (3.7%) | 18 (5.0%) | 21 (4.7%) |
| **5–8** | 8 (9.8%) | 24 (6.6%) | 32 (7.2%) |
| **9–12** | 26 (31.7%) | 34 (9.4%) | 60 (13.5%) |
| **13–16** | 44 (53.7%) | 227 (62.5%) | 271 (60.9%) |
| **≥ 17** | 1 (1.2%) | 60 (16.5%) | 61 (13.7%) |
| **Total** | 82 (100.0%) | 363 (100.0%) | 445 (100.0%) |

learning/teaching system, and the procedures of Web assisted learning. This also explained why there was little need for universities to design their own syllabuses (see previous discussion on school-based curriculum design).

Observations from colleges and universities in China showed that the use of PowerPoint presentation almost became the norm of classroom teaching and most experimental universities delivered College English course by combining regular classroom teaching with organized or independent computer-assisted learning. Different ways of class arrangement were adopted by different universities, which include:

- Speaking (Small class) + Reading/Writing/Translation (Big class)
- Regular teaching (Small class) + Students' self-teaching with teacher supervision (Big class)
- Lecturing (Big class) + Practice (small class) + Computer-assisted self-teaching
- Lecturing (Big class) + Organized computer-assisted self-teaching and group coaching

Electronic data from the courseware collected from the experimental universities showed teachers' and students' active use of the Web for various purposes of teaching, learning, interaction and assessment. However, colleges and universities that were surveyed showed differing adoptions of Web-based instruction.

When responding to the question of how the model of "classroom teaching + computer assisted learning" was applied in their universities, 29.6% of the respondents chose "All classes", 33.5% chose "Some classes" and 36.9% chose "None". This means, despite all the efforts made by the MOE to introduce the new model to all colleges and universities, more than a third of the schools still retained the old model of teaching. There might be reasons related to the lack of necessary hardware or software or to the shortage of technical personnel. But responses to one of the survey questions concerning the teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of the new model seemed to suggest further training was needed before university teachers could be expected to fully adopt the new model. Table 11 clearly shows that less than 1/5 of the universities believed that the new model was very effective and 13.4% of the respondents even had no idea of the effectiveness of the model.

### *Changes relating to the approaches to learning*

The old of model of College English teaching was characterized by the passive role taken by the students whose main task was to obtain the knowledge of English from teachers and textbooks. This approach to learning had been proved ineffective in cultivating students' abilities to use English for communicative purposes. As a corrective measure, the *CECR* requires that the new model of teaching "should enable students to select materials and methods suited to their individual needs, obtain guidance in learning strategies, and gradually improve their autonomous learning ability" (HED–MOE, 2007, p. 31).

To promote autonomy in learning, different experimental universities came up with different and innovative measures. Some designed a separate component of student training at the beginning of their course; others offered a series of lectures on the cultivation of autonomous learning and uploaded them to the online course center; and still others conducted online forums devoted to questions addressed to autonomous learning. In addition to these direct measures, software programs or the components in online course center which cater to students' independent learning were made good use of. Furthermore, in designing classroom activities, teachers were frequently using group work, presentations, research-oriented learning, and teacher talk occupied less class time.

**Table 11**: Attitudes towards the effectiveness of the new model

| | High | Fair | Low | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All colleges and universities** | 74 (19.1%) | 247 (63.8%) | 14 (3.6%) | 52 (13.4%) | 387 (100.0%) |

| **Table 12**: Effectiveness of teaching methods | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Very effective** | **Fairly effective** | **Not effective** | **No idea** | **Total** |
| **A** | 8 (1.7%) | 351 (74.8%) | 91 (19.4%) | 19 (4.1%) | 469 (100.0%) |
| **B** | 199 (41.2%) | 273 (56.5%) | 4 (0.8%) | 7 (1.4%) | 483 (100.0%) |
| **C** | 157 (32.6%) | 270 (56.0%) | 10 (2.1%) | 45 (9.3%) | 482 (100.0%) |
| **D** | 146 (30.9%) | 234 (49.5%) | 8 (1.7%) | 85 (18.0%) | 473 (100.0%) |
| **E** | 19 (4.1%) | 173 (37.3%) | 156 (33.6%) | 116 (25.0%) | 464 (100.0%) |
| **F** | 7 (1.5%) | 85 (18.2%) | 175 (37.4%) | 201 (43.1%) | 468 (100.0%) |

Note: **A** = Lecture by teacher
**B** = Teacher's lecture + appropriate amount of practice in class
**C** = Teacher's lecture + students' independent learning based on online courseware
**D** = Teacher's lecture in big class + students' practice in small class
**E** = Teacher-organized communicative activities, without systematic introduction to linguistic knowledge
**F** = Students' independent learning based on online courseware

Since the enhancement of students' ability to learn independently is one of main objectives of the *CECR*, people's attitudes towards this objective becomes very important. However, as is shown in Table 3 in the earlier section of the paper, less than one third of the respondents in our recent survey regarded it as very important. A further question in the survey addressed the effectiveness of different teaching methods. Responses to this question also show that people still had reservations about the effectiveness of autonomous learning.

***Changes relating to testing and assessment***

As one of the key measures used by the HED–MOE to steer the reform, the CET has always been a regulating force for the College English teaching in China. But testing is a two-edged sword. It could help to bring more resources to College English teaching, but it may also result in teaching to the test, making the course deviate from the correct goals prescribed by the *CECR*. It has been the hope of the HED–MOE to reduce the negative backwash effect of the CET by increasing the ratio of subjective test items, introducing more sub-skill components into the test, adopting new test formats that bear closer resemblance to authentic language use, encouraging universities to turn CET into a non-compulsory requirement for undergraduate qualification, and issuing score reports rather than passing certificates (thus giving room for universities to set varying passing scores according to the actual English proficiencies of their students).

In addition to the reforms in the national CET, the *CECR* also lays out a number of principles for university-based practices of testing and assessment. Among the measures introduced, the document gives particular importance to the combination of summative and formative assessments because such an evaluation system not only "helps teachers obtain feedback, improve the administration of teaching, and ensure teaching quality but also provides students with an effective means to adjust their learning strategies and methods, improve their learning efficiency and achieve the desired learning effects" (HED–MOE, 2007, p. 32).

The responses to our survey question of whether the CET certificate was required for undergraduate qualification show that close to two thirds of the universities followed the directions of the MOE (see Table 13). But this government request seemed to have met with some resistance from local and private universities (see Table 14). And the same tendency was also true for Project-985/211 versus Non-Project-985/211 universities. This could probably be explained by the fact that, while the elite universities could attract applicants with higher English language proficiency and better incentive for learning the language (hence, less need for externally imposed pressure for learning), the low ranking colleges and universities needed the test to force their students to keep up with learning English because English was the only way that these colleges and universities could compete with their higher ranking peers.

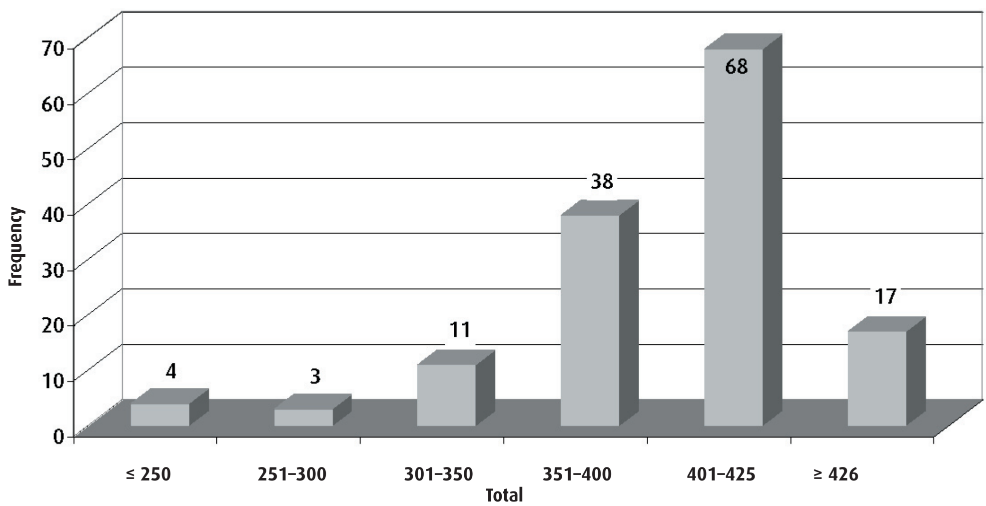
**Table 13**: Whether requiring CET certification for undergraduate qualification (for all universities surveyed[3])

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 126 | (35.7%) |
| **No** | 227 | (64.3%) |
| **Total** | 353 | (100.0%) |

**Table 14**: Whether requiring CET certificate for undergraduate qualification (for universities of different administrative jurisdiction)

| | Types of Universities | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Ministerial** | **Provincial** | **Local** | **Private** | **Others** | |
| **Yes** | 13 (22.0%) | 74 (34.7%) | 18 (56.3%) | 17 (41.5%) | 3 (75.0%) | 125 (35.8%) |
| **No** | 46 (78.0%) | 139 (65.3%) | 14 (43.8%) | 24 (58.5%) | 1 (25.0%) | 224 (64.2%) |
| **Total** | 59 (100.0%) | 213 (100.0%) | 32 (100.0%) | 41 (100.0%) | 4 (100.0%) | 349 (100.0%) |

**Figure 2**: Cutoff scores for passing CET




Another desired effect of the CET reform shown by the survey was that, among the universities that still required their students to pass the CET, there was clear variation in the cutoff scores for what constituted a "Pass", as shown in Figure 2.

Observations from the experimental universities show instances of flexible and innovative utilization of the national CET results. Some ran their own English qualification examinations but students could be exempted from this examination if they obtained a certain score from the CET. Others counted the CET score as half of the total score for undergraduate qualification. Still others linked the CET score with the results of other domestic or internationally accepted tests and allowed their students a free choice of the tests they preferred.

Concerning course work evaluation, different experimental universities also came up with different measures. Most incorporated oral and written components in their achievement tests. Students' classroom performance, use of online learning systems, and their participation in

[3] Due to a technical error, of the 530 colleges and universities surveyed, only 353 answered this question.

various other curricular and extracurricular activities related to English language learning could all count toward their final grade. More and more functions had been built into the online learning systems that could provide instant feedback on students' oral and written practices and statistics showing students' progress or relative standing in a class were also made available to both teachers and students, enabling them to make timely adjustments in their teaching and learning.

**Reflections and conclusions**

After eight years of intensive efforts made by government leaders, university teachers and students, as well as publishers and education software developers, College English, a compulsory course affecting the life of millions of college students, has undergone tremendous transformation. One of the most important driving forces behind these apparent changes was undoubtedly the direct leadership of the state government, especially the MOE (Wu & Liu, 2008). Many of the measures initiated by the government have been at least partially accepted and implemented.

The success of this top-down model of reform was attributable not only to the particular socio-political traditions which provided a favorable environment for the center-periphery model, but also to the urgency of the situation which called for immediate and effective measures to curb the growing social dissatisfaction with College English teaching. More importantly, along with the promulgation and the ensuing revision of the *CECR* and the reform of the CET, the government also took a series of supportive measures, including providing financial support to four publishers for the development of online learning systems, selecting 180 experimental and then 65 model colleges and universities for the generation of ideas and experiences to be disseminated in the later stages of the reform, supporting 437 research projects related to the reform, and organizing training programs which were attended by over 15,000 teachers from more than 1,000 colleges and universities (Zhang, 2008). These measures contributed immeasurably to the success of the endeavor.

Top-down as it was on the whole, the recent College English reform also encouraged local participation and innovation. Many colleges and universities came up with innovative ideas and practices which were either suited to their particular needs or circumstances or ready to be adopted by other institutions of a similar nature. It was the combined efforts from both the top and the grassroots level that could guarantee the sustainability of innovation (Markee, 1997).

Behind the apparent achievements made by the recent College English reform, it must be recognized at the same time that disparities still exist among different types of colleges and universities. On the whole, it seems that most of the innovative measures have been well received by most of the elite universities. But some of these measures have met with misunderstanding or even resistance. Initiators and implementers of these measures may not take the lack of action from the universities as hostility towards reform or mere irresponsibility for their students. Reasons may lie in the specific conditions the teachers and students are in, which are not ready for the kind of reform that is promoted, or in the specific social and educational environment which is different from that for which the new reform has been designed.

The lack of action may also be due to the fact that more training for both the teachers and students should be provided and more time should be allowed before real changes can be expected to take place. After all, "[c]hange is a human necessity. It evolves rather than take shape in fits and starts. Change in education is no exception (Mukhopadhyay, Pillai, Murthy, Sagar, & Ramanujam, 2009). Furthermore, teachers' psychological reactions should be taken into serious consideration, as Waters (2009) points out that resistence is a natural response to change. Instead of supressing different voices, the government should encourage people with different opinions to express their concerns. Only in this way can new solutions be worked out and timely corrections be made of the possibly erroneous policies that the implementors of innovation are trying to push.

In the initial designing stage of the reform, great emphasis was given not only to what was to be reformed but also to how the reform was to be carried out. In other words, implementors fully realized that there should be diversified requirements for colleges and universities with different educational resources and in different geographical locations, and sufficient training and education should be provided to teachers, students and university administrators. But along with the progression of the reform, more and more attention was focused on a unified format of change and a change that was expected to come at the lowest possible cost in terms of financial and human resources investment. At this time, it is important to keep in mind the lesssons from countless past educational reform projects that flexibility in the goals and methodologies of an innovative program and sustained support from the reform initiators are essential for the successful incorporation of the principles and practices introduced by the reform (Waters, 2009; White, Martin, Stimson, & Hodge, 1991).

To conclude, it seems appropriate to quote White et al. (1991),

> Curriculum innovation may be thought of as being on-going and developmental rather than as the installation of ready-made and complete solutions in a system ready and waiting to receive them. Indeed the implementation of an innovation may be only the beginning of a process of adaptation, adjustment and refinement and the innovation may require continuing support before it becomes institutionalized as part of the routines of the organization (pp. 191-192).

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# 6 Pedagogical Blogging for University Courses

■ Brad Blackstone and Chris Harwood
National University of Singapore

**ABSTRACT:** *Various forms of computer-mediated communication have resulted in the formation of multifarious online communities. Blogging is one such form that is now used widely within the university for educational purposes. This paper gives an overview of pedagogical blogging and discusses the way it was implemented in two university courses. It also proposes that because students and their teacher facilitators develop and share common interests and goals, they evolve into what Lave and Wenger (1991) have termed a "community of practice" (CoP). Following that, the paper explains how blogging in these two course CoPs extended teaching and learning out of the classroom into a class-centered "blogosphere." A theoretical justification for utilizing blogging is also provided as is a description of the manner by which a systematic approach to blogging can broaden learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction. Finally, the paper shows how students following a strict blogging regime positively view blogging as an opportunity to refine various writing skills within the context of their "real world" writing tasks.*

## Introduction

At the advent of the Internet, Warschauer (1996) suggested that computer-mediated communication would provide learners with a way "to share not only brief messages, but also lengthy (formatted or unformatted) documents—thus facilitating collaborative writing—and also graphics, sounds, and video" and that it would enable them "to publish their texts or multimedia materials to share with partner classes or with the general public." When we look at the Internet today and consider the impact on the world of over 50 million weblogs (known as blogs) (Weybret, 2010) as well as websites such as the social networking site Facebook, the video sharing site YouTube and the collaborative encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, Warschaurer's foresight was not only accurate but arguably visionary.

The popularity of these various forms of computer-mediated communication has resulted in the formation of multifarious online communities. In these communities people exchange gossip, stories, ideas, advice, insights and goods as well as various media and files, mirroring the communication that occurs between members in physical communities. This is a major reason why blogs have become popular teaching-learning platforms among educators. A blog is an easy-to-create website where anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can create, present and archive content, written or otherwise, and receive feedback from site visitors. Within an educational setting, having blogs enables learners to create, as Lee (2009) notes, a social workspace where, while adhering to group-generated values and norms, they work to collaborate in sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. In this way, blogging provides both teachers and learners with more opportunities for meaningful interaction, ultimately helping them forge vibrant online communities.

This paper gives an overview of pedagogical blogging and discusses the way it was implemented in two university courses. In addition, it suggests that since members of pedagogical blogging communities share common values and norms, interests and goals, they evolve into what Lave and Wenger (1991) have termed a "community of practice" (CoP). Following this, the paper explains how blogging in these two course CoPs extended teaching and learning out of the classroom into a class-centered "blogosphere." Of course, any learning activity in a course should be theoretically justified and systematically implemented. To that end, this paper explains the theory underpinning institutional blogging, how learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction is enhanced in the process, and how students following a strict blogging regime positively view the activity as an opportunity to refine various writing skills within the context of their "real world" writing tasks.

## Blogging and its main elements: The blog, the blog post and reader comments

Blogging is the act of bloggers communicating on blogs. After a writer has set up a blog, using one of any number of freely available blog sites—www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com are among the most well-known—they can then write and upload the post, and if need be, attach other files. Posts are archived in reverse chronological order, with the most recent post listed at the top of the main blog page. With each post, the writer can also receive comments. When writing is being shared within a particular group of bloggers, such as a class of students who have common interests and goals and who are working through similar writing tasks, the individual is given an opportunity to see how others have written on the same theme, articulate a critical response, and while reflecting on both the process and the various products, return to their own post and, if so inclined, reshape it.

The students' individual blogs then becomes a place where they can post and archive blog entries, whether written discussions on various topics, responses to questions, free writing and/or draft assignments; include photographs, songs, video clips and accessible web-links; receive critical feedback, not just from the teacher, but from anyone in a class and from other interested online parties; and analyze, evaluate and then comment on the post of others. The result is informal peer teaching and learning, which can be highly motivating as each student negotiates new understandings and develops an identity as a valued member of the learning community.

In this way, blogging serves the teacher as a means of having students interact with each other in a highly meaningful context via regularly posted assignments on course-related themes. Additionally, it can serve a teacher as a means for monitoring each student's communication within a community of practice and enable them to intervene and guide practice where necessary.

## Communities of Practice (CoP)

In a CoP, people who share a common interest, profession or goal are bound by what they do together, whether that is having lunch or discussing solutions to problems. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group (or community) that the members learn from one another, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. Toohey (1996) suggests that the CoP perspective offers a new framework for looking at second language learning, arguing that in a CoP

> ...the second language learner is seen not as internalizing the second language, but rather as a newcomer beginning to participate in the practices of a particular community. (p. 553)

Within this framework, language learning is considered a process of increasing participation in the performance of community practices.

### *CoP and learning*

Wenger (1998, p. 2) suggests that any CoP should identify itself along three dimensions:

- *What it is*—its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members
- *How it functions*—the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity
- *What it has produced*—the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

The educational focus of a CoP centers upon the talents and skills, and goals and achievements that members value. For example, in a business CoP, letter-writing skills would be seen as important. In order to effectively communicate with customers and colleagues, members would be encouraged to develop such skills, a talent for writing would be highly valued, and anyone who had won a contract through writing a series of persuasive letters would be lauded. Members of a student business CoP would also see refining of letter writing skills in English as an important goal as well as a form of professional development. While external directives and conditions may influence this understanding of what is important, the student business CoP itself, and within that, any teacher and student members themselves, would be essentially self-organizing and self-determining, setting their own goals and judging how well those are achieved. In short, the individual CoP determines what is important and why.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), new CoP members acquire skills and pursue activities by actually engaging in the practices together with expert members rather than being explicitly taught. They suggest that participation in the activities of the group is not only a condition of membership in a CoP but also "is itself an evolving form of membership" (p. 53). The same authors use the term "situated learning" to describe the learning that happens in a CoP and argue that situated learning takes place in multiple and varied ways. The learner's role in a CoP is not a single role; in fact, the learner usually participates or engages in several roles within a CoP.

In a second language or communications skills class CoP, these roles might include a learning practitioner, aspiring expert, peer tutor, least experienced member, member with the greatest IT know–how, community grammar/vocabulary/writing expert and so on. When the members of a CoP such as this interact, be it one to one, in a small group or all together, the role each plays depends on the task at hand, the personalities involved and the social dynamic of the setting. To pose an example, if students in the language class are assigned to do situational pair work, and in their pairs, need to develop answers to a reading activity, the member of the pair with the better reading skills might well take over, guiding the other toward more reliable answers. In some situations, this member might be younger and even less socially mature than the one being guided. However, within the confines of this particular task and its required skills, she or he acts as the expert of the moment. As Hanks (1991) notes, learners switching roles in this manner implies a "different sort of responsibility, a different set of relations, and a different interactive involvement" (p. 23).

It is in this context that the idea of pedagogical support being provided by a CoP is especially relevant. Similar to the concept of the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) and in line with the tenets of social constructivist learning theory (MacMahon, 1997), the CoP framework stresses the importance of social interaction in enhancing the educational process. Within the CoP framework, the processes for learning a second language or developing communication skills are not just viewed as a matter of acquisition but of participating in the social world. For that reason they become enhanced when the learner has an opportunity for playing various roles while engaging others in practice-based activities within related practice-focused communities. This reflects the sort of interaction learners experience in authentic situations, which Haneda (2000, p. 14) sums up as follows:

> The concept of a 'community of practice' in the foreign-language-learning context can therefore be best understood as applying to students who are simultaneously members of multiple communities, ranging from the classroom-bound community of teacher with student

to broader professional and recreational communities that include fluent speakers of the target language.

In short, the CoP offers learners today what they have found in specific learning situations since time immemorial, a chance to gain learning experience in a contextually rich, socially vibrant environment.

### *CoP and Web 2.0*

By 2003 the Internet and Web 2.0 technology extended the reach of CoPs further, freeing learners in educational settings from being "bound" to the classroom in the way that Haneda (2000) describes. Students can now readily engage one another and the teacher outside of the classroom. Along with near ubiquitous access to the Internet, the increasing array of Internet devices such as cell phones, laptop computers and iPads has also facilitated greater acceptance of learning theories and pedagogical practices with a CoP orientation. Long past are the times when learning was viewed as the simple acquisition of knowledge in isolation. Today, students living in regions throughout the world and studying at all levels in various education systems participate, share and collaborate in work groups and broader learning communities, often times interacting with peers with greater frequency online than face to face. Accepted as members in these multifarious groups and buoyed by the support of numerous communication channels, they not only acquire knowledge and understanding unavailable in their own homes (and sometimes not provided in their schools), they develop skills and tool sets unfamiliar to their parents and teachers.

Modern curricula around the world emphasize collaborative, task-based, student-centered learning, whereby students learn through working together in CoPs to complete tasks and activities as they would in any other community. For example, if one goal of a language class is to learn and practice new grammar points, teachers nowadays will have different groups present on different grammar points. Each group may initiate discussion on the grammar presentation inside class, and then most probably continue work outside of class: researching content, sharing what is found, and then organizing it as a presentation. The group will be doing some work face-to-face and some of it online.

It is in this context that Lave and Wenger's idea of "situated learning," born in the pre-Internet early 1990s, has been supplanted by Jones and Jo's term "ubiquitous learning," or u-learning. Jones and Jo define u-learning environments as "any setting in which students can become totally immersed in the learning process." In the modern world, this setting can be extended to almost anywhere, with the potential only limited by Internet access or the availability of a device to connect to it (2004, p. 469).

### *The university-level blogging group as CoP: A rationale*

Pedagogical blogging has been increasingly embraced by language educators as a platform that redefines the space of the classroom and enhances student-student interaction. Indeed, Davis (2004) lists thirty potential uses for blogs to complement coursework, from the now standard reflective journal to a portfolio of student work, where they post assignments based on literature readings. In fact, blogs and associated blogging activities have been used effectively for pedagogical purposes in a variety of post-secondary instructional contexts. Blogging has proven attractive to language and communication skills educators and learners alike (Blackstone, Spiri & Naganuma, 2007; Blackstone & Wilkinson, 2011; Jones, 2006) because it

- encourages course content-based discussions out of the physical classroom and beyond class time (Stanley, 2006; Williams & Jacobs, 2004);
- supports both individualized and broadly interactive communication (Cottle, 2009; Pinkman, 2005; Shifflet, 2008);
- motivates students to engage positively in the writing process (Barrios, 2003; Cottle, 2009; Shifflet, 2008; Trammel & Ferdig, 2004).

- enhances critical thinking and increases learner autonomy (Richardson, 2006);
- gives students the chance to "maximize focused exposure to language in new situations, peer collaboration, and contact with experts" (Dieu, 2004, p. 26); and
- facilitates student collaboration within a "community of learners" (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Nelson & Fernheimer, 2003; Stanley, 2006).

No matter what the justification for using blogging activities and assignments as a complement to existing coursework is, any teacher who implements a blogging component usually discovers that the "mutual engagements" taking place within this particular CoP can take on a life of their own. Given encouragement to not just post but also to interact with classmates through reader commentary, many of the student bloggers give more time to the activity than required, while the numbers and length of the blog posts usually exceeds expectations. The nature of comment responses shows a range of types from social to instructional, and thanks to the ubiquitous nature of the blogging platform, student-student interactions can take place 24 hours a day. In much the same way that among a group of Facebook friends, a member will usually be online, updating a status, uploading new photos, chatting, or simply checking the status of one's friends, within a class of bloggers, members can access and input content on their own blogs and/or the blogs of others at any time. Autonomous, asynchronous "interaction" becomes routine for the blog group CoP.

### Blogging and learner autonomy

Over the last 20 years, the concept of learner autonomy has risen to prominence and modern pedagogy promotes the idea that learners should be more independent. To encourage learner autonomy students should have a role in planning, controlling and evaluating their own learning (Wenden, 1991). Blogging activities are a way of moving students away from teacher dependence towards independent learning. When used appropriately, they encourage learners to negotiate understanding and meaning about ideas and concepts through collaboration. In effect, students use each other as a learning resource and in the process begin to take charge of and take responsibility for their own learning.

Swain (1995) refers to this kind of practice with English-learning peers as "comprehensible output." She argues that this is nearly as important as comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003) because learning takes place when the student encounters a gap in her linguistic knowledge of the second language (L2). Swain believes that by noticing the gap between what they want to say and what they are able to say, learners notice what they do not know or know only partially in a language. By then hypothesizing and testing what could be lexically, grammatically or contextually possible, they are able to modify their output so that they learn something new about the language. Consequently, learners reflect on the language they have learnt, and their output enables them to make sense of and internalize linguistic knowledge.

Pedagogical blogging is a good way for learners of English to receive and produce comprehensible input and output because it incorporates many of the principles underlying cooperative learning. For example, student bloggers could be asked to watch a short film clip and critique its content in a blog post about it. They could also be instructed to comment on each others' posts regarding the film. This activity would involve both collaborative and interactive learning, two key elements of cooperative learning.

### Pedagogical blogging: Two university-level course CoPs

Next, two studies from the National University of Singapore (NUS) English Language courses are considered. How blogging was integrated into each course is discussed as well as why establishing web-based CoPs beyond the classroom in both of these courses were an effective means of enhancing the educational process.

### *Blogging in EM1201: A basic English skills course approach*

At the start of Academic Year (AY) 2009–10, testing at the National University of Singapore (NUS) revealed that some of the recently matriculated Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YSTCM) students had a reasonable understanding of basic grammar but many had difficulty applying their understanding to contextualized grammatical errors in longer texts such as their own or other students' paragraphs. The ability to self-correct grammatical errors in longer texts is essential for non-native English speaking students studying in English as this skill is necessary for them to progress to their next level of inter-language competence.

This section of the paper briefly discusses why the blogging platform is a useful pedagogical tool for lower level university students and reports on how a blogging component was integrated into the YSTCM curriculum of the Basic English course (EM1201) at NUS to enable students to practice grammar-editing skills. It also presents and interprets findings from an attitudinal survey of a class of student bloggers about their learning experience using blogs and discusses these findings with a document analysis of the students' blog posts and comments made during the course.

YSTCM was founded in 2001 and is rapidly becoming a world-renowned music conservatory. The selection criteria for new students to the conservatory are related specifically to their musical ability. As a consequence, many of the students recruited from China, Korea, Thailand and Vietnam require supplementary English language courses to enable them to study and learn in English at university level. Most students are aged between 18 and 22 years old and 70% are from mainland China and fall between A2 and B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) for the four skills. The students can generally write simple connected sentences, which are on familiar or personal topics and can produce spoken phrases sometimes connected in a simple way. Their listening and reading skills are a little stronger but overall they have a low level of English competence.

Classroom-based action research was carried out in a class of 10 EM1201 students (nine Chinese, one Thai). As stated earlier, the students had a reasonable understanding of basic English grammar but many found it difficult applying their understanding to contextualized grammatical errors in their own texts. The challenge was how to use the blog platform to enable students to generate written comprehensible output and use this output to improve their grammar editing skills, while at the same time fostering cooperative learning and encouraging the students to be more independent in their learning outside the classroom.

### *Setting up and managing the EM1201 blogging CoP*

To give students the opportunity to practice analyzing, synthesizing and presenting information using a modern writing platform, a blogging component was introduced to the course to generate contextualized extended texts. Students used blog posts to introduce themselves and their musical influences, review concerts, discuss composer's abilities and reflect on their learning. The majority of homework assignments for the course involved writing and commenting on blog posts.

The students were partnered with a blogging "buddy" and assigned to a blogging group of four to five students within the class. Blackstone et al. (2007) note this is an effective way of guaranteeing that each member regularly receives comments on their posts and prevents "popular" students from dominating blogging activity. Each student was required to comment on their blogging buddy's posts and encouraged to comment on other members' posts within the blogging group. Students were told that their posts should be in formal English. However, to encourage more "friendly" feedback, their comments and suggestions to each other were allowed to be informal.

Also, each student was required to review his or her blog posts after in-class grammar awareness sessions (see below) and try and correct mistakes. For example, students were asked to focus on correcting article errors following article input sessions, pronoun errors following pronoun input sessions and so on. They were also asked to try and correct other mistakes related to the organization, structure and cohesion of the text and when possible comment on these problems in their blogging buddy's posts. This kind of personalized and contextualized text editing practice was precisely what the students needed to improve.

To provide students with appropriate models of feedback and to show them that their blog contributions were being monitored, the teacher posted comments about student posts and made blog entries as well. This was an essential pedagogical and administrative element as he was able to praise suitable student suggestions and prevent misunderstanding occurring with incorrect suggestions. The teacher's participation also seemed to have motivated the students to participate more because it demonstrated he was engaged in the blogging process with the students. Indeed, one student blogger gently 'reprimanded' the teacher in a post when he did not post any comments one week.

### *In-class blog editing*

To further practice correcting contextualized grammatical errors in long texts, the music students were given the opportunity to edit their blogs in-class in a computer classroom. Blogging buddy pairs were instructed to review each other's blog posts and consider their organization, cohesion and grammar. They were asked to discuss any mistakes or problems and edit their posts where necessary and to post comments about some of the observations they were making. This was done to support the teacher's observations of the process in the evaluation of the activity. To encourage the students to be more independent in their learning, when they asked the teacher questions, he opened the question up to the class and encouraged peer correction as much as possible. It was thought this would promote learner autonomy and enhance learning outcomes by allowing students to negotiate meaning and understanding themselves and also provided good practice in the self correction skills that needed to be improved.

### *Grammar awareness*

It was necessary to ensure that students received classroom input and practice of the kind of editing skills they would be required to reproduce on their blog posts for homework. Table 1 below shows how this was timetabled. Course EM1201 ran for 12 weeks with two-hour classes twice a week. Grammar awareness sessions were written into the curriculum and were taught in the two classes prior to the grammar editing homework. For example, in week three, the students reviewed the guidelines for the use of pronouns in class and were given opportunities to check their understanding of them in both discreet item and freer practice activities.

During the in-class grammar awareness sessions, the music students demonstrated a good basic understanding of grammar and performed well with the discrete item practice. However, when they tried to look for grammatical mistakes in the longer texts, they started to question their understanding of grammar and began discussing the subject in more depth, asking each other what they thought was right and wrong, and why. They also started to refer to the grammar guidelines that had been reviewed earlier in the class. This initial guided practice was essential scaffolding for the homework, where they reviewed and edited their own blog posts for grammar errors.

**Table 1**: Blogging schedule (grammar editing)

| Week | Tutorial 1 | Tutorial 2 | Homework |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Paragraph Writing (1)<br>**Grammar: Pronouns (1)** | Presentation Skills (1)<br>**Grammar: Pronouns (2)** | Tutorial 1: 2nd Write blog post<br>Tutorial 2: Comment on blogging partners' post and **edit blogs for pronoun errors**. |

### *EM1201 blog impressions and student feedback*

To evaluate the effectiveness of using blogs to practice grammar editing skills, the following methodology was used.

In order to monitor the correction process, the initial blog posts were copied onto a document. Once student editing had taken place, it was possible for the teacher to compare the initial post with the edited version. Next, each edited section was briefly looked at to determine if the student had improved the text in the editing process; whether, for example, students had successfully edited the tense, article and pronoun errors or whether they were still negotiating meaning about the grammatical forms they had written. It was thought that this activity would both provide an insight into the usefulness of the in-class grammar awareness sessions and evidence of the students' use of the blog platform to edit their texts and practice their grammar editing skills. A selection of these text comparisons is given in Appendix 1.

In addition, the comments students posted to each other with grammar editing suggestions about their blog posts were also collated by the teacher to determine if the learners gave each other useful suggestions and feedback about their English language skills. A selection of these comments and suggestions is presented in Appendix 2.

To gather and record student perceptions and beliefs about blogging and grammar editing on the course, the music students were asked to complete a survey at the end of the semester. The survey used a Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to assess student responses to 26 questions about writing in general, as well as blogging on the course. A summary of the survey findings is provided in Appendix 3.

### *EM1201 blog impressions: Findings and discussion*

The students' perceptions of their learning and the use of blogs were very positive. One hundred percent agreed blogging helped them find mistakes in their work. One hundred percent also agreed that looking for grammar mistakes in their blogs made them think a lot more about grammar. Eighty percent said they had learnt grammar from their classmates and 90% said they had helped correct their classmates' English. Furthermore, 100% of students agreed that receiving feedback from a blogging partner was an effective way of improving their posts, of which 60% strongly agreed. This supports the idea that blogging is a student-centered, peer focused activity (Glogoff, 2005).

These figures are particularly encouraging when the educational background of the sample is considered. All the students had previously been taught English in a teacher centered-classroom using the grammar translation method. As Wu (2004) notes, culturally Chinese learners perceive their teachers to be an authoritative and domineering source of knowledge. Generally students are obedient and respectful and feel that they should learn from the teacher rather than from one another. The student feedback from the questionnaire indicates the EM1201 students altered these perceptions about learning. It shows that students believed they learnt from each other and that blogging facilitated this student-centered learning. It also suggests that students were now adopting practices about meaning, understanding and learning from this new CoP in Singapore and comparing them favorably with the practices they had left behind in their educational CoPs in their native countries.

This positive feedback was supported by comments the students made to each other when blogging. Eighty percent of students posted more than the required number of posts and comments and gave and received a lot of useful grammatical suggestions, such as, "I think you should change *chosen* to *choose*" as well as advice on content such as, "I think you need write [sic] something about how this piece makes you feel and not only introduce it". (More examples are given in Appendix 1.)

Other comments unrelated to the coursework are also noteworthy. They provide an insight in to the kind of social and learning interactions that occurred in the web-based CoP. Students asked for help, empathized, praised and requested more information much like members would in any community. Below are some examples taken from the EM1201 blog posts.

> "It's very nice blog. Would you like to teach me how to add the audio file, please?"
>
> "That's amazing that you can play three different instruments. I wish I can play the cello also!!!"
>
> "....your blog is looking great - I understand the freedom you enjoy in game music...."
>
> "....could you post a link that he is playing?"
>
> (From the blog musicisum2, 2010)

These EM1201 student comments are an indication of the influence of the blogging community to act as a social lubricant in educational contexts. Indeed, before and sometimes during classes, the students were observed discussing topics that had started online and were brought to the physical classroom and vice-versa. This sped up the class bonding process and made classroom discussions and interactions more intimate and personalized. It also provided live documented evidence of the usefulness of web-based CoPs in facilitating and supporting learning.

In previous semesters trying to persuade students to practice grammar editing skills outside the classroom was very difficult. The music students are very busy with their core modules as well as the practicing and rehearsals they are involved with for live performances. The fact that most students posted more than the required number of posts indicates that they were highly engaged and found the activity useful. This is supported by student survey findings that show that 100% of students thought receiving feedback on written posts was positive and believed blogging was a good way to learn from other students.

Another benefit of this kind of written interaction was that students became more comfortable correcting one another verbally in class. For example, when the students worked on an essay using *process writing*, the learners in the class that had been doing the grammar editing using blogs were much more willing to give critical feedback to one another than the learners in classes which had not blog edited. This was because they had practiced giving and receiving feedback in their blog posts and were transferring these skills to the process writing activity in class.

Appendix 2 gives a selection of the type of student grammar editing completed on the course. It illustrates the kinds of errors that were corrected and provides some examples of attempted corrections. The in-class grammar awareness sessions proved to be extremely useful for the students as many of the corrections were related to the grammar topics discussed and practiced in-class. Furthermore, after analyzing the students' grammar editing in the first week, it became apparent that they were identifying and correcting many more errors than the ones that they were asked to primarily focus on. For example, Appendix 2, comment 8 shows a student edit of the modal *must* to the modal *have*. This is a significant self-correction at this basic learner level and shows a real negotiation of meaning and understanding of modality took place. In addition, comment 9 is an edit of noun choice replacing *sound* with *melody*. This shows the students reflected on their word choice, realized they needed to be more specific and managed to select a more appropriate noun. It also suggests that the blogging activity encouraged learners to take charge of their own learning, becoming more autonomous in the process.

Another advantage of keeping a record of student's original posts and the edited versions was that it was possible to identify, for example, grammatical misunderstandings in the meaning and use of definite articles (see Appendix 2, comment 2) and clarify understanding with the students individually during the course conferencing sessions.

Observations of the in-class blog editing were also very positive. The students were lively and engaged throughout the class and enjoyed reading, commenting and correcting each other's posts. It was noticeable that the students were immediately comfortable exchanging advice and suggestions with each other. One possible reason for this is that, prior to the in-class blog editing session, they had given each other written feedback about their work as part of their blogging homework. This practiced written feedback gave them the confidence to voice their suggestions to their blogging buddy in class. As with the in-class process writing of the essay referred to earlier, the blogging activity enabled students to transfer skills honed on the blogging platform outside the classroom to face-to-face communication in the classroom.

Using blogs to support student learning was very successful with the EM1201 class at NUS. The students improved their grammar editing skills, showed an increase in motivation and became more autonomous learners. Clearly, blogs can be a very useful and adaptable learning aid that can promote student-centered learning through the establishment of online CoPs. The challenge for educators is to determine how to appropriately integrate blogs into curricula to best meet their students' needs.

**Blogging in ES2007S: A professional communication course approach**

"Professional Communication: Principles and Practice" (ES2007S) is offered as an elective to upper-level science and engineering students at NUS. ES2007S has the stated goal of enabling the students to become more effective communicators within various social settings, especially in the workplace. By the end of the course, they are supposed to be able to (a) know and apply the principles of communication to develop strategies for a successful exchange of ideas with others, and (b) plan, construct and express spoken and written messages clearly, convincingly and professionally, which are fitting to audience, context, and purpose. Each of these proposed learning outcomes is in line with the communication skills described as essential in a survey of 104 Silicon Valley employers who were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with newly hired employees (Stevens, 2005).

To achieve the relevant communication skills objectives in ES2007S, the students read about the fundamentals of interpersonal, intercultural, nonverbal, business communication and associated communication theories, review strategies for active listening, effective writing, speaking, presenting, and conducting survey-based research, and work through related class activities and skill builders. Using these processes as a foundation, they then practice effective communication through several series of tasks: going through an application process, including writing an application letter and a resume and doing a mock interview; evaluating faulty business letters and writing effective ones; and doing a survey-based research project within a small group, which involves conducting a formal meeting in order to reach consensus on a research topic, writing meeting minutes, planning primary and secondary research, developing an online survey instrument and interview questions for the primary research, analyzing data, describing the research in a written report, and finally, presenting the research project orally.

After teaching this course for AY 2007–8, the teacher felt that student engagement with two course elements, discussions of the course content and effective writing practice, could be better supported by a more comprehensive writing/discussion regime. Having successfully used pedagogical blogging in an English for Academic Purposes course for first-year engineering students, the teacher asked this question: might blogging serve learners in ES2007S equally well?

It was within this context that he decided to implement a term-length series of blogging activities with the goal of providing each student with more opportunities to share ideas with classmates and the teacher on the course content, to reflect on what was being learned, and to practice and refine written communication skills. After being used for two semesters in AY 2008–9, the blogging activity seems to have fulfilled these goals and provided students with a meaningful collaborative learning experience.

This section

- describes pedagogical blogging as it was used with 20 tutorial groups of 336 students conducted by six teachers during two semesters at NUS;
- describes two novel components: the blogging buddy and the blogging group;

- summarizes the ES2007S blogging process and content topics;
- provides a brief description of how these own students' blogs were evaluated; and
- relates impressions of the blogging activity from various viewpoints, including those filtered from a term-end anonymous attitudinal survey of all ES2007S students.

***Blogging in ES2007S: A rationale***

Blogging was used in ES2007S as a way of having the students further explore in more detailed discussion the communication principles they had been learning, apply these principles to authentic communication situations, and reflect on their learning. For this reason, the blogging activity was listed in the course syllabus as an "e-portfolio." What differentiated the blogging activity from a paper portfolio, however, was the fact that reader commentary was regularly provided by, first, each student's personal editor, or blogging buddy, then by members of a subgroup of the class, the blogging group, and eventually by other classmates and the course instructor. Another value-added difference in the blogging was that each student's posts could be accessed by anyone with the student's blog address.

***The blogging buddy and the blogging group***

As mentioned earlier, previous pedagogical blogging experiences have shown that when students are free to make comments on posts by anyone in a given class, the most popular students receive many comments while others receive few or none (Blackstone et al., 2007; Cottle, 2009). Assigning each student in a class a blogging buddy and a blogging group, which is a subset of the class at large, is an effective means of guaranteeing that each member regularly receives comments on their post. By creating groups of five to six students in a class of 15 to 18 and then requiring each group member to comment on at least two or more of the group members' posts, a teacher can create conducive conditions for all students to gain meaningful feedback. Moreover, this system does not restrict a student's post commentary to being made only on the posts of blogging group members. Indeed, students usually make comments on nearly as many non-blogging group members' posts as they do on group members' posts.

In the ES2007S classes, each student selected her or his blogging buddy from within the assigned blogging group. The rationale for requiring a blogging buddy was that when each student in a class has someone acting as a first-draft editor, the "published" posts are of higher quality. "The blogging buddy is the initial peer reviewer, the first or final-draft reader, the one who acts both as the writer's good conscience—useful for motivational purposes—and as his/her proof-reader—in that way, also a surrogate teacher" (Blackstone et al., 2007, p. 9). The value that such editing practice has in the context of helping students develop better written communication skills goes beyond the blogging exercise itself. In reference to her findings from the survey of Silicon Valley employers, Stevens (2005, p. 5) states that the employer feedback she gathered makes the case "for more rigorous writing and editing standards in college courses. Establishing strong editing skills can make students more responsible for accuracy in the quantitative business subjects and help them develop into stronger writers."

Such editing need not be a laborious process. Students can be informed that the blogging buddy can make a quick read of the classmate's pre-post writing as long as they offer clear, concise suggestions for changes in content, organization and/or language use, if those are needed. The value of having such an editor was clearly recognized by ES2007S students. On an end-of-term anonymous survey evaluation of blogging in ES2007S, similar to the one used in EM1201, for Semesters 1 and 2, 2008/2009, 87.9% of the 108 students indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that "Receiving feedback from a blogging buddy is a positive learning experience."

*The ES2007S blogging process and content topics*

The process for the blogging component of ES2007S proceeded as follows:

- Each student created their own blog site.
- Each gave their blog address to the teacher and classmates, who included a hyperlink to that address in a list of classmate names on their own blog sites.
- Each was assigned a blogging group. From within that group, each chose a blogging buddy.
- Within the first week of classes, each wrote a post, which was expected to be a multi-paragraph response of 250 to 300 words to an assigned topic related to the course content. Before posting, each had their first draft read by the blogging buddy. After making any necessary changes, each posted their edited writing on the blog.
- Finally, within one week of the assigned due date for the post, each student was required to read and make comments on the blog posts of at least three classmates.

The ES2007S students were told that two of the classmates' posts read had to be from the assigned blogging group, while the third read could be from the class at large. Seven post assignments were required for each of the two semesters but students were encouraged to make additional posts if they desired. At least 50% of students voluntarily made more than the required seven posts. Nearly all students made more than the required number of comments on their classmates' posts, once again showing their enthusiasm as members of the class blogging community.

Blog post topics during AY 2008–9 included the value of effective communication skills, an interpersonal communication problem, an intercultural observation scenario, a critique of a business communication, an autobiographical/personal statement for use in a job or graduate school application, an open topic related to any communication issue, and reflective posts, one on the course research project or the oral presentation and another on overall learning throughout the course.

*Assessing the blogging process*

Paraphrasing Kennedy (2003), Jones (2006, p. 82) states "blogs combine the best elements of portfolio-driven courses where student work is collected, edited, and assessed, with the immediacy of publishing to a virtual audience." In ES2007S, because the blogging activity, which constituted 20% of the course grade, was categorized as the "e-portfolio," students understood that their blog work—both posting and commenting—would be evaluated in total at the end of the term. At the start of each term a rubric was distributed to students (and other course teachers) describing ideal blogging behavior in terms of appropriate content, good organization and language use, and other variables such as the frequency of posting and the nature of effective comments on a classmate's post.

The evaluation and assessment of the blogs involved the teacher reading every student's blog post during the week after the post was made, usually allowing sufficient time for the student's classmates to make comments first. In addition to leaving brief qualitative comments on the posts regarding content, organization and/or language use, the teacher scored each post "holistically," along a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being "exceptional," 3 "very good," 2 "adequate," and 1 "mediocre." The assessment focus was on how clearly and completely the content responded to the assignment and how accurate the language use was. These marks were entered into a database but not shown to students to prevent them from being obsessed about their points.

At various times during the term, however, selected blog posts were discussed during class, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each. In addition, self-evaluation forms were distributed to all students at the start of the term that required them to assess their posts using the same 4-level scale. The bloggers were also requested to estimate the number of comments they had made on their classmates' posts for each assignment and the number of comments others had made on their own. The form was collected at the end of the term. Throughout the term notes were made about how well each student commented on their classmates' posts and these were factored in when allotting points for the blogging component.

### *ES2007S blog impressions: Preliminary survey of students, findings and discussion*

As with any newly instituted teaching strategy or activity, various problems became apparent in the use of blogging on the course. These included the fact that some of the course teachers asked to utilize this activity as part of the course had never worked with blogs before and had difficulty in understanding how to best integrate them into their lessons. Some teachers also were not sure to what extent they needed to give students feedback. Another problem for teachers was determining the best means of evaluating the students' blogging while not becoming overburdened. Related to this was the fact that since ES2007S already included five marked assignments, students and teachers alike expressed some concern at the demands of having to do the bi-weekly blogging tasks.

Still, considering the scope of the blogging exercise and the potential benefits in light of the initial objectives, these problems seemed manageable. It was within that context that a preliminary research study of student attitudes toward blogging was conducted. The core research question was this: Had the blogging component achieved the goals of giving students more opportunities for sharing ideas on the course content, reflecting on what was being learned, and practicing and refining written communication skills? The answer voiced by a majority of the students in their blogs and in their opinions expressed on the end-of-term anonymous survey was yes.

The aforementioned survey was set up using surveymonkey.com, an online survey design site, and sent to all ES2007S students after the last tutorial session. Survey items were of various types. For the purposes of this paper, only student responses to a selection of the Likert-type scaling statements of agreement/disagreement have been considered. Key areas surveyed included those that are described below.

A key teaching focus of ES2007S is to give students an opportunity to put into practice, within a real world context, those communication principles read about and discussed in the course. It was therefore necessary to address "communication" as a survey item in the context of the blogging regime. To this end, for the statement "Blogging is a good way to communicate with classmates and the teacher," 85% of the 120 respondents who completed the survey over two semesters indicated that they strongly agreed/agreed. It is important to note that this agreement increased from 75% in Semester 1 to 96.4% in Semester 2. One possible explanation for this change lies in the extent to which teacher feedback was given on student posts. In the case where teachers neglected to give feedback to students, as was true in Semester 1, there was widespread student criticism. That practice changed in Semester 2. For this reason, it can be suggested the 21.4 point increase in the percentage of favorable opinions to the fact that as teachers developed more familiarity with blogging, they recognized that students expected their feedback.

Assessing student perception of the influence that blogging might have had on written communication skills development also seemed relevant. When asked to rate their agreement/disagreement with the statement "Blogging helped me improve my written communication skills," 81.6% of the 120 respondents answered in the affirmative. This increased from 75% in Semester 1 to 89.3% in Semester 2.

Because the blogging work entailed peer editing a blogging buddy's post and giving constructive feedback on the blog posts themselves, it seemed pertinent to include an item on collaboration. This item also might underscore the degree to which students felt that their CoP had supported their learning. For the statement "Blogging is an effective means of my collaborating with others in learning," 77.5% of the 120 respondents strongly agreed/agreed. This increased from 68.7% in Semester 1 to 87.5% in Semester 2. Clearly, the student blogger's sense of being a valued member of the CoP is reflected by these results.

In an effort to determine how students might view the commentary added to their posts, they were asked to rate their agreement with a statement related to the positive value of receiving feedback. A convincing 96% of the 120 respondents—95.3% in Semester 1 and 96.4% in Semester 2—expressed agreement. Again, general student satisfaction with the way that their learning community supported the practice of them making blog commentary is exhibited by this item.

Of course, judging an activity by a limited number of students' perceptions is not a sufficient means of evaluating its efficacy. However, for a course in communication skills, impressions as evidenced by this quote from one student's final reflective post do offer a substantial testament to the power of blogging when used appropriately to establish a nurturing CoP:

> "What I enjoyed about this module was that I had the chance to present myself to an audience through physical interactions (e.g. the oral presentation) and... cyber interactions. Blogging, I feel, lessens many of the restrictions we impose on ourselves during face-to-face interactions. As I read the entries of my other classmates, I start to see the many facets of their individual characters. On my part, I loved the blogging activity even though I was rushed for time at certain times. It seems like blogging for ES2007S is the only time I start prodding my brain and truly reflect all kinds of issues. The challenge was to put all those reflections and thoughts into the most appropriate words and of course, in good grammar." (Suzuki, 2009)

## Conclusion

For teachers who have seen how blogging extends CoPs beyond the classroom and the extent to which learning outcomes of the students engaged in pedagogical blogging improve, the question is no longer whether blogging is an effective learning aid or not but how to best implement it in curricula. Therefore, further research needs to address its implementation in to different courses to address the challenges that teachers face in areas such as assessment and time management. Further research should also investigate the nature of the feedback given by blogging buddies and the different CoP roles they assume that are inferred in the feedback. More studies on the relationship between blogging activities and specific skills development are also necessary. Only then will the full potential that the blogging platform has for enhancing student motivation, supporting student collaboration, facilitating language and communication skills development, and transforming the boundaries of any given learning community be fully realized.

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### Appendix 1: Student comments and suggestions

1. I think that you want to use the word "join" but you write the other word "joy" down.
2. There are several problems in your essay: "What's the music means to me"—should be "what does the music mean to me"? and "he just sing with his memory"—is it "he just sing by his memory"? And, when you want to show a YouTube clap, you can copy the "Embed" then type it.
3. It should be "talent" not "talente". And—every moment with his should be "his every moment". Also I think "the musicians must trusted in him" should be "the musicians trusted him", "it not about how old is he" should be "it does not relate to his age".
4. I found some mistakes in your work, you can correct them then your journal will be better. The first one is "Ye I know your guys "maybe it is "Ye I know you guys". The second one is "can not" should better be "cannot" shorthand should better be corrected to normal typing. Such as "didn't" should better be "did not".
5. Maybe you can use "concern" instead of "consider" it has lots = there are lots difficulties informations = information
6. I think we can say the melody is very ordinary or it just has an ordinary melody rather than it is a ordinary melody.
7. However, I don't understand what you mean by extremely well. I know the meaning of it. But I feel this adverb is too affirmative. Conductors are learning pieces as well. Every conductor has their own perspective to one piece. It is hard to define which one is more close to the composer's will.
8. I found some mistake in your journal. 1st, I think you should change 'CHOSEN' to 'CHOOSE' 2nd, I think 'change something from ' is better than 'To'.
9. I think you also need write something about how this piece make you feel, not only introduce a piece.
10. I think you can write more specifically. Why it is a wrong era in 1970s? You can briefly introduce some of the information that you mentioned Suggestion: Trained strictly. No need "the" before "music". He was only 18. In those years, he led his orchestra...By his age = because of his age. He was also appointed ....in 2009

### Appendix 2: Student grammar editing

| | Original post | Edited post | Successful edit | Still negotiating meaning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I have been study playing violin for 19 years | I have <u>been playing</u> violin for 19 years. | ✓ | |
| 2. | When the children are over one full year old. | When <u>the</u> children are on their <u>one year old</u> birthday | | ✓ |
| 3. | I began to learn the composition. | I began to *learn composition*. | ✓ | |
| 4. | I realized it is such important that can easily influence my mood. | I realized <u>how easily it</u> could influence my mood. | ✓ | |
| 5. | He would warm up for half a hour. | He would warm up for half <u>an</u> hour. | ✓ | |
| 6. | It seems that is all the memory it left. | It seems <u>like</u> that is all the memory <u>he</u> left. | | ✓ |
| 7. | How come a man wear a high-heeled shoes. | How can a man <u>wear high-heeled</u> shoes. | ✓ | |
| 8. | I got new assignment, I must do it. | I got a new assignment, <u>that I have to do</u>. | ✓ | |
| 9. | The sound is so smooth. | The <u>melody</u> is so smooth. | ✓ | |
| 10. | In my opinion, this world can united because of this kind of music. | In my opinion, <u>the</u> world can united by this kind of music. | | ✓ |

**Appendix 3: Student survey**

| | Writing and blogging | (%) Strongly agree | (%) Agree | (%) Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I like writing in general | 40 | 60 | |
| 2. | I like it when my teacher gives comments on my writing. | 80 | 20 | |
| 3. | I like it when a classmate gives comments on my writing. | 70 | 30 | 10 |
| 4. | I like making comments on a classmate's writing. | 30 | 40 | 30 |
| 5. | I found grammar editing my essay in class useful. | 80 | 10 | 10 |
| 6. | I learnt English grammar from my classmates. | 40 | 40 | 20 |
| 7. | I helped my classmates correct their English. | 30 | 60 | 10 |
| 8. | I like blogging as an activity. | 30 | 60 | 10 |
| 9. | I blog in my free time in my first language. | 10 | 60 | 30 |
| 10. | I like posting witing assignments on my blog. | 30 | 60 | 10 |
| 11. | I like reading my classmates' written posts. | 30 | 70 | |
| 12. | I like my teacher making comments on my posts. | 90 | 10 | |
| 13. | Receiving feedback on my written posts is a positive experience. | 70 | 30 | |
| 14. | Blogging is a good way to learn from other students. | 60 | 40 | |
| 15. | I would like to continue blogging. | 60 | 40 | |

| | Blogging and grammar | (%) Strongly agree | (%) Agree | (%) Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Blogging on this course was a good way to communicate with classmates and the teacher. | 60 | 40 | |
| 2. | Blogging in this course has helped me improve my writing skills. | 70 | 30 | |
| 3. | Blogging on EM1201 helped me find grammar mistakes in my work. | 70 | 30 | |
| 4. | Looking for grammar mistakes on my blog and my classmates' blog really made me think more about grammar. | 50 | 50 | |
| 5. | Blogging has been a positive learning experience. | 60 | 40 | |
| 6. | I like having a blogging partner. | 30 | 50 | 20 |
| 7. | Receiving feedback from a blogging partner is effective for improving my post. | 60 | 40 | |
| 8. | Having a blogging partner encourages me to write better posts. | 60 | 40 | |
| 9. | Receiving feedback from a blogging partner is effective for improving my writing skills. | 40 | 60 | |
| 10. | Receiving feedback from a blogging partner is a positive learning experience. | 50 | 50 | |
| 11. | Giving feedback on my blogging partner's post is a positive learning experience. | 50 | 50 | |

# 7 Attractive Factors for E-learners

■ Charatdao Intratat
King Mongkut's University of Technology

**ABSTRACT:** *Educational psychologists assert that a learner's motivation initiates his behavior and persistence in learning activities (Woolfolk, 2007; Stipek, 1998). His motivation may have influenced his efforts and as these efforts prove successful, his sense of self-efficacy increases, and in turn, improves motivation (Elliot et al., 2000). Most studies claim that students have positive attitudes toward e-learning (Todman & Dick, 1993; Intratat, 2007). However, some intrinsic personal factors such as gender and age affect the success levels of the e-learners. Further, extrinsic environmental factors such as technical problems, pressure of work and lack of time have an impact on students' withdrawal levels from e-learning programmes (Packam, et al., 2004). In order to investigate the attractive factors that encourage e-learners to develop as autonomous learners, this study surveyed the opinions of university students who had experienced studying with e-materials. The subjects in the study were 3,080 undergraduates and graduate students from all nine faculties at the King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). The study focused on the students' reasons for using the computer and the e-materials which they did frequently. The major findings indicate that they used computers mostly to communicate with friends, and to search for general and academic information. The most frequently visited websites were described as user-friendly, equipped with up-to-date general knowledge and academic information and were directly related to the students' reports or homework.*

## Introduction

Developers of e-materials such as computer assisted language learning (CALL) and educational web designers share a similar goal with language teachers that their learners will study or practice successfully throughout the learning process. In the event that the target groups have not accomplished their learning tasks, the developers and designers expect that their materials will serve the practical needs of the learners. They hope that their materials will encourage the learners to persist despite their difficulties and continue to study regularly. Most of all, it would be ideal if the learners could manage a self-directed performance, because this would develop an autonomous learning mindset suitable for life-long study. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential for developers and designers to find not only interesting content but also techniques to create attractive, stimulating, and encouraging materials.

However, attracting and preserving the learners' interest in study is difficult because learners will not perform self-directed and self-regulated e-learning unless they are motivated. Many educational psychologists also accept that a learner's motivation positively influences his behavior and enhances his persistence in learning activities (Woolfolk, 2007; Stipek, 1998).

Generally, motivation is classified into two types—intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is influenced by personal factors such as the need to conquer, their interests, curiosity, beliefs, expectation, enjoyment, self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-determination. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is influenced by external environmental factors such as rewards, social pressure, punishment, maintaining identity, and group acceptance. When a learner works to fulfill his personal interest, he is inspired by intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). In addition, his motivation may have influenced his efforts and as these efforts prove successful, his sense of self-efficacy increases, and this in turn, improves his motivation (Elliott et al., 2000).

This viewpoint purports that a learner's habit of learning autonomously is directly supported by his intrinsic motivation. When the learner has self-esteem and self-confidence in his achievement, he develops strong interest in his work with greater persistence and effort (Marsh, 2004).

Intrinsic motivation is also inspired by the learner's creativity, flexibility, and ego needs to be competent and to exercise personal control. A number of educational psychologists suggested general principles for a motivating material: it should provide immediate feedback (Hudson, 1984) and it should be interesting and enjoyable (Elliott, 2000). The material should also provide challenging and varied learning activities to maintain interest (Marsh, 2004) and should enable the student to aim for achievable short-term goals (Marsh, 2004; Woolfolk, 2007). In addition, the requirement for the output in the tasks should be clear and new techniques and methods such as simulations and games should be used to arouse the learner's curiosity. However, familiar background knowledge of the learner is needed as a stepping stone (Marsh, 2004). For this reason the material should be comparable to real world situations in which the learners can exercise their choice of action and control of effect. Such active involvement creates positive emotions which will facilitate learning and performance (McCombs, 2007).

Several studies also indicate that the use of e-materials such as CALL is a way to improve foreign language teaching and learning. Most studies agree that students have positive attitudes toward e-learning (Todman & Dick, 1993; Intratat, 2007). This supports the principles for motivating materials because e-materials are current and engaging and they arouse the learner's curiosity and excitement. Moreover, they are designed to help the learners privately and automatically. Since e-materials usually provide the answers after the learners commit a few wrong attempts, they reduce the learners' embarrassment and anxiety (Elliott, 2000).

The studies referred to above claim that e-materials should be the most appropriate tool for modern learners. However, some intrinsic personal factors such as sex and age affect the success level of e-learners and extrinsic environmental factors such as technical problems, pressure of work and lack of time result in students' withdrawal levels from e-learning programs (Packham et al., 2004). It is therefore significant to investigate the factors that render e-materials effective in encouraging learners to keep on studying with them.

## Purpose of the study

This study surveyed the opinions of KMUTT students who had experiences in studying with e-materials. The purposes of the study are as follows:

- To find out the students' purposes when using computers, the contents of e-materials and the reasons for their frequent visits to preferred websites.
- To explore the factors that might encourage e-learners to develop as autonomous learners.

## Research method

The subjects, instruments and data analysis used in this study are as follows.

- The subjects in the study were 3,080 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the first semester of 2008. There were 2,715 undergraduate students and 365 graduate students representing approximately 25% and 5.8% respectively of the undergraduate and graduate population from all nine faculties at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangkok, Thailand.
- The instrument used in the study was a set of questionnaires, distributed by selected sampling. It consisted of questions with Likert scale answers and some open-ended questions for additional suggestions or comments.

The questions in the first part probed the students' purposes when using computers such as when communicating with friends, searching for general or academic information, entertaining themselves, practicing skills on their own or those assigned by teachers as well as when engaging in hobbies or part-time jobs. The questions in the second part were concerned about the content of academic websites that the students regularly visited. Certain characteristics were listed such as content that may be examined, general up-to-date information, exercises with key answers, illustrations and games, information for reports or homework, suitable vocabulary or a Thai translation facility, and a user-friendly layout.

The questions in the third part sought the reasons for students' frequent visits to their favourite websites. The choices of reasons included being able to study at a convenient time and place, to use their free time constructively, to practice skills and to gain new knowledge. Preferring to study with e-materials, and following suggestions from lecturers and recommendations from peers or seniors were also provided as choices.

- The data collected were analyzed for means and SD. The difference between groups was analyzed by t-test and one-way ANOVA for statistical significance. The results of students' opinions were interpreted, applying the ranking by Best (1981) as follows:
  1.00–1.70 = the least
  1.80–2.50 = less
  2.60–3.30 = moderate
  3.40–4.10 = much
  4.20–5.00 = the most

## Findings

### *The students' purposes of using computers*

On the whole, all the students' purposes could be interpreted as moderately popular ($\bar{x}$ = 3.30, *SD* = 1.0802). The purpose to use computers to search for general information of their interest ($\bar{x}$ = 3.92) was rated the highest. The next most popular purposes were contacting friends via e-mail or Hi-Five ($\bar{x}$ = 3.76) and searching information for reports or homework. Entertainment such as playing computer games was the students' fourth most popular purpose ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50). Studying or practicing as assigned by teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.00) and self- studying ($\bar{x}$ = 3.01) were moderately popular and engaging with hobbies and part-time jobs ($\bar{x}$ = 2.22) were less popular. The details are in Table 1 below.

The comparison of the purposes distinguished by gender revealed that, in general, the male and female students did not rate all purposes as significantly different. On the contrary, when comparing purposes by levels of study and faculties, there was significant difference at 0.05 levels.

**Table 1**: Students' purposes for using computers

| Purpose | Mean | SD | Opinion ranking |
|---|---|---|---|
| Searching for general information | 3.92 | 0.8945 | much |
| Contact friends: e-mail, hi5, etc. | 3.76 | 1.1258 | much |
| Searching for reports or homework | 3.67 | 0.9845 | much |
| Engaging in entertainment | 3.50 | 1.2123 | much |
| Self- studying | 3.01 | 1.0441 | moderate |
| Studying/practicing as assigned | 3.00 | 1.0006 | moderate |
| Engaging in hobby or part-time job | 2.22 | 1.2538 | less |
| **Average** | **3.30** | **1.0802** | **moderate** |

In comparing purposes by levels of studying, there was overall significant difference at 0.05 levels. When each topic was analyzed, it was found that first year students and fourth year students used computers for contacting friends more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.82). Graduate students used computers when searching for general information ($\bar{x}$ = 4.0), for searching academic information for reports or homework ($\bar{x}$ = 3.83), and for studying or practicing as assigned by teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.12) more than other students. First year students used computers for entertainment more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.63). Meanwhile, the second and third year students used computers for self-studying more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.11 and 3.12 respectively). The second year and the fourth year students used computers for hobbies or part-time job more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 2.42). The details are shown in Table 2.

As for the purpose of contacting friends, students from the School of Architecture and Design, and Graduate School ($\bar{x}$ = 3.89) used computers more than students from other faculties. Students from the School of Bio-resource and Technology used computers to search for information of their interest and for reports or homework more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 4.36). As for entertainment, the students from Graduate School, Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology used computers for entertainment more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.68).

For the purpose of studying and practice assigned by teachers, students from the School of Energy and Material used computers far more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.38). For self-studying purposes, students from the School of Liberal Arts used computers more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.40).

Regarding hobbies and part-time jobs, the students from the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology used computers for more than other students ($\bar{x}$ = 2.64). The details are presented in Table 3.

In answering the open-ended questions, the students provided additional purposes of using computers. These included gathering information by watching the news and movies, listening to songs, reading horoscopes or religious stories, and buying goods. Some academic purposes given included reading journals, upgrading new technology, loading illustrations for reports and printing work.

***Characteristics of academic websites that students frequently visited***

Overall, the most popular characteristic of academic websites was its user-friendliness whereby the information could be conveniently searched ($\bar{x}$ = 3.96). Other popular characteristics were the content that included new general knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.80), information for projects or homework ($\bar{x}$ = 3.74) and descriptions with suitable vocabulary or with a Thai explanation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.58). Illustrations and games ($\bar{x}$ = 3.52), and content that could be examined ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50) were also rated as popular features, and content with exercises and answers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.38) were rated as moderately popular.

The result of the analysis showed that in general, male students and female students had significantly different opinions at the levels of 0.05 regarding the characteristics of the websites that they frequently visited. The female students preferred content that could be examined more than male students. They also chose the following characteristics more than male students: contents that included exercises with answers, information for projects or homework, descriptions with suitable vocabulary or with Thai explanation. Moreover, they preferred websites that were conveniently located such that they could search for information easily. The details are shown in Table 4.

The researcher then compared characteristics of academic websites among students from different academic levels of study. Overall, there was no significant difference at the levels of 0.05. However, students from different faculties had significantly different preferences for the characteristics of academic websites that they frequently visited. Students from the Institute of Field Robotic (FIBO) looked for contents that could be examined ($\bar{x}$ = 4.0), exercises with answers ($\bar{x}$ = 4.14), and illustrations and games ($\bar{x}$ = 4.14) more than other students. Students

**Table 2**: Purposes to use computers by levels of studying

| Purposes to use computers years of studying | | Contact friends | Searching general information | Searching information for report or homework | Entertainment | Studying/ practicing as assigned | Self-studying | Hobby/ part-time job | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Undergraduate 1st year | Mean | 3.82 | 3.90 | 3.52 | 3.63 | 2.84 | 2.83 | 1.99 | 3.22 |
| | SD | 1.1418 | 0.9181 | 1.0005 | 1.2425 | 0.9514 | 1.0089 | 1.2104 | 0.6054 |
| Undergraduate 2nd year | Mean | 3.71 | 3.89 | 3.72 | 3.53 | 3.10 | 3.11 | 2.42 | 3.36 |
| | SD | 1.1396 | 0.8890 | 0.9574 | 1.1480 | 1.0031 | 1.0052 | 1.2571 | 0.5981 |
| Undergraduate 3rd year | Mean | 3.69 | 3.93 | 3.67 | 3.44 | 2.98 | 3.12 | 2.22 | 3.29 |
| | SD | 1.1477 | 0.9011 | 1.0261 | 1.2336 | 1.0115 | 1.0731 | 1.2914 | 0.6183 |
| Undergraduate 4th year | Mean | 3.82 | 3.98 | 3.80 | 3.35 | 3.04 | 3.09 | 2.42 | 3.36 |
| | SD | 1.1202 | 0.8873 | 0.9570 | 1.2061 | 1.0345 | 1.1312 | 1.3121 | 0.6252 |
| Graduate | Mean | 3.75 | 4.01 | 3.83 | 3.15 | 3.12 | 3.07 | 2.16 | 3.30 |
| | SD | 1.0074 | 0.8295 | 0.9482 | 1.2246 | 1.0510 | 1.1123 | 1.1795 | 0.5626 |
| F | | 1.8853 | 1.7960 | 10.5115 | 11.9417 | 11.1928 | 11.9495 | 18.1225 | 7.6918 |
| Sig. | | 0.1102 | 0.1268 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

**Table 3**: Purposes to use computers by faculties

| Purposes to use computers by faculties | | Contact friends | Searching general information | Searching information for report or homework | Entertainment | Studying/ practicing as assigned | Self-studying | Hobby/ part-time job | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engineering | Mean | 3.79 | 3.88 | 3.59 | 3.58 | 2.91 | 2.92 | 2.09 | 3.25 |
| | SD | 1.0960 | 0.8909 | 0.9694 | 1.1852 | 0.9735 | 1.0227 | 1.2120 | 0.5853 |
| Science | Mean | 3.80 | 4.01 | 3.76 | 3.31 | 2.97 | 2.91 | 2.05 | 3.26 |
| | SD | 1.1993 | 0.8726 | 1.0303 | 1.3130 | 0.9884 | 1.0289 | 1.2729 | 0.6282 |
| Industrial Education and Technology | Mean | 3.77 | 3.90 | 3.70 | 3.68 | 3.23 | 3.26 | 2.64 | 3.45 |
| | SD | 1.1103 | 0.8517 | 0.9647 | 1.1123 | 1.0124 | 1.0130 | 1.2685 | 0.6226 |
| Information Technology | Mean | 3.33 | 3.66 | 3.51 | 3.33 | 3.26 | 3.32 | 2.56 | 3.29 |
| | SD | 1.2819 | 1.1382 | 1.0352 | 1.1987 | 0.9282 | 1.0032 | 1.2476 | 0.5959 |
| Architecture and Design | Mean | 3.89 | 4.18 | 3.87 | 3.19 | 2.89 | 3.01 | 2.20 | 3.31 |
| | SD | 1.0235 | 0.7751 | 0.9827 | 1.3118 | 1.0899 | 1.1411 | 1.2942 | 0.6214 |
| Bio-resource and Technology | Mean | 3.86 | 4.41 | 4.36 | 2.68 | 2.59 | 2.86 | 1.59 | 3.19 |
| | SD | 1.2458 | 0.7341 | 0.7895 | 1.4924 | 1.1406 | 1.2069 | 0.9081 | 0.5791 |
| Energy and Material | Mean | 3.74 | 4.09 | 3.76 | 3.26 | 3.38 | 3.18 | 1.82 | 3.32 |
| | SD | 0.9942 | 0.7121 | 0.8187 | 1.2138 | 0.9539 | 0.9991 | 1.0290 | 0.5693 |
| Liberal Arts | Mean | 3.00 | 3.80 | 4.00 | 2.80 | 2.60 | 3.40 | 1.00 | 2.94 |
| | SD | 1.2247 | 0.4472 | 0.7071 | 0.8367 | 0.5477 | 0.5477 | 0.0000 | 0.2595 |
| Graduate School | Mean | 3.89 | 4.05 | 3.89 | 3.68 | 2.54 | 2.34 | 2.07 | 3.21 |
| | SD | 0.6790 | 0.5533 | 0.8459 | 0.9363 | 0.9138 | 0.9200 | 0.8498 | 0.4401 |
| FIBO | Mean | 3.86 | 3.71 | 3.86 | 3.17 | 2.00 | 1.71 | 1.57 | 2.88 |
| | SD | 0.8997 | 0.4880 | 0.6901 | 0.7528 | 0.5774 | 0.4880 | 0.5345 | 0.4372 |
| F | | 5.0383 | 6.5372 | 4.9417 | 7.3430 | 10.3989 | 12.0808 | 14.0828 | 5.0383 |
| Sig. | | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

**Table 4**: Characteristics of frequently visited academic websites

| Characteristics of frequently visited academic websites | | Content of exam | New general knowledge | Exercise + answer | Illustration + game | Information for report, homework | Simple vocabulary, Thai | Convenience | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male students | Mean | 3.45 | 3.77 | 3.34 | 3.50 | 3.64 | 3.52 | 3.89 | 3.59 |
| | SD | 1.0034 | 0.9171 | 1.0377 | 1.0348 | 0.9478 | 0.9972 | 0.9651 | 0.6506 |
| Female students | Mean | 3.55 | 3.82 | 3.43 | 3.53 | 3.83 | 3.63 | 4.03 | 3.69 |
| | SD | 1.0029 | 0.8795 | 1.0237 | 1.0147 | 0.9314 | 0.9813 | 0.9134 | 0.6591 |
| t | | -2.6433 | -1.4099 | -2.4674 | -0.7272 | -5.6299 | -3.0324 | -4.1595 | -4.2302 |
| Sig. | | 0.0083 | 0.1587 | 0.0137 | 0.4672 | 0.0000 | 0.0024 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

from the School of Energy and Material searched for contents with new general knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 4.29) and descriptions with suitable vocabulary or with Thai explanation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.88) more than other students. Meanwhile, students from the School of Liberal Arts preferred websites that were convenient for searching information ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20) more than other students. The details are shown in Table 5.

With regard to the open-ended questions, some remarks from the students show that they frequently visited websites hosted by universities, faculties and academic journals. Thus, user-friendliness is also an important consideration.

***Reasons why the students frequently visited the academic websites on their own***

This section explores the reasons that inspired these students to return and study or practice at the same websites repeatedly. Overall, the most popular reasons include being able to study at a convenient place ($\bar{x}$ = 3.78) and time ($\bar{x}$ = 3.74), being able to use their free time constructively ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50), practice skills and get new knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.46). Other reasons rated as moderately popular were having a preference to study with e-materials ($\bar{x}$ = 3.28), following suggestions from lecturers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21), and recommendations from peers or seniors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.03).

In general, the reasons of male and female students were not significantly different at the 0.05 levels. In comparing the reasons among students from different levels of study, there was no significant difference but the reasons among students from different faculties were significantly different at 0.05 levels.

The students from FIBO frequently visited the academic websites due to the convenience of studying anytime ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00) and the recommendation by peers or seniors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.71), whereas students from the School of Liberal Arts did so because it allowed them to study regardless of location ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20). Students from the Faculty of Science visited the websites that were suggested by their teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.43), and the students from the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology liked to study with e-materials. The students from the School of Energy and Material visited academic websites because they wanted to use their free-time constructively ($\bar{x}$ = 3.76), and to practice skills and obtain new knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.91). The details are presented in Table 6.

Also, in answering the open-ended questions, students added more reasons for repeated visits to the same academic websites on their own. They were related to the quality of the websites in terms of their entertainment factors, interest level, suitability to individual needs, practicality, and their loading speeds.

## Discussion

According to the study, it can be seen that the students used computers for academic purposes, social contact and entertainment more than for hobbies or part-time jobs. Overall, there was no significant difference between male and female students' purposes when using computers. However, by the different levels and fields of study, their purposes were significantly different at 0.05 levels.

User-friendliness was the most preferred characteristic of the content in academic websites that students regularly visited on their own. The characteristics were significantly different by gender and fields of study but not levels of study. Students frequently visited the academic websites mainly due to the convenience afforded them in terms of the time and place of study. In general, the factors of sex and academic levels of study did not affect the students' choices. The students' reasons in visiting the websites were significantly different at the 0.05 levels by their fields of study.

These findings revealed that intrinsic factors such as gender, levels of study or ages, as well as extrinsic factors such as fields of study affect the students' purposes, preference and persistence in e-learning. These findings are **consistent** with the study of Packham, Jones, Miller, and Thomas (2004).

**Table 5**: Characteristics of frequently visited academic websites by faculties

| Characteristics of frequently visited academic websites by faculties | | Content of exam | New general knowledge | Exercise + answer | Illustration + game | Information for report, homework | Simple vocabulary, Thai | Convenience | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engineering | Mean | 3.50 | 3.80 | 3.41 | 3.52 | 3.73 | 3.55 | 3.92 | 3.63 |
| | SD | 0.9849 | 0.9009 | 1.0095 | 1.0305 | 0.9282 | 0.9819 | 0.9568 | 0.6481 |
| Science | Mean | 3.61 | 3.86 | 3.56 | 3.55 | 3.79 | 3.72 | 4.08 | 3.74 |
| | SD | 0.9810 | 0.9021 | 1.0340 | 1.0314 | 0.9805 | 0.9935 | 0.9306 | 0.6904 |
| Industrial Education and Technology | Mean | 3.49 | 3.78 | 3.43 | 3.64 | 3.72 | 3.59 | 3.92 | 3.65 |
| | SD | 0.9338 | 0.8615 | 0.9480 | 0.9303 | 0.8933 | 0.9397 | 0.8951 | 0.6194 |
| Information Technology | Mean | 3.44 | 3.65 | 3.37 | 3.40 | 3.63 | 3.61 | 3.92 | 3.58 |
| | SD | 1.0786 | 0.9252 | 1.0186 | 0.9711 | 1.0428 | 0.9513 | 0.9768 | 0.6666 |
| Architecture and Design | Mean | 3.33 | 3.82 | 2.76 | 3.31 | 3.78 | 3.37 | 4.17 | 3.51 |
| | SD | 1.2261 | 0.9809 | 1.1693 | 1.2053 | 1.0499 | 1.1894 | 0.9349 | 0.7321 |
| Bio-resource and Technology | Mean | 3.00 | 3.91 | 2.73 | 3.09 | 4.24 | 3.55 | 4.14 | 3.56 |
| | SD | 1.1547 | 0.8679 | 1.1205 | 1.2690 | 0.8309 | 0.9117 | 0.5732 | 0.5843 |
| Energy and Material | Mean | 3.59 | 4.29 | 3.62 | 3.47 | 4.00 | 3.88 | 3.94 | 3.83 |
| | SD | 0.9883 | 0.7190 | 0.9216 | 0.9288 | 0.8165 | 0.8796 | 0.9516 | 0.4958 |
| Liberal Arts | Mean | 2.40 | 4.00 | 2.80 | 3.40 | 4.20 | 2.60 | 4.20 | 3.37 |
| | SD | 0.8944 | 0.7071 | 0.8367 | 0.5477 | 0.4472 | 0.5477 | 0.8367 | 0.2390 |
| Graduate School | Mean | 3.66 | 3.71 | 3.57 | 3.57 | 3.70 | 3.58 | 3.79 | 3.70 |
| | SD | 0.7205 | 0.7315 | 0.7594 | 0.9882 | 0.7115 | 0.8320 | 0.9670 | 0.5688 |
| FIBO | Mean | 4.00 | 4.14 | 4.14 | 4.14 | 3.57 | 3.57 | 4.00 | 3.94 |
| | SD | 0.0000 | 0.3780 | 0.6901 | 0.3780 | 0.5345 | 0.5345 | 0.5774 | 0.2590 |
| F | | 3.2088 | 2.4804 | 13.6270 | 3.0938 | 1.7550 | 3.3693 | 2.9176 | 3.1711 |
| Sig. | | 0.0007 | 0.0081 | 0.0000 | 0.0010 | 0.0718 | 0.0004 | 0.0019 | 0.0008 |

**Table 6**: Reasons to visit the academic websites on their own by faculties

| Reasons | | Convenient time | Convenient place | Recommended by peers, seniors, etc. | Suggested by teacher | Preference of e-materials | Profitable free time | For skills + knowledge | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engineering | Mean | 3.74 | 3.78 | 3.02 | 3.19 | 3.28 | 3.49 | 3.43 | 3.42 |
| | SD | 0.9951 | 0.9539 | 0.9692 | 0.9298 | 0.9669 | 0.9482 | 0.9471 | 0.6600 |
| Science | Mean | 3.80 | 3.87 | 2.99 | 3.38 | 3.35 | 3.66 | 3.55 | 3.52 |
| | SD | 0.9496 | 0.9562 | 1.0010 | 0.9206 | 0.9441 | 0.9396 | 0.9342 | 0.6533 |
| Industrial Education and Technology | Mean | 3.68 | 3.75 | 3.16 | 3.35 | 3.43 | 3.63 | 3.61 | 3.52 |
| | SD | 0.9877 | 0.9078 | 0.9875 | 0.9369 | 0.9446 | 0.9154 | 0.9223 | 0.6651 |
| Information Technology | Mean | 3.80 | 3.79 | 3.02 | 3.28 | 3.35 | 3.39 | 3.42 | 3.44 |
| | SD | 1.1652 | 1.0009 | 1.0156 | 0.9667 | 1.0466 | 1.0040 | 1.0434 | 0.6772 |
| Architecture and Design | Mean | 3.63 | 3.71 | 2.73 | 2.65 | 2.91 | 3.19 | 3.27 | 3.16 |
| | SD | 1.1450 | 1.1299 | 1.0980 | 1.0809 | 1.1230 | 1.1101 | 1.0624 | 0.8086 |
| Bio-resource and Technology | Mean | 3.73 | 3.64 | 2.68 | 2.86 | 2.82 | 3.50 | 3.64 | 3.27 |
| | SD | 0.9351 | 0.9535 | 1.0414 | 0.7743 | 0.8528 | 1.1019 | 1.0931 | 0.6484 |
| Energy and Material | Mean | 3.91 | 3.97 | 3.24 | 3.24 | 3.29 | 3.76 | 3.91 | 3.62 |
| | SD | 0.9651 | 0.9370 | 0.8187 | 0.8549 | 0.9055 | 0.7808 | 0.7927 | 0.5765 |
| Liberal Arts | Mean | 4.00 | 4.20 | 2.60 | 2.60 | 2.80 | 3.40 | 3.60 | 3.31 |
| | SD | 0.7071 | 0.4472 | 1.1402 | 1.1402 | 1.0954 | 0.5477 | 0.8944 | 0.5288 |
| Graduate School | Mean | 3.77 | 3.84 | 3.41 | 3.00 | 3.07 | 3.02 | 2.88 | 3.28 |
| | SD | 0.7626 | 0.7574 | 0.8692 | 0.7862 | 0.9314 | 0.8632 | 1.0102 | 0.5553 |
| FIBO | Mean | 4.00 | 3.86 | 3.71 | 3.14 | 2.57 | 2.43 | 2.57 | 3.18 |
| | SD | 0.0000 | 0.3780 | 0.4880 | 0.3780 | 0.7868 | 0.5345 | 0.7868 | 0.3843 |
| F | | 1.0518 | 1.0140 | 5.4665 | 13.3978 | 6.9774 | 8.6120 | 7.2361 | 7.1794 |
| Sig. | | 0.3957 | 0.4260 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |

In terms of the content characteristics, the results of the study supported several viewpoints from many researchers mentioned previously. For example, similar to the observation made by Marsh (2004) and Woolfolk (2007), the students in this study stated as a preference the practicality of using websites that could help them to achieve short-term goals such as the undertaking of exam preparation, report work or other types of homework. Their preference for exercises with answers was also reflected in the study by Hudson (1984) on immediate feedback. Their search for new general information, illustrations and games supported the ideas of Elliott (2000) that materials should be interesting and enjoyable and also the ideas of Marsh (2004) that they should provide challenging and varied learning activities to maintain interest.

Based on the results of the study, this paper makes some recommendations on attractive features to e-material developers and educational web designers. The three most popular characteristics of e-materials and academic websites for the students in this study are user-friendliness, new general knowledge, and information for report and homework.

Since user-friendliness was ranked the highest by most students, material designers should consider the learners' convenience as first priority. According to Intratat (2009), certain characteristics of e-materials were considered desirable by the learners. For example, the table of content should be clearly provided in banners or drop-down windows. All topics in the table of content should be easily accessible in one click of the mouse.

When learners access selected topics, the layout should be clear and convenient for the reader. The text should preferably be limited to within one screen. If it is longer, scroll functions are needed. The exercises should also be objective with answer keys provided in self-access style. Types of exercises recommended are multiple choice, matching, cloze test and re-arranging of sentences. General principles to maintain user-friendliness are that the questions and choices of answer should be on the same screen so that the learners can choose the answers by clicking or dragging the mouse.

As for new general knowledge, the materials and websites are more attractive if they are updated or renovated from time to time. The information for report and homework should also be updated for temporary courses. In addition, examples of old exams with answer keys are quite popular among students. Last but not the least important, illustrations and games are also attractive, especially to undergraduate students.

It can be concluded that in designing e-learning materials, these characteristics above are essential because they attract the students' interest and arouse their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. When students are motivated, they engage successfully in self-directed learning, which can subsequently lead to the development of an autonomous learning mindset suitable for life-long study.

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8

# Technology in Language Classrooms:
## Filmmaking as a Tool for Developing Life Skills

■ Seemita Mohanty
National Institute of Technology, Rourkela, India

**ABSTRACT:** *An acquisition-rich environment is one where language is used in real-time by the users outside of the classroom. Learning occurs best when the learner is self-motivated and the task at hand entails multiple interactions and challenges the learner's cognitive processes. With rapid advancements in technology, language classrooms in India are undergoing sea-changes where teachers are being compelled to incorporate technology into their teaching methodologies so that the present day learner's needs are addressed. But rather than "learning from technology", it is the "learning with technology" method which allows for more creative and empowered learning. This paper explores the potential the filmmaking process has in developing the life skills of 40 undergraduate engineering students. Right from the initial idea to the final presentation there are so many opportunities and experiences for learning that it can safely be considered as a powerful and appropriate tool for the 21st century language classrooms. The filmmaking experience which cultivates the students' visualization skills, problem solving skills, logical thinking skills, planning and coordinating skills and speaking and writing skills, could act as a stepping stone to other innovative and creative academic projects. At National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela where the filmmaking project was successfully completed by the students as a Language lab group assignment is reflected upon as a case study. At NIT, Rourkela, language lab is a one-semester, compulsory two-credit lab course for all the 2nd year Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) students.*

### Introduction

With rapid advancements in technology, classroom teaching and learning strategies are being redesigned continuously to meet the demands of present day digitally-literate learners. Technology has become so ubiquitous today that if we don't integrate it into our classroom teaching then students tend not to take assignments too seriously. It also seems unwise not to take advantage of all that technology that is being made available to us by the system. But effective technology integration should happen in ways that serve to expand and enhance the learning process rather than to teach basic computer skills and software programs. In particular, technology integration must support the four key components of learning: active engagement, participation in groups, frequent interaction and feedback among students, and connection to real-world experience.

With new technological tools continuing to emerge and impact the teaching-learning methods, language teachers and researchers worldwide are also facing the question of how best to utilize the vast array of technological tools available in the language classrooms while keeping abreast of the rapid changes in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) world (Chapelle, 2003; Chapelle & Douglas, 2006). Additionally, with technology becoming more interactive, accessible and convenient, students also wish to use it more in their classroom learning. In language classrooms, particularly where the target students are potential engineers, it becomes all the more essential that the integration of technology into our teaching strategies happen in such a way that utilizes and generates students' inherent technical knowledge and skills as well as provides them with a supportive learning environment which nurtures their creativity and other life skills.

**Rationale**

An acquisition rich environment is one where language is used in real-time by the users outside of the classroom. Learning occurs best when the learner is self-motivated and the task at hand entails multiple interactions and challenges the learner's cognitive processes. Active student involvement in the learning process always enhances learning. Most experts agree that students learn best when they take an active role in the education process, discussing what they read, practicing what they learn, and applying concepts and ideas (Davis, 1993). "Active learning" as defined by Bonwell and Eison (1991) is "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing." Active learning as suggested by Smart and Csapo (2007) include the following general characteristics:

- Students are involved in more than listening.
- Instruction emphasizes the development of students' skills more than just transmitting information.
- Students develop higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis and evaluation).
- Students are engaged in activities (e.g., reading, discussing, and writing).
- Students explore their own attitudes and values.

Our aim therefore, should be to ensure that learners are assigned tasks driven by technology, and at the same time it should be cultivating their life skills that have become so essential in today's competitive work place scenario. In recent times rapidly changing circumstances at work and in society are putting a premium on adaptability, collaborative learning and learning through experience. World Health Organisation defines life skills as 'abilities for adaptive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. UNICEF defines it as a behaviour change or behaviour change approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills. The core set of skills as proposed by the World Health Organisation, that follow the above descriptions are:

- Problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Coping with stress and emotions
- Effective communication skills
- Decision-making
- Creative thinking
- Empathy
- Negotiation skills
- Self-awareness

Life-skill education therefore promotes mental well-being in young people and equips them to face the realities of life. Effective application of life-skills can influence the way learners feel about others and themselves, which in turn can contribute to their self-confidence and self-esteem. Today's learners are going to be tomorrow's leaders and managers. "No organization in a post-industrial, hyperturbulent, twenty-first century environment will survive without executives capable of providing both management and leadership. Leading change and managing stability, establishing vision and accomplishing objectives, breaking the rules and monitoring conformance, although paradoxical, all are required to be successful" (Whetten & Cameron, 2007). Our students, in other words, need to develop competencies that will enhance their ability to be both leaders and managers. The critical factor here is to develop these skills in our students by giving them such tasks and assignments that showcase their tech-savvy abilities and creativity at the same time.

**Digital media: Need and application**

Students today live in a world immersed in visual literacy. Television, computer/video games, cell phones, social networking sites, e-mails, chat rooms and instant messaging are common forms of entertainment and communication among students of this generation. After all this exposure they become quite accustomed to learning from the visual media. Digital natives, or "native speakers" of today's technology, require learning environments that support their need to learn and think in technological terms (Prensky, 2001). Visual literacy has become extremely important today in both education and in the wider world of business and industry; the latter because employers are increasingly demanding it of their prospective workers.

Having said that, the focus in education, should be on "learning with technology" rather than "learning from technology," (Kingsley, 2006) as the former allows for more creative and empowered learning. Learning with technology fosters creativity in the learner as he or she is empowered to design individual representations of content using technology. With multimedia, learners engage in knowledge construction rather than knowledge reproduction (Reeves, 1998). The use of multimedia (text, sound, graphics, and video) can assist students to incorporate their creativity and innovation into a project delivered by the computer. Creative projects using multimedia elements encourage discovery and innovation and their application to real world situations. Teaching digital natives is not simply about learning technology; instead, it is about teaching students to use technology such that they become critical thinkers and problem solvers (Theodosakis, 2001). The filmmaking assignment reported in this study is one such means of using multimedia techniques that allows students to communicate ideas visually. When students use technology as a tool or a support for communicating with others, they are in an active rather than a passive role of working with the technology in course of researching, analyzing, organizing and representing information they have gathered for their assignment.

### The Indian scene

In order to stay abreast of global trends of engaging in the use of technology to transfer knowledge, language classrooms in India are also undergoing sea-changes where teachers are being compelled to incorporate technology into their teaching methodology, so that the present day learners' needs for the working world are properly addressed. In most engineering institutes and colleges in India today, multimedia digital language laboratories are the norm rather than the exception. But strangely, in Indian language classrooms, the use of digital video/visual literacy is limited, even with the advanced technology that has been made available in most technical colleges and institutes. While teachers and researchers in the USA, like Theodosakis, (2001), Hofer and Owings-Swan (2005), Sharkey (n.d.), Armstrong, Tucker and Massad (2009), Sheffield (n.d.), in the United Kingdom, Kingsley (2006), Allam (2007), in Australia, Kearney and Schuck (2004), Ludewig (2001) and in Singapore, Pun (2009) have been in the forefront as digital video/digital storytelling practitioners and researchers their counterparts in India have not really considered filmmaking as a tool in the language teaching-learning process. A review of contemporary literature did not reveal any Indian scholar working on this particular teaching and learning strategy. However, this is gradually becoming an area of interest to researchers of CALL in India. Some individual scholars have started exploring digital video productions as an effective tool for developing life-skills of present day learners.

### Filmmaking as a creative assignment

Right from the initial idea to the final presentation the filmmaking process is full of so many opportunities and experiences for learning that it can safely be considered as a powerful and appropriate tool for the 21st century language classrooms (Theodosakis, 2001). The filmmaking experience cultivates the students' ability to visualize, problem solving, logical thinking, planning and coordinating skills as well as speaking and writing skills that could act as a stepping stone to other innovative and creative academic projects. As creativity and innovation are increasingly being considered invaluable in securing jobs and livelihoods in today's competitive and fast-changing marketplace. Today's generation of youth are always looking for opportunities to express themselves; and by expressing themselves creatively through such an assignment they get empowered with the notion that they can translate their goals into tangible reality. They develop valuable life-skills that boost their self-confidence and enthusiasm for taking on new challenges.

Digital moviemaking is broadly defined as the use of a variety of media (images, sound, text, video and narration) to convey meaning. User-friendly, non-linear video editing software like Windows Moviemaker, Apple's iMovie, Sony Vegas Pro 9, Total video converter, Photoshop, Nero Soundtracks etc. are used by students to create videos to communicate thoughts and ideas. The ability to capture diverse images, text and sounds and make educated decisions regarding the best way to combine them into a coherent and meaningful product makes digital filmmaking an appropriate tool for creative language learning. The students explore an original idea, prepare their own script and then simultaneously do the acting and directing. Editing concludes the process. These activities of exploring ideas and turning them into tangible scripts and role playing in films where the language for communication is English, best exemplify creative language learning.

The filmmaking assignment has its foundation in the task-based approach to language learning and teaching. Language learning is a developmental, organic process that follows its own internal agenda. Errors are not necessarily the result of bad learning, but are part of the natural process of interlanguage forms gradually moving towards target forms (Ellis, 1994). Studies demonstrate that by engaging in meaningful activities, such as problem-solving, discussions, or brainstorming, the learner's interlanguage system is expanded and encouraged to develop (Long & Porter, 1985; Ellis, 2003).

## The study

This study reported in this paper is the outcome of a successfully completed filmmaking task assigned to 40 undergraduate engineering students at NIT, Rourkela Institute as a part of their Language lab semester-end project. The Language lab is a compulsory, one semester, two-credit lab course for all the 2nd year Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) students. Increased intelligibility in speech, improved communication skills and greater self-confidence are the learner goals in these classes. In these three-hour weekly lab sessions, along with the language learning multimedia resources that the students access on a self-study basis, other practical activities are regularly conducted to make the sessions meaningful. Engineering students are technologically inclined but to get them motivated and interested in completing an assignment and actually enable them to learn something from it is not easy.

The filmmaking assignment was given with some of the following key objectives in mind:

- To provide the students with an innovative assignment that would require originality of thought and optimum application of their creativity.
- To give an assignment to the students that along with improving their written and spoken English, also fosters their team spirit abilities, problem solving and analytical thinking skills, leadership skills and their ability to plan, organize and coordinate things.
- To give an opportunity to the students to do something creative that would remain with them as a memoir years after they leave their alma mater.

## Filmmaking and communication skills

Students today realize that employers view effective communication skills and the ability to work in teams as being critical to an individual's success in the competitive workplace. They are genuinely interested in improving these skills, but their age range (18–21) is such that unless the assignments challenge their creativity and critical thinking skills they immediately lose interest. Also, although they are advanced language learners, they do commit grammatical, lexical and pronunciation errors while writing and speaking in English. At the same time it can be said that these deficiencies in their speech and writing have never deterred them from using their L2. Their technical abilities/potential necessitates that the assignments are challenging and at the same time not too content-led that they might hinder them from enjoying the learning process.

The filmmaking process that encourages the exploration and practice of a variety of life skills in an interesting way requires heterogeneous classrooms. If we consider the current educational methods in most Indian institutes, concepts from textbooks and case-studies are taught but little or no attention is paid to real-life skill sets (Agarwal, 2009). The additional skill-sets needed to make it in the corporate world, like conflict management, mentoring, networking, practicing leadership skills and execution (the art of getting things done) are not given much emphasis upon. Yet these are skills that are required most in the workplace.

Theodosakis (2001) in his website, www.thedirectorintheclassroom.com, details how the filmmaking process can develop these essential skills at every stage of its production. Each stage is a learning experience:

- It improves oral, visual, writing and presentation skills.
- It develops leadership, negotiating, communication skills and gives a sense of team spirit to the students. Students who hardly talk to each other start working together.
- It creates awareness of the community, friends and self.
- It bridges the gap between the curriculum and the world outside the classroom.
- It fosters research, organization, planning, analysis and synthesis skills.

The lives of our engineering students are mostly full of academic drudgery and very few students do any original or innovative project in the initial two years of their B.Tech career. This filmmaking experience which cultivates their visualization skills, problem solving skills, logical thinking skills and planning and coordinating skills, could act as a stepping stone to other innovative and creative academic projects during the last two years of their B.Tech studies. They have so much fun while completing the filmmaking project that they don't realize how much they learnt from the whole process. A few brief comments from the students are furnished here to highlight how much fun they had during the process:

> "... Thinking new ideas, new effects in movies, it was all fun and a great experience."
>
> "Had great fun sitting with friends and sharing different curious ideas."
>
> "We had a lot of fun and we explored different areas within ourselves."

This is one group assignment that provides a forum through which students learn from each other as they engage in content-focused give and take discussions (Michaelsen, 2000). They learn to coordinate, collaborate and strategize together to achieve a common goal. In real life language is most often used by two, three (or more) individuals to exchange greetings or share ideas, emotions or experiences. Group work, thus is an obvious source of rich and rewarding learning encounters (Tickoo, 2003). Language-acquisition research (Long & Porter 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985) has also shown that it is in small group interaction that rich opportunities for negotiating meanings become available.

### Some observations of students during the filmmaking process

The study reported in this paper was conducted on a class of 40 students who were first divided into random groups of seven or eight and assigned the task of preparing a short film to be presented to the whole class at the end of the semester. The assignment was given to them at the start of the semester. The theme of the assignment was "life at NITR," as that was the life they were most familiar with, and therefore, it was deemed that they would find it easier to visualize and storyboard. At the same time, groups were given the option to develop scripts based on other themes. Initially the students experienced a sense of apprehension when they heard of the assignment. Furthermore, the concept of moviemaking was somewhat new and different to them and they didn't know how to react. For some students it was "like a bolt from the blue, same as exam blues." A few others were left wondering "whether they were engineering students or movie-makers." But then, as the surprise factor wore off, a few enterprising boys took up the challenge and started giving serious thought to the assignment. The thought of making a movie that was scripted, acted, directed and edited by themselves was extremely challenging, innovative and interesting, yet at the same time quite a few were very much apprehensive of the task. Gradually as the students defined their ideas, prepared scripts and visually laid out their stories, and captured images, they became engrossed and passionate about their work.

Basically there are three steps involved to make a movie: pre-production, production and post-production. The first stage starts with the students rehearsing, preparing the script and utilizing the props. This enables teams to develop their artistic vision through the script writing and rehearsals and most importantly, prevent any errors that would cost the teams wasting time during production. The second stage is the production stage, where acting, directing and shooting happens. This is a long-drawn process and quite a few changes are made to the script during this. The post-production stage involves the editing part after which the finished product is presented to the class and beyond. A sense of achievement is "felt" as days of brainstorming, discussions, arguments, counter-arguments and hard team-work combine to form a slick half hour package of creativity and imagination.

## Learning outcomes

With this kind of an assignment, where the impact on student learning is more in the process than in the product, assessment based on conventional grading patterns should not be the focus for the teacher. The process itself is a learning experience for the students which provide a foundation to the essential life skills required for today's work-place. The learning outcomes are closely tied to students' comments and feedback. Along with the general course feedback form, a questionnaire on the movie-making assignment was administered at the end of the semester to two engineering branches (Electronics and Instrumentation, Electronics and Communication) of 2nd year B.Tech students at NIT, Rourkela. All students, 40 in total, completed the questionnaire which was in two parts and did not require them to reveal their identity. One was the open-ended questions on the task and the other was the close-ended section on meeting educational objectives (see Appendix 1). Discussions with few individual students were conducted to supplement the primary data collected through the questionnaire.

### *General observations and students' feedback*

Initially there were a few dissenting voices regarding the lack of cooperation from other team members and lack of cohesion in the team. A few students sought permission to change their teams, but were denied by the faculty. Eventually they learnt to work with their new team mates and had no further complaints. A few "social loafers" (Latane; Williams, & Harkins, 1979) emerged within the groups who simply filled up the numbers rather than doing anything substantial. Time-management was an issue with most of the students. However it was observed that the majority of the students enjoyed themselves and had fun within their groups during the filmmaking process. In general the students reported that the movie-making experience helped them to bond better with their team-mates, enabled them to utilize their creativity and imagination and developed their self-confidence in facing an audience. A few genuine comments on the filmmaking experience made by the students in the feedback form are furnished below to reinforce the observations:

> "I learnt that even I have the ability to think and bring out various ideas. I saw the inner creativity I had within me."

> "The most outstanding part of my experience was when the entire group came together in one small room and eruption of bizarre ideas that were flooded while thinking on a particular scene."

> "Team Works Means More We. I had read this quotation few years back but believe it now."

> "I think movie making will be the most outstanding part of my lab experience as it is very fun

as well as we are learning many more things."

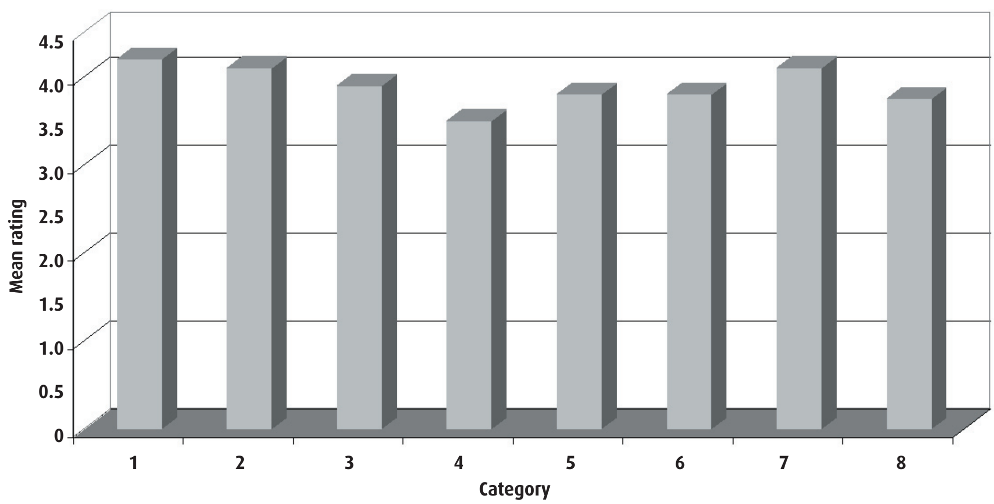
"Implementing on someone else's idea after discarding your one when you were fully in favour of yours is the thing I have learnt."

Section 2 of the questionnaire was used to assess the perception of the students on meeting educational objectives of the filmmaking assignment. There were eight statements in total, for dimensions such as, team-work and cooperative learning, creativity and visioning skills, technology skills, ability to experiment, analyze and reason, critical thinking skills, leadership skills and conflict management skills, communication skills and building self-reliance and confidence. The respondents were required to rate each statement on a five-point scale indicating their satisfaction level with the said objective.

**Table 1**: Scoring key

| Total objective score | | | Dimension score | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31–40 | Excellent | (75% and above) | 4.5–5 | Excellent | (75% and above) |
| 21–30 | Good | (65% and above) | 3.5–4 | Good | (65% and above) |
| 11–20 | Average | (50% and above) | 2.5–3 | Average | (50% and above) |
| < 10 | Poor | (below 50%) | < 2 | Poor | (below 50%) |

**Figure 1**: Chart indicating meeting educational objectives mean rating




Note: **Category 1** = Integration of communication skills and subject knowledge.
**Category 2** = Encouraging teamwork and co-operative learning among students.
**Category 3** = Fostering creativity and visioning skills.
**Category 4** = Developing technology skills.
**Category 5** = Developing the ability to experiment, analyze and reason.
**Category 6** = Improving critical thinking skills and decision making abilities.
**Category 7** = Developing leadership skills and conflict management abilities.
**Category 8** = Building self-reliance and confidence within new technology areas.

## Results

The mean objective score, taking into account all 40 students was found to be 29.85 which is rated as *Good*. The results of all the mean dimension scores were found to be good. No mean dimension score reached the rating of *Excellent*, denoting 75% and above category. At the same time there was no average or poor ratings. This denotes that students were generally happy with the assignment and perceived the filmmaking task to be quite appropriate in meeting the educational objectives of the learner.

## Conclusion

In an increasingly competitive and globalised world it is the creative brains which will survive and flourish the most. Along with creativity and innovation what will impact our students' life, both personal and professional, will be their ability to adapt to various adverse situations. Here, life-skills education comes into the picture. It is the need of today's world. It makes a person "a balanced adult" who contributes meaningfully to the community and to the society at large. Learners who have imbibed good life-skill abilities will have a clear competitive advantage over others. Therefore, as is evident from the study above, the filmmaking assignment which integrates technology and creativity on one platform is one way to let students have a hands-on, proactive approach to learning. They learn multiple skills at a time, and get an opportunity to analyze their own work to make sure that all its parts have a meaningful purpose. This leads to a strong sense of ownership and hence better quality of work. As is evident from the students' feedback, when used in teaching and learning, filmmaking has the potential to enhance participation, motivation and collaboration, qualities essential to be successful in life.

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**Appendix 1: Course Language Lab (HS 371)—Moviemaking assignment questionnaire**

**Section 1**

1. Did the movie making assignment challenge you intellectually?
2. Did the assignment meet your expectations?
3. Did you feel your time was well spent? Please explain.
4. What is the most significant thing you learned (individually) from this assignment?
5. Was the duration of the assignment optimal for the completion of the assignment?
6. What difficulties did you face (individually or as team while completing the assignment?
7. Do you feel this assignment contributed in any way to your overall objectives and goals here at the institute or afterwards?
8. In your opinion what was the most outstanding part of your movie making experience?
9. In your opinion what was the least valuable part of the movie making experience?
10. What additional comments and suggestions do you have about this assignment that I might incorporate for future assignments?

**Section 2: Meeting educational objectives.** *(Please circle the number)*

| | Poor | | Average | | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Integration of communication skills and subject knowledge: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Encouraging teamwork and co-operative learning among students : | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Fostering creativity and visioning skills: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Developing technology skills: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Developing the ability to experiment, analyze and reason: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Improving critical thinking skills and decision making abilities: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Developing leadership skills and conflict management abilities: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Building self-reliance and confidence within new technology areas: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*Please read the whole paper through very carefully and see if you'de like to re-organize certain parts under more pertinent headings. I have made some suggestions but you will need to go through them very carefully as it's your paper after all.*

9

# A Social-psychological Perspective on Singaporean Schoolchildren's Strategy Use in English Literacy Learning


■ Wengao Gong, Donglan Zhang, Lawrence Jun Zhang and Tamas Kiss

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

May Yin Ang-Tay

Ministry of Education, Singapore



**ABSTRACT:** *Despite the plethora of literature concerning language learning strategies, there is a paucity of studies pertaining to the influence of social and psychological factors on young English learners' use of literacy learning strategies in the Asian context. As a multilingual and multicultural Asian society which implements a unique bilingual policy of taking English (which is not native to the local people) as the dominant language, Singapore provides a good scenario for the exploration of such issues. As part of a two-year intervention project aiming at promoting schoolchildren's self-regulated English literacy learning ability, we conducted a preparatory study which intended to collect students' basic English learning information and identify the gap in their knowledge of literacy learning strategies. We administered a reading survey and a writing survey to 678 Primary 3 pupils from two typical primary schools in Singapore. Our results show that our informants did attempt to use different literacy learning strategies, though the average frequency of strategy use was not very high. We also found that learners' gender, motivation, self-efficacy, and out-of-school effort are related to their use of learning strategies whereas their ethnic groups and home languages are not. Our results reveal the necessity of strategy instruction for this group of schoolchildren and the potential importance of gender and psychological factors in literacy strategy instruction programs.*


## Introduction

As the major working language for the government, law, and commerce, the primary medium of instruction from pre-school to tertiary education, and the lingua franca for all the ethnic groups in the country, the English language has firmly established itself as the most important language in multilingual Singapore. As a consequence, Singaporean students need strong literacy skills in this language to succeed in school and in life. Students who fail to acquire these skills will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in both social communications and the job market. Thus, how to promote schoolchildren's literacy development in the English language has become a key issue in Singapore's primary school education.

Studies (e.g., Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008) suggest that explicit strategy instruction is conducive to students' literacy development. This kind of instruction is characterized by the following procedures: teacher explicitly explaining what a strategy is; teacher modeling how to use it; students applying the strategy with teacher help; and students autonomously applying the strategy in new contexts. In order to find out whether and to what extent explicit strategy instruction is helpful to Singaporean schoolchildren's English literacy development, we started a two-year intervention project in two primary schools in 2009. To make the intervention more focused and more suitable for our target students, we conducted a preparatory study to evaluate our subjects' status quo of strategy use in English literacy learning by administering two surveys to the whole cohort of P3 students prior to the intervention project. At the same time, we also collected demographic information about our informants as well as information about their interest, self-efficacy, and out-of-school study effort in English literacy learning. This paper focuses on reporting students' self-reported strategy use in their English literacy learning before the intervention and whether and to what extent their strategy use is related to social-psychological factors such as their gender, ethnic group, home languages, interest in reading and writing, self-efficacy, and out-of-school learning efforts.

## Review of literature

### *Defining language learning strategies*

Language learning strategies (also known as learner strategies) have been an important theme of research in the field of language acquisition over the past three decades. However, there is still no consensus about what language learning strategies actually are. For instance, Chamot defines learning strategies as "techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information" (Chamot, 1987, p. 71), while Oxford (1990) uses the term "learner strategies" and defines it as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8).

Despite the occasional differences in phrasing and focus, most definitions of language learning strategies in the literature so far bear considerable resemblance to what Gu (2005) calls the "prototypical core" of learning strategies which consists of procedures such as selective attention, analysis of task, choice of decisions, execution of plan, monitoring of progress, modification of plan, and evaluation of results. As language learning comprises different aspects such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the actual realizations of these procedures may not be exactly the same. For instance, literacy learning strategies, which are the focus of this paper, may not be exactly the same as the strategies used for listening and speaking learning, due to the different nature of spoken and written language, among other things. Nevertheless, the deliberate and strategic nature as reflected in these procedures is inherent in all language learning strategies. This is also the case for reading and writing learning strategies, as we will see below.

### *Reading and writing as strategic processes*

Reading and writing are two basic literacy skills which are of vital importance to people's survival in modern society. Studies suggest that reading, a seemingly automatic and effortless activity in real life situations, is actually a process which involves plenty of strategic behavior on the part of the reader. As the ultimate goal of authentic reading is for comprehension, when we are talking about reading, we are actually referring to reading comprehension. According to Block and Duffy,

> comprehension is a strategic process; that is, good readers proactively search for meaning as they read, using text cues and their background knowledge in combination to generate predictions, to monitor those predictions, to repredict when necessary, and generally to construct a representation of the author's meaning (2008, p. 21).

Reading strategies are "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 368). In a similar vein, writing is also a process which involves various strategic actions. According to Harris, Santangelo, and Graham,

> "writing is a recursive, strategic, and multidimensional process central to (1) planning what to say and how to say it, (2) translating ideas into written text, and (3) revising what has been written" (2010, p. 226).

As a productive skill, writing involves greater deliberate control and goal-directedness, because

> the writer must negotiate the rules and mechanics of writing, while maintaining a focus on factors such as organization, form and features, purposes and goals, audience perspectives and needs, and evaluation of communicative intent and efficacy (Harris, Graham, Brindle, & Sandmel, 2009, p. 132).

To promote learners' literacy development, it is very important to raise their awareness about the strategic nature of the reading and writing processes and familiarize them with the strategies that good readers and writers tend to use. Meanwhile, we should also pay attention to learner variables such as gender, race, self-efficacy, motivation, and effort and contextual factors such as home languages and culture. These variables are also found to be closely related to literacy learning and strategy use, as we will see in the following two sections.

### *Gender and literacy learning strategies*

Gender difference is a recurrent topic in studies pertaining to literacy learning strategies. Quite a few studies focus on investigating the differences in the use of language learning strategies between male and female ESL students at the college level (e.g., Rebecca, Martha, & Madeline, 1988; Green & Oxford, 1995) and find that female students tend to use language learning strategies more often than their male counterparts. As these studies did not focus on reading and writing strategies in particular, they could not tell us much about whether learners of different gender would behave differently when it comes to reading and writing strategy use. Studies about gender differences in the use of reading and writing strategies among pre-teens are scarce, though there are studies concerning gender differences in other aspects of reading and writing learning. For instance, Merisuo-Storm (2006) found that Finnish boys and girls (aged 10 and 11) are different in their preference for reading materials and their attitudes towards reading and writing. According to the study, students' attitudes towards writing were "more negative than those regarding reading" and "boys were significantly more reluctant writers than girls" (p. 111). Although Merisuo-Storm's findings were based on Finnish students, the gender differences in attitudes towards basic literacy skills such as reading and writing may well be a contributing factor to the gap between boys and girls in literacy assessment performance in a wider context. The results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States over the past 17 years (1992–2009) reveal that girls in grades 4 and 8 consistently performed better than their male counterparts in reading and writing achievements (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). In Australia, boys' lesser achievement in literacy has also attracted the attention of some researchers who call on educators and school administrators to pay greater attention to gender differences in children's literacy performance at school (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). According to the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) Report, the average score of Singaporean P4 girls was 567 points whereas that of the boys was 550 points (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Although there is no published statistics about gender differences in high-stake national exams such as the Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE), we suspect that there is a gap between boys and girls in literacy assessment performance. Moreover, the consequence of this gap is more serious than that in the United States and Australia due to the high-stake nature of national exams in Singapore. This paper will not explore gender differences in literacy assessment performance; instead, we will focus on the gender issue in literacy learning strategy use.

### *Self-efficacy, motivation, effort, and literacy learning strategies*

Studies suggest that certain learner variables such as self-efficacy, motivation, and effort can also play an important role in literacy learning. Self-efficacy refers to learners' perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels (Bandura, 1997). According to Schunk and Zimmerman (2007), a learner's level of self-efficacy can influence their choice of activities, effort expenditure, persistence, and achievement. Cole (2002) explains that learners with positive self-efficacies feel a strong sense of control over their learning and believe that they have the power to succeed whereas learners with poor self-efficacies feel just the opposite. Therefore, Cole thinks that it is important for educators to "evaluate students' self-efficacies and provide meaningful, motivational activities that will improve and enhance students' confidence in their abilities" (2002, p. 328).

Apart from self-efficacy, a number of researchers argue that motivation and effort investment are also variables that should not be neglected. As Boekaerts and Cascallar (2006) point out, learners must initiate activities that set the scene for learning, assign values to the learning activity, motivate themselves, and persevere. Teachers can teach students reading and writing strategies, but students may never reach their full potential if they do not have the intrinsic motivation to read and write and they do not invest adequate effort (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010).

There remain few studies on whether young ESL learners with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ in strategy use when they are approaching English literacy learning. More investigation in this regard is needed to develop strategy instruction programs which can better accommodate learner needs.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Six hundred and seventy-eight Primary 3 students from two neighborhood primary schools in Singapore were involved in the preparatory study of our research project. Among them, 362 (or 53.4%) were boys and 316 (or 46.6%) were girls. Ninety eight percent of these participants aged between eight and nine years when they took part in the study. There were 486 (or 71.7%) ethnic Chinese students, 148 (or 21.8%) ethnic Malay students, 24 (or 3.5%) ethnic Indian students, and 20 (or 2.9%) students from other ethnic groups (e.g., Eurasians, Koreans, and others). As far as home languages are concerned, 67.8% of the participants reported that their home languages included English and their respective mother tongues while 32.2% of them claimed that only one language was spoken in their home. Among those who claimed to speak only one language at home, 9% speak only English, 13.9% speak only Chinese (or Chinese dialects), 7.5% speak Malay, and the rest 1.8% speak Tamil or other languages.

### *Instruments*

Drawing on studies on language learning strategies in general (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002; Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2007), and the findings concerning upper primary (from P4 to P6) pupils' English learning strategies for Singaporeans in particular (e.g., Gu, Hu, & Zhang, 2005; Rao, Gu, Zhang, & Hu, 2007; Zhang, Gu, & Hu, 2008), we developed two sets of survey forms for the preparatory study: one about reading and the other about writing. There were 42 items in the first draft of both surveys. The two survey forms were then piloted in a neighborhood primary school of similar proportion of students from different ethnic groups. During the pilot study, we asked the students to highlight the terms that they could not understand and the language that they found difficult or confusing so that we could subsequently rephrase them. We also noted down students' reactions when they were answering the pilot forms and the amount of time they needed in completing the surveys. We conducted an internal reliability test on the survey items based on the pilot study data and found that the alpha values for both surveys to be greater than 0.9 (the benchmark value for good design is 0.8). We then made some adjustments to the pilot version by simplifying the language, reducing the number of items, and redesigning the layout of the survey question booklets and the answer sheets.

The final version of the survey forms consists of 40 items each. For each survey, there are two sections. Section One, which consists of 12 questions, is for collecting students' personal information (age, gender, home languages, interest in reading and writing, preferred language(s) for reading and writing, effort in out-of-school reading and writing). Section Two is for collecting information concerning their strategy use in reading or writing. In this section, there are 40 statements about what a reader or writer does in their reading or writing process. Under each statement, there are five options (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) with 1 representing *Never*, 2 for *Occasionally*, 3 for *Sometimes*, 4 for *Usually*, and 5 for *Always*. The students were asked to read each statement and to think about their own experience and then pick a number which best represents what they did. Appendices 1 and 2 list the strategies employed in reading and writing surveys.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The reading and writing surveys were administered to 678 students in two schools, with the help of the English language teachers. Step-by-step survey administration instructions were provided to the teachers involved and the two surveys were administered in separate days so as not to overwhelm the students.

After the data were collected, they were entered into SPSS. As there were 40 items for each survey, we found it necessary to conduct a factorial analysis for each survey to avoid handling too many variables in other statistical analyses. The KMO and Bartlett's tests for our datasets showed a KMO value of .955 for the reading data and .948 for the writing data, indicating that our data were suitable for factor analysis.

Through factor analysis, we extracted five strategy groups for the English reading survey and seven groups for the writing survey. The five reading strategy groups can explain 47.4% of the variance whereas the seven writing strategy groups can account for 47.8% of the variance. For convenience of expression, we renamed all the strategy groups. The reading strategy groups were renamed as (1) *Goal-setting and Planning*, (2) *Comprehension Enhancement*, (3) *Attention Management*, (4) *Coping with Unknown Words*, and (5) *Monitoring and Evaluation*. Table 1 lists the specific strategies clustered under each of these reading strategy groups. The data were then recoded according to these strategy groups and new values were computed for them as well.

The seven writing strategy groups were renamed as (1) *Activating Prior Knowledge*, (2) *Planning Techniques*, (3) *Global Planning & Monitoring*, (4) *Drafting*, (5) *Vocabulary Strategy*, (6) *Quality Control*, and (7) *Rewarding Self*. Table 2 lists the specific writing strategies under each strategy group. The data were also recoded and new values computed.

A variety of statistical analyses was carried out subsequently based on the values of these clumped strategy groups.

**Table 1**: Factor analysis results for English reading survey

| Item no. | Coefficient | Specific strategies |
|---|---|---|
| | | **RD_Factor 1: Goal Setting & Planning** |
| RD_Q01 | .536 | Goal setting |
| RD_Q02 | .553 | Determining reading speed |
| RD_Q03 | .542 | Determining reading purpose |
| RD_Q04 | .547 | Activating prior knowledge (knowledge about the topic) |
| | | **RD_Factor 2: Comprehension Enhancement** |
| RD_Q09 | .547 | Reading back and forth for main ideas |
| RD_Q10 | .547 | Differentiating important and less important information |
| RD_Q13 | .521 | Predicting by using what has been read so far |
| RD_Q14 | .492 | Asking questions while reading |
| RD_Q17 | .456 | Restating ideas in own words for better understanding |
| | | **RD_Factor 3: Attention Management** |
| RD_Q19 | .462 | Paying closer attention when facing difficulty |
| RD_Q20 | .700 | Concentration management |
| | | **RD_Factor 4: Coping with Unknown Words** |
| RD_Q25 | .647 | Guessing when unsure about the exact meaning |
| RD_Q26 | .581 | Applying linguistic knowledge for guessing word meaning |
| RD_Q27 | .566 | Using contextual clues in coping with unknown words |
| RD_Q28 | .715 | Using dictionaries for coping with unknown words |
| RD_Q29 | .599 | Asking for help in coping with unknown words |
| | | **RD_Factor 5: Monitoring & Evaluation** |
| RD_Q32 | .527 | Checking whether reading goals achieved |
| RD_Q33 | .516 | Checking understanding through discussion with peers |
| RD_Q35 | .477 | Checking level of understanding after reading |
| RD_Q36 | .567 | Thinking about writer intention after reading |
| RD_Q37 | .595 | Thinking about text types |
| RD_Q38 | .648 | Noting down good words/phrases for future use |
| RD_Q39 | .568 | Evaluating writer opinions |
| RD_Q40 | .564 | Evaluating text quality |

**Table 2**: Results of factor analysis for English writing survey

| Item no. | Coefficient | Specific strategies |
|---|---|---|
| | | **WR_Factor 1: Activating Prior Knowledge** |
| WR_Q01 | .539 | Reading for modeling |
| WR_Q06 | .547 | Gathering information about the topic |
| WR_Q10 | .516 | Activating prior knowledge (text type) |
| WR_Q16 | .453 | Activating prior knowledge (words or phrases read before) |
| WR_Q17 | .448 | Activating prior knowledge (ideas read before) |
| | | **WR_Factor 2: Planning Techniques** |
| WR_Q04 | .502 | Understanding task requirements |
| WR_Q08 | .653 | Planning by listing ideas |
| WR_Q11 | .481 | Making an outline |
| WR_Q12 | .469 | Using graphic organizers for planning |
| | | **WR_Factor 3: Global Planning & Monitoring** |
| WR_Q02 | .536 | Psychological preparation 1 (self-encouragement) |
| WR_Q03 | .462 | Psychological preparation 2 (reducing anxiety) |
| WR_Q07 | .518 | Thinking about audience |
| WR_Q27 | .664 | Quality monitoring (assessing possible reader response) |
| WR_Q33 | .528 | Thinking about readability |
| WR_Q34 | .527 | Self-evaluation (strengths & weaknesses) |
| WR_Q38 | .594 | Progress monitoring (writing quality) |
| WR_Q39 | .629 | Progress monitoring (writing ability) |

| Item no. | Coefficient | Specific strategies |
|---|---|---|
| | | **WR_Factor 4: Drafting** |
| WR_Q15 | .424 | Prioritizing ideas over language while drafting |
| WR_Q23 | .491 | Coining words as compensation strategy |
| WR_Q24 | .427 | Meeting task requirements |
| WR_Q28 | .680 | Revising (ideas) |
| WR_Q29 | .629 | Revising (re-organizing ideas) |
| WR_Q32 | .552 | Revising (words/phrases) |
| | | **WR_Factor 5: Vocabulary Strategy** |
| WR_Q18 | .555 | Using details to support main ideas |
| WR_Q21 | .453 | Consulting dictionaries for unfamiliar words |
| WR_Q22 | .654 | Using circumlocution as compensation strategy |
| | | **WR_Factor 6: Quality Control** |
| WR_Q19 | .451 | Ensuring coherence |
| WR_Q20 | .528 | Ensuring cohesion |
| WR_Q25 | .598 | Ensuring completeness of text structure |
| WR_Q26 | .633 | Ensuring correctness of grammar |
| WR_Q31 | .675 | Mechanics (spelling & punctuation) |
| WR_Q37 | .588 | Trying to learn from teacher feedback |
| | | **WR_Factor 7: Rewarding Self** |
| WR_Q36 | .733 | Rewarding self for completion of writing tasks |

**Table 2**: Results of factor analysis for English writing survey *(continued)*

## Results

### *Overall results for reading and writing*

Tables 3 and 4 show that students did not report a very frequent use of the reading and writing strategies listed in our surveys, as the mean scores for all the reading strategy groups are not very high. If we take a closer look at Table 3, we find that only one reading strategy group (*Attention Management*) scored slightly above 3.5 on a five-point Likert scale, suggesting that students tried to use attention management strategies to fix their reading problems more often than other strategies.

As can be seen from Table 4, students' reported use of writing strategies was not very frequent, either. The mean scores for five out of the seven strategy groups fared below 3.1. Despite that, students did report more frequent use of strategies related to writing quality control. If we recall the specific strategies of quality control (see Table 2), it is not too hard to figure out why this was the case. Issues such as cohesion, coherence, completeness of text structure, correctness of grammar, spelling, and punctuation are all aspects an English teacher will emphasize repeatedly to their students.

Presenting the mean scores of students' reported strategy use can only give us a rough picture about whether our informants attempted to use strategies and how often they did so.

**Table 3**: Mean scores for reading strategies

| Reading factors | N | Minimun | Maximum | Mean | Standard deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal-setting & Planning | 659 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.7508 | .97839 |
| Comprehension Enhancement | 659 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8200 | 1.00725 |
| Attention Management | 658 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.5304 | 1.14337 |
| Coping with Unknown Words | 655 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0791 | .89854 |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | 656 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8742 | .96509 |

| **Table 4**: Mean scores for writing strategies | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading factors** | **N** | **Minimun** | **Maximum** | **Mean** | **Standard deviation** |
| Activating Prior Knowledge | 657 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.4259 | .91844 |
| Planning Techniques | 654 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.1044 | .96438 |
| Global Planning & Monitoring | 639 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0430 | .96501 |
| Drafting | 651 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.9411 | .90904 |
| Vocabulary Strategy | 657 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.9254 | 1.04263 |
| Quality Control | 652 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.6639 | .90927 |
| Rewarding Self | 660 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8788 | 1.60060 |

As the focus of this paper is on exploring the relationship between students' use of reading and writing strategies and social and psychological factors such as their gender, ethnic groups, home languages, interest in reading and writing, self-efficacy, and the like, we need to carry out more complicated statistical operations. The following sections present the results in this regard. In order to avoid confusion, we present the reading and the writing results separately.

***Reading strategy use***

*Social variables and reading strategy use*

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate whether students' self-reported reading strategy use is different if they are grouped according to their gender, ethnic groups, and family language backgrounds. Our results show that boys and girls were different only in one reading strategy group (*Coping with Unknown Words*) ($F$ (1,649) = 11.45, $p$ = .001, partial $\eta^2$ = .017), using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01 (0.05/5). Girls reported more frequent use of strategies related to coping with unknown words ($M$ = 3.21, $SD$ = .87) than boys ($M$ = 2.97, $SD$ = .91). For the rest of the reading strategy groups, no gender differences were found. Students from different ethnic groups did not show significant differences in their self-reported use of reading strategies. No difference was found among students from different home language backgrounds in their self-reported use of reading strategies either.

*Psychological variables and reading strategy use*

MANOVA tests were also conducted for finding out whether students with different levels of interest in English reading, different degrees of self-efficacy, and different out-of-school learning effort performed differently in their self-reported strategy use.

As can be seen from Table 5, the mean scores of students with the highest self-rated reading interest are significantly higher than the scores of students with fair and low reading interest. This can be observed in all strategy groups. In other words, students with high reading interest tended to use strategies more often.

As revealed by Table 6, students with the highest self-rated reading ability (or self-efficacy) reported more frequent use of strategies than those with fair and low abilities. The differences between high ability students and fair and low ability students are statistically significant in four out of the five reading factors. The only exception is the use of strategies related to coping with unknown words, which shows no differences. What we can observe from this finding is that students with high self-rated reading ability tended to use reading strategies more frequently than students with low self-rated reading ability.

Among the 678 informants, 397 reported that they spent extra time reading in English after school, accounting for 59% whereas the other 41% reported that they did not do so. A MANOVA test reveals a significant difference in the reading strategy use between students who read after

**Table 5**: Reading interest and reading strategy use

**Tukey HSD**

| Dependent Variable | (I) Interest in reading English | (J) Interest in reading English | Mean Difference (I–J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | 95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal-setting & Planning | Strong | Fair | .2792* | .07831 | .001 | .0952 | .4631 |
| | | Low | .7321* | .16634 | .000 | .3414 | 1.1229 |
| Comprehension Enhancement | Strong | Fair | .2967* | .08084 | .001 | .1068 | .4866 |
| | | Low | .7842* | .17170 | .000 | .3809 | 1.1876 |
| Attention Management | Strong | Fair | .5299* | .08875 | .000 | .3214 | .7384 |
| | | Low | 1.3947* | .18850 | .000 | .9519 | 1.8375 |
| Coping with Unknown Words | Strong | Fair | .2377* | .07191 | .003 | .0687 | .4066 |
| | | Low | .7271* | .15273 | .000 | .3683 | 1.0859 |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | Strong | Fair | .3396* | .07688 | .000 | .1590 | .5202 |
| | | Low | .8851* | .16330 | .000 | .5015 | 1.2688 |

*. The mean difference is sigificant at the .05 level

**Table 6**: Reading ability and reading strategy use

**Tukey HSD**

| Dependent Variable | (I) English reading ability | (J) English reading ability | Mean Difference (I–J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | 95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal-setting & Planning | Very Good | Fair | .2522* | .08171 | .006 | .0603 | .4442 |
| | | Low | .4659* | .18848 | .036 | .0231 | .9087 |
| Comprehension Enhancement | Very Good | Fair | .2679* | .08406 | .004 | .0704 | .4654 |
| | | Low | .7118* | .19390 | .001 | .2563 | 1.1673 |
| Attention Management | Very Good | Fair | .3923* | .09395 | .000 | .1716 | .6130 |
| | | Low | 1.1492* | .21672 | .000 | .6401 | 1.6583 |
| Coping with Unknown Words | Very Good | Fair | .0990 | .07519 | .386 | -.0776 | .2757 |
| | | Low | .6178* | .17344 | .001 | .2104 | 1.0253 |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | Very Good | Fair | .2499* | .08086 | .006 | .0600 | .4399 |
| | | Low | .6662* | .18652 | .001 | .2281 | 1.1044 |

*. The mean difference is sigificant at the .05 level

school and those who did not: $F$ (5, 632) = 5.31, $p$ = .000; $\lambda$ = .96; partial $\eta^2$ = .04. Students who read after school tended to use reading strategies more often than those who did not.

### *Writing strategy use*

*Social variables and writing strategy use*

We conducted the same kind of tests as we did with the reading survey to find out whether students' writing strategy use differs when they were grouped by gender, ethnic groups, and home language backgrounds. Our results show that boys and girls were different in their reported use of four groups of strategies, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .007 (0.05/7). They are: *Activating Prior Knowledge* ($F$ (1, 602) = 11.22, $p$ = .001, partial $\eta^2$ = .018), *Vocabulary Strategy* ($F$ (1, 602) = 9.01, $p$ = .003, partial $\eta^2$ = .015), *Quality Control* ($F$ (1, 602) = 7.43, $p$ = .007, partial $\eta^2$ = .012), and *Rewarding Self* ($F$ (1, 602) = 11.31, $p$ = .001, partial $\eta^2$ = .018). Among these four factors, girls' mean scores of the first three factors ($M$ = 3.56, $SD$ = .89; $M$ = 3.06, $SD$ = 1.06; $M$ = 3.80, $SD$ = 3.61) are higher than boys' ($M$ = 3.31, $SD$ = .93; $M$ = 2.81, $SD$ = 1.02; $M$ = 3.61, $SD$ = .91). In other words, girls tended to use strategies related to activating prior knowledge, coping with vocabulary problems, and quality enhancement more frequently than boys whereas boys tended to use the strategy of self-rewarding more often than girls.

A MANOVA test shows that ethnic Malay students reported significantly greater use of strategies related to *Global Planning & Monitoring* than ethnic Chinese students, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .007: $F$ (2, 601) = 5.08, $p$ = 0.006, and partial $\eta^2$ = .017. In other words, our Malay informants tended to use strategies related to global planning and monitoring more often than their Chinese counterparts. No significant differences were observed in all the other strategy groups among students from different ethnic groups.

Students from different home language backgrounds did not show any significant difference in their reported use of writing strategies.

### *Psychological variables and writing strategy use*

Our MANOVA test results show that students with the highest self-rated writing interest reported more frequent use of six out of the seven groups of writing strategies than those students with fair or low interest (see Table 7). No significant difference was observed in the use of *Rewarding Self* among students with different levels of interest. What we can conclude from this finding is that students' interest in English writing appears to be related to their use of writing strategies.

As Table 8 illustrates, students with high self-rated writing abilities outperformed those with fair and low writing abilities on six out of the seven writing strategy groups. The only exception is *Rewarding Self*. In other words, students with high self-efficacy tended to use writing strategies more frequently than students with low self-efficacy in English writing.

Among the 678 students, 62% claimed that they did spend time on English writing after school whereas the other 38% said they did not do so. Our MANOVA test results show that students who wrote after school were different from those who did not in four out of the seven groups of writing strategies, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .007. These strategy groups include: *Activating Prior Knowledge* ($F$ (1, 602) = 25.89, $p$ = .000, partial $\eta^2$ = .041), *Global Planning & Monitoring* ($F$ (1, 602) = 19.44, $p$ = .000, partial $\eta^2$ = .031), *Vocabulary Strategy* ($F$ (1, 602) = 21.64, $p$ = .000, partial $\eta^2$ = .035), and *Quality Control* ($F$ (1, 602) = 7.82, $p$ = .005, partial $\eta^2$ = .013). That is to say, students who wrote after school tended to use these four groups of writing strategies more often than those who did not. They did not show significant differences in their use of strategies related to *Drafting* and *Rewarding Self*.

**Table 7**: Writing interest and writing strategy use

**Tukey HSD**

| Dependent Variable | (I) Interest in English writing | (J) Interest in English writing | Mean Difference (I–J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Activating Prior Knowledge | Strong | Fair | .4990* | .07338 | .000 | .3266 | .6714 |
| | | Low | 1.2170* | .15391 | .000 | .8554 | 1.5787 |
| Planning Techniques | Strong | Fair | .5092* | .07892 | .000 | .3238 | .6947 |
| | | Low | .9224* | .16553 | .000 | .5335 | 1.3114 |
| Global Planning & Monitoring | Strong | Fair | .5142* | .07886 | .000 | .3289 | .6995 |
| | | Low | 1.0428* | .16542 | .000 | .6541 | 1.4315 |
| Drafting | Strong | Fair | .4645* | .07421 | .000 | .2901 | .6388 |
| | | Low | 1.0398* | .15565 | .000 | .6741 | 1.4056 |
| Vocabulary Strategy | Strong | Fair | .4577* | .08671 | .000 | .2540 | .6614 |
| | | Low | .8223* | .18188 | .000 | .3950 | 1.2496 |
| Quality Control | Strong | Fair | .3482* | .07355 | .000 | .1754 | .5210 |
| | | Low | 1.0816* | .15426 | .000 | .7191 | 1.4440 |

*. The mean difference is sigificant at the .05 level

**Table 8**: Writing ability and writing strategy use

**Tukey HSD**

| Dependent Variable | (I) English writing ability | (J) English writing ability | Mean Difference (I–J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | 95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Activating Prior Knowledge | Very Good | Fair | .4170* | .08400 | .000 | .2196 | .6144 |
| | | Low | .9667* | .17709 | .000 | .5506 | 1.3828 |
| Planning Techniques | Very Good | Fair | .6017* | .08749 | .000 | .3961 | .8072 |
| | | Low | .9129* | .18445 | .000 | .4795 | 1.3463 |
| Global Planning & Monitoring | Very Good | Fair | .5800* | .08796 | .000 | .3733 | .7867 |
| | | Low | 1.0696* | .18544 | .000 | .6339 | 1.5054 |
| Drafting | Very Good | Fair | .4960* | .08315 | .000 | .3006 | .6913 |
| | | Low | .8876* | .17529 | .000 | .4758 | 1.2995 |
| Vocabulary Strategy | Very Good | Fair | .5357* | .09565 | .000 | .3109 | .7604 |
| | | Low | 1.0326* | .20165 | .000 | .5588 | 1.5064 |
| Quality Control | Very Good | Fair | .2746* | .08297 | .003 | .0796 | .4695 |
| | | Low | 1.0964* | .17491 | .000 | .6854 | 1.5074 |
| Rewarding Self | Very Good | Fair | .3178 | .15076 | .089 | −.0364 | .6721 |
| | | Low | −.0097 | .31783 | .999 | −.7565 | .7371 |

*. The mean difference is sigificant at the .05 level

## Discussion

From what has been presented above, we can see that Singaporean schoolchildren's self-reported use of literacy learning strategies seems to be influenced by certain social and psychological factors.

Our results show that girls reported more frequent use of strategies related to dealing with unknown words in their reading than boys. In writing, girls reported more frequent use of three groups of writing strategies than boys: *Activating Prior Knowledge*, *Vocabulary Strategy*, and *Quality Control*. Boys only outperformed girls in one strategy group, that is, *Rewarding Self*. What we can conclude from these results is that boys and girls may have different preferences in strategy use, especially in writing. If we recall Merisuo-Storm's (2006) comments about a more negative attitude towards writing among boys and their greater reluctance in writing activities, we may not find the differences between girls and boys in their use of writing strategies very surprising. What is worth noting here is that language educators may need to encourage boys to pay more attention to strategies which are related to prior knowledge activation, dealing with vocabulary problems, and writing quality enhancement. This is especially important and should be taken into serious consideration if lower-primary English teachers decide to introduce strategy instruction into their teaching practice. Despite the fact that gender differences tend to be developmental and the gap between males and females will be eventually leveled off, it is still worth bearing in mind that boys, especially lower-primary schoolboys, may need more help in their language learning in general and development of writing skills in particular.

In a multi-racial society like Singapore, it is quite possible for students from different ethnic groups to have different understanding about literacy learning and to consider more strategic ways of approaching literacy learning. The finding that ethnic Chinese and Malay students reported significantly different use of writing strategies related to *Global Planning & Monitoring* seems to indicate that ethnicity might have something to do with students' strategy use in English learning. We also noticed that ethnic group may not be a key variable in Singapore schoolchildren's use of English literacy learning strategies, as our statistical results did not reveal any other differences among students from different ethnic groups. More investigation should be carried out if we want to have a better understanding about the exact role of ethnicity in students' literacy learning strategy use.

As more and more families in Singapore choose to use English as their home language, the influence of students' mother tongue languages on their English literacy learning may become an issue of lesser importance. Moreover, with Singapore not likely to become a monolingual society in the foreseeable future, Singaporean children will probably continue to learn English literacy in a multilingual environment. Therefore language educators should take this into consideration when they conduct strategy instruction.

Similar to the findings in other learning strategy studies, our findings show that learners' interest in literacy learning, their self-rated reading and writing abilities, and their out-of-school effort in literacy learning are all closely related to their strategy use. What language educators need to do is strengthen the bilateral ties between motivation, self-efficacy, and effort expenditure and the more frequent use of learning strategies. By increasing learners' intrinsic interest in reading and writing in English, helping them to build up their self-efficacy, and boosting their voluntary effort expenditure on literacy practice, language teachers can make students more active in conducting strategic behaviors in their literacy learning. On the other hand, incorporating explicit strategy instruction into daily literacy teaching practices can raise learners' awareness of learning strategies and build up their self-efficacy, which will in turn promote students' interest and greater effort in literacy learning.

## Conclusion

The results of the preparatory study of our research project show that our informants did attempt to use different literacy learning strategies, though the average frequency of strategy use was not very high. We also found that learners' gender, motivation, self-efficacy, and out-of-school effort are related to their use of learning strategies. Students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds may be able to exert influence on the use of certain literacy learning strategies. The influence of home languages on students' strategy use is not validated by our data. Our findings reveal the necessity of strategy instruction for this group of schoolchildren and the potential importance of social and psychological factors in literacy strategy instruction.

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**Appendix 1: Inventory of reading strategies**

| Item No. | Strategy | Item No. | Strategy |
|---|---|---|---|
| RD_Q01 | Setting a goal for reading | RD_Q21 | Applying linguistic knowledge for understanding |
| RD_Q02 | Determining reading speed | RD_Q22 | Reading difficult parts aloud for understanding |
| RD_Q03 | Determining reading purpose | RD_Q23 | Re-reading difficult parts |
| RD_Q04 | Activating prior knowledge (knowledge about the topic) | RD_Q24 | Ignoring unimportant unknown words |
| RD_Q05 | Predicting (via title/pictures) | RD_Q25 | Guessing when unsure about the exact meaning |
| RD_Q06 | Predicting (via common knowledge) | RD_Q26 | Applying linguistic knowledge for guessing word meaning |
| RD_Q07 | Using text knowledge for understanding | RD_Q27 | Using contextual clues in coping with unknown words |
| RD_Q08 | Paying attention to every word | RD_Q28 | Using dictionaries for coping with unknown words |
| RD_Q09 | Reading back and forth for main ideas | RD_Q29 | Asking for help in coping with unknown words |
| RD_Q10 | Differentiating important and less important information | RD_Q30 | Chunking long and difficult sentences for understanding |
| RD_Q11 | Highlighting important information for better understanding | RD_Q31 | Using knowledge of grammar for understanding difficult sentences |
| RD_Q12 | Checking understanding while reading | RD_Q32 | Checking whether reading goals achieved |
| RD_Q13 | Predicting by using what has been read so far | RD_Q33 | Checking understanding through discussion with peers |
| RD_Q14 | Asking questions while reading | RD_Q34 | Summarizing important information read |
| RD_Q15 | Pause and think for better understanding | RD_Q35 | Checking level of understanding after reading |
| RD_Q16 | Visualizing | RD_Q36 | Thinking about writer intention after reading |
| RD_Q17 | Restating ideas in own words for better understanding | RD_Q37 | Thinking about text types |
| RD_Q18 | Reducing anxiety when facing difficulty | RD_Q38 | Noting down good words/phrases for future use |
| RD_Q19 | Paying closer attention when facing difficulty | RD_Q39 | Evaluating writer opinions |
| RD_Q20 | Concentration management | RD_Q40 | Evaluating text quality |

**Appendix 2: Inventory of writing strategies**

| Item No. | Strategy | Item No. | Strategy |
|---|---|---|---|
| WR_Q01 | Reading for modeling | WR_Q21 | Consulting dictionaries for unfamiliar words |
| WR_Q02 | Psychological preparation 1 (self-encouragement) | WR_Q22 | Using circumlocution as compensation strategy |
| WR_Q03 | Psychological preparation 2 (reducing anxiety) | WR_Q23 | Coining words as compensation strategy |
| WR_Q04 | Understanding task requirements | WR_Q24 | Meeting task requirements |
| WR_Q05 | Thinking about purpose | WR_Q25 | Ensuring completeness of text structure (beginning, body, and ending) |
| WR_Q06 | Gathering information about the topic | WR_Q26 | Ensuring correctness of grammar |
| WR_Q07 | Thinking about audience | WR_Q27 | Quality monitoring (assessing possible reader response) |
| WR_Q08 | Planning by listing ideas | WR_Q28 | Revising (ideas) |
| WR_Q09 | Planning about what language to use | WR_Q29 | Revising (re-organizing ideas) |
| WR_Q10 | Activating prior knowledge (text type) | WR_Q30 | Revising (reading aloud for problems) |
| WR_Q11 | Making an outline | WR_Q31 | Mechanics (Spelling & punctuation) |
| WR_Q12 | Using graphic organizers for planning | WR_Q32 | Revising (words/phrases) |
| WR_Q13 | Planning by thinking about how to write | WR_Q33 | Thinking about readability |
| WR_Q14 | Planning by selecting a focus | WR_Q34 | Self-evaluation (strengths & weaknesses) |
| WR_Q15 | Prioritizing ideas over language while drafting | WR_Q35 | Other-evaluation (seeking peer feedback) |
| WR_Q16 | Activating prior knowledge (words or phrases read before) | WR_Q36 | Rewarding self for completion of writing tasks |
| WR_Q17 | Activating prior knowledge (ideas read before) | WR_Q37 | Trying to learn from teacher feedback |
| WR_Q18 | Using details to support main ideas | WR_Q38 | Progress monitoring (writing quality) |
| WR_Q19 | Ensuring coherence | WR_Q39 | Progress monitoring (writing ability) |
| WR_Q20 | Ensuring cohesion | WR_Q40 | Effort monitoring (looking out for writing opportunities) |

10

# Incorporating Cross-cultural Communication in ELT: A Pedagogical Approach

■ Y. Suneetha
Rajeev Gandhi Memorial College of Engineering & Technology, Nandyal
G.M. Sundaravalli
Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi

**ABSTRACT:** *Cross-cultural communication has become ever more significant through the globalization of markets, affairs of nation-states and technologies. Consequently, the cultural quotient (CQ) is becoming increasingly important, especially in the context of the changing dynamics of work culture around the world. This paper makes a case for the need to pay attention to intercultural communication and discusses some specific approaches and strategies in the teaching of intercultural communication in the classroom. These approaches include addressing issues like learning to honour one's own culture and sharing it with others while developing a capacity to be open to other cultures. Other strategies include progressing from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative state of understanding and acceptance of cultural differences and increasing one's ability to communicate with non-native speakers. Specifically, classroom practices and strategies suggested include intercultural explorations, use of texts, films, short stories and other multi-media resources, contrastive case studies of cultures, group encounters and role plays.*

## Introduction

Sir Francis Bacon said that if a man was gracious and courteous to strangers, it showed that he was a citizen of the world, and that his heart was no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joined them. The present work force even in local contexts demands global skills such as excellent communication skills. Regardless of the region, global skills are the primary requisite of any organization as these organizations are operating in a global scenario. Cross-cultural communication is one such global skill that will equip the learner to adapt to any cultural context. Cross-cultural communication has emerged largely through the globalization of markets, affairs of nation-states and technologies. Cultural quotients (CQ) are becoming increasingly important, especially in the context of the changing dynamics of work culture around the world. Cross-cultural issues have become vital due to Informatization. This is a process whereby information and communication technologies such as the World Wide Web, computers, films, and television shape cultural and civic discourse. They have transformed economic and social relations to such an extent that cultural and economic barriers are minimized.

Accordingly, the present curricula should stress the mutual exchange of "know how", strategic utilization of competencies, as well as improvement in the quality of higher education and the role it plays to ensure sustainable development and better quality of life for people. This paper makes a case for the need to pay attention to intercultural communication and discusses some specific approaches and strategies in the teaching of intercultural communication in the classroom. These include tackling issues like learning to honour and sharing one's own culture while developing a capacity to be open to other cultures; progressing from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative state of understanding and acceptance of cultural differences; and increasing the ability to communicate with non-native speakers. Specifically, classroom practices and strategies include intercultural explorations through the use of appropriate texts, films and other multi-media resources, short stories, contrastive case studies of cultures, group encounters and role plays.

**What is culture?**

Culture is an amorphous concept even in the most rigorous of theoretical discussions of inter-cultural communication. Typically it is defined as a symbolic system, which includes issues of perception, cognition and understanding. It is essential for today's work force to be aware of the differences in communication across cultures at their workplaces. Various scholars have attempted to define culture. A more succinct definition is provided by Down (1971) "... a culture is a system of symbols shared by a group of humans and transmitted by them to upcoming generations" (p. 30). Barnow (1973) suggests that culture is inheritance and is expressed through culture, "a culture is a way of life of a group of people, the configuration of all of the more or less stereotyped patterns of learned behavior which are handed down from one generation to the next through means of language and imitation" (p. 6).

A major component of a culture is its systems of values, beliefs, and material products. First, culture includes belief systems that involve stories, or myths, the interpretation of which can give people insight into how they should feel, think, and/or behave. Second, culture includes value systems. Values are formed based on how we learned to believe things ought to be or how people ought to behave, especially in terms of qualities such as honesty, integrity, and openness. Third, culture is also defined by material products such as food, clothing, and music.

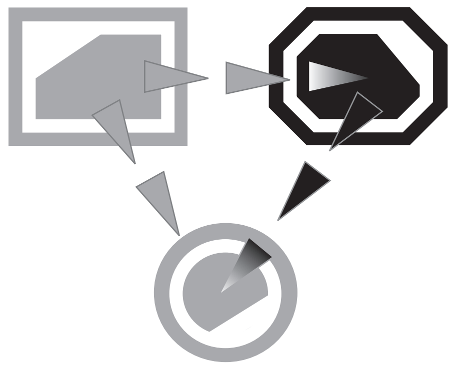
Thus, culture provides people with a general cognitive frame work for an understanding of the world, and for functioning in it. Culture mediates relationships among men and between men and their environment. It is the primary determinant of how a person views reality both consciously and unconsciously. Moreover it provides the context which enables human beings to communicate.

For these reasons, one's professional career can never be separated from his or her cultural habits. Cross-cultural training can put a negotiator in a beneficial position over his or her competitors. Though many companies feel reluctant to train their employees, it is absolutely essential and profitable in view of today's increasing demand for interaction in different global scenarios. Ian Stern, director of Holistic Training Solitarians, emphasizes cross-cultural training as an essential people skill. Thus cultural quotients (CQ), in this ever changing dynamic work culture, are becoming increasingly more important.

**Cross-cultural communication defined**

Language and cultural misinterpretations can be avoided by increasing our understanding of other people and their cultures. The study of cross-cultural communication addresses this need by examining the communications and interactions between people of different cultures and sub cultures. The fundamental principle of cross-cultural communication is that it is through culture that people communicate. Thus an Indian, a Chinese, an American speaks like any other Indian, Chinese, or American. As Kineberg (1965) points out that "we find that culture differ widely from one another in the amount of emotional expression which is permitted. We speak for example of the imperturbability of the American Indian, the inscrutability of the oriental, the reserve of the English man and at the other extreme of the expressiveness of the African or Sicilian. Although there is always some exaggeration in such clichés it is probable that they do correspond to an accepted cultural pattern, at least to some degree" (p. 174). Thus the ways people communicate and interact, their language patterns, nonverbal modes all are determined by culture (Klopf & Park, 1982).

**Figure 1**: Intercultural communication model




Cross-cultural communication theory begins with the assumptions of cultural variations. These differences act as barriers to communication. Knowing the differences exist and recognizing the potential effects on communication, the communicator will be more sensitive to the fact and accommodate such differences. This means that for communicators to understand each other, they should have something in common in their back grounds that will enable them to perceive the stimuli similarly. Communication is intricately woven into the culture. Culture fosters or promotes communication process. There is strong correlation between culture and language.

Considering the variations in cultures that reflect communication, it is necessary to discuss the barriers to cross-cultural communication.

## Barriers to cross-cultural communication

### *Culture bound verbal and non-verbal communication*

Knowledge of the non-verbal code system of a culture different from one's own is particularly helpful in establishing a communication relationship within intercultural context. Non-verbal codes consist of body movements, facial expressions, gestures, Para language, chronemics and proxemics. Verbal communication displays non-verbal cues through emotion and speaking style as well as intonation, rhythm and other prosodic attributes. The following discussion propagates non verbal actions which are extremely culture-bound.

Among the most basic cultural dimensions is individualism versus collectivism. Collectivistic cultures emphasize community, shared interests, harmony, tradition, the public good, and maintain face. Tocqueville (1945) points out, "Individualism is mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself (or herself) from the mass of his (or her) fellows and to draw apart with his (or her) family and friends, so that he (or she) has thus formed a little circle of his (or her) own, he (or she) willingly leaves society at large to itself." (p. 104).

Evidence exists that personal individualism may transcend cultural differences for certain variables. Schmidi (1983) compared the effects of crowding on people from an individualistic culture (the United States of America) and a collectivistic culture (Singapore). The study examined the relationships among personal control, crowding annoyance, and stress, reporting similar findings for both cultures (p. 221-239).

The other dimension of cross-cultural communication is proxemics, the power distance. It is obvious that power distance would affect the non-verbal behavior of a culture. High power distance cultures (e.g., India) may severely limit interaction. High PDI countries often prohibit dating, free contacts, which are taken for granted in low PDI countries.

Cultural differences in non verbal behaviors with power implications in one or both cultural groups can lead to misunderstandings eye gaze is a power cue in main stream US culture, in differences in patterns between black and white American communicators may lead to interactional difficulties. Lafrance and Mayo (1976) report that black speakers look at their conversational partner less while listening than speaking. The pattern of for white communicators is the opposite (p. 547-552).

Further, the latest research asserts that, in many cultures exterior signs of emotions are taken as a natural thing. The people of the Middle East and of the Mediterranean area are lively and hearty. For the Japanese, the public display of excessive emotions may be considered as an act of impoliteness, lack of control and even a kind of invasion of the private space of the other person. Silence has different meanings in different cultures. The Chinese have a saying "silence is golden..." In Australia silence can be interpreted as shyness or lack of dynamism. Touch has different interpretations in different zones. In Thailand and Laos it is rude for strangers to touch upon the head of the children where as in western countries it is way of showing affection.

### *Gender communication*

Gender has been neglected as a cultural dimension. This dimension refers to the rigidity and definitions of gender roles. More rigid cultures exert influence on members to behave within a narrow range of gender-related behavior and stress traditional gender role identification. Communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication. Language also reflects difference in social status between genders.

Proxemics offers considerable evidence that gender communication is a form of intercultural communication. Space is a primary means by which a culture designates who is important, who has privilege. Responses to invasion of space also differ between men and women. While men may respond aggressively, women tend to yield space rather than challenge the intruder. These differences can create problems in communication. In the work place, employees in the traditional female role, secretary, generally have a smaller space rather than the employee in the traditional male role, executive.

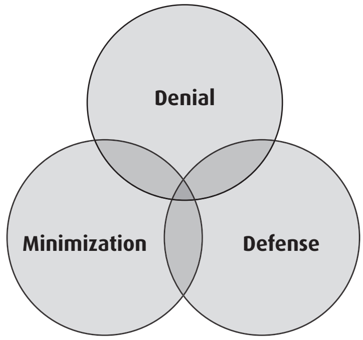
### *Ethnocentrism*

Ethnocentrism refers to the superiority feeling of the members of a certain culture. Generally, ethnocentric persons have the tendency to interpret the other culture, based on their own cultural values. An American manager considers English as the "best" and will not learn another language. The manager may consider another language as inferior or illogical. And if she/he considers his/her nonverbal system as the most civilized, he/she will have the tendency to reject other systems as primitive. In this way the ethnocentrism can become an obstacle for an efficient empathy and lead not only to the total destruction of communication, but to antagonism and even hostility.

Each society has its own culture and values. These are the ways they live and interact with each other. It is not "bad" to have American or Chinese values. What is important is that the way of doing things may not be the same. Ethnocentricism is a belief in the centrality of one's own culture. It often involves judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's own. Bennet (1993) defines ethnocentricism as "assuming that world view of one's own culture is central to all reality" (p. 30). Bennet has a model of developmental sequence of intercultural sensitivity. In this he discussed the three stages—denial, defence and minimization. (See Figure 1)

- Denial: Avoids new culture; isolated; denies the existence of new culture
- Defence: Negative stereotyping; superiority of one's own culture eg. Nazis
- Minimization: Hide cultural variations; universal truth or values based on one's own assumptions.

**Figure 2**: Stages of ethnocentricism




***Stereotypes***

Stereotyping is an extension of ethnocentricism. Samovar and Porter (1991) define stereotypes as "the perceptions and beliefs we hold about groups or individuals based on our previously formed opinions and attitudes" (p. 280). As the definition suggests, stereotypes do not develop suddenly but are formed by our culture over period of time. Stereotypes can either be positive or negative. If a group is termed as dishonest we start treating everyone in that group as dishonest irrespective of individual natures. Many examples can be given as the one is the women are not good at math or tough subjects like Aeronautics  which may cause women in turn to avoid studying such subjects.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) caution that in order to overcome the problem of over-simplification and stereotyping "comparisons between groups should always consider both likenesses and differences, that is, they should be based upon more than a single dimension of contrast, and it must be remembered that no individual member of a group embodies all of his or her group's characteristics" (p. 157). Indeed, an issue to keep in mind, as McKay (2002) explains, is that a contrast of especially western versus eastern assumptions of cultures of learning "can perpetuate differences, promote the concept of otherness, and lead to simple dichotomies and stereotyping" (p. 121).

Therefore, it is also important for teacher educators to emphasize individual variation, as well as the dynamic nature of cultures. It needs to be pointed out that the main aim of using the above framework is not to find out how different the students or teaching context will be from what teachers are accustomed to, but to explore what kind of preconditioned ideas teachers themselves have about that particular context, while showing them the dimensions over which cultures are most likely to vary in their discourse systems.

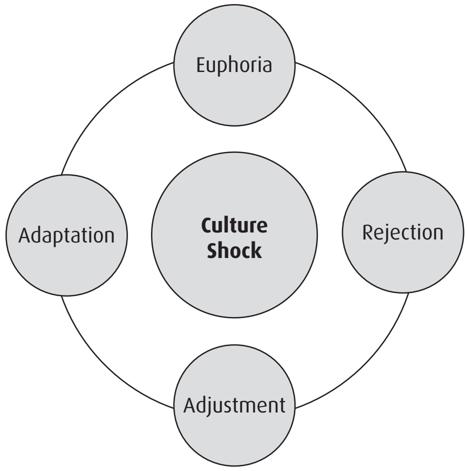
***Culture shock***

Culture shock is a strange psychological phenomenon which acts a barrier in communicating with others especially in a global environment. The term "culture shock" was first introduced in the 1950s by Kalvero Oberg to describe the phenomena people might experience after moving to a new environment. Culture shock can be described as the feeling of disorientation experienced by a person suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life. Culture shock is the physical and emotional discomfort a person experience when entering a culture different from his or her own. Culture shock is not a sudden phenomenon; rather, it builds up slowly and is often a series of small events.

Culture shock may involve any of these symptoms:

- sadness, loneliness, melancholy
- preoccupation with health

**Figure 3**: Process of culture shock




- insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little
- depression, feeling vulnerable, feeling powerless, changes in temperament
- anger, irritability, resentment, unwillingness to interact with others
- identifying with the old culture or idealizing the old country
- loss of identity
- unable to solve simple problems
- lack of confidence

For some people, culture shock can be brief and hardly noticeable. For others, it can bring intense physical and emotional discomfort. Though it is inevitable it can be managed or overcome with conscious awareness of one's own reactions.

To overcome culture shock, it is vital to understand other cultures to indulge in healthy interactions and for the well-being of the individual. As one goes through the cycle of adjustment in the new culture, one's understanding and knowledge of the host country increases.

### Cross-cultural communication in ELT: Pedagogical approaches

"When in Rome behave like a Roman" is an old proverb, but it takes little pain to understand "Roman" behavior, eventually leading to a cross-cultural communication gap. A cross-cultural communication gaffe can turn a successful deal futile in no time. It can lead to detrimental consequences in public relation, negotiation, mass media communication, business campaigns and meetings.

The present world is changing rapidly and becoming increasingly multicultural. Hence, increasingly complex skills and knowledge are required of people. Yet educational institutions are not fully prepared to accommodate these needs of modern world, nor is the human potential to learn and obtain such "new" competencies fully adequate. Almost seventy years ago John Dewey (1938) expressed:

> Learning…means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future. It is to a large extent the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a society where change is the rule, not the exception (p.19).

Intercultural communication is considered as an essential academic discipline. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) conceptualize the phenomenon of intercultural communication as "... a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures" (p. 17). Moreover, intercultural communication is regarded by some social scientists as an academic discipline—that is to say, a branch of communication studies. People with these interests are more willing to take on the challenge of the global, multicultural world and are probably better equipped to live up to academic internationalization policies than anyone else. Having said that, the role of intercultural communication education in attaining the goals of internationalization and, more specifically, in providing optimal intercultural competence-education cannot be understated.

## Pedagogical objectives

The main objective of teaching cross-cultural communication is the development of capability of multidisciplinary handling of communication, through the development of the historical and thematic global vision. The contents and objectives of the courses must extend the simple knowledge and handling of information from the perspective of the design, in order to manage the greater objective which is to create their own identity and the capability to generate contribution and development. A major goal of cross-cultural communication education is the attainment of cross-cultural interaction. Some specific objectives are:

- to create an understanding of a student's own culture
- to create strategies to improve day-to-day cross-cultural communication and maximize cultural sensitivity
- to identify communication breakdowns which stem from the cross-cultural aspects of an interaction
- to explore stages of adaptation and personal strategies for managing the stress of culture shock
- to describe the relationship of culture and communication as mutually reciprocal influences
- to avoid misunderstanding based on cultural differences and methods for managing relationships.
- to understand the country context and its impact on professional and personal objectives
- to develop a communication perspective on intercultural interaction that incorporates:
  - knowledge of a variety of ways of developing messages among different cultures
  - knowledge of how information varies in its processing by acoustic and visual modalities within cultures
  - development of an attitude of an open-mindedness in cross-cultural communication
  - understanding of the basis of acceptance or rejection for communication in different cultures

A good point for teachers to consider the students' socio-cultural backgrounds in designing and implementing programs/lessons would be in the methodology courses in teacher education programs. It is not cultures that communicate but people (and possibly social institutions) with different cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural communication occurs when the producers and receivers of a message belong to different cultures. On the assumption that knowledge of cultural differences may lead to improved cross-cultural communication, various teaching strategies have been devised to impart such knowledge.

## Pedagogical approaches

The language pedagogy is universal and always transcendental as it does not stick to limited horizons. Listed below are some strategies which have been practiced in recent years.

*Information/knowledge approach*

In this approach a significant quantity of information about historical, cultural, economic, social, political, psychological issues. If the students are exposed to such information then they will develop a cognitive understanding of other peoples' customs, beliefs, and values which are important in cross-cultural interaction. Allowing open discussions rather than mere lectures will enhance the student perspective of communication. The following are the few approaches:

- biographies of great personalities of the world—Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi
- historic novels, such as *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy; and
- literary texts such as American literature, Commonwealth literature, Indian literature.

*Area simulation approach*

A focal point of this approach is the creation of a specific environment where the learner gets first hand exposure of a different or contrasting culture. The main purpose of this simulation is that the learner will acquire a better understanding of a different culture by taking part in a situation different from his/her culture. A few examples of this approach are the following:

- interaction with a foreigner;
- creation of a situational or role play with characters of different cultures and regions; and
- on-line chats with people from different countries.

*Group encounters*

The main purpose of this approach is the development of self understanding that will lead to a more flexible attitude towards another culture. Emphasis is on the process of interaction as opposed to experiences occurring independently of the group as a means of building trust and interdependence. Examples include brain storming, group discussions, debates on various social issues.

*Communication theory approach*

The main thrust of instruction here is the search for patterned systems of interaction within a given cultural system. Communication models are used to describe the interface of communication variables in various communication situations. Analysis of Encoding, decoding process by taking a topic of different culture will help in understanding the communication process.

*Programmed approach*

This approach utilizes programmed learning material to transmit cultural information. Programmed learning represents a highly individualized and systematic instructional strategy for class-room instruction as well as self-learning. It is now considered as one of the most important innovations in the field of education. In this approach, emphasis is on cognitive learning of the cultural variables affecting interpersonal interactions. One example of this approach is the Culture Assimilator, wherein specific information about a foreign culture is transmitted to members of another culture. The main objective is to train people to interact in a variety of situations in a specific culture.

*Games and exercises*

Games are an important tool for imparting understanding and empathy in cross-cultural situation when they are set up to parallel real life situations. A leader provides guidance in the playing of a game and also in the discussion which follows. As the game progresses participants become so engrossed in it that they lose many of their inhibitions. The success of game playing varies greatly in accordance with the expertise of the instructor. The following are some simulation games.

- BAFA BAFA: This is a game to demonstrate experientially, the cultural norms and roles and the intercultural communication problems which develop when such cultures interact. The game may take 1 1/2 hours.
- FIRO B (fundamental interpersonal relations orientation): This exercise is designed to measure an individual's expressed behavior towards others and the behaviour he/she wants from others, from the dimensions of inclusion; control, and affection.
- East-west simulation: This game involves two groups of players, one representing of western culture, the other an eastern culture. The goal is for one to negotiate and obtain a national treasure of the other group. This game, which may take two hours to complete, consists of three phases:
  1. Role definitions within the society and development of strategies
  2. Negotiating period
  3. Presentation of the offer from one group to another. It may take two hours.

***Other activities***

*Activity 1*

Have learners to write answers to the following questions. Their response should consists of 3–5 pages.

1. How do you define your national identity? What are the values, beliefs and customs, that make up your national identity?
2. If you were new to your own country and had only the print medium to learn from, what would you include in a list of the country's values and/or priorities?
3. How do you perceive your geographic region unique in terms of the following:
   - language, including accent, idioms, jargon, slang;
   - social persona—openness to newcomers, friendliness, extroversion;
   - economic status/prestige; cultural values and priorities (festivals, music, food, sport, landscape)
   - concepts of time and personal space.

*Activity 2*

Show a video clipping showing two contrasting cultures and then ask the learners whether the following items are visible or hidden.

- facial expressions
- gestures
- literature
- ideas about leadership
- ideas about modesty

It is generally believed that a combination of two or more of the approaches may prove to very effective.

## Conclusion

As the global village continues to "shrink" and cultures collide, it is essential for all of us to become more sensitive to the infinite variety of gestures and body language that surround us. There are various cultures in the world with unique customs, values, and languages. Imposing one's own cultural values on others while neglecting variety is not the best way to communicate or establish relationships. As English teachers, we constantly deal with our students' use of language and attempt to help them make it more appropriate to their situation and goals. Just as they need to know how to "moderate" their opinions as they increase English language proficiency, and how to be polite in various situations, students should also learn to appreciate the extent to which many words and expressions are derived from cultural norms.

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# 11

# Can Reading Selections Positively Influence Reading, Thinking, and Writing Skills?

■ Rungpat Roengpitya
Mahidol University, Thailand

**ABSTRACT:** *Many English courses in higher education are designed for an academic purpose (Kramsch, 2000). In the academia, it is crucial that the English competency of students meets the level at which enables them to use English as a medium for analysis of texts in various fields, and critical writing. However, in many primary and secondary schools in Thailand, Thai students do not have adequate competence in English to do this (Wiriyachitra, 2002, p. 7). Thus, university freshmen need English courses which can help advance their English. For this reason, reading materials of English courses at university level play an important role. While such reading materials can indirectly strengthen students' morals and integrity (core values of some universities), they can also broaden their world views and in so doing improve their thinking skills. This paper proposes several types of reading materials for English courses specifically for freshman monks and novices. The reading materials have been designed to conform to Buddhist precepts (as this is the context of the study) and to suit the specific interests of these students, their special field being religion. It has been found that the selection of English reading materials helps students develop their thinking, strengthens their English grammar and improves their organization skills in writing. Additionally, students pay more attention and learn to study on their own if the reading materials are changed each semester.*

## Introduction

In countries where English is spoken and written as a foreign language (EFL), the learning and acquisition of the English language in the higher education is different from that in native English countries (Brown, 2000, p. 193). In EFL countries where English is taught as a foreign language, generally, students of all majors learn their content subjects in their native language. As a result, they only have the opportunity to be exposed to English language in two or three English courses during their degree programmes. Teachers and curriculum developers in higher education are constantly faced with the question of how the EFL university curriculum and reading materials can be designed, so as to help EFL learners advance their language skills especially reading and writing, and to improve their English competency to attain the academic proficiency level.

Kramsch (2000) states that academic language is not everyday life language and that learning to conduct an academic discourse can assist students to meet their life goals, even beyond their expectations. Cummins (1979, 1980 as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 246) made a distinction between the ability to use language in a higher-educational level as "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)" versus the conversational fluency as "Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)". A clear view and true understanding of the differences between CALP and BICS can not only guide higher-level EFL instructors to design their EFL curriculum to meet students' life goals, but it can also eliminate the misunderstanding that EFL courses in higher education should be able to automatically upgrade the students' English proficiency mainly for the BICS.

Furthermore, amongst the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the skills of reading and listening are the so-called "input" language tracks that yield the enhancement of the output language tracks: writing and speaking (adapted from the concept of the ecology of language acquisition (Brown, 1991 as cited in Brown, 2000, pp. 294-296). In the tertiary level, it is crucial for students to have the English written literacy: the proficiency in the reading and writing skills. English written literacy is considered a major tool for improving English skills, as well as for understanding other subject areas (Richardson & Fleener, 2009, p. 4). In order for university students to strengthen their reading and writing skills and for them to achieve CALP, the EFL curriculum design and the reading materials play a major role.

This paper aims to present, through an empirical study, factors that affect the selection of the reading materials for EFL university courses and the proposed design of the reading materials for EFL university courses that may help students to fortify their reading, writing and cognitive skills. This paper also discusses the effects of using such reading materials in EFL courses on the thinking and writing skills of students.

**Factors that affect the selection of the reading materials for EFL university courses**

The selection of reading materials for EFL university courses is based on important factors such as the aim of the course, students, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods of teaching, as is detailed below.

The first factor is the aim of the EFL university courses. Many EFL university courses state the aim of the EFL courses in the course syllabi that the first-level EFL course trains students to be competent in four English skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The higher EFL courses help advance the four English skills of students at higher levels. Examples (1), (2), and (3) below show the course descriptions for three consecutive EFL university required courses for non-English major students.

> (1) English 1
> "A training of English for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."
>
> (2) English 2
> "A further training of English (from English I) for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."
>
> (3) English 3
> "A training of English (from English II) for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."
>
> (The sources are from a non-English-major curriculum of a state university in Thailand).

From the course descriptions above, the EFL university courses are generally aimed at acquiring the four skills. The materials also give lecturers the liberty to plan and adapt them for teaching that falls within the course descriptions. Thus, it depends on the instructors to select suitable reading materials for their students and to aim their EFL courses at the BICS and/or CALP levels.

The second factor is students. Generally, Thai university freshmen are in the age group of 17–19 years old, and have been exposed to English language learning for 2–16 years prior to their undergraduate studies. The level of exposure to English in primary, secondary, and high schools varies according to their EFL curriculum. Additionally, some students may have their personal experiences of being exposed to English used in native English-speaking contexts either while on summer vacation or on some exchange programs such as the one-year American Field Service (AFS) programme. Such information is valuable and can be gleaned through questionnaires, distributed and collected during the introductory part of the courses. Additional information gained from the questionnaires will assist instructors to understand the English experiences, nature, attitude, and trend of students e.g., their *academic and non-academic interests* which can be linked to their popular culture (Lin, 2010). However, factors that may affect students in class can be *gender* and *social status*. A specific group of students can consist of Buddhist-monks who are all males. All monks need to keep 227 Buddhist precepts, and thus the chosen reading materials should conform to these precepts. Major precepts include the rules against violence, robbery, adultery, lies, and alcohols. Thus, materials (readings or movies) selected for classes with monks should not contain such content or scene.

Third, the temporal factors of EFL courses cover the number of class hours and the number of sessions per week (2–3 hours x 2–3 sessions = 4–9 hours per week), the duration of each course (7–15 weeks per semester), and the number of EFL courses for the Bachelor's programs. Most undergraduate programs require two or three EFL courses.

Fourth, the spatial factors of EFL courses mean the number of students per class and the classrooms. In other words, a smaller class with 12–20 students can yield more opportunities for students to interact with one another, when compared to a larger class of 50 students. Furthermore, well-equipped classrooms with an internet access can support both instructors and students to do more activities such as video clips in English.

Fifth, the methods/approaches of teaching also play a role. The methods of EFL university courses depend on the aim of the course, the selected materials, the nature of students, the class size, the class environment, the instructors' teaching experiences, and so on. The methods, themselves, influence the reading selection of EFL courses.

There are several methods or approaches discussed in the literature (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005) such as the grammar-translation approach, the direct-method approach, the grammar approach, the audio-lingual approach, the discrete-item approach, the communicative approach, the task-based approach, the learner-strategy approach, and the integrated approach. Other methods include the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology, which is found to be able to assist integrating reading and writing skills of students in class (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009). The CLIL method allows the science-major students to acquire some arts and social-science contents through English. At the same time, the arts and social-science students can use English as a medium to comprehend science content, or even conduct mini scientific experiments in class. The CLIL method also supports the activity theory in EFL classroom settings. The activity theory was proposed by Lantolf and Genung (2004, pp. 175-196). In this theory, students are provided with more English social activities and discussion in class to help advance their English skills.

Thus, to help set the EFL university curriculum toward the CALP level, the factors, mentioned above, are the aim of the university courses, students and their background, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods of teaching. The next section will cover the proposed design of the reading materials for EFL university courses.

## The proposed design for the reading materials for EFL university courses

In an empirical study during the academic year 2008 and the first semester of the academic year 2009 (2008–2009, thereafter), I have designed reading materials specifically for some groups of EFL students, based on the five factors mentioned above. The four-year program in which I have been involved require three EFL courses for specific groups of students during the first academic year. The first English course (English 1) was conducted during the first semester, the second (English 2) was conducted during the second semester, and the third (English 3) was conducted during the summer. Each semester stretched for a minimum of 15 weeks, except for a shorter period of seven weeks for the summer course. The class meetings were at least six hours per week.

The number of students for each semester is pre-assigned, depending on the enrolled students, which ranged from 8 to 24 students per group. Each group comprised a mixture of students with different English experiences and proficiencies. All students were monks and were in the age range of 18–22 years (the mean age was 19 years). Their earliest exposure to the English language was at 4–18 years old (the mean age 11.66 years). The duration of the exposure to English ranged from 2 to 16 years (the mean duration was 7.87 years).

Considering the aim of improving students' English proficiency for the CALP level and the fact that these students had to further some content courses in English during their second to the fourth years of the program, I designed the reading materials for the three EFL courses, according to the needs of students and the concentration of each EFL course, as follows.

In English 1, from the pretest, it was found that students had different levels of English competency. Many of them had been through a Buddhist high-school track with little exposure to English and needed to have their English grammar strengthened. Thus, English grammar was the main focus of the English 1 course.

Unlike the grammar-drill approach conducted in secondary and high schools, the EFL university course should have its own approach to improve students' grammar, as well as to implement other subject contents, social values, and integrity. Besides, the EFL courses are aimed at developing the students' abilities of analytical, rational, and critical thinking. These three types of thinking will support students' learning in both language and subject areas throughout their university study, as well as their future higher education.

For the course English 1, I developed the so-called "theme-grammar-reading-based" integrated approach. First, different themes were chosen for different weeks throughout the entire semester. The themes can be general topics such as family and friendship; the academic topics e.g. Buddhism (religion); or the current/popular topics e.g., Randy Pausch's the childhood dream in *The Last Lecture* (Pausch, 2008). Once the weekly themes were set, the grammar focus of each week could be assigned, followed by the selection of suitable readings. Each week, through the reading materials, students were able to become familiar with real usage of the English grammar occurring naturally in, for example, the present tense (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4-6). Students were then encouraged to think analytically and critically under the theme of the week. Besides that, the instructor could explain or insert the grammar rules in L1 or L2 during the session (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, students with low English proficiency were encouraged to do the grammar drill exercises as their homework (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 8-10).

It must be noted that the themes, the grammar focuses, and reading materials can be adjusted, revised, or changed each academic year, to suit the English proficiency and need of students and to develop the class materials to be most updated.

During one semester of 15 weeks, I designed the themes, grammar focuses, and reading materials, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2 shows other suggested themes, grammar focus, and reading materials.

After the first semester, the course English 2 was planned for the second semester. It was expected that students would have a stronger command of English grammar, enough to move to a higher level of English for academic purposes, by the end of the first semester.

The teachers were aware of the fact that these specific groups of students were in humanities and social sciences, and their concentration was less in science. Thus, to fill the gap of their knowledge, they need to be introduced to more scientific thinking and methods.

English 2 was focused on the academic-scientific reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English. This course was designed with three main parts: the weekly themes, the class activities (hands-on activities, video-clip activities, and mini-scientific experiments), and the reading materials. The teaching approaches for this course were the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009), along with the activity theory in EFL classroom settings proposed by Lantolf and Genung (2004, p. 175-196).

Each session of this course was further sub-divided into two sub-sessions. The first half (1.5 hours) was a lecture, in which the reading materials of the week were discussed and the theory of writing was explained. During the second half, students were exposed to different types of activities (one hour) such as (hands-on) mini-scientific experiments, hands-on activities, the

**Table 1**: Schedule, themes, grammar focus, and reading materials for the course English 1

| Week | Themes | Grammar focuses | Reading materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pretest, family, (childhood) dream | Tenses | The Last Lecture *(Pausch, 2008, pp. 1–18)* |
| 2 | Friendship | Present tense | Winnie-the-Pooh *(Milne, 1926)* |
| 3 | Parents and family | Past tense | The Last Lecture<br>*(Pausch, 2008, pp. 22–26, pp. 31–34)* |
| 4 | Hope | Present perfect tense | The Audacity of Hope<br>*(Obama, 2006, Prologue)* |
| 5 | Values | Past perfect tense | The Audacity of Hope<br>*(Obama, 2006, pp. 53–64)* |
| 6 | Values | Future tense | The Audacity of Hope<br>*(Obama, 2006, pp. 65–72)* |
| 7 | Values | If clause | The Audacity of Hope<br>*(Obama, 2006, pp. 73–84)* |
| 8 | Agreement (how to agree) | Nouns, pronouns | How to Have a Beautiful Mind<br>*(De Bono, 2004, pp. 3–12)* |
| 9 | Refusals (how to disagree) | Modifiers | How to Have a Beautiful Mind<br>*(De Bono, 2004, pp. 13–25)* |
| 10 | Literature | Voices | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (*Twain, 2008*) |
| 11 | Literature | Sentences | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (*Twain, 2008*) |
| 12 | Gratitude | Sentences | The Last Lecture *(Pausch, 2008, pp. 157–158)*<br>Life's Greatest Lessons<br>*(Pausch, 2008, pp. 55–63)* |
| 13 | Buddhism, peace, happiness | Paragraphs | Vision of Dhamma (Peace through Freedom and Happiness) *(Payutto, 2007, pp. 2–7)* |
| 14 | Buddhism, peace, happiness | Paragraphs | Vision of Dhamma (Peace through Freedom and Happiness) *(Payutto, 2007, pp. 2–7)* |
| 15 | Hope (Epilogue) | Essays | The Audacity of Hope<br>*(Obama, 2006, Epilogue)* |

**Table 2**: Other suggested themes, grammar focus, and reading materials

| Weeks | Themes | Grammar focuses | Reading materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| Additional | Hero | Questions, tenses | The Lucifer Effect *(Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 3–22)* |
| Additional | Success | Present and past tense | Life's Greatest Lessons *(Urban, 2003, pp. 1–8)* |
| Additional | Honesty | If clause | The Last Lecture<br>*(Pausch, 2008, pp. 163–164)* |

video-clips of real academic lectures, of general activities, and of TV series/programs. Some activities were designed based on cultural weeks such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and so on. The last 30 minutes were reserved for writing a mini report or a wrap-up session.

The reading materials were selected to be related to the weekly themes, activities, and types of writing e.g., during week 3, students read on the topic of "time" in "People don't find time. They make time" from the book entitled *Life's Greatest Lessons* by Urban (2003, pp. 123–132). Students conducted a mini experiment of an hour glass and learned how to write an essay with contents arranged in a chronological order. The contents and activities of the entire session were based n the theme of "time".

Students could learn English from the real academic and non-academic contexts. During the activity session, students were taught to think of every step of each activity in English. During the last 30 minutes of the session, students were asked to write a summary of the activity, and what they had learned from the activity, including the advantages and disadvantages of the activities. They could practise the writing of opinions, agreement, and disagreement in English.

This course also required students to conduct their mini group term project, in which students had to choose the topic of their interests (according to the learner-strategy approach in Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 16-18), to design an academic study or experiment, to review literature related to their topic, to run the real mini experiment or to collect questionnaires, to analyze their results, and to write a term paper. This term paper gave students a chance to conduct a real experiment or study and to write an academic report. It also trained students to think, conduct, and write an academic paper in English.

The themes, class activities, and reading materials for the course English 2 are shown in Table 3.

English 3 was the last English course for the program. For the academic year 2008, the course English 3 was scheduled to be conducted in summer within a shorter period of seven sessions. Thus, the reading materials were designed to suit the time constraint, and were focused on academic writing and English for higher reading, literary criticism, following the integrated approach (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 18-19). Table 4 shows the schedule, themes, and reading materials for the course English 3.

It can be suggested that, if the course English 3 has the same duration as the ones of the

**Table 3**: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 2

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Activities | Reading materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hard work/classification | Hands-on activity: *Classifying objects* | Life's Greatest Lessons *(Urban, 2003, pp. 109–114)* |
| 2 | Keeping up to date/ Writing a letter | Writing activity: *Writing a letter* | Success "Keeping up to date" *(McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 14–21)* |
| 3 | Time/Writing in chronological order | Hands-on activity: *Making a comparison and contrast of an hourglass with five different tubes* | Life's Greatest Lessons: "People don't find time—they make time." *(Urban, 2003, pp. 123–132)* |
| 4 | Gratitude, respect, and Thanksgiving/Writing a card | Writing activity: *Writing a thank-you card* | Pages to Happiness on "Gratitude and Respect" *(Payutto, 2007, pp. 101–102; 89–90)* |
| 5 | Family/Writing a narration | Video-clip activity: *Watching Professor Marian Diamond's lecture on Integrative Biology 131 (12 minutes) and answering the questions.* (Diamond, 2005) | Pages to Happiness on "Cherishing One's Parents: Bringing up Our Children" *(Payutto, 2007, pp. 51–56)* and on "Expressing Respect to Those Who are Worthy of Our Respect" *(Payutto, 2007, pp. 19–21)* |
| 6 | Cooking/Writing process | Hands-on and writing activities: *Making an omelette* | Success "Taking a Break" *(McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 72–73)* |
| 7 | Detectives/Writing description | Hands-on and writing activities: *Being a detective* | An excerpt about CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research, June 22, 2007) and Sherlock Holmes *(Doyle, 2008)* |
| 8 | Christmas/Writing a probability | Writing activity: Dictation: *Christmas from the song "One Toy Soldier" by Enya* | Success "The World Ahead" *(McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 42–49)* The song and lyric "Auld Lang Syne" |

**Table 3**: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 2 *(continued)*

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Activities | Reading materials |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Do good and life/ Writing comments | Activity: *Discussing the characters in the readings and expressing opinions* | The Tales of Beedle the Bard "The Tales of the Three Brothers *(Rowling, 2008, pp. 87–105)* |
| 10 | Court/Writing about reasoning | Video-clip and writing activities: *Watching the Judge Judy video clip "An eBay auction" (Judy)* | Success: "An Eye for an Eye" *(McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 24–31)* |
| 11 | Ethics/Problems and solutions | Activities: *Quiz. Discussing about the ethics found in the reading materials* | 1. An excerpt on "China's Tainted Milk," and "The US Economy." 2. Life's Greatest Lessons: "Honesty is Still the Best Policy." *(Urban, 2003, pp. 75–83)* |
| 12 | Literature/Comparison and contrast | Activity: *Discussing, comparing, and contrasting different characters in the reading materials* | Island of the Aunts *(Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 3–35)* |
| 13 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: *Discussing about the story (opinion)* | Island of the Aunts *(Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 36–51)* |
| 14 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: *Discussing about the story (opinion)* | Island of the Aunts *(Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 264–281)* |
| 15 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: *Discussing about the story (opinion)* | Gulliver's Travels *(Swift, 2008)* |
| 16 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: *Discussing about the story (opinion)* | Gulliver's Travels *(Swift, 2008)* |

**Table 4**: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 3

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Reading materials |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Overview of reading and writing | — |
| 2 | Outlining an essay/Mindmap | College Writing *(Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, pp. 63–70)* |
| 3 | Introduction and conclusion | College Writing *(Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, pp. 71–77)* |
| 4 | Kennedy's inaugural address (1961) | Reading for the Real World 2 *(Zwier & Stafford-Yilmaz, 2004, pp. 109–116)* |
| 5 | Reading literature | Oliver Twist (chapters 1–4) *(Dickens, 2008)* |
| 6 | "Cultural Attitudes Towards Time" | Reading for the Real World 2 *(Zwier & Stafford-Yilmaz, 2004, pp. 165–172)* |
| 7 | Reading literature | Oliver Twist (chapters 5–7) *(Dickens, 2008)* |

courses English 1 and English 2, instructors may apply the same format of English 2, but the reading materials would be at a higher academic level. Furthermore, the activities may include tasks on how to write the abstracts and academic papers and how to make effective oral and poster presentations.

## Results

This section presents the scores of two groups of students. The first group consists of 24 male monk students, who took all three courses English 1, English 2, and English 3, throughout their first academic year in a state university in Thailand. The second group had 8 male monk students, with the scores of English 1. Other instructors were responsible for English 2 and English 3 of the second group.

**Figure 1**: The essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the first group

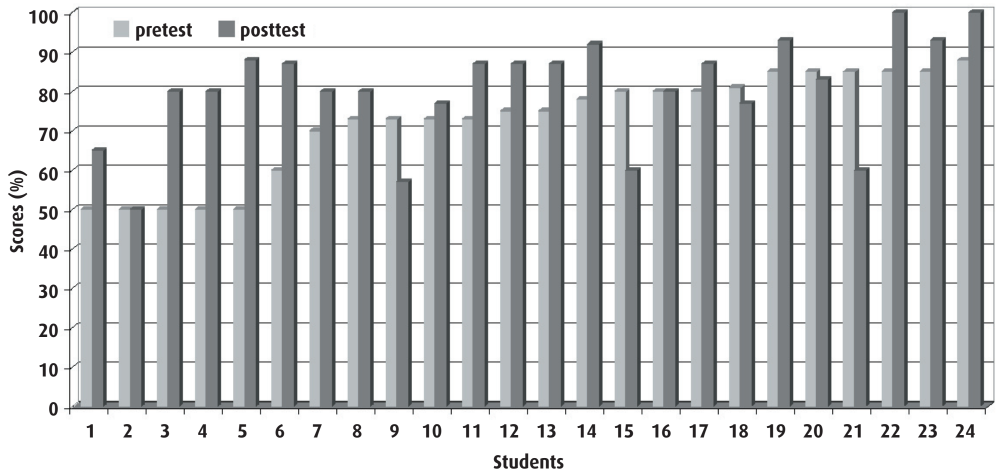



**Figure 2**: The essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the second group

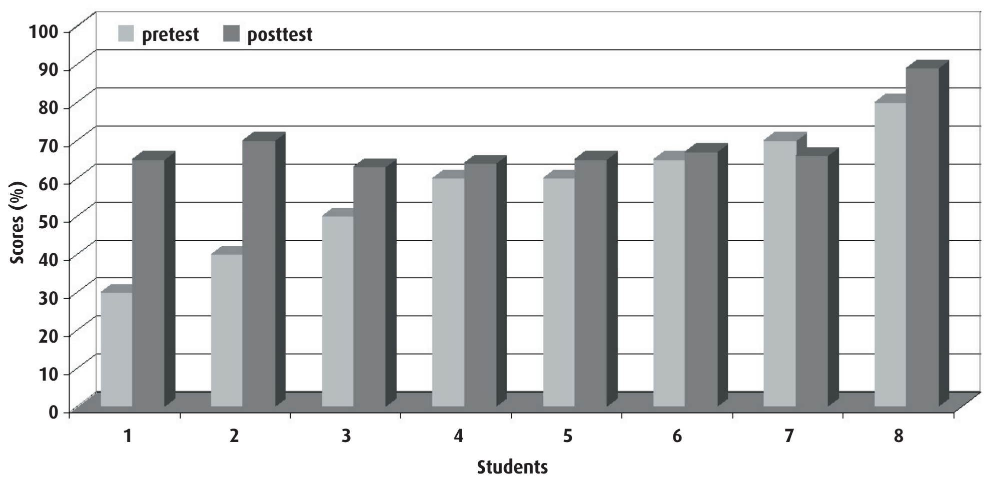


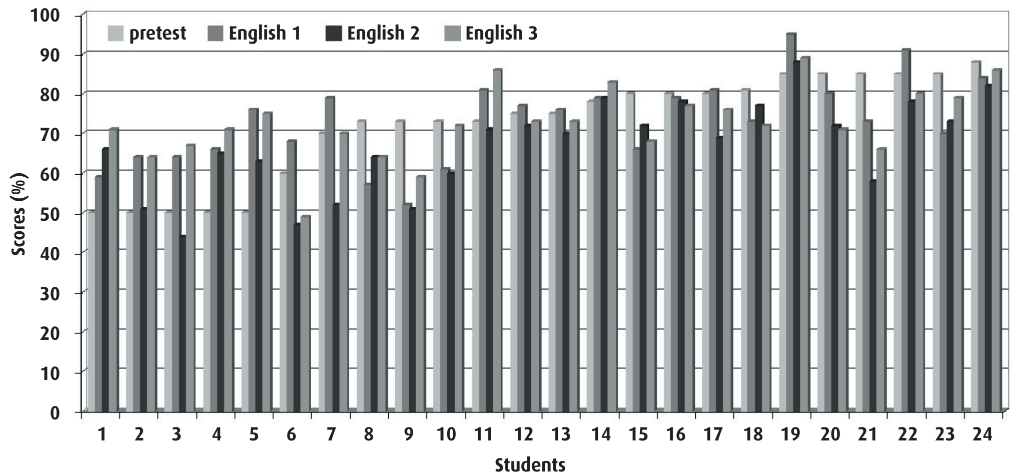

Figure 1 shows only the essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the first group. Figure 2 presents the essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the second group. Figure 3 illustrates the overall scores of the pretest, English1, English 2, and English 3 of the first group.

From the results shown in Figure 1, 17 out of 24 students of the first group had a higher posttest essay scores. Thus, it can be interpreted that the materials and the methods of teaching were effective for English 1 courses, especially for writing essays. It can be further noticed that students with lower pretest essay scores had a greater development than students with higher pretest essay scores.

From the results shown in Figure 2, 7 out of 8 students of the second group had a higher posttest scores for their essays. Again, it can be interpreted that the materials and the methods of teaching were effective for English 1 courses, especially for writing essays. The results present in the same way that students with lower pretest essay scores had a greater development than students with higher pretest essay scores.

Figure 3 shows the overall scores of the pretest and final scores of the courses English 1,

**Figure 3**: The overall scores of the pretest, English 1, English 2, and English 3 of the first group




English 2, and English 3. It can be seen that the scores fluctuated. The factors which may play a role are the content materials, the duration of the course, and the students' attention and interest. First, the content materials for English 2 were based on science, rather than humanities and social sciences in which students were majored. Second, the duration of English 3 was half that of English 1 and English 2. Third, the shorter duration of the course could affect students' attention and interest. Further studies need to be conducted to prove whether the new design of teaching and course materials truly impact upon the English language acquisition of freshmen.

## Discussion and conclusion

This paper proposes one way in which reading materials can be designed for the EFL courses in a university English curriculum. Before planning the reading materials, the factors that affected the selection of the reading materials were clarified and described. These factors include the aim of the EFL university courses, students, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods/approaches of teaching.

After all factors had been considered, the design for the reading materials for the EFL university courses was constructed. In this paper, the proposed design for the reading materials for the EFL university courses was based on the focus of each course (the grammar needs, the content, academic reading/writing requirements. Teaching approaches were modified in relation to the focus of the course and the weekly themes. The "theme-grammar-reading-based" integrated approach for the course English 1 is one of the approaches which can accelerate the English-grammar acquisition of the students, along with other academic contents, so that they can use their English in academia for the rest of their program. The CLIL approach, together with the activity theory of Lantolf and Genung (2004), for the course English 2, is hoped to train students for their more advanced logical, critical, analytical, thinking, while being able to comprehend more scientific and literary contents in English. The focus on academic writing and literary reading and criticism, in English 3, framed the teaching method to include lectures and discussions, with opportunities for students to exchange their views and critical opinions.

Throughout the development of the curriculum, a frequent question arose as to how reading materials could affect the reading, thinking, and writing skills. This empirical study of small groups of students in a specific major suggested that, after the students are informed of the BICS and CALP goals of the EFL courses in a higher education at the beginning of their first course (English 1), more than 80% of the students had a clearer view of EFL learning and tended to be more inspired and motivated to master English. Thus, with a strong motivation and a positive view of the EFL acquisition (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 64), it was assumed that students would be eager to read the materials prior to each session.

From this study, it was found that effective reading materials contained interesting contents in the major and minor fields of students. Many of the materials dealt with current issues e.g., the US economic downfall in 2008 and these triggered interesting discussions in class. Some selected materials yielded interactive activities (as in the English 2 course) and led to the strengthening of the analytical, logical, and critical thinking of students. The chosen literary works were well-known (e.g., classic literature in the English 3 course). The materials in social studies cultivated social values and integrity to students, which suited the students' needs in their educational program, and their future studies and career.

The crucial concern was that the reading materials, functioning as an input, should help advance the students' thinking (as the process between the input and output) and the students' writing (the output process). For instance, for the second course (English 2), the first group of students were allowed to design their own term paper based on scientific group projects. One group was interested in "coffee". From various printed and online sources, they learned the history of coffee, how coffee was made, the various types of coffee beverages, for example, Americano, latte, mocha, etc., and the similarities and differences of the beverages. Another group was interested in planting herbs and vegetables. They studied herbology from the sources, picked the types of plants or herbs they liked, bought the seeds, actually planted them near their dormitories, noted what they observed daily while their plants were growing, and wrote a scientific report for their term paper.

Furthermore, it is deemed that the EFL courses will be successful, if the curriculum opens the flexible schedule and rules for instructors to be able to add current or supplementary reading materials during the semesters. In this way, students would be able to discuss current issues or current news in English. Moreover, the reading materials and/or themes of each academic year should be adapted to their particular level. This is to suit the interest of different groups of students of different academic years and also to discourage new students of the current year, who receive the reading materials from former students of the past academic year, from paying less attention to the readings due to being distracted by the notes made on them by previous students. Clearly, if the reading materials are new (or partially new), students will be eager to read and learn by themselves, and the courses will be more effective. This suggests that, prior to the process of choosing the reading materials, EFL instructors may first need to source for and read up on the latest issues in an effort to ensure that they have a wide range of reading materials both in their major fields and in other fields.

To conclude, the selection of reading materials, together with the methods of teaching, can affect the reading, thinking, and writing skills of students. The contents of the carefully-chosen reading materials, along with some activities, can actually help advance students' logical, analytical, and critical thinking, which will, later, be reflected in their writing assignments. Thus, the selection of reading materials plays a major role in the success of EFL courses and curriculum.

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# 12 The Academic Writing Experience of Undergraduate Industrial Technology Students in Indonesia

■ Ista Maharsi
Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper explores the academic writing experiences of undergraduate International Program students of Industrial Technology (IP FTI) at the Islamic University of Indonesia. Specifically, this paper discusses what the students think of academic writing, how they give meaning to it, interpret it and actualize themselves through it. The data presentation and analysis are based on the narratives of the research participants. The participants were four IP students (one student from each semester II, IV, VIII, X) and three lecturers. The data was taken from in-depth interviews (unstructured and structured interviews) with the participants, class observations and document collection. It was found that students went through the stages of the writing process with limited knowledge of writing skills, limited exposure to the reading materials of their discipline and inadequate feedback. The students perceived academic writing as part of their academic tasks that would be useful for their future careers. However, not all students were able to improve their academic writing on their own skills.*

## Introduction

The need for mastery of academic English, both written and spoken, in higher education is becoming more apparent than ever before. The expressed need for good academic writing skills is significant in Europe because European students enter universities without adequate mastery over academic writing (Bruce, 2005, p. 239). Similarly, the recent, rapid emergence of international programs and immersion programs in Indonesia may serve as evidence that English is increasingly playing an important role in Indonesian society. In other words, to be successful academically, students must have a good command of English.

Additionally, university graduates will enter the job markets and encounter challenging communication situations. They have to be able to communicate their thoughts orally and in writing clearly in job interviews. Therefore, thinking critically, understanding complex issues in their respective fields of study, offering various alternative of solutions to those issues, and communicating their ideas effectively are crucial skills both orally and in writing, and need to be integrated in the day-to-day teaching.

The study reported in this paper investigates students' experiences in writing in an academic context in the field of Industrial Technology during their undergraduate studies. The study aimed to do this for two reasons. First, although English is the language of instruction in the teaching and learning processes, it has been observed that students encounter various problems in writing academic English. Second, from the students' experiences of writing in an academic context, several questions have been raised as to how they can be helped to perform better in their academic tasks. The study also makes suggestions for more effective academic English writing lessons.

This paper will discuss the International Program of Faculty of Industrial Technology of Islamic University of Indonesia (henceforth IP FTI UII) undergraduate students' experience in academic writing, what they think about it, how they get through their writing process, and what kinds of problems they encounter.

## Literature review

### *Academic writing experience*

As suggested by Hoadley-Maidment, academic writing could be described as writing that deals with academic subjects (Mercer & Swann, 1996, p. 295). As a subject, academic writing can be described as a genre of writing academic papers, general subject reports, essays, compositions, academically focused journal articles, short-answer test responses, technical reports (i.e. lab reports), theses and dissertations.

In terms of approach, while Jordan (1997) offers two approaches of academic writing, namely, process and product approaches, Seow (2002) divides writing process into four stages, namely, planning, drafting, revising and editing. Brown (2001), on the other hand, frames three stages of writing, which are pre-writing, drafting and revising, while Blanchard and Root (1997) divide the writing process into five steps, beginning with prewriting and moving on to planning, drafting, revising and editing. Finally, Oshima and Hogue (1999) categorize the writing process into four stages that include prewriting, planning, writing and revising of drafts.

Dewey (1958) views experience as knowledge that helps clarify needs and lived experience, according to him is also shared experience in which people learn together with others. Academic writing experience, therefore, may mean knowledge of writing in the academic context which is shared and clarified to understand needs significant to improve learning. This study investigates academic writing as a process in which stories or experiences of research participants who write academic papers and assignments are described, narrated, and interpreted.

### *Narrative research*

Clandinin and Connelly (2003) defined narrative research as "a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). Additionally, Patton (2002) highlights that "the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings" (p. 116). The basic questions of revealing a story or narrative about a person and its humanity and environment are viewed as the core motivation in this kind of research.

Therefore, as this research is meant to be a narrative study, the analysis will be presented in the form of life stories detailing experiences and interests that serve as tools to reveal perspectives which communicate needs, convey circumstances and in so doing construct meaning. The stories of these research participants reveal their life experiences in a deep and meaningful way. Personal narratives of both the participants and the researchers are brought to surface through perception, interpretation and context to shed light on insightful experiences of social and cultural meanings.

## Research method

### *Research design*

There were seven participants in this research, four students (one from each semester II, IV, VIII, X), the program initiator, a content-course lecturer, and an English lecturer. The data was gathered from them through interviews, observations, and documents such as student papers and laboratory reports. This research attempted to understand the stories of the participants about their experiences in academic writing, how they felt about it, how they gave meaning to it, how they figured out the difficulties and came up with their own solutions. Finally, the study also aimed to investigate how students motivated themselves and became empowered by all those meaningful experiences. In keeping with the objectives of this study, a qualitative research paradigm was employed so that rich details could be obtained through the life stories of the research participants. These detailed descriptions served to expose intermingled views on the complexities of the participants' life experiences (Holliday, 2002).

Further, Bloom (as cited in Merriam, 2002) explains that in narrative research, "how each narrative offers a means for the narrator to construct herself [or himself] through the act of narrating stories" was significant to enable the researcher to "make sense of the telling rather than the tale" afterwards (p. 310). For this reason, the process of how events were experienced, lived, and dealt with became an important aspect of understanding phenomena because the process provided explanations, reasons through the relationships established along the way. Hence, it was not simply the stories, but how the stories were connected, lived, and interpreted by an individual that gave meaning to this kind of research.

In terms of research validity—or what other scholars refer to as credibility, verification, transferability, authenticity, trustworthiness—strategies such as triangulation (rationalizing or connecting perceptions), thick and rich descriptions (deeper and thorough description), were sought to support the validity of findings (Creswell, 2003; Holliday, 2002; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Comparing different data sources in search of themes, checking information with participants to get confirmation, examining rich details of experiences, seeking opinions from peers or colleagues in the field, presenting contradictory opinions or different perspectives in pursuit of revising explanation were all carried out to ensure a valid and reliable piece of research.

***Procedure for data collection***

According to Creswell (2003), data collection steps may "include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured (semi-structured) observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information" (p. 185-186). He also suggested preparing interview briefs and observational protocols as well as keeping audio and/or videotape recordings as well as field notes. However, the choice of data-gathering tools may need to be adapted and adjusted along the way as and when the research context presents challenges (Holliday, 2002; Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, Creswell confirms that multiple methods of qualitative research can be employed together regarding interactive and humanistic characteristic. In line with this view, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the "snow ball method" when interviewing with consideration of emergent facts and problems. Therefore, class observations, document collection and in-depth interviews were not carried out in a linear pattern but rather at nearly the same time.

Based on Creswell's (2003) model, this research followed several procedures for obtain accurate data. First, preliminary interviews (see appendix A) was used to design a map of the research as well as to predict the unexpected problems; second, lists of questions were composed (see appendix B) for in-depth interviews based on the results of the preliminary interviews and literature; third, in-depth interviews were conducted with the research participants to gain narratives and interpretations of their life experiences; and fourth, class observations and documents were gathered to obtain the descriptions of behavior and important events. In so doing, probable emergent situations became more apparent.

The research reported in this paper gathered data from preliminary interviews, unstructured interview and structured interview. The in-depth interview data were recorded and filed. As soon as the interview data was gathered, it was transcribed and coded. Other data collection techniques included observation and document gathering. This time-consuming activity, indeed, provided narrative and descriptive information. Participant journal/diary, observation reports, and students' assignments were kept and later on used in data analysis.

### *Methods for analyzing data*

This research followed the methods for analyzing data based on the theoretical framework of Creswell (2003) in which the generic process of data analysis may include several steps (organization of the data, data reading, coding, narrating description and themes, and interpreting). All data gathered was transcribed, coded and then selected. The coding process, in particular, was conducted through naming meaningful events that include time, topics, data source, participants, and categories of writing stages. A code of (Struct/Indah/03/07/07/PLAN), for instance, indicates that the data were taken from structured interviews with Indah on 3 July 2007 about planning her writing. Emergent categories were added when they could be used to support data to answer research questions. Data that showed connection with the research topic and eventually helped answer research questions was separated and categorized under headings. Commentaries and notes were compiled and collated to support the analysis of the data.

## Results

The writing process can be a recursive, exhausting and complicated problem for writers, particularly novice writers or student writers. It is not surprising that the IP students of Industrial Technology experience the same challenges when writing their laboratory reports, papers, field work reports, and theses. Below are the results of interviews conducted with the research participants, which are arranged based on the writing stages: pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising and editing, feedback and evaluation.

### *Pre-writing*

Students may start their writing processes in different contexts. First, after they have topics, usually determined by the lecturers; second, they are familiar with the topic; third, they are interested in a particular subject.

> "The topic is determined... I just want to write familiar, easy topics, so that it will be easier to explore..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/PRE-TOPIC).

> "The topic I usually write was determined by the lecturers..." (Struct/Nia/230507/PRE-TOPIC).

> "Since the beginning, I did my internship and Field Work at a company and I want to go on writing more about this company and its system feasibility..." (Struct/Rini/010407/PRE-TOPIC).

> "My supervisor suggested me to write on the topic..." (Struct/Indah/130607/PRE-TOPIC).

When topics are determined by the lecturers, students may not need to come up with their own ideas. Instead, they may only need to narrow down the topics to manageable ideas for development. In such a context, students may write on the topics minimally, just to complete their assignments as required by their lecturers. Consequently, their writing exposure gained may be limited to writing about something very specific. In this context, students then proceed to search for information in reference books, the internet or other sources. Students might prefer searching for information on the internet than books because students often have ready access to such information.

At this stage, they try to gather information that could be used to develop ideas to support their topic in order to be able to complete their assignment. In this research context, students brainstormed and seemed to be aware that they needed many ideas, evidence, and facts in order to raise the quality of their writing.

> "I search information from the internet... I can also read reference books if I want to..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/PRE-BRAIN).

> "I go to the library, look for reference books, and then I'll do it at home, using dictionary. I also browse the internet" (Struct/Nia/230507/PRE-BRAIN).

> "After I find out the topic, of course the next thing I do is finding information on the same topics from books, and then from the company that I do research in... (Struct/Rini/01/04/07/PRE-BRAIN)

> "I search, learn, read, or may be I ask those who understand... I search in the internet, too, of course. I search in journals too, but nor very detail, because I just need to find out the outline which will show how it may look like after it's developed..." (Struct/Indah/13/07/07/PLAN)

Theoretically, according to White and Arndt (1991), brainstorming is "a widely used and effective way of getting ideas flowing" (p. 18). It can be carried out individually or in groups. For Wawan, it seemed that his act of brainstorming was not really a necessary thing to do because he indicated that he searched for information from reference books when he wanted to. Nia, in comparison, seemed to be more familiar with sourcing for information and making use of several resources. Their understanding appears to be that brainstorming may be limited to finding information or ideas to start to write rather than connecting ideas to establish a mind map. However, the effort to get information on similar topics to enable them to "get the ideas flowing" in their writing was apparent. Even though the participants did not state "making a mind map," for example, they took notes on important ideas that might be used in their writing. Therefore, it can be assumed that they did brainstorm before they planned their writing although they might not have identified it as a part of preparing to write.

***Planning***

After they obtained sufficient information from the pre-writing stages, they began to select what would go first and next and what would become the background, the introduction, discussion and conclusion. To do this, they created guidelines for their writings.

> "I grouped them just like stories, which one is first, which one is next... I make them connected..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/PLAN).

> "May be I can make a guideline, in other papers; this is because of this or that... "(Struct/Nia/230507/PLAN).

> "It's like a background... well, actually the lecturer describes a kind of background, then I just follow her. I put this and that, I choose which one as introduction, background, etc..." (Struct/Rini/010407/PLAN).

> "I try to find things based on categories. I search, look, read, and I'm thinking of what will happen if I use this or that. I should try to find other categories..." (Struct/Indah/13/07/07/PLAN)

Nia made guidelines for her writing by trying to establish relationships among the ideas, while Wawan tried to connect them into "a story". According to Blanchard and Root (1997), within the stage of planning, the information and ideas are used to produce an outline. From the outline, a writer can develop his/her writing. The process of grouping ideas, how long they would have to write and which aspects need more emphasis are all parts of the writing process.

At this point, the participants began to understand the value of planning their writing before they actually plunged into develop the ideas and writing. They understood that writing needs information, opinions, and ideas that relate to their writing. They realized that they could not depend on their own ideas or opinions; rather they need many sources to enrich and support their writing. In addition, it seemed obvious then that they had come to the stage of categorizing their ideas into manageable sub-topics and planning their writing. It is important to note at this juncture that they had various "ways" of planning their writing, which were actually their efforts at making their writing organized. This was their unique understanding of the process of writing.

*Drafting*

Drafting is the next step of the writing process after outlining. Within this part, according to White and Arndt (1995), a writer considers ways to attract readers and to maintain their interest in reading the writer's writing. In addition, Oshima and Hogue (1999) clarify that drafting starts with writing a topic sentence followed by detailed information. A writer should follow the outline and maintain unity as well as coherence. Referring to the idea of unity and coherence, there are two important things to consider, namely topic sentence (controlling idea) and supporting details. Those two aspects are essential to keep the paragraphs flowing and connected to one another. Therefore, determining topic sentences and supporting details are early steps in drafting.

> "Gee,... I don't know. Randomly... sometimes, I put the topic sentences at the end of paragraph, sometimes all sentences in one paragraph are topic sentences, and there is a form like that, isn't it? So I just go on, I don't make any concept" (Struct/Wawan/090507/DRFT-CI/DRFT-SD).

> "When preparing a paper, I arranged the points (controlling idea) and I tried to explain them in different chapters. Then, I also prepared supporting ideas..." (Struct/Nia/230507/DRFT-CI/SD).

> "From the beginning, the main idea was at the beginning of the writing, so the next sentences should correspond to the previous ideas..." (Struct/Indah/130607/DRFT-CI/SD).

Wawan, Nia and Indah seem to understand the concept of a controlling idea and supporting ideas in different ways. In particular, Wawan was not sure whether what he wrote was the topic sentence or supporting details. The major difference between them is that Wawan seems confused about where to put controlling ideas as he may put the controlling ideas anywhere in his writing. Nia and Indah, however, seem to understand what comes first and next as they indicate the idea of providing subsequent details and considering the relationship between ideas.

In the drafting process, writers need to concentrate on organizing the ideas in their writing into the various sections of introduction, body and conclusion (Blanchard & Root, 1997). Accordingly, writers should understand how to construct a good introduction, a well-organized body and a summary that retains the most essential information.

In writing, a writer also needs to consider other opinions. In terms of citing other people's opinions into their writing, students tend to adopt a "copy and paste" approach which includes even the sources and only slight changes are made to the words. Wawan, for instance, admits that,

> "Sometimes I take somebody else's opinions. I wrote them not exactly, I changed a little bit. I omitted a little bit and I added a bit." (Struct/Wawan/290507/DRFT-QPS).

However, in another instance when he had to write a report on the interviews of ten persons, he paraphrased and summarized their opinions.

> "Once, I had an interview assignment with 10 people. I interviewed them, and then I wrote what they said. I wrote down what the interviewees meant. I just wrote. So, in short, I understood the meaning, later I would re-write them..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/DRFT-QPS).

Although what he did was contextual and conditional, due to his assignments, he had actually paraphrased and summarized. He seemed to have subconsciously presented other people's opinions using his own words. These skills, indeed, can be developed in order to improve his academic writing.

Two other students, Nia and Rini demonstrated quite different ways of quoting. While Nia preferred rewriting all ideas and never used her own sentences, Rini just modified one or two words (Struct/Nia/230507/DRFT-QPS). Rather different from the other participants, Indah just decided that she would take the entire quote and use footnotes to document the sources of the opinions (Struct/Indah/130607/DRFT-QPS).

The above findings may reveal a fact that students need more explanations, practice and understanding on how to quote, paraphrase, and summarize to enable them to make their academic writing more effective, appropriate and varied. More importantly, the correct way to cite other people's opinions in academic writing is regarded as significant in terms of maintaining originality of thought, adhering to academic conventions and avoiding plagiarism.

Since in academic discourse plagiarism is viewed as "a serious offence" (Hyland, 2001), it is important for students to understand and apply the conventions of citing references. However, my data shows evidence that two teacher participants did not address the issue of plagiarism through written feedback on their students' writing. As a result, miscommunication may have resulted between what the teacher considered as a serious offence and the students' perception of plagiarism as mere "small mistakes."

The information that I obtained from Irene about plagiarism shows that she did not really push students to make good paraphrases. She just tried to encourage them to modify the sentences a little bit. The problem is that the idea of "a little bit" could be relative.

> "I corrected the students' writing in terms of their word usage. I corrected their paraphrases, when citing other people's opinions, just a little bit. I just emphasized them not to write like a plagiarist. If they want to use all ideas, the way they should write must be different from paraphrasing." (Un-struct/Irene/120407/F&E T-CORR).

What Irene did was to actually inform the student that there were different ways to cite other people's opinions to avoid plagiarism. The only problem is that these citations conventions were not addressed clearly and comprehensively. In this case, students might think that the idea of plagiarism is not that serious as long as they make "a little change." Alternatively, students may not have had sufficient practice or exposure in how to paraphrase since this aspect was not emphasized or enforced.

***Revising***

The steps taken to add, rearrange ideas and eliminate irrelevant sentences are common practice among writers. When revising, a writer may change, rearrange, add or delete in order to communicate his/her ideas more effectively and interestingly (Oshima & Hogue, 1999). Based on the data, the research participants tookthe same steps such as adding ideas and sentences, eliminating irrelevant sentences, fitting words and ideas into readable, understandable and effective sentences based on their own perspectives. The words "based on their own perspectives" may suggest that the measurement of "an effective sentence" is set by the students. This also implies that what is effective according to them might not be effective based on language convention or at least the lecturers' assessments.

> "Sometimes I add ideas... sometimes I eliminated irrelevant sentences... (Struct/Nia/230507/REV-ADD/ELMNT).
>
> "I changed the sentences that I think not relevant, and then I corrected them..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/REV-ELMNT/REARR).
>
> "If the lecturer wanted me to add ideas, I'll add. I also eliminate irrelevant sentences and moved ideas here and there." (Struct/Rini/010407/REV-ADD/ELMNT/REARR).
>
> "I added sentences, eliminate some as well. I thought that the sentences seemed to be too long. Sometimes I also moved the sentences... (Struct/Indah/130607/REV-ADD/ELMNT).

It seems that the participants realized that they had to revise their writing. The revision could be done at the level of ideas and sentences. This stage of writing seems to necessitate recursive acts as well since a writer may need to read his or her sentences and paragraphs more than once to obtain the flow of ideas.

*Editing*

Editing seems to be the final step in writing. When editing, a writer usually checks the punctuation, capitalization, spelling and grammar (Blanchard & Root, 1997, p. 55). From the data, it seems that punctuation and capitalization are not difficult for students. Still, correcting sentence structure may become a rather frustrating act.

> "Revising deals with the content, while editing with the skin. I edited the spelling, capitalization... anything, periods, commas and everything." (Struct/Wawan/290507/EDIT-PUNC/CAP).

> "I edited the writing afterwards. I checked the periods, commas, capital letters..." (Struct/Nia/230507/EDIT-PUNC/CAP).

> "I edited the capitalization and punctuation. Capitalization is usually used at the beginning of sentences, or when there are special words... titles, cover [page], names of companies..." (Struct/Rini/010407/EDIT-PUNC/CAP).

> "I edited the pages [for example] there shouldn't be only one page here then I would put them down on line. I edited the punctuation and capitalization as well." (Struct/Indah/130607/EDIT-PUNC/CAP).

From their narratives, Wawan, Nia, Rini and Indah seem to understand punctuation and capitalization quite well. Their good understanding on these matters should ease their writing process and may encourage them to improve their academic writing.

*Feedback and evaluation*

For the sake of improvement and empowerment, students require feedback on their work from the lecturers. According to White and Arndt (1991, p. 117), feedback from other people will be very beneficial if it is done at the drafting stage because the writer still has the opportunity to change his text.

Sometimes, students may also need to evaluate their own work in order to become autonomous learners. Lecturers, on the other hand, are expected to correct students' assignments as an instrument to improve students' writing. The correction may include both students' content and the language. Irene, for example, corrects both the language and the content; she even goes into greater detail with regard to word choices and sentence structure.

> "I correct both the content and the language. But before I come to the content, I don't understand the sentences (Subject Predicate Object). So, the first step I do is 'clearing up the grammar' and the word choices. I show them the correct forms straightforwardly, because I don't want to do 'the job' twice." (Un-struct/Irene/120407/F&E T-CORR).

By contrast, Awan seems to pay more attention to the content because he assumes that content is more substantial than the language.

> "I rarely comment on the language... it's because... what... only the content. I just... they are supposed to focus on this. So it's more on the content than the language... What I want is that the students can understand my subject; the language problems can be improved later on..." (Un-struct/Awan/190407/F&E T-CORR).

Irene tends to pay attention to the details of an assignment rather than "merely the appearance". It may indicate that she wants her students to write properly. She wants to show that language is such an important tool to convey meaning. It could be assumed that she recommended her students to write in correct language; otherwise, other people would not understand what they write.

Awan may have positive reasons for his action. Apparently, he does not want to discourage his students by focusing too much on their grammatical mistakes in their writing and speaking, as reflected in what he said, "... sometimes it [language] becomes the barrier, but I don't want to talk about the barrier itself at the first place." Therefore, he preferred to correct the content than the language. This might signify his encouraging approach towards his students' work. He thought that he could encourage students to do better by telling the students to write the content correctly while the language can be corrected afterward. The following sample shows the teachers' correction on some aspects of the language used in Rini's assignment on Research Methodology Course. The correction addresses language appropriateness, word choice, and content. In short, the lecturer appears to be enabling students to understand how to write through the practice of holistic correction. Perpignan (2003) asserts that "it is not the explicitly conveyed messages and their encoding that should be focused on by teachers and researchers, in order to generate better conditions for feedback effectiveness, but the intentions which inspire them and the means which promote them" (p. 271).

**I.2 Problem Statement**

Based on the previous background, the main problem that will be discussed in the research is the feasibility of an information system that has existing in PT. PLN (PERSERO) APJ DEPOK in order to give services for both of internal and external customer. Based on the information that given by the prev. background. Performance is in PLN still give ... the performance of IS needs to examine still appropriate or not.

**I.3 Objectives**

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the information system that has existing in the company. That analysis will be able to solve information system problem. On the other hand, it will produce another alternatives solution that can be applied more profitable. The alternative is able to give feasibility of a system.

significant

Concerning self-evaluation, students may just "take it for granted." Like Wawan and Nia, they even go to "extreme" where they never do self-evaluation intentionally. However, it is important to note that self-evaluation in this context means "giving values or grades" to students' own work.

> "So far I have never evaluated my own writing. I did not know which one was wrong." (Struct/Nia230507/F&E-SELF EVAL).
>
> "I never self-evaluate my own work..." (Struct/Wawan/290507/F&E-SELF EVAL).

In comparison, Rini appears to be the most aware of her own capacity. She tried to look within herself as to what she needed to improve.

> "I thought about my own writing, it's not like what is written in books. I can't discuss directly, I always 'go round' from the same point again and again... I think I need more practices and read more. More experiences may be..." (Struct/Rini/010407/F&E-SELF EVAL).

Overall, lecturers vary in giving feedback on students' writing in terms of the content and the language. The lecturer may even go into further details when he/she believes that what he/she is doing will be of great benefit to the students. Students, then again, will respond to the lecturers' feedback with their own objectives—interest, requirements, curiosity. Alternatively, they may ignore the feedback with the probable consequence of there being less progressive learning.

## Discussion of results

This research was carried out to get a description and interpretation of the students' experiences on academic writing. The major finding that emerges from the data analysis is that students underwent several steps of writing including pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising and editing until they understood and perceived what academic writing is and how they should write academically. Their understanding on brainstorming, for example, was just limited to their perception that references were needed to get ideas to write. Brainstorming was perceived as "guidance" for developing ideas (Nia) and "a stage to compare, to map and to draw pictures of writing" (Indah). They did not infer further that references were required in academic writing to avoid plagiarism, a severe offense in academic context.

The planning stage was acknowledged by the students as a necessary step to organize their ideas through outlining, connecting, looking for relationships and following any available models given by the lecturers. The drafting stage turned out to be a long process that included various steps such as what should be presented, how the thesis statement and the supporting details should be expressed as well as how to achieve unity, coherence and orgnization in the text.

It was found that revising and editing were perceived as ways to make their writing tidy and organized (Indah) to be "good and readable" (Wawan). To some extent, students were confused about the revising and editing stages and did them at the same time as they were perceived as being similar in nature. Surprisingly, although word processors were of great assistance, it was still difficult for the students to use them to correct grammatical errors, particularly sentence structures.

The second finding was related to feedback given by lecturers. Students received feedback (both on the language and the content) from the lecturers when writing fieldwork reports, thesis proposals (in the Research Methodology Course) and theses. Only limited feedback was given to other kinds of assignments.

Lecturers tended to correct the content and mathematical results on laboratory reports and other content-course assignments that contained mathematical operations. There were different perceptions and emphases on what needed to be corrected. While awareness of the importance of both language and content was emphasized (Irene), reluctance and worry about discouraging students by correcting too much on the language rather than the content was a concern (Awan). Imam, by contrast, was concerned more about grammatical structures and the choice of words.

In sum, the students' experiences in coping with academic writing in their discipline resulted from inadequate writing practice, less than effective writing instruction , limited writing skillsand feedback, and finally, poor understanding of the nature of tasks and difficulties in balancing their knowledge of the discipline and their language ability .

## Conclusion

This study reported in this paper has examined the academic writing experiences of four undergraduate students of Industrial Technology and the perspectives of three of their lecturers on their academic writing. The students have attempted several types of academic writing tasks such as laboratory reports, summaries, fieldwork reports and theses, and have, therefore, been exposed to the various steps involved in the writing process. Interestingly, it was found that Nia, Rini and Wawan differed in their understanding about the writing process.

The lecturers often decided on the topics but in instances when students had to decide on a topic by themselves, they tended to write on topics that they were interested in or were familiar with. Some students brainstormed prior to drafting their writing, but made limited use of resources such as the internet and textbooks. This evidence demonstrates the low motivation of students with regard to reading higher level journal articles when doing a writing assignment. Reading journal articles is important for them to understand the language and writing discourse in their discipline, the knowledge of which will help them develop their ability to write in their disciplines.

In the drafting stage, students found it difficult to come up with outlines detailing their topic sentences and supporting details. Wawan, for example, did not understand what topic sentences and supporting details were. In terms of unity and coherence, students seemed to understand what they really meant but they had difficulties in applying those concepts in their writing. Consequently, they used relatively limited transitional signals and at times they used them inappropriately.

The organization of ideas became another impediment in students' writing. While some students seemed to understand exactly what they needed to do with their ideas, others did not know which appropriate organization best suited their topics. Poor organization of ideas may have influenced the development of their ideas and to some extent may have distracted them from their purpose of writing.

Another common feature was that students tended to copy the whole sentences or phrases when citing other people's opinions or thought. This might have been because it was easier to do than paraphrasing and summarizing. Since lecturers' feedback dealt mostly with the content (although students expected their language to be corrected as well) because academic tasks in the field of Industrial Technology involved numerous mathematical calculations, students and teachers tended to pay less attention to the use of the language. This was deliberately contradictory to the argument that both the content and the language, within the context of English for Specific Purposes, were seen as equally important.

In conclusion, considering that the students' understanding of academic writing might have resulted from insufficient knowledge, practice, exposure, and the lack of clear lecturer' instructions as well as requirements of academic assignments, an improvement program aimed to enhance students' academic writing knowledge and to bridge different lecturers' instructions is deemed necessary.

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## Appendix A: Preliminary Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me about the process of establishing the International Program of Industrial Technology Department?
2. Did you find any obstacle?
3. What are the requirements for students who will enter the program?
4. What are the general objectives of the International Program?
5. How would you prepare for the students' English language ability since English is used as the language of instruction?
6. What is expected from the graduates of the Program?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

**General understanding**

1. How would you describe in general academic writing of International Program of Industrial Technology?

**Products of academic writing (writing genre)**

1. What type(s) of writing assignments are required in your courses and discipline?
2. What guidance do you get from your writing class?

**Products of academic writing (writing genre)**

1. What type(s) of writing assignments are required in your courses and discipline?
2. What guidance do you get from your writing class?

**Process of writing**

1. How do you start, develop and finish your writing?
2. What are your problems with process of writing?

**Subject of writing**

1. What topic do you usually write?

**Purpose of writing**

1. Why do you need to write academically?
2. How important is writing in your courses, program, and field?

**Audience**

1. Who do you write to?
2. When do you usually write?

**Style**

1. How do you use grammar, spelling, vocabulary, language appropriacy?
2. How do you organize your writing?

**Students' responses**

1. How do you respond to your lecturers' writing?
2. Do you think you are sufficiently helped by the writing class?

**Lecturers' feedback and evaluation of students' work**

1. Why do students need to write academically?
2. What type(s) of writing assignments are required in your courses and discipline?
3. What guidance do you provide on student writing?
4. How do you comment on and evaluate student written work?
5. What do you think about your students' writing?
6. What kinds of strengths and/or weaknesses do you see in your students' writing?
7. What aspects of writing do you think your students need to work on?
8. What do you think is the role of content course lecturers such as yourself in helping students develop academic writing skills, i.e. writing for (discipline) purposes?
9. What are some of the things that you can help your students improve in terms of their writing?
10. How can writing courses (e.g., composition courses) better prepare students for writing tasks in content courses?
11. Is writing for your discipline similar to or different from writing in another discipline?
12. Is there anything that I did not ask but you would like to add?

# 13 Decision-Making in a Collaborative Writing Task

■ Merlyn Lee
De La Salle University–Dasmarinas, Philippines

**ABSTRACT:** *Collaborative writing offers an authentic learning environment where students do not only develop their writing skills but also critical thinking and decision making skills. Despite studies conducted on collaboration (Leeser, 2004; Mabrito, 2006; Storch, 2005; Watanabe & Swain, 2007), few studies have focused on how students arrive at decisions, especially in an ESL context. This study describes the decision-making processes that occur during a collaborative writing task involving college freshman students. It looks into students' writing decisions and the factors that underlie such decisions. Two groups, each consisting of three female students, wrote an argumentative essay collaboratively. The writing sessions were audio and video-taped and a stimulated recall interview was conducted immediately after each session. Verbal transcripts of the interaction were analyzed according to topical episodes and classified based on Burnett's (1993) categories of decision making, which include immediate agreement, elaboration, considering alternatives, and voicing explicit disagreement. Patterns of decision-making were identified in each category. The stimulated recall protocols were used to explain participants' decisions during the stages of prewriting, drafting, and revising. The study revealed participants' less attention to planning but more time spent on translating ideas into sentences. More patterns and longer turns were noted under Voicing Expilict Disagreement and focused more on ideas and translating or phrasing ideas. Conflicts were attributed to participants' differences in their knowledge about writing itself and views about what constitutes good writing. The study recommends explicit teaching of collaborative skills and composing strategies and correction of students' misconceptions about good writing.*

## Introduction

With the value placed on collaboration in both academic and workplace settings, teachers are beginning to realize the need for more opportunities for students to develop collaborative and decision-making skills. Writing, which is traditionally viewed as a solitary activity, could be a venue for enhancing students' collaborative skills (Rochelle & Teasley, 1995; Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009; Yong Mei, 2010). Despite these benefits, researchers suggest further investigation especially on learner interaction (Putnam & Rafoth, 1990; also cited in Rymer, 1993) and on how a group arrives at decisions. Roskams (1999) explains that many teachers believe that active participation and accurate, appropriate, and meaningful feedback in Asian cultures are constrained by fear of mistakes and politeness norms. Gokhale (1995) also stressed that more evidence has yet to be presented to establish its effectiveness at the college level. Hayes (2000), moreover, draws attention to the few studies on problem solving and decision-making processes in classroom writing. In addition, the researcher sees the need for a study on this area because projects or academic requirements in universities are often done in small groups. Undergraduate essays, term papers, and research projects are often accomplished collaboratively because of the big number of students per class.

This paper describes student decision-making during a collaborative writing task. It analyzes patterns of decision-making during the prewriting, drafting and revising stages of writing and investigates how decisions are arrived at.

## Theoretical framework

This study on collaborative writing draws on dialectical or social constructivism. Dialectical or social constructivism according to Moshman (1982; also cited in Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2001) refers to the "...origin of knowledge construction as being the social intersection of people, interactions that involve sharing, comparing and debating among learners...." (p. 35-36). Writing as social constructivism stresses collaborative social interaction, where learners build knowledge as they interact with one another. Knowledge therefore, is considered a product of social processes where learners experience problem solving and decision-making. Social negotiation takes place as they consult one another about how to write (Derry, 1992; also cited in Benton, 1997).

Two dimensions are addressed in this study: the social and cognitive dimensions of collaborative writing. As members of a group work together to write, they share ideas, debate with one another, and make decisions. In this social context, certain thought processes are happening. An individual tries to process and understand information based on his/her existing schemata or knowledge, which helps determine how the topic or issue is approached. When students' ideas vary, disagreement may arise and explanation becomes necessary. In this sense, thinking is tied to the social context of the learning experience.

This collaborative activity may reveal patterns of interaction in the three stages of writing: prewriting, drafting, and revising. Four categories of decision-making are considered based on Burnett's framework (1993): *immediate agreement, elaboration, considering alternatives, and voicing explicit disagreement*.

Immediate agreement takes place as a result of a shared understanding among the members. In this category, members do not engage themselves in discussion but merely accept the idea proposed by another member. There could be elaborations but they come after an agreement has been reached. Burnett explains that immediate agreements are important in decision-making; however, they "... are only detrimental if they are the predominant kind of decision-making...." (p. 153). In her study of substantive conflict, the pairs which produced high-quality documents deferred consensus through considering alternatives and voicing disagreements but such types of conflict were not so evident in pairs who produced low-quality documents.

During decision-making about how to solve a problem, conflicts may arise as a result of differences in ideas. While most teachers probably would demand that students avoid disagreement, Brown and Palincsar (1989; also cited in Van Boxtel, Var Linden, & Kanselaar, 2000) argue that conflict is important in social interaction because it can lead to explanation, justification, reflection, and a search for further information. Bruffee (1999) highlights the importance of disagreement in collaborative learning as part of teaching interdependence to students. Moreover, Burnett (1993) explains that not all conflicts can be detrimental to the group such as substantive conflict, which includes considering alternatives and voicing disagreement. Both are considered productive because they defer consensus and allow for possibilities or options to be explored. Members, while their ideas are in conflict with one another, are actually engaged in what Trimbur calls "intellectual negotiation" (Burnett, 1993).

Topical episodes in the category *Considering Alternatives* show members offering other options to a point presented instead of raising arguments against it. In doing so, explanations are sometimes necessary. Elaborations are necessary when there is a breakdown in mutual intelligibility. They are therefore helpful in decision-making and an important aspect in collaboration. According to Anderson, Mayes, and Kibby (1995), "...in explaining something to a peer, he or she must clarify and organize the material learned and in so doing may discover gaps in his or her knowledge, or inconsistencies with others' work, which in turn stimulates a search for further information...." (p. 29).

## Methodology

### *Participants of the study*

Six female students enrolled in a college freshman writing class served as participants. They were asked to write an essay in English individually prior to the conduct of the study. The essays were rated by three English teachers in the same university. The Kendall Coefficient of Concordance was used in determining inter-rater reliability. With the level of significance at 0.05 and a 95 % level of confidence, the computed value was 0.83. Since the null hypothesis was rejected, it could be concluded that there was a significant agreement among the three raters. The essays were ranked according to the average of the rankings of the three raters. Mixed ability grouping was observed. Ranks 1, 4, and 5 were in Group A, and ranks 2, 3, 6 were in Group B. Each group consisted of one "high", "average", and "low" member. The descriptions were only labels that distinguished participants from one another in terms of their performance in the essay and did not refer to their ability in class.

### *Data-gathering procedure*

Two weeks before the study took place, the participants were given an orientation about collaborative writing such as participant roles, group dynamics and decision-making. The participants were also briefed on the conduct of the stimulated recall method. Each group went through the following procedure before the actual conduct of the study. They were asked to undertake a prewriting task, which was being videotaped. A stimulated recall was conducted and during this time, the participants had the chance to obtain clarifications about the method. A similar activity was conducted again as a form of training for them.

*Writing task*: The writing task was done in three stages: prewriting, drafting, and revising. The participants wrote an argumentative essay on the topic of "Computer technology: A curse to mankind". A week before the topic was made known to the participants so that they could read articles about the topic or gather ideas about it. Since the study did include language as a variable, participants were allowed to use their first language, which is Filipino, or English, their second language.

*Verbal protocol*: Interactions during the prewriting, drafting and revising stages of writing were transcribed using Allwright's (1990; also cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991) transcription conventions. Annotations were provided where necessary but only those conventions that were relevant to the study were considered. Topical episodes which did not relate to the writing task like deciding as to who would take down ideas were excluded.

*Stimulated recall method*: After each writing session, the participants and the researcher viewed the tape. The participants were given instructions to explain or describe what was happening. Following the guidelines of Eisenhart and Borko (1993), questions asked were minimal and general (e.g., "Tell me what you are/were thinking" rather than specific (e.g., "Were you thinking of any alternative actions?"). The stimulated recall is an alternative to the think-aloud procedure, where participants speak out what they are thinking about while writing. Such a method is not possible in a collaborative writing task since participants work as a group.

*Coding the transcripts*: The verbal protocol of the interaction was analyzed for identification of topical episodes. A topic episode is a segment of the interaction where a decision was arrived at. In the category *Voicing Explicit Disagreement*, only those episodes which showed open arguments or where negative feedback was introduced by "No", "That's wrong", or their equivalent in Filipino were considered. The transcripts were coded twice. The second coding took place one week after the first coding to see if the results were similar. To check on the validity of the researcher's coding, two language teachers (Filipino and English) also coded the transcripts. Where disagreements occurred, the three conferred to arrive at a consensus.

The content of talk in the topical episodes was categorized based on Lockhart and Ng's framework (1995), which considers procedure, phrasing/wording, organization, ideas, style, word choice, and grammar. Patterns of decision-making were identified based on McDonough and McDonough's (1997) guideline in determining patterns in that for a pattern to exist there should be several samples of it. Given the varying number of topical episodes in each category in the three stages of writing, the researcher decided that in a particular category where the number of topical episodes was small, that is from four to six, the pattern should appear at least twice. If the number of topical episodes was more than six, it should recur in at least three topical episodes.

## Results and discussion

Each group spent an average of 40 minutes on each session. The participants were told they had up to seven sessions to finish the task. Group A spent one session for prewriting, two for drafting, and one for revising. Group B spent one for prewriting, three for drafting and one for revising. Based on the number of sessions, it is apparent that the participants spent less attention to planning. This finding is in contrast with Storch's (2005) and Cumming's (1989; also cited in Storch, 2005) findings, where learners spend more time generating ideas than working on language.

In all 15 topical episodes were identified in both groups. The small number of episodes may be traced to the time spent on this stage. The groups spent one session on prewriting only, showing that the groups did not spend much time planning how the essay should be written or how the ideas should be organized. It is also likely that there were more episodes in Immediate Agreement and Elaboration since at this stage participants were still gathering ideas about the topic. Also, since all of them were enrolled in the same course, their ideas were not in conflict.

### *Drafting*

Tables 1 and 2 present how both groups arrived at decisions based on content of talk and categories of decision-making.

Both groups focused their decision-making more on ideas and the wording of these ideas as expected since this is the drafting stage. The highest number of topical episodes is found in *Voicing Explicit Disagreement* in Group B as reflected in Table 2. This finding runs contrary to Olsen and Kagan's observation (1992) that members who belong to the same clique or are close friends tend to agree too soon. In the present study, the participants could be considered socially homogeneous because they had been classmates for two semesters and they also admitted they

**Table 1**: Content of topic episodes in the Drafting stage (Group A)

| Content | Immediate agreement | Elaboration | Considering alternatives | Voicing explicit disagreement | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Word Choice | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Phrasing | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| Idea | 3 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 12 |
| Organization | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Procedure | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Style | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| **Total** | **7** | **9** | **9** | **8** | **33** |

**Table 2**: Content of topic episodes in the Drafting stage (Group B)

| Content | Immediate agreement | Elaboration | Considering alternatives | Voicing explicit disagreement | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Word Choice | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Phrasing | 3 | 0 | 6 | 23 | 32 |
| Idea | 3 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 10 |
| Organization | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Procedure | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Style | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| **Total** | **6** | **6** | **8** | **37** | **57** |

were friends. However, it could be a reflection of the kind of task that was given to the participants. Hayes (2000) explains that "... difficult writing tasks often require writers to do a substantial amount of problem solving or decision-making....." (p. 12).

### *Revising*

Group B spent their time deciding on two aspects of the essay only, punctuation and wording of ideas. One of the two topical episodes, which consisted of more than a hundred turns, did not show the participants collaborating since the conflict involved two members only according to Baker's (2002) framework for collaboration. Group A showed some planning on how to go about the task of revising the essay. They first analyzed the introduction and gave comments about it before deciding what should be done. Then they proceeded to other parts of the essay. Group B on the other hand, also started analyzing the introduction but no planning on how to go about revising the essay was made.

### *Patterns of decision-making*

*Immediate agreement*

The patterns of interaction in this category reflect shared understanding since no conflict arose when solutions were proposed. Implicit agreement was suggested by a topical shift as an indication that the group showed confirmation to the proposal by implementing the proposed solution. The patterns identified were as follows:

- Member explains the problem and proposes a solution—another member/group agrees
- Member proposes a solution before explaining the problem—member/group agrees
- Member proposes an idea—another member/group agrees

In this category, participants showed their agreement through approving responses or through a restatement of the proposed idea. As seen in most topical episodes, members readily agreed to the proposed idea or solution. One disadvantage of this pattern of decision-making, however, is that it restricts the roles of members since members immediately showed agreement, whether or not an explanation was given.

*Elaboration*

All elaborations during the prewriting stage focused on ideas. Since the members were still gathering ideas, it is understandable that giving explanations or reasons for ideas presented was necessary before a decision was made. No conflicts were present in this category. Members merely extended a proposed idea.

Episodes in this category for both groups focused on explanation of points or ideas. The lack of conflict in both groups is also indicative of the participants' relative content knowledge, one factor which has been cited to have an effect on participation in a collaborative task. Zuengler (1993) found in her study that participation patterns can be explained by the amount of knowledge members have about the topic of discussion.

The content of most discussions also shows that writing is a recursive process rather than linear. When students saw the need to generate ideas, they went back to planning and gathering ideas. While this action suggests inadequate planning as what has been observed in both groups, what is noteworthy is that the participants knew what to do. This only shows that in a way, the participants were applying one composing strategy and one problem solving strategy as well.

*Considering alternatives*

Participants proposed alternatives directly, that is, ideas were not prefaced with polite expressions. The reason probably is that the task did not really demand a more structured kind of interaction where members only speak when they are asked to do so or that they should always introduce their suggestions with formulaic expressions. In addition, the participants were familiar with one another. The phrases were a form of persuasion but the decision could be interpreted as false consensus, which Rymer (1993) refers to as a tendency of members to agree even if they are not fully convinced as illustrated in this extract:

1—"Technology should do good in human race." [reading] They should help in everyday living. They make our living easier.
3—It makes our living much easier.
1—It makes our living na lang.
3—Oo.[Yes]

Most of the proposed solutions and alternatives in this category were not supported by reasons, justifications, or explanations. Since the focus was on the phrasing of ideas, it could be that the participants did not see the importance of explaining them.

The recurring pattern in this category shows a member proposing a solution/idea, followed by member/s proposing an alternative before a decision is reached.

3—Nowadays, computers are becoming...useful?
1—have become
2—use of computers na lang...
1—Sige. Use of computers.

Another pattern of interaction shows members proposing an idea in English first, then explaining the idea in Filipino when it is not acceptable. This pattern was observed when participants seemed to find difficulty in the wording of ideas and in such topical episodes, language played an important role in the resolution of the problem. Collaboration was evident when members sought help in the wording of ideas in English. Participants would often "think aloud", that is, express what they were thinking aloud. They were not alternatives but rather attempts only on their part. Often, the explicit expression of such thinking stimulated other members' thinking too. Flower (1989) claims that "... shared thoughts stimulate further the other members and results in the collaborative construction of meaning." (p. 288). This show of collaboration is an indication of shared decision-making too, for the final alternative cannot be attributed to one member but to all.

The two patterns of interaction identified in this category reflect the ways in which groups can arrive at a decision without resorting to open arguments. What is significant is that groups considered more than one alternative before choosing the final option, which shows that the participants were trying to find the best solution. Baker (2002) argues that collaboration requires a high degree of symmetry. He explains that when a proposed idea is rejected without discussion, then it is not collaborative nor an interaction where one participant is doing all the problem solving. Following Baker's line of thought, it could be said that students need to be taught skills in argumentation such as supporting one's views or giving reasons for rejecting an argument.

*Voicing explicit disagreement*

Most topical episodes categorized under *Voicing Explicit Disagreement* were noted in the drafting stage. The content of talk focused more on the phrasing of ideas as expected since it is at this stage that ideas are translated into sentences or paragraphs. Most episodes were long. For example, it took more than one hundred turns for the group to finally arrive at a solution when the problem was on how to finish a sentence which begins with *on the contrary*. After much talk, the group decided to write it as "*On the contrary, it gives bad effects*". The long episode may be explained by the participants' lack of linguistic resources, which is similar to Philp, Walter and Basturkmen's observation (2010) in their study of peer interaction. First, a member proposes an idea/solution followed by a disagreement from a member or the group. At one glance, this pattern seems ideal since conflicts are resolved immediately. However, according to Baker (2002), when members in a group disagree to a proposed solution without an explanation, members may just be attending to the task but they are not collaborating. In this kind of decision-making, where no explanations are given, members are not getting higher-level help. They may just agree without really knowing the reason for the solution. While Storch (2002) concluded in her study on patterns of interaction in ESL talk that language helped in the negotiations dealing with language issues, in the present study, the participants failed to utilize language as a tool for providing support to their arguments, which could be explained by their relatively low level of language competence.

The second pattern shows this series of events: a member proposes a solution, a member disagrees, another member proposes an idea/solution, a member reacts, another member proposes until a decision is made. This pattern often leads to lengthy discussions. Gollin (1999) however, supports the value of contestation or conflict during interaction in that while it is "... complicating and often prolonging the writing process, is also seen as one of the major strengths of collaborative writing...." (p. 279). On the other hand, in order for a conflict to be considered substantive, the point of contention should be valid to rationalize for the length of discussion. For example, Group B's topical episode which was a prolonged argument on whether to use "*are assure*" or "*assured*", does not seem to justify its length since it focuses on a local feature.

The third pattern of interaction shows members providing explanations or justifications to negative feedback or disagreement. This kind of interaction shows one of the strengths of collaborative writing. Learners develop skills in argumentation and at the same time allow them to check their knowledge about content and writing. There were topical episodes however, showing members accepting counter-suggestions or disagreements without listening to explanations. For example, using "*Kasi ayoko talaga. Ang pangit.*" [*Because I don't like it. It's awkward*.] as a justification to one's disagreement does not provide much information to the members. Although the group knew something was wrong with the proposed sentence, the data does not suggest that what they knew was valid. One goal of collaboration is the sharing of knowledge so that a member can refine or make modifications in her existing knowledge if necessary. Also, this lack of elaboration deprives other members of the opportunity to learn from one another. In addition, better decisions are more likely to happen if members do not just agree without listening to explanations. Even if the conflict has been resolved, this kind of resolution does not guarantee that it will improve the decision-making skills of the participants, which is one of the benefits of collaboration.

Participants' decision-making in this category could be explained by the stimulated recall protocol. The reasons for their conflicts and disagreements centered on their differences in their knowledge about writing as expressed by the participants' explanations or arguments as follows:

> Words/terms should not be repeated (e.g., Some people... Some ladies; other; people; every day). A good composition should have new words to create "excitement and curiosity" for the reader.
>
> "Higher English" should be used in college which means using another term rather than mentioning it again.
>
> Repeating words gives the impression that the writer's vocabulary is limited.

> Effective communication of ideas should be prioritized over style or choice of words.
>
> Since phrasing has been talked about and debated on in the previous discussions, focus should shift to grammar and vocabulary in the drafting stage.
>
> If a paragraph is already well-organized, the group should check on grammar.
>
> The longer the sentence the better.
>
> The shorter the sentence the better.
>
> Words should come from the heart. When I read an essay, I look at how/what kind of words are used.

Disagreements on how the writing activity should proceed, however, could be traced to differing preferences for writing procedures, organization and writing style as noted in the following participants' comments or statements:

> This is the first time I have worked on a very long introduction. When we worked individually, it was easier. But together, it was difficult. It was chaotic. We could not decide on whether to use a question, an explanation or a background. I suggested how we could start it with a question.
>
> I was thinking of how we could classify and outline our ideas. There were just too many. Sentences with similar ideas should be combined.
>
> We were just exchanging ideas but one of us wanted to include all ideas.
>
> I observed that their examples were advantages but our composition is on disadvantages. We should introduce the advantages before citing the disadvantages, then the thesis statement to clearly show the difference.

A significant point to make here is that one of the underlying principles of constructivism is the concept of sociocognitive conflict which arises when the learner realizes that her existing understanding is being challenged. The conflicts noted in this category, despite the long discussions, could still be considered significant as the members of the groups may well have participated in the construction of knowledge.

## Conclusion

The collaborative writing activity revealed writing practices of students which teachers may find helpful in their teaching. The less time spent on prewriting and revising stages by the participants suggest some re-direction in the teaching of writing if the process approach to writing is observed. Poor planning results in poor drafting. As such students need to be taught how to develop good planning skills. How the patterns of interaction were arrived at in the four categories could be traced either to the participants' shared understanding or to differences in their understanding about writing. Their background knowledge as revealed in the stimulated recall protocol may have been formed by their experiences with their classmates, teachers and the people around them and their writing experiences.

The study has shown that while shared knowledge facilitates decision-making, differences allowed for the development of thinking skills as students attempt to solve the resulting conflict by adopting a strategy. Based on this observation, it could then be said that a collaborative writing task could be an effective strategy for teaching higher thinking skills. Good decision-making skills are learned and practiced and good decisions are based on knowledge. Decision-making skills therefore, should be taught to students as they could be used outside the classroom. They should also be taught about participant roles in a collaborative writing activity.

The stimulated recall method was a helpful means of getting the participants' perspective. The resulting protocol of this study has exposed students' misguided notions about writing, which may have been acquired from the kind of materials they read or from the kind of writing they often do although a welcoming thought for teachers of writing is that the participants have constantly thought of their reader during writing. A similar study may be conducted to identify other misconceptions about writing that students hold using the think-aloud procedure or interview. An analysis of collaborative groups' output and relating it with their decision-making may also be conducted in order to determine the extent of influence of writing decisions on the output.

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# 14

# Differences in the Learning Anxieties Affecting College Freshman Students of EFL

■ Mei-Ling Lee
Chienkuo Technology University, Taiwan

**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between English learning anxieties (communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation), among EFL non-English major students. The participants of this study consisted of 254 freshmen at a continuing school in Taiwan, including 109 female students and 145 male students. A questionnaire ELAS (English Learning Anxiety Survey), for the purpose of understanding participants' inner thoughts in terms of English language learning anxieties among three categories, was partially edited from FLCAS (foreign language classroom anxiety scale) and partially designed by the researcher. The data was then analyzed by using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Scheffe Post Hoc Test. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences on the English Learning Anxiety Scale (ELAS) with respect to the three categories of communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation among EFL college freshmen. Also of the three categories of English learning anxiety, the highest mean score across the items was test anxiety, followed by communication anxiety and fear, and finally of negative evaluation. Additionally, students whose majors were Commercial Design had the highest anxiety scales, followed by those who majored in Industrial Engineering & Management and Cosmetology and Styling. The lowest anxiety level was among students majoring in Mechanical Engineering, followed by those who majored in Applied Foreign Languages and Electrical Engineering.*

## Introduction

The need for mastery in academic English, both spoken and written, in higher education, is becoming more significant in the 21st century. More than 600 million people worldwide speaking English as an international language. Thus, it has become a major agent of globalization and its contribution has resulted in English which, in turn, has resulted in it becoming a prerequisite for an individual to become a part of the international business and cultural society. Over the past decades, a certain amount of research on the role of foreign language anxiety in foreign language learning showed that anxiety influences language learning and production (Scott, 1986; Phillips, 1992; Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Cheng, 1998). That is to say that foreign language anxiety not only affects students' attitude but is also considered to be detrimental to the performance of language learning. Young (1991) defined foreign language anxiety as "worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27). Many scholars argue that low self-esteem and competitiveness can be two major factors causing language anxiety. Conversely, students with high self-esteem could perform better than those with low self-esteem. In a study done by Cheng, 1998 and Wharton, 2000, a significant relationship was found in the relationship between English learning anxiety and students' English proficiency.

## Purpose of the study

Getting students interested in learning English is a big problem that most EFL teachers face, in particular, for those teachers who are at the technological university level. Since foreign language anxiety reflects learners' internal and external responses to foreign language learning contexts and foreign language learning processes, an investigation and detailed analysis of foreign language anxiety is necessary and significant. The purpose of this study is to explore whether there is a correlation between English learning anxiety and communication anxiety, test anxiety, and the fear of negative evaluation among Taiwanese EFL college freshmen in a continuing school in Taiwan. It also endeavors to determine how foreign language anxiety varies among students.

## Research questions and research hypotheses

Based on the purpose of the study, the research question was framed as follows: Are there any differences in English learning anxiety among EFL college freshmen with different majors in anxiety levels of communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation? In keeping with this purpose, the following hypothesis was proposed: There are insignificant differences in English learning anxieties among EFL college freshmen.

## Literature review

### *Foreign language anxiety and foreign language achievement*

Many scholars agreed that there is anxiety-provoking potential in learning a foreign language and have found that language learning difficulties could predict anxiety best in foreign language learning settings (Chan & Wu, 2004). Many second language researchers have long been aware that anxiety is often associated with the success of target language learning, and verified the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning. Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (1999) found that students who have low expectations of their foreign language ability tend to have low levels of foreign language achievement, which may reflect an accurate perception of their foreign language. Second language learning does appear to involve relatively high levels of anxiety. Such anxiety may determine perseverance, motivation, and interest in studying a foreign language. More recent research has established that second language acquisition is related to a high level of anxiety in comparison with other university courses (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). As Horwitz (2001) argued, anxiety is a complicated problem and could make people's normal performance, especially in a foreign language classroom, particularly stressful. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) stated that "anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 125). Anxiety is a kind of mental problem that may not be found or noticed easily. According to MacIntyre (1995) anxiety as "the transient emotional state of feeling nervous that can fluctuate over time and vary in intensity" (p. 28). It is a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness that is associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system and would interrupt the normal operation of the mental and physical constitution, including the process of foreign language learning. In reviews of earlier literature about foreign language anxiety, both psychologists and linguists reaffirm the correlation between anxiety scales and measures of achievement. Horwitz (1988) defined foreign language anxiety as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 125). This implies that foreign language anxiety would take place only in foreign language learning situations, such as in an EFL or ESL classroom. This suggests an implication that anxiety is a kind of situation-specific anxiety (Foss & Reitzel, 1988; Ellis, 1994). Therefore, it clearly explains why some approaches and methods in foreign language teaching, such as "suggestopedia" and "the natural approach" all emphasize the importance of reducing anxiety in foreign language learning.

### *Foreign language anxiety and EFL learning*

Second language anxiety has a debilitating effect on the oral performance of speakers of English as a second language. A study conducted by Woodrow (2006) found that English language learners from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs), China, Korea and Japan were more anxious language learners than other ethnic groups. Foreign language anxiety is a complex phenomenon that possibly relates to many factors existing in learning processes (Samimy & Rardin, 1994). The interpersonal network of language contacts, including academic, family, and social-institutional environments have a seemingly positive effect upon developing language competence and bilingualism. Foreign language anxiety seems to be the common experiences among EFL learners. Dixson investigated the relationship between anxiety and listening comprehension (1991), suggest that anxious students had difficulty grasping the content of a target language message. Another study was conducted by Cheng in 199. Her study found out a strong correlation between EFL learning and EFL anxiety in writing and speaking. Furthermore, some researchers indicated that anxiety is an important factor in foreign language reading difficulties (Saito & Samimy, 1996). In addition, Sellers (2000) who explored the relationship between language anxiety and reading comprehension in Spanish as a foreign language (2000), the results indicated that more highly anxious students tend to recall less passage content than the students with lower anxiety.

Researchers, such as Horwitz (1986) described three components of foreign language anxiety. The first is communication apprehension. Speech is the core modality of language. For EFL learners the proficiency in target spoken language is an especially important part of training and maintenance of language skills. Speaking is anxiety-provoking in foreign language activities. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991d) propose that fear of negative evaluation is closely related to communication apprehension. When students are unsure of what they are saying, fear of negative evaluation occurs and they may doubt their ability to make a proper impression. The inability either to express oneself or to comprehend another person leads to frustration and apprehension. Price (1991) interviewed 10 college students of French to examine students' opinions of foreign language anxiety, revealing that anxiety was related not simply to speaking activities, but more specifically to speaking in front of classmates and teachers. The second component is fear of negative social evaluations, as Watson and Friend (1969) noted, refers to "apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, and the expectation that others would evaluate themselves negatively". Bailey (1983) examined the relationship between the learners' competitiveness and self-esteem as a potential source of learner anxiety, claiming that the competitive nature of L2 learning can lead to anxiety when learners compare themselves to others or to idealized self-images. Krashen (1985a) also suggests that anxiety can arise according to one's degree of self-esteem. People with low-esteem may worry what their peers or friends think, in fear of their negative responses or evaluation. The third component of foreign language anxiety is test anxiety, Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety, that is, apprehension over academic evaluation. Test anxiety (TA) causes poor performance. It relates inversely to students' self-esteem and directly to their fears of negative evaluation, defensiveness, and other forms of anxiety. A growing number of researches have been devoted to investigating the correlation between language anxiety and achievement, finding some negative results (e.g., Horwitz, 1988; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Generally speaking, students in technology universities appear to be less successful English learners and are prone to possess low learning motivation and less self-confidence to acquire the language efficiently. Thus, in this study, the researcher would like to explore to what extent English learning anxiety that EFL college freshmen experience among varying majors.

### *Instrument*

The instrument in this study was a modified version of English Learning Anxiety Survey (ELAS), which was partially based upon a questionnaire—foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) to assess learners' anxiety about the target language learning (see Appendix B) and mainly was self-designed by the researcher. This newly-modified version of questionnaires—English learning anxiety survey (ELAS) with 32 items used a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to strongly agree" (4 points). "strongly agree" was counted as 4 points, "agree" as 3 points, "disagree" as 2 points, and "strongly disagree" as 1 point. The higher the total points, the more anxious the students are. The first part of the questionnaire was a personal English Learning background questionnaire. It was intended to investigate students' general English learning experience, especially those experiences related to learners' English learning anxiety. The second part of the questionnaire was an English learning anxiety survey (ELAS), which was used to investigate participants' language anxiety in English learning. In the ELAS, there were 33 question items, which were divided into three broad categories of English learning anxiety: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

In order to facilitate the participants' understanding of the questionnaire items, this instrument was conducted in the participants' native language, Mandarin Chinese to avoid unnecessary misreading and miscomprehension. One native English teacher and five EFL professors who were teaching at the technology university at the time of this study helped to verify the appropriateness and adequacy of the wording and lexical expressions in the questionnaires (both English and Chinese editions; appendices A and B). For the Chinese version, the words "foreign language" in each item was replaced by the word "English" to be consistent with the participants of EFL learners. Table 1 identifies the items within the three categories.

## Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the implementation of formal survey to ascertain the validity and reliability of the research instruments. It was conducted during the regular school day of the 2009 academic year using the same procedures designed for the formal investigation. The participants (N = 23) were sophomores of applied foreign languages studying at continuing school at a technical university in the central part of Taiwan. This instrument was written in Chinese to facilitate the students' understanding of the questionnaire items. Before the survey, the researcher gave a clear explanation of the questionnaire to the participants in Chinese. To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, those who participated in the pilot study were not chosen as the participants in the formal survey.

After the pilot study was finished, the data were collected by the researcher immediately and analyzed by SPSS (statistical package for the social science) 12.0, the researcher eliminated two inappropriate items out of the 34 original questionnaire items as suggested by reviewing panel. Thus, the consistency estimates of reliability for the three subscales of the final questionnaires after the two items were extracted; the coefficient alpha of .82, .77, .78 and .86 suggested that the final version of the 32-item questionnaires was reasonably reliable for the formal final study. The overall results of the pilot study indicated that the instruments and procedures selected for the experiment were suitable to carry out in the main study (see Table 2).

### *Data collection and participants*

The modification of the instrument was made according to the pilot results and participants' responses, then questionnaire of the formal survey was developed and used in the formal survey.

**Table 1**: Three categories of English learning anxiety

| Category | Total items | Item no. |
|---|---|---|
| Communication anxiety | 13 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 |
| Test anxiety | 9 | 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 |
| Fear of negative evaluation | 10 | 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 |

**Table 2**: Cronbach's alpha values for the instrument reliability

| Category | Cronbach's alpha value |
|---|---|
| Communication anxiety | .82 |
| Test anxiety | .77 |
| Fear of negative evaluation | .78 |
| Overall language anxiety | .86 |

**Table 3**: Description of participants by gender of the returned questionnaires

| Gender | N | Missing data | Completed data | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 146 | 1 | 145 | 56.9 |
| Female | 109 | 0 | 109 | 42.7 |
| Total | 255 | 1 | 254 | 99.6 |

The participants in this study were randomly chosen from nine classes of non-English major students, as well as one class of English major students at a technology university, located in central Taiwan, in the academic year 2009. Participants were asked to read each statement and circle the number indicating the frequency which best described their English learning anxiety.

The researcher distributed 312 questionnaires of different departments with 10 majors, including International Business; Information Management; Cosmetology and Styling; Industrial Engineering & Management; Electronic Engineering; Electrical Engineering; Mechanical Engineering; Commercial Design; Civil Engineering; and Applied Foreign Languages.

Of the 255 returned questionnaires with the returned rate of 81.7%, only one was discarded as invalid; therefore, a total of 254 valid questionnaires (equal to 81.4% of distributed ones) were used in the formal investigation. Of all the student population, females accounted for 56.9, and 42.7% were males (Table 3).

### *Data analysis and results*

The researcher utilized Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 12.0 for windows to answer research questions to explore the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables of differences in English learning anxiety among EFL college freshmen at continuing school with different majors. Firstly, descriptive analysis was performed to compute the means and standard deviations for each item and each kind of anxiety to derive a broader understanding of the general situation of students' anxiety. Secondly, ANOVA was conducted to compute significant differences in English learning anxiety among the participants learning parameters.

### *Analysis of research question*

Research question: Are there any differences in English learning anxiety among students with different majors?

The result of ANOVA showed significant differences in students' English learning anxiety among different variables (Table 4). The significance of differences in *Communication Anxiety* yielded an $F = 8.290$ and reached a $p < .05$ level of significance, and in *Test Anxiety* $F = 7.599$, $p < .05$, as for *Fear of Negative Evaluation*, research showed an $F = 7.492$, and reached a $p < .05$ level of significance. Multivariate test also showed a significant difference in English learning anxiety among students' majors (Table 5).

Of the three categories of English learning anxiety, the highest overall mean score across items in *Test Anxiety* (M = 3.060, SD = .491) followed by *Communication Anxiety* (M = 3.057, SD = .555) and *Fear of Negative Evaluation* (M = 2.842, SD = .580). (Table 6)

As seen in Table 7, students with the means and standard deviations for overall English learning anxiety among the top five majors were students who majored in Commercial Design (M = 3.43, SD = .44), followed by Information Management (M = 3.21, SD = .56), Cosmetology and Styling (M = 3.15, SD = .41), Civil Engineering (M = 3.05, SD = .40) and Electronic Engineering (M = 3.03, SD = .46) respectively.

For further studies found among the top five majors, Commercial Design, Civil Engineering and Electronic Engineering all listed *Test Anxiety* as their number 1 anxiety (M = 3.51, M = 3.09 and M = 3.07), followed by *Communication Anxiety* (M = 3.49, M = 3.03 and M = 3.04) and *Fear of Negative Evaluation* (M = 3.29, M = 3.03 and M = 2.98) as their number 2 and 3 anxiety, while Information Management, and Cosmetology and Styling listed *Communication Anxiety* as their number 1 anxiety (M = 3.36 and M = 3.23), followed by *Test Anxiety* (M = 3.33 and M = 3.19) and *Fear of Negative Evaluation* (M = 2.93 and M = 3.04) as their number 2 and 3 anxiety.

As seen in Table 8, students with the means and standard deviations for overall English learning anxiety among the bottom five majors were students who majored in Mechanical Engineering (M = 2.44, SD = .66), followed by Applied Foreign Languages (M = 2.73, SD = .46), Electrical Engineering (M = 2.85, SD = .51), Industrial Engineering & Management (M = 2.88, SD = .50), International Business (M = 3.10, SD = .44) respectively.

Further studies revealed that among the bottom five low—anxiety majors, Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering all listed *Communication Anxiety* as their number 1 anxiety

**Table 4**: ANOVA tests of between-subjets effect on three categories by majors

| Category | | SS | df | MS | *F* | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication anxiety | Between Groups | 14.286 | 9 | 1.587 | 8.290 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 46.910 | 245 | .191 | | |
| | Total | 61.195 | 254 | | | |
| Test anxiety | Between Groups | 17.081 | 9 | 1.898 | 7.599 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 61.192 | 245 | .250 | | |
| | Total | 78.273 | 254 | | | |
| Fear of negative evaluation | Between Groups | 18.456 | 9 | 2.051 | 7.492 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 67.063 | 245 | .274 | | |
| | Total | 85.520 | 254 | | | |

**Table 5**: Multivariate test for students' communication anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation for EFL non-English major freshmen

| Effect | Wilk's Lambda value | *F* | df | Error df | *P* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | .020 | 3922.792 | 3.000 | 243.000 | .000 |
| Major | .570 | 5.591 | 27.000 | 710.328 | .000 |

**Table 6**: Overall mean and overall SD scores on three categories of English learning anxiety

| Category | Overall mean | Overall SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Test anxiety | 3.060 | .491 | 1 |
| Communication anxiety | 3.057 | .555 | 2 |
| Fear of negative evaluation | 2.842 | .580 | 3 |

| **Table 7**: The top five high-anxiety majors | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Major** | **Anxiety** | **M** | **SD** | **Rank** |
| Commercial Design | Test anxiety | 3.51 | .48 | 1 |
| | Communication anxiety | 3.49 | .38 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 3.29 | .47 | |
| | Overall | 3.43 | .44 | |
| Information Management | Communication anxiety | 3.36 | .49 | 2 |
| | Test anxiety | 3.33 | .51 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.93 | .67 | |
| | Overall | 3.21 | .56 | |
| Cosmetology and Styling | Communication anxiety | 3.23 | .36 | 3 |
| | Test anxiety | 3.19 | .43 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 3.04 | .45 | |
| | Overall | 3.15 | .41 | |
| Civil Engineering | Test anxiety | 3.09 | .46 | 4 |
| | Communication anxiety | 3.03 | .33 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 3.03 | .40 | |
| | Overall | 3.05 | .40 | |
| Electronic Engineering | Test anxiety | 3.07 | .42 | 5 |
| | Communication anxiety | 3.04 | .45 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.98 | .45 | |
| | Overall | 3.03 | .46 | |

| **Table 8**: The bottom five high-anxiety majors | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Major** | **Anxiety** | **M** | **SD** | **Rank** |
| Mechanical Engineering | Communication anxiety | 2.58 | .72 | 1 |
| | Test anxiety | 2.42 | .71 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.32 | .56 | |
| | Overall | 2.44 | .66 | |
| Applied Foreign Languages | Test anxiety | 2.92 | .48 | 2 |
| | Communication anxiety | 2.85 | .45 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.42 | .45 | |
| | Overall | 2.73 | .46 | |
| Electrical Engineering | Communication anxiety | 2.91 | .50 | 3 |
| | Test anxiety | 2.84 | .56 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.81 | .48 | |
| | Overall | 2.85 | .51 | |
| Industrial Engineering & Management | Test anxiety | 2.94 | .48 | 4 |
| | Communication anxiety | 2.91 | .56 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.78 | .45 | |
| | Overall | 2.88 | .50 | |
| International Business | Test anxiety | 3.18 | .49 | 5 |
| | Communication anxiety | 3.14 | .41 | |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | 2.98 | .42 | |
| | Overall | 3.10 | .44 | |

(M = 2.58 and M = 2.91), followed by *Test Anxiety* (M = 2.42 and M = 2.84) and *Fear of Negative Evaluation* (M = 2.32 and M = 2.81) as their number 2 and 3 anxiety, while Applied Foreign Languages, Industrial Engineering & Management, and International Business all listed *Test Anxiety* as their number 1 anxiety (M = 2.92, M = 2.94 and M = 3.18), followed by *Communication Anxiety* (M = 2.85, M = 2.91 and M = 3.14) and *Fear of Negative Evaluation* (M = 2.42, M = 2.78 and M = 2.98) as their number 2 and 3 anxiety.

**Discussions, conclusions and recommendations**

Language learning difficulties could predict anxiety in foreign language learning settings (Chen & Chang, 2004). As previous research has suggested, anxiety has a great effect on second language acquisition and may be a part of the difficulty that learners have in acquiring another language. This study corresponds to Young's (1999) description of foreign language anxiety as "worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27) among EFL learners in the investigation of foreign language anxiety. That is, second language acquisition in second language learners is related to a high level of anxiety in comparison with other university courses (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). The results indicated that the scores on the English learning anxiety survey (ELAS) (i.e., communication anxiety, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and overall anxiety) significantly correlated to EFL students of different majors. According to the students' responses to the questionnaire, test anxiety and communication anxiety made up the highest mean scores among the three categories of English learning anxiety. These revealed that most of the EFL Asian students have some trepidation toward test and communication anxiety. While learning English, students were not confident enough to speak freely, or do well on written tests, as well. This finding may suggest that students with higher foreign language anxiety could influence their four language skills on English proficiency (El-Banna; 1989; Dixson, 1991; Aida, 1994). Certain highly anxious students sometimes attribute language acquisition difficulties to low intelligence. Among the bottom three low-anxiety majors: Mechanical Engineering was listed as the number 1 lowest anxiety major, followed by Applied Foreign Languages and Electrical Engineering. Perhaps this was due to their major studies being taught in English by their instructors and the majority of the adopted textbooks were written in English.

Among the three categories of English learning anxiety, all ten majors listed *Fear of Negative Evaluation* to be their lowest apprehension, this indeed showed an important issue that faces the country now. Without doubt, we are in a test-driven society that puts an extremely high value on education; the school authority and parents are concerned exclusively with their children's' performance even before formal elementary school. This phenomenon has produced an array of consequences, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the so-called test-dominated-education system is somewhat responsible. This is why the results showed fear of negative evaluation to be the least important factor, while "communication anxiety and test anxiety are of paramount importance.

The results revealed that most of the students lacked confidence in speaking English and felt nervous about test-oriented status in current educational system. Hence, future studies may consider working on what those factors are which resulted in speaking difficulties and test anxiety. Though the causes may be very complicated, it can allow teachers to have a greater understanding of an EFL learner's prospectives regarding their English learning attitudes and outlooks. The government and the country's educational systems may need to overhaul its educational policy and the country's educational system and make a greater effort improving the educational system that has been limited to the English education of technological universities. Therefore, English lessons need to integrate productive skills like speaking and writing in addition to written tests in order to encourage students to speak more by means of constructive and helpful methods to elevate students' learning environment. To achieve this, teacher educators need to create in-class opportunities for students to perform tasks that require a meaningful exchange of information. In other words, focus on whole language and learning "how to use" English instead of learning “about” English; examples could be use of e-learning platform; chatting room; e-mail and online discussion boards are some very good sources of motivation for students to improve speaking skills.

Furthermore, EFL teachers may want to consider providing students with low-anxiety learning contexts, and a more accommodating and friendly atmosphere should be maintained to reduce foreign language anxiety. Teachers should make foreign language classrooms “anxiety-free zones” by eliminating the anxiety-provoking factors according to different levels of foreign language competences and the foreign language anxieties of their students. Even teaching students learning strategies to reduce foreign language anxiety can help learners to lower their foreign language anxieties.

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### Appendix A: English learning anxiety survey (English version)

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of anxiety in English learning and use it as a basis for English teaching-learning improvement. This questionnaire is designed for academic research. It contains 32 items that may reflect your feelings about your English class. After reading each statement, please circle the number and indicate whether you (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, (4) strongly agree. Your answers are considered to be highly valuable and will also be kept confidential Note that there is no right or wrong response to any of the items on this survey.

**Part A: Background information**

1. What is your sex?
   ☐ 1. Male ☐ 2. Female

2. What is your major?
   ☐ 1. Mechanical Engineering ☐ 2. Electrical Engineering ☐ 3. Electronic Engineering
   ☐ 4. Industrial Engineering & Management ☐ 5. Information Management ☐ 6. International Business
   ☐ 7. Commercial Design ☐ 8. Cosmetology and Styling ☐ 9. Civil Engineering
   ☐ 10. Applied Foreign Languages.

3. How many years have you learned English?
   ☐ Three years ☐ Four years ☐ Five years ☐ Six years
   ☐ More than six years

**Part B: Self-reported English learning anxiety survey**

| | Statement | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | I get nervous when I don't understand the words the native English speakers say. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | I worry that my English listening ability is not good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | I don't dare to speak English with other students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | I'm afraid to make mistakes when the teacher asks me to answer questions in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. | I get nervous when the teacher calls on me to do the text summary. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. | I worry that I'm unable to communicate with others owing to my low English proficiency. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. | I get nervous when I have to write the reflections after reading. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | I'm afraid people may not understand what I wrote because of my improper usage of words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | I'm afraid that there are mis-spelling or grammar mistakes when writing sentences. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | I get nervous when taking English listening comprehension tests. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. | I get nervous about possibly not "keeping up" or receiving poor scores when taking English listening comprehension tests. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. | I'm afraid that I might make mistakes in front of the class when taking an oral test. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. | I get nervous when the teacher asks questions in English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. | I'm afraid that I can't complete all the questions within the specified time due to my slow reading speed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. | I become nervous when the teacher asks me unexpected questions and I have to answer them verbally. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. | I get panicky when there are many words I don't know on English tests. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. | I get nervous when I don't understand grammar or sentence structures on tests. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. | I worry about my writing speed too slow when testing English translation or writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| | Statement | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. | I worry about making mistakes due to limited vocabulary and incorrect word usage when testing in English translation or writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. | I worry about the insufficient use of sentence patterns when testing in English translation or writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. | I get nervous when the English teacher asks me questions for which I haven't prepared in advanced. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. | I have no confidence in my English listening comprehension. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. | I worry that my promotion or pay raise or job qualification would be affected by my poor English proficiency. | | | | |
| 26. | I don't know what I'm talking about when I feel nervous in English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. | I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when doing an English presentation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 28. | I'm afraid that my broken English pronunciation would cause jokes when I want to bring up questions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. | I'm afraid to be criticized or scorned by peers during team discussion because of my poor English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 30. | For fear of being laughed at by others, I don't dare to ask questions even when encountering unknown words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 31. | I worry about an English teacher who might have negative feelings about me due to my bad performance on English listening comprehension exercises. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. | I feel my heart beating up when I know that I am going to be called on in English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

## Appendix B: English learning anxiety survey (Chinese version)

**各位親愛的同學:**
**這份問卷是想要了解您英文學習的情形，問卷計有32道題目，每個題目有1、2、3、4、的選項，分別代表: 非常不同意、不同意、同意、非常同意,並無所謂的「對」與「錯」的標準答案，請根據您實際的情況來回答。您的資料僅供學術研究之用，您的寶貴意見將對本研究結果有關鍵性之影響，且絕不會將資料外洩，請放心與誠實作答。謝謝您的合作。**
**敬祝學業進步!**

**壹、基本資料**

1. 性別
 ☐ 1. 男 ☐ 2. 女

2. 系別
 ☐ 1. 機械 ☐ 2. 電機 ☐ 3. 電子 ☐ 4. 工管
 ☐ 5. 資管 ☐ 6. 國企 ☐ 7. 商設 ☐ 8. 美容
 ☐ 9. 土木 ☐ 10. 應用外語

3. 學習英文的時間
 ☐ 1. 三年 ☐ 2. 四年 ☐ 3. 五年 ☐ 4. 六年
 ☐ 5. 六年以上

**貳、英文學習焦慮問卷調查表**

| | **題項內容** | **非常不同意** | **不同意** | **同意** | **非常同意** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 我會覺得其他同學的英語說的比我好。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | 上英文課時，聽不懂老師說的英語或用英語與老師對話時，我會覺得害怕。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. | 聽不懂外國人所說的話時，我會覺得緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. | 我會擔心自己的英文聽力程度不佳。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. | 我不敢和同學講英語。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. | 當老師要我用英語回答問題時，我會怕講錯。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. | 當被老師叫起來說出文章大意時，我會覺得緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. | 我擔心自己的英語能力不佳，無法用英語和他人溝通。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. | 閱讀文章後要馬上寫出感想時，會讓我覺得緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | 怕用詞不當，別人看不懂我寫的東西。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | 我怕寫出來的句子，會有單字拼錯或文法錯誤。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | 進行英文聽力測驗時，我就會覺得緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. | 考英文聽力時，跟不上速度或擔心成績不佳，我會緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. | 口試時，我會害怕在全班面前講錯。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. | 上英文課時，如果老師當場抽問，我會很緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. | 我擔心英文閱讀速度太慢，無法在規定的時間內完成作答。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. | 當老師問我出乎意料的題目時，要我口頭回答，我會很緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. | 英文試題中有很多生字時，我會很慌張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. | 考試看不懂文法或句型時，我會緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. | 考英文翻譯或寫作時，我會擔心寫的速度太慢。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. | 考英文翻譯或寫作時，我會擔心認識的單字太少寫不出來及單字用法錯誤。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. | 考英文翻譯或寫作時，我會擔心所用的句型太少。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. | 當英文老師問到我事先有沒有準備好問題時，我會感到緊張。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. | 我對自己的英文聽力沒有自信。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. | 英文程度不佳，我怕會影響升遷或加薪或無法勝任目前的工作。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. | 當我在上英文課講英語時，我會感到緊張且不知道自己在講什麼。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. | 當我在發表英文報告時，我會擔心同學的嘲笑。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| 題項內容 | 非常<br>不同意 | 不同意 | 同意 | 非常<br>同意 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. 上英文課，我想提出問題時，我會擔心我的發音不標準，而鬧笑話。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. 在做分組討論時，擔心自己的程度不夠，而被組員批評、鄙視。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 30. 上英文課中，遇到生字而不敢一人發問，怕被同學譏笑。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 31. 做英文聽力練習時，害怕因表現不佳老師對我有負面的看法。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. 上英文課，當我即將被叫到時，我會感到心跳加速。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

**題目到此結束，謝謝您的填答與合作!**

# 15 The Ethical Formation of Teacher Identity: Pre-service Teachers in Hong Kong

■ Michelle Mingyue Gu
Hong Kong Institute of Education

**ABSTRACT:** *An increasing number of studies have been carried out on teacher identities, but few have explored how individuals can enact their ethical agency to construct alternative teacher identities. Informed by Clarke's framework of ethical self-formation that utilizes Foucault's four axes of ethics, this study investigated the understanding of teacher and teaching profession among a group of pre-service teachers in Hong Kong and their discursive determination in identity construction. In-depth interviews were employed for data collection. The findings indicate that teacher identities are contingent and constructed, and that the notion of the ethico-politics of teacher identity opens up scope for moving beyond the narrowing of focus on particular meanings of teaching and enables the teachers to build ethical agency for identity reformation and reconstruction.*

## Introduction

The field of education has witnessed growing interest in the notion of identity. In a sense, learning to teach is framed in terms of the development of teaching identity rather than the acquisition of skills and techniques, where identity refers to an individual's knowledge of themselves and others' recognition of them (Danielewicz, 2001). A growing body of literature on teacher education has employed the concept of identity, which includes studies on teachers' professional identity formation, studies on the identification of characteristics of teachers' professional identity, and studies in which professional identity was (re)presented by teachers' stories, as summarized in the overview of the recent research on teacher identity by Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004).

Cross (2006) argues that a focus on teacher identity deepens and extends the understanding of who teachers are and what teaching is. Identities are formed and constructed through continuous negotiation, discussion, and justification (MacLure, 1993), which implies that they are both given and achieved, and that agency exists within the social process of becoming teachers. The relationship between the personal dimension and the social dimension in teacher identity formation has attracted research attention (e.g., White & Ding, 2008). Implicit in the recognition that identities are formed at the nexus of the individual and the social is the idea that identity involves both self-reflection and social recognition, which are essential to "any substantive account of ethical life" (Butler, 2005, p. 49). Within the inevitably social process of becoming a teacher, there is a potential site of agency, where individual teachers reflect on alternative ways of how they have lived, and appropriate other possible elements from alternatives to how they actually live to form identities. This implies the necessity to explore the space for individuals to exercise their ethico-political agency in identity formation.

The main thrust of this study is to investigate the extent to which individual teachers could act ethically in an identity-forming process partially determined by social discourses and cultural convention. Following works by researchers such as Peters (2003), Zembylas (2003a, 2003b, 2007), Zembylas and Fendler (2007), and Clarke (2009), who apply Foucault's (1983, 1985) ethical work in educational theory and practice, and employing Clarke's framework for ethical self-formation, this study investigates how a group of pre-service teachers understand teaching and explores how teachers can exercise their professional agency to maximize their potential for development and growth by constructing their teacher identities differently. The paper begins by outlining a framework for analyzing teacher identity and understanding the interplay between the individual and the social. The findings are then presented and discussed.

## A diagram for doing identity work

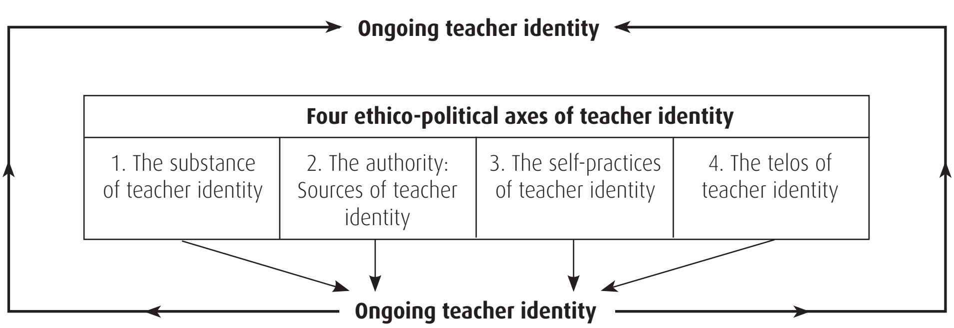
Commenting on the interplay between the individual and the social in identity formation, Marsh (2003, p. 8) indicates that, by "patching together the fragments of the discourses" to which people are exposed, they are constantly fashioning and refashioning their identities. Although the fashioning and refashioning of identities is somewhat a process of being positioned in the pre-existing and ongoing social conversations, individuals, as agentive beings, are able to search new linguistic and social resources to resist the positions that are unfavorable (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).Thus, identities are formed and constructed in continuous negotiation, discussion and justification (MacLure, 1993), which implies that identities are both given and achieved and that a space of agency exists within the social process of becoming teachers.

Since identity is a matter of arguing for oneself (MacLure, 1993), the creation of identity becomes an ethical imperative (O'Leary, 2002). Thinking identity in relation to ethics and histories requires a diagram which can provide a plane of understanding of historically specific forms of truth, power and subjectivity (Prozorov, 2007). Clarke (2009) has translated Foucault's (1983, 1985) four aspects of axes of the relationship to oneself into identity in terms of the substance of teacher identity, the authority sources of teacher identity, the self-practices of teacher identity, and the endpoint of teacher identity, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The first axis refers to the substance of teacher identity, concerning "what part of myself pertains to teaching and what forms of subjectivity constitute—or what forms do I use to constitute—my teaching self" (Clarke, 2009, p. 190). The second axis is the authority-sources of teacher identity, concerning "why I should cultivate certain attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and what sources of discursive authority I recognize as a teacher" (p. 191). The third axis is about the techniques and practices used to shape and fashion the teaching selves. The fourth axis concerns the goal or purpose of being a teacher.

Employing the diagram for doing identity work, this study recognizes individuals as agents who are able to create and change things with their pre-positioning in social events and who continuously develop a sense of self in their engagement with the world (Archer, 2000; Clarke, 2008). Incorporating the influence of social factors as well as individual creativity and agency, this study understands teacher identity formation as a combination of past experiences, present activities and future expectations which are "continuously being renegotiated through social

**Figure 1**: A diagram for doing "identity work" (adapted from Clarke, 2009, p. 191)



interaction" (Miller Marsh, 2003, p. 6). This article seeks to understand a group of pre-serve teachers' identity formation from a political and ethical perspective. It aims to examine how teacher identities have been constructed in particular ways and explore to what extent the effort taken to look into one's own history can enable teachers to think and construct their identities differently.

More specifically, the following questions will addressed: How are the professional identities of pre-service teachers in a teacher education institution in Hong Kong produced? What are the possible ways of constructing teacher identities?

## The study

### *Participants*

As the only teacher education institution in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Institute of Education (hereafter the Institute) offers four-year Bachelor of Education degree programmes. Most students at the Institute intend to become either primary or secondary school teachers. The participants were 12 year-one students from the English and Chinese Departments. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the participants. The names are all pseudonyms.

Interviews were employed for data collection. There were two rounds of individual interviews at an interval of two months, each of which lasted about one hour. The first interview was focused on the students' teaching identity development, and the second one on confirmation and clarification of the preliminary findings emanating from a preliminary analysis of data from the earlier interview. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) to elicit their understanding of teaching and their teaching experiences. A mixture of English, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese was used for interviewing the participants. Data extracts in Chinese in this article were translated into English.

### *Data analysis*

This study's data analysis was a gradually evolving process in which the data, theoretical framework, coded categories and research questions were constantly evaluated, re-evaluated and reformulated in order to construct the themes and patterns that potentially answer the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this sense, these themes represent "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 2001) initiated by the participants. The theoretical framework was grounded in the data rather than imposed or pre-determined.

As recurring patterns that seemed relevant to addressing the research questions were identified, categories were developed, informed by both the data and theoretical framework outlined above.

**Table 1**: Participants

| Name | Gender | Department |
|---|---|---|
| Aeron | Male | English |
| Alex | Male | English |
| Maggie | Female | Chinese |
| Penny | Female | English |
| Sam | Male | Chinese |
| Lulu | Female | English |
| Xin | Female | English |
| Tian | Female | English |
| Shi | Male | Chinese |
| Gan | Female | Chinese |
| Qiang | Female | English |
| Zhou | Female | English |

Examples of the categories were “subjectivity in constructing teacher identity” and “practising teacher identity”, which were associated with ‘the substance of teacher identity’ and ‘self-practice of teacher identity’ in Clarke’s (2009) framework. Alternative explanations were then searched for to test the emerging understanding across cases.

## Findings

### *The substance of teacher identity*

The student teachers identified a variety of forms of subjectivity that they used to constitute their teaching selves, including character, passion towards teaching, subject knowledge, communication skill and teaching strategy, and rational mind. In the following three excerpts, the students see teaching as most concerned with character:

> *Extract 1*
> Zhou: I have great confidence that I will become a good teacher because I am a very observant person. Although I don’t appear to be very active and very talkative, I like to observe the surroundings. This will help me capture what students want and like. I think students like a teacher who is sensitive to their needs and who is inquisitive and always likes to explore new things. (Jan 10th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

> *Extract 2*
> Lulu: I don’t think I am a suitable person for teaching because I get anxious easily and lose my temper. The students won’t like me. I think a teacher should provide guidance to the students and if the teacher loses patience when students misbehave, he/she will become a negative model for the students to follow. The teachers play a key role in influencing students’ character and value development. I think a teacher should be the type of person who has a very stable character. (Jan 12th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

> *Extract 3*
> Qiang: I am an active, extroverted and talkative person. I think my character offers a big advantage for teaching because the students like a young teacher who can always create a lively learning environment for them. (Jan 15th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

All the three students seem to be concerned about whether students will recognize them as a good teacher. Because identity is relational, this is a crucial aspect of the substance of any teacher’s identity. However, at the same time, they limit the potential options for working on this aspect of their practice by basing their teaching capacity on their “characters”, which they see as unchangeable and unchanging. For example, Zhou and Qiang could explore what they could do more besides “observing the students and being inquisitive”, and “being active, extroverted and talkative”, Lulu might re-establish her teaching confidence if she explores further how a professional relationship with the students can be set up by viewing providing a fair and effective teaching as the basis of being liked by the students (Furlong & Maynard, 1995).

It is found that some students rush to the conclusion that teaching is not a suitable profession to them because of value conflicts. Shi is representative of this view:

> *Extract 4*
> Shi: I don’t think teaching is a suitable job for me because I think teachers should concentrate on knowledge transfer. But in Hong Kong, teachers have to spend a lot of energy and time on classroom discipline. Maybe I will work for a company after graduation. Maybe I should work in other places where teachers don’t need to care too much about discipline. (Jan 9th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

Shi wants to change profession or to teach in other places than Hong Kong because she thinks classroom management is time-consuming and teachers should focus exclusively on knowledge transfer. It seems that, endowing teaching with a narrow meaning, Shi limits her potential in developing a comprehensive teaching capacity. She also sees good classroom discipline as a condition for effective teaching, but ignores the fact that the latter can lead to the former.

The following excerpts indicate that the constitution of the teaching self is more complicated than those previously stated,

> *Extract 5*
> Sam: In Hong Kong, becoming a good teacher is complicated because the society, the parents and students all have high demands on us and the students here are not easy to deal with. First you must be very professional, and you mush have great knowledge in the subject. It's very important. Second thing is about your pedagogy, your teaching skills. Because teaching is not individual work; it's interaction about others. You have to know how to interact with others. Third thing is that I think teaching is not just about knowledge, and a teacher should first of all be a good person. Fourth, if you are irrational, then you cannot perform very well in teaching. (Jan 7th, 2010)

Sam thinks that subject knowledge, interactive skills, moral quality and a rational mind all construct a teaching self. Sam emphasizes that becoming a good teacher is not an easy process in Hong Kong, where "the society, the parents and students all have high demands" on teachers and the students are "difficult to handle". Sam then uses legitimating strategies (Fairclough, 2003) to justify the substances of a teaching self by explaining their utility. The above excerpt reflects that identity formation entails the practices of self-reflection and social recognition.

### *The authority sources of teacher identity*

A variety of issues are identified by the students that are concerned with the issues of why teachers should cultivate certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviors and what authority the teacher should assume. Below the two excerpts represent two extremes of the student teachers' view on the authority sources of teacher identity:

> *Extract 6*
> Aeron: Well, actually I think the teachers should consider what the students need, because teachers not only teach, as I said before, teachers not only teach students how to get the knowledge, but also the moral value. If we're cool about the students that we don't consider their needs, they may perform very badly. I mean they may not consider other person's position when they grow up. So I think for teachers, they should consider the students' needs before they have punished them, before they scold them. It is our responsibility as teachers to understand students' levels and give them the opportunity to soar. In HK, if you are too harsh to students, they will see you as their enemies and sometimes even refuse to learn. (Jan 9th, 2010)

> *Extract 7*
> Qiang: I think teachers should have the capacity to guide their students because the students are still too young to judge what are good or bad. Students in HK usually have serious discipline problems. The class time is limited and if we give too much freedom to the students, there will be no time for real teaching. I don't identify with this point because I think teachers should have some control over students and students should respect the teachers. (Jan 15th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

Aeron places value on the discourse of teaching as sacrifice and thinks that teachers should always see things from the student's perspective, which is reflected in his attempt to consider students' needs first and give them opportunity to express their ideas and explore new things. In contrast, Qiang sees the authority of teacher identity as lying in teachers' capacity to take control over students and provide sufficient guidance. However, the hard division between being considerate and taking control may limit their exploration of effective teaching. Both argue that their teaching beliefs are grounded in the teaching context of Hong Kong, which reflects that the social shapes individuals in different ways and that different people tend to have different interpretations of the surrounding. The need for a balance between these two extremes is expressed by another student teacher:

> *Extract 8*
> Sam: teachers should have space for the students. Teachers should have freedom for them to develop their own style, but on the other hand, teachers need to give them instructions, because if you didn't have guidance for them, you don't have obedience in the class, and students will not have a clear way for them to go, and it is still very confused for themselves. So it's very difficult for you to balance. A balanced attitude will ensure effective learning and teaching. So probably learning how to balance will be a long journey for young teachers. (Jan 7th, 2010)

In Sam's text, some assumed values and operating presuppositions, which are indicators of the sources of authority he draws on, can be found. Explicit modal statements are employed to frame the requirements he stipulates for teachers, such as "teachers should..." and "teachers need to... ". To rationalize these requirements, Samuel refers to the utility of the stipulated attitudes and behaviors: "A balanced attitude will ensure effective learning and teaching".

A number of students advocate continuous learning and improvement, and justify them on the basis of narratives about the rapid update of knowledge in the information age and the importance of teachers' global vision. For example,

> *Extract 9*
> Gan: Teachers should keep on learning new technologies, be alert to the social news, and always ready to change. Your interests and vision should not be only focused in what is happening in Hong Kong, but you should have a wider vision. This way you can have real discussion and sharing with the students and only when they regard you as an up-to-date person, will they be willing to share their real feelings. We should try to lesson the generation gap. (Jan 28th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

> *Extract 10*
> Zhou: Teachers need to go to more places to experience different cultures. This way they won't be biased in teaching and will guide students in making judgement by themselves and help students develop their own values. (Jan 10th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

The legitimating strategy Gan utilizes to justify subjection to the behavioral requirement is rationalization. He explains the utility of these behaviors: "This way you can have real discussion and sharing with the students and only when they regard you as an up-to-date person, will they be willing to share their real feelings." A similar strategy is adopted by Zhou, as she advocates "a more tolerant attitude towards different cultures" which, she argues, may lead to an unbiased view in teaching.

### *The self-practices of teacher identity*

In terms of the third axis concerning the practices or techniques the student teachers use to fashion or shape their teaching selves, they focus on classroom practices, peer sharing, seeking guidance from critical friends, reflective journaling and engaging in professional learning. For example,

> *Extract 11*
> Aeron: Actually before this semester, I didn't have the chance to teach in school, and I don't know how a teacher would be like in the class. And I found that in the school, in the classroom, you need to do many things. For example, you need to not only teach the stuff that you're required to teach, but also you need to control the students so that they don't scream aloud and run around. But also you need to consider the personal problems or the academic problems. I think I need to learn through teaching. (Jan 9th, 2010)

Aeron points out that teaching and learning constitute two important practices a teacher should use to shape the teaching self. A similar idea is expressed by Lulu:

*Extract 12*
Lulu: Every time after the teaching practicum, I will reflect on the aspects of my teaching that need improvement, and learn how to make my teaching better. So teaching can help us identify the problems and learning can enable us to solve them. (Jan 12th, translated from Chinese)

It seems that the self-practices can open space for an awareness of the contingency and constructedness of teachers' knowledge and professionalism (Clarke, 2009). As Zhou and Shi say:

*Extract 13*
Zhou: My past experiences tell me that one's understanding of teaching is not stable, but has always been evolving and changing. When I have new teaching experiences and new knowledge inputs, I will reconsider the teaching techniques I used before and redesign them for future use. (Jan 10th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

*Extract 14*
Shi: I think we can video-record our classroom teaching from time to time and write reflective journals. We can share feelings and perceptions, and exchange ideas with friends or colleagues. The most important thing is everyday practice. (Jan 9th, 2010, translated from Chinese)

The various techniques the students use, like teaching and learning, seeking advice from more experienced colleagues and reflecting on incidents in the classroom are practices of self-formation. Such practices are important because what they entail is a matter "of capturing the already-said, of reassembling what one could hear or read, and this for an end that is nothing less than the constitution of the self" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 237).

***Why the choice of teaching profession?***

In terms of the ultimate goal or purpose in teaching, insights are gained from the students' comments' about why they want to be a teacher. The students' understanding of the ultimate goal in choosing the teaching profession varies, from the oft-cited notion of making a difference to the students' lives, to a more practical attitude like financial security. Li and Lulu are representative of those who take a practical view towards teaching:

*Extract 15*
Tian: The teaching job attracts me because I don't need to get involved in something complicated in the society and I can work in a simple environment. (Jan 8th, 2010)

*Extract 16*
Lulu: This job is very stable. I can be a teacher for 30 years and lead a quiet and peaceful life. But I won't feel bored because I always have new students coming each year. I will can enjoy a sense of achievement in teaching others and live meaningfully. (Jan 12th, translated from Chinese)

Here, the purpose of teaching is constructed in terms of life stability, where teaching provides a desirable work environment and a relatively stable employment. Their views of the telos of teaching seems to have little connection with teaching itself, but focuses on what life style teaching can provide them. They would benefit from reconstructing their understanding of the profession and exploring other aspects of teaching. Below is another individually oriented perspective on teaching:

*Extract 17*
Sam: I love teaching because I like performance before others and I imagine the classroom is just like a stage for me. (Jan 7th, 2010)

From the students' comments, we can also find that the meanings of teaching are constructed from their past experiences. For example,

> *Extract 18*
> Maggie: The English teachers I had in primary and secondary schools are not professional enough so I want to become an English teacher in the future in order to contribute to the society. (Jan 14th, 2010)

In contrast to the above excerpts, the following comments are more concerned with the social aspects of teaching. A discourse of altruism can be found:

> *Extract 19*
> Xin: I think a teacher can enlighten people and make them become a real person, a person useful to the society. So I think this is a good profession. (Jan 12th, 2010)

> *Extract 20*
> Penny: I think this is a great job. If you could help a rude or irresponsible student become a very useful person, you will have a great sense of achievement. (Jan 5th, 2010)

> *Extract 21*
> Aeron: I will try to help students get high scores in examinations, to enter good universities, have good jobs, and lead happy lives. (Jan 9th, 2010)

These represent a fairly conservative value that schooling reproduces and endorses accepted social values. Aeron has a very exam-oriented attitude and he regards turning students into those with highly academic achievements as the goal of his teaching. He thinks that the conditions of "a happy life" are "high scores" in examinations, entering "good universities" and having "good jobs". His use of "high scores" and "happy life" may limit students' multiple choices in pursuing their desired lives. Penny and Xin appear to take the prevalent social values for granted and unproblematize the use of "rude", "irresponsible" and "useful", where they fail to realize that the social environment, the educational system or the school might partially cause the students' "unacceptable" behaviors.

Some student teachers construct meanings in teaching as developing individual learners' agency in learning how to learn and pursuing a life that they want to lead. For example,

> *Extract 22*
> Maggie: The most meaningful part in teaching lies in its potential to develop students' interest in learning and equip them with the ability to learn, and make them become the persons who can advance the society. (Jan 14th, 2010)

> *Extract 23*
> Xin: I think the meaning of teaching is to help students become a person they want to be. Teachers can give the students some space and chance to think about their own lives, to plan their own future. Teachers can have big influences students in career choice, values, etc, but you can never change a person's life. You can only help students know they really want and chase their dreams. (Jan 12th, 2010)

Rather than reflecting a conservative model where schooling should produce socially accepted individuals, these comments reflect the student teachers' intent to regard students as free agents who are able to enact their own agency within the constraints and influences of the social context and to make choices and seek new possibilities of life.

## Discussion

Through the lens of ethical re-formation (Clarke, 2009), the ways in which a group of student teachers understand being a teacher and the teaching profession is explored to see how teacher identities have been shaped and to explore possible ways of comprising them differently. Britzman

(1994, p. 72) argues the significance of recognizing the discursive constructedness of thinking in teacher education:

> Unless the narrations of practice are read through theories of discourse—that is, as representing particular ideological interests, orientations, communities and meanings, and as deploying relations of power—there remains the danger of viewing the teacher's practical knowledge as unencumbered by authoritative discourse and as unmediated by the relations of power and authority that work through every teaching and research practice.

The student teachers might be able to conduct a "historical ontology of [them]selves" (Foucault, 1997b, p. 318) if they explore the underlying reasons that can explain, and the influences that have shaped their particular understanding of their teachings selves, and thus become aware of other possibilities. However, this means they need to be ready to let go of an unchanging and stable identity and of any attainable perfection that can be held on to once attained (Clarke, 2009). Yet according to Butler (2005, p. 42), this is liberating, in that "suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same". Moreover, recognizing that identity is continuously renegotiated within specific contexts provides space for the possible retransformation of pedagogical practices through explorations of teaching and of others' ideas. A deterministic perspective on identity would be problematic and, instead, a critical approach that views identity as contingent and constructed is adopted in this study.

Recognizing the contingency of the history that comprises the diagram of the identity, as illustrated in Figure 1, provides the condition for exercising ethical agency. In terms of the axis concerning the substance of teacher identity, some students equate their teaching identity with their character which they deem as unchanging and fixed, which, in some cases, leads to student teachers' assertion that teaching is not a suitable job for them. This may also make them rely on their character in teaching too much, but neglect the fact that pedagogical practices require ongoing improvement so as to be adapted to different contexts and students. It is found that a rigid definition of teacher responsibility closes off the path to a teaching career. For example, Shi has decided to work in a company after graduation because she doesn't think teachers should take responsibility of managing classroom discipline, but should focus solely on knowledge transfer. It would be beneficial if she recognizes that it is not necessary to place the two responsibilities in opposition, and they can be mutually supporting. Her idea of teaching in a place other than Hong Kong shows how social discourses can influence teaching identity and reflects her attempts to locate herself in a new teaching context that will allow her to resist identities that position her in an undesirable way. However, she doesn't recognize that contextual change won't solve the problem, as, in the process of becoming a teacher, "identity is always deferred" and "never really, never yet, never absolutely 'there'" (MacLure, 2003, p. 131).

In terms of the second axis about the sources of authority for teacher identity, some student teachers held views like "teachers should always put students' needs at the first place", and "teachers should always have control over their students". We may find that their teaching identities are socially shaped because student teachers who hold these viewpoints emphasize that some students in Hong Kong are not obedient and classroom management is a big issue for Hong Kong teachers. Their stereotypical views set them up for potential frustration, as they will be challenged by changing contexts when they teach students in different grades, and with different learning orientations and motivations. Some participants, for example, Zhou and Gan, show a more developmental view of teacher identity by indicating that "teachers should be ready to change and alert to new things" and "be tolerant of distinct cultures". This may enable them to adapt quickly to the ever changing teaching conditions.

In terms of the third axis concerning the self-practices of teacher identity, the many practices shaping the student teachers' identify which include reflective journaling, peer sharing, seeking for critical comments, and so on, are essential for teacher identity transformation. These reflect an awareness of the contingency and constructedness of teaching skill and knowledge and an open space for discourse of ongoing professional learning.

In terms of the forth axis with regards to the telos of teacher identity, some student teachers seem to employ a rather individualistic and singular perspective on teaching, as reflected in the comments like "teaching can provide a stage for me to perform before a group of audience", and "teaching can give me a simple work environment". The over-simplistic view they hold may lead to disillusionment since teaching means constant interaction with students and the outer surroundings so it is unlikely to find a really "simple" environment. The individualistic view on teaching is also presented in some student teachers' determination to turn "impolite" and "irresponsible" students into a person "valuable" to the society. A more socially oriented view of the causes of student behavior may help teachers ease their own burden of responsibility and "recognize new avenues for effective action", such as engaging in dialogue with colleagues or management about school policies (Clarke, 2009, p. 195). Moreover, some pre-service teachers aim to produce students who can get high scores in examinations. As in other Asian countries, HK students are assessed throughout their schooling (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Tang & Biggs, 1996). Examination scores have become an important, if not the only, measure for high school and university entrance. Therefore, the prevailing social standard for a good teacher is whether the students he/she teaches can achieve high scores. The students would benefit from considering filling a more complex and multi-faceted classroom role than simply following single-faceted social demands to help students achieve high scores.

As Clarke (2009) argues, teachers can be subjects in two senses, i.e., to the determination of others or their own. Teachers can be subject to a determination "which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attracts him to his own identity, imposes a law or truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize on him" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). Alternatively, one can also strive "to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being" (Foucault, 1997a, p. 282). Being a teacher involves both senses and the latter sense may help one individual to move out of the "hard doctrines of truth and falsity, self and otherness, good and evil, rational and irrational, commonsense and absurdity" (Connolly, 2002, p. 173). The identity work thus requires us to not just look into ourselves though the socialized conscience, but to be aware that individuals are constituted as subjects and shaped by different economies of power.

## Conclusion

This study has investigated a group of student teachers through the lens of a diagram of identity work developed by Clarke (2009). Tracing the historical development of teacher identities enables us to understand teacher identity in the following senses. Identity is constructed in the interaction between the individual and the social. Realizing the constructedness of identity helps one to let go of stereotypical views and to actively engage in the social and political practices of teaching. Furthermore, it involves an awareness of the inevitable ambiguity and contingency of any identity. Therefore, the notion of ethic-politics of teacher identity can be utilized to embrace various meanings of teaching and counter the tendency to narrow the aspects involved in teaching. The recognition of the teacher identities as contingent and constructed offers a rationale for the unsettling and deconstructive ethico-political identity work, and offers a way of moving beyond discussion that focuses on trying to define teacher identity as a theoretical concept. This paper, employing the framework of identity that draws on the later ethical work of Foucault, presents a deeper understanding of teacher identity and provides possibilities for identity reformation or reconstruction. More research on doing such identity work is thus worthwhile.

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**Appendix 1: Interview Schedule**

a. Can you talk about your experiences before you joined the programme? Like who you are and what you did.

b. How do you perceive teachers and the teaching profession? What are your perceptions of English language teachers and the English language teaching profession? How did you come to have such perceptions?

c. How does society view teachers? What do you think gives rise to these perceptions?

d. What are your expectations from taking this programme? What do you want to achieve by taking this programme?

e. What is a good/effective teacher in your mind? What is the role of teaching and what is the role of teacher?

f. How is the conception of 'good/effecitve teacher' formed in your mind? Would you please tell us some experiences that have influenced your conception? For example, do you have met some teachers who have influenced you in becoming a teacher?

g. What kind of teacher do you want to become ultimately? Why? How far away do you think you are from that ultimate goal? How would you work towards that ultimate goal?

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# The Pedagogy of a Tertiary-level EFL Teacher in the PRC

■ Sandra Tsui Eu Lam
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the implemented English language pedagogy at schools in the People's Republic of China in view of the little research that has been done in this area (Zheng & Adamson, 2003). Two questions that have been raised in the literature on English language teachers and learners in China are: "Is there a gap between the officially promoted communicative approach and the actual pedagogy of EFL teachers in Chinese classrooms?" and "Are Chinese students receptive towards classroom practices informed by the communicative approach?" (Barnaby and Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Leng, 1997; Ng & Tang, 1997; Rao, 1996; Yu 2001).This paper reports an in-depth, descriptive study of a PRC EFL teacher through lesson observations and interviews at a key university in an inland province,; and a concurrent investigation of student attitudes (through interviews) towards this teacher's pedagogy, in an attempt to answer the abovementioned questions. The findings challenge the stereotypical views of the Chinese English language teacher and learner. While not entirely subscribing to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, the teacher's pedagogy came across as a principled approach based on the teacher's personal beliefs about the teaching and learning of the English language, her personal experiences as both student and teacher and her perception of students' needs. The students, on the other hand, expressed desire for less teacher talk and more opportunities for student participation, contrary to the common perception of the Chinese learner.*

## Introduction

While CLT as a teaching methodology in ELT has been unequivocally promoted by China's education authorities in recent years (Hu, 2002b, 2005; Zheng & Adamson, 2003) and a continual debate as to its necessity, appropriateness and effectiveness has also been taking place in academic circles (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002a; Li, 1984; Rao, 1996), there has been concurrently "very little research on the implemented English language pedagogy in schools in the PRC" (Zheng & Adamson, 2003, p. 324). Furthermore, while acknowledging that CLT has been similarly promoted in various Asian countries in an attempt to improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching, researchers have also highlighted that "there is almost invariably a gap between policy imperatives and classroom realities" (Hu, 2005, p. 636).

This paper seeks to contribute to a greater understanding of the implemented English language pedagogy in the People's Republic of China, by exploring the pedagogy of an English language teacher at a key university in an inland province through lesson observations and interviews. The paper also investigates student attitude towards this teacher's pedagogy (through interviews) and CLT and non-CLT instructional practices (through a questionnaire). Zheng and Adamson's study (2003) sought to give us a clearer picture of how an English language teacher in a secondary school in China "mediates the tensions between his own beliefs and practice... and those of the promoted methods" (p. 324). In a similar vein, this study seeks to inform us on how English language teachers in China conduct lessons in reality, but unlike the Zheng and Adamson study, the study reported in this paper was conducted in a capital city of an inland province, that is to say, it was not carried out in a coastal and/or relatively developed region.

In a study by Hu (2003), two versions of CLT are identified in the more developed regions in China such as the coastal areas and the capital cities of the inland provinces. The first is a "weak" version whereby communicative elements (such as opportunities for students to use the target language in real communication or in problem-solving) are incorporated into a more traditional framework of "presentation-practice-production" or "a predominantly structure-based syllabus". By contrast, the second is a "strong" version in the form of Content-Based English Instruction (CBEI), where the teaching and learning of English is integrated in the instruction of non-language subjects (p. 312-313). This paper reports a study which seeks to investigate which "version", if any, is found in this classroom located in an urban centre in an inland province. Unlike the Zheng and Adamson (2003) study, this study offers another dimension, namely, that of the students' perspective on the teacher's pedagogy. The aim of this investigation was to determine to what extent students themselves, and not just teachers, were prepared for the use of CLT approaches in the English classroom in China, as promoted by the authorities.

The research questions which this study sought to answer were: "Is there a gap between the officially promoted communicative approach and the actual pedagogy of EFL teachers in Chinese classrooms?" and "Are Chinese students receptive towards classroom practices informed by the communicative approach?" Both these questions have been raised in the literature on English language teachers and learners in China (Ellis, 1996; Leng, 1997; Ng & Tang, 1997; Rao, 1996; Yu, 2001).

## Method

### *Research framework*

The term "pedagogy", as used in this paper, is defined as the teacher's personal beliefs about the teaching and learning of the English language translated into classroom practices observable through lesson observation and elicited and elucidated through focus interviews. This is a definition derived from the notions of the theory of teaching and learning, design of teaching and learning activities and the execution of teaching and learning activities as reflected in the terms "approach", "design" and "procedure" in the model for the description and analysis of methods presented in Richards and Rodgers (2001). In line with this model, the data collected from the study were examined from the point of view of approach, design and procedure, though it was not assumed that the investigation would necessarily yield a picture of a coherent "method". The aim of the investigation was to determine the extent to which the CLT approach had been incorporated into the lessons, and if so, how the students responded to the approach.

A total of 4.5 hours of lessons were observed and videotaped for analysis. Detailed notes were also taken during lesson observations. A total of one and a half hours of interviews with the teacher were conducted in English while two hours and 40 minutes of interviews were conducted mainly in English with 16 students (out of a class size of 50). These students were volunteers who responded to the invitation to participate in the study. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively, to see if there were emergent/recurrent themes which would reflect the emphases and/or strengths/weaknesses in the teacher's pedagogy. Students were asked open-ended questions such as: "What do you enjoy most about this teacher's lessons?", "What activities have you found most helpful?" and "What suggestions for improvement do you have for your teacher?" Students were told they could express their views in Chinese at any point in the interviews should they find it more conducive to a freer expression of their views. They were also assured of anonymity in the reporting and discussion of the data.

In addition, a survey containing 18 items, ten describing CLT instructional practices and eight, non-CLT instructional practices, was administered to 48 students (two out of the class of 50 were absent on the day of the survey). Students were asked to indicate on a Likert Scale of 1 to 5, their attitudes towards these instructional practices, with "1" indicating that "they do not like it at all" and "5", that "they like it very much". This survey seeks to investigate students' readiness for the use of CLT instructional practices in the classroom, regardless of whether the CLT approach had been adopted by their teacher.

### *Participants*

The teacher, Yin (a pseudonym), was a relatively young member (less than five years of teaching experience) of the faculty of a key university in a capital city of an inland province of the People's Republic of China. She was, however, distinguished by good student feedback (the highest score achieved, with 98.86 out of 100 in 2006).

The class observed in this study comprised 50 students in a "bilingual class"—a class offered to students who had good enough scores to qualify for a course that offered more instruction in English and also oral English classes conducted by foreign teachers. The 16 students who attended the interview were volunteers.

## Results: Findings from the lesson observations

### *Yin's pedagogy*

The impression one gets of Yin's pedagogy as garnered from the six lessons observed is one in which the teacher is very much the central figure in the classroom but not without considerations of the students' needs and learning goals. Her pedagogical approach bears some elements of the communicative method but cannot be described as adhering to CLT methodology in the strictest sense.

The following were the main features of Yin's lessons:

- *Teacher-fronted instruction*: Teacher talk took up about 80% of class time, with the teacher clearly in control of the direction and pace of the lesson. She guided the classroom interaction with explanations of the text in terms of main ideas, structure and language items and called upon students to answer questions. Here is an example that came at the beginning of a lesson: "What does the title tell you about this passage? What comes to your mind? ...Can you come up with some adjectives to describe "friends"? Some students responded to the questions while seated, without raising their hands. It seemed the teacher was not expecting them to answer the questions as she proceeded to show a PowerPoint slide on a definition of a friend.)
- *Use of open-ended questions*: Twenty-two instances of open-ended questions were noted in the lessons observed. The predominance of such questions used during this reading comprehension class shows that the teacher believes in getting students involved through stimulating their thinking beyond surface questions of grammatical meaning. Some examples of such open-ended questions are: "By what qualities does Bill Porter get his work done?", "What's your idea about human nature?" and "Why do you think that Lenny went pale and hesitated...?"
- *Focus on meaning rather than language*: The focus seemed to be on the meaning and ideas in the text rather than the language difficult phrases were duly explained and some translation exercises were given but 70% of class time was spent on elucidating the meaning of the text and eliciting students' response to the main message of the text. It may be said that the approach is literary, rather than the traditional grammar focus one would expect in EFL classes.

- *Little corrective feedback and focus on grammar*: It follows from the previous point that there was little focus on corrective feedback and input on grammar. There were no grammar drills, parsing of sentences or analysis of grammatical structures.
- *Use of Chinese at selected points in the lesson*: There were 16 instances of the use of Chinese during the six periods of lessons observed in giving instructions and in a translation exercise on expressions found in the texts. Chinese was used mainly for explanation of difficult expressions found in the texts, and minimally in comments on students' presentations or responses. It was observed that its use served the purposes of clarification of meaning and identification with students, that is, as a means of establishing rapport with students. This was observed primarily in the teacher's comments on students' responses.

  An example of the use of Chinese in explaining difficult phrases came in the form of a translation exercise. The teacher read out the Chinese equivalent of the following phrases from the text and asked the students to spot them in the text: "I think they must have small insight or great vanity" and "I should never have believed that he was capable of such an action."
- *Communicative features*: Three instances of pair work were observed. One instance of a role-play incorporated in the reading aloud of a dialogue in the text, and two instances of games one, a ranking activity and the other, a guessing activity. (Refer to Appendix 2 for details)
- *Use of multimedia*: Both teacher and students did make use of PowerPoint slides—the students in the prepared presentations assigned to them, and the teacher, in presenting her own responses to questions posed or in introducing extraneous input for example, pictures of human cruelty in response to the theme of human nature in the text.
- *References to life or connections with life*: Perhaps, the most salient feature of Yin's pedagogy is the emphasis on the connections between the meaning of the text and real life that she sought to make, almost in every lesson. This can be seen in the open-ended questions she asked about the students' responses to the text (e.g. "Would you like to have Burton as your friend?" or "What can you learn from Bill?") and the extension activities in class or set as homework for example, "Read in depth and find the connection between this story and cruelty" or "Recall one challenge you have had and what you did to overcome it" (as homework). In an extension activity on the nature of human nature, students were asked to rank a list of forces of nurture in descending order in terms of their importance.

## Results: Findings from interviews with Yin

### *The use of Chinese in the English classroom*

"If you keep speaking in English, you will drive them crazy..." was Yin's remark when asked about her use of Chinese in her English lessons.

If teacher-student interaction in English only is a mark of CLT practice, then the use of the L1 in the EFL classroom is reminiscent of traditional approaches like Grammar Translation. However, the use of Chinese in Yin's classroom cannot be seen in such a simplistic light. For her, whether she should use Chinese in her classroom depends on student reaction. One key reason is "to draw back their attention" if they should be lost. Hence, its use arose from a very practical consideration of helping the student keep up with the lesson. This seems to make perfect sense with less able students who may be overwhelmed should one adhere strictly to the CLT dictum of communicating only in the target language in an attempt to immerse learners in the foreign language environment so as to promote acquisition.

When asked if she found it contradictory to use Chinese in an English class, she explained that she was operating out of the principle of the learner being "at the centre of the learning process" (one that seems more inclined towards the CLT approach than traditional approaches like Grammar Translation) and so, it is necessary  to use Chinese at some points in the lesson if the student is to learn. The two situations in which she would use the Chinese language are: when students are "lost" (that is, they are not able to keep up with the flow of linguistic input in the target language), and when "only the Chinese can convey the result" (that is, the language item is too difficult to be explained using the target language). This view is echoed in Rao (1996), who feels that explaining difficult phrases in the target language, which in this case, is English, can be very time-consuming and may even confuse students. As Larsen-Freeman (1986) puts it, "The meaning of the target language is made clear by translating it into the students' native language" (p. 18).

She did elaborate that there had been "a shift in [her] teaching strategy" from using a lot of Chinese to using Chinese only at necessary points in her lessons. She recognized that though her lessons could be very "lively" when conducted with the former strategy, the students need more exposure to English and an English environment if they are to improve in their competence in English.

What these remarks show us is a teacher who reflects on her teaching and is ready to make changes so as to meet students' needs. Though on the surface, the use of Chinese in the English classroom may appear "outdated" and not in keeping with the aspirations of the CLT approach, the above comments from Yin clearly point to a principled decision in its use and not the result of any blind adherence to any teaching method.

In discussing reconciling the communicative approach and the traditional Chinese methods in the teaching of English, Rao (1996) highlighted that the use of students' native language is challenged by the communicative approach  because "the habits of the students' native language are thought to interfere with the students' attempt to master the target language" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p.47). However, it is clear, as shown in the case of Yin's experience, that, in Rao's words, "banishing the students' native language from the classroom will not benefit Chinese English learners...especially during the early stages of English instruction" (p. 469).

### *The focus of Yin's ELT—language or culture?*

"The emphasis was on the language, grammar, spelling...vocabulary..." was Yin's reply to my question on the focus of ELT when she was a student. She elaborated that the teachers then did not emphasize much on the "culture behind the language", nor on understanding "the culture of the English-speaking world."

She acknowledged that this background in her learning has influenced her approach in teaching, in that she now makes a deliberate attempt "to help them [the students] see beyond the language", and point them to the culture. This emphasis on culture, as one of her guiding principles, is neatly captured in these words of hers: "to learn the word to know the world". Interestingly, the influence here is one of a reaction against the perceived deficiency in the teaching approach which the teacher experienced as a student.

When asked what she considered to be the main focus of ELT now, she said it differed "according to different students". By that, she meant that, for beginners, the focus should be on language, while for intermediate and advanced level students, there should be a shift from language to something more,  that is, culture.

Evaluating the lessons observed, one could not find many references to the culture of the English-speaking world per se, but there were often references beyond the specific language items or specific meanings of the text to larger concerns which may be deemed "cultural" in a broad sense. For example, she discussed notions of friendship, human nature and the qualities that make an effective salesman—ideas related to the themes of the texts studied, but not directly related to the language of the text per se. Hence, one might say that she was trying to help the students "see beyond the language" (Yin's words)

When asked whether she found her emphasis on "culture" helpful to her students at their level of proficiency, she acknowledged that, while the good students would benefit, perhaps the weaker ones would not find it so helpful. She found that some of her students still made basic mistakes in their writing and admitted that "maybe this is something [she] had not addressed—basic command". She agreed that there is a need to strike a balance between focus on language and focus on culture/ideas.

However, having acknowledged that some of the students, specifically the weaker ones, may not have found her approach that helpful, she explained that the fact that there was no pressure to complete the syllabus in any way, justified her approach which put emphasis on culture. (Her students were from the Bilingual class which admitted students who were stronger in English than the average students and most students in her university had proficiency levels higher than the requirements of the Band 4 CET exam, which college students in China take.)

### *Yin's understanding of the term "CLT"*

Yin had heard of and read about the term 'CLT', and remarked that it is "one of the recommended ways of teaching", but acknowledged that "[she] had not been fully trained in the teaching strategy". She used the following terms to describe this method: the students are "the centre of the classroom" and "the focus of the teaching goal" while the teacher is the 'facilitator', whose job it is to come up with "activities to make sure students are involved in class ... to speak and think and experience English". (Yin)

When asked if she had incorporated any activities that subscribe to this approach in her teaching, she listed the following: she often gave students "opportunities to speak", both to her and to other students; she often asked many questions to make them think; she got them to do group/pair discussion, and presentations such as duty reports and team work presentations at the beginning of each class.

#### *"Duty report" and "team work" presentations*

When observing her class, I noticed that at the beginning of each class, a group of students would present either something that was related to the topic of the lesson for the day or a topic of their choice. At the interview, I asked Yin for the rationale behind these activities.

For the duty report, students were supposed to present something on Chinese culture or current affairs; while for the team work report, students presented something that was related to the topic of the lesson. The rationale of these two activities was "to give them [the students] more exposure to English", "more chance to speak in public" and "to disseminate Chinese culture" (Yin). The presentations also required the use of the multimedia, which gave them an opportunity to get in touch with modern technology. The teacher also required the rest of the class to become "critical listeners" to comment on the presentations, both in terms of the content and/or matters of language. She said the students would be more stimulated to listen since it was "not just you alone, teacher talking". This would give the students "positive peer pressure" (Yin).

These *out-of-class strategies* that Yin put in place shows an awareness that effective learning involves what goes on beyond the classroom. One may say that she was playing the role of "facilitator" with the students, which was "the focus of the teaching goal".

## Findings from interviews with students

### *Positive feedback on Yin's lessons*

The majority of the interviewees liked the *duty report* they were assigned. They felt it helped build their confidence in speaking English, they could have "many different topics" and they could "share something that [they] like".

Another strong point is her emphasis on vocabulary. Students praised her for pointing out "sparkling sentences" in the text, giving them "beautiful phrases", "new expressions and exploring the background of words and word associations". She also offered students ideas on how to improve their vocabulary. She was described as "very eager to help [them] to learn".

Most of the interviewees (about two-thirds) agreed with her use of Chinese in class. They felt it helped them to understand better, especially abstract terms and cultural differences. They seemed to acknowledge its place in the class where necessary—in one interviewee's words, it contributes to "better understanding of *some* expressions" (emphasis mine).

Perhaps, the strongest point of Yin's pedagogy was her passionate manner and ability to go beyond the text to talk about culture and life. She was described as "energetic", "full of knowledge", and willing to share her own experiences, and how to learn English. She "doesn't just talk about the passage". "She has interest in culture, she will introduce something about culture to us so it's interesting, but it is a little profound". Her class was described as "a class full of questions". It is clear that the interviewees did appreciate her breath of knowledge and that she was eager to take them beyond the text and extend their understanding to a deeper level. Obviously, her focus was more than just understanding the language and the students seemed agreeable to that.

## Suggestions for improvement for Yin

### *More opportunities for students to talk*

The most popular suggestion (from about two thirds of the interviewees) was for more opportunities for the students to talk. The teacher "talks for the most part of the class...maybe lack of interaction". "Let us have more time for free talk". "The class is rather silent...[she] should encourage students to talk more." Some said that pair discussion was useful and "can be employed more". Others suggested "more varied methods" such as games, holding a meeting, group work, songs and acting.

Some also expressed the desire for more informal interaction with the teacher. One said students liked "private speech" rather than "public speech", for example, during break times (as concurred with by some others). This is understandable given the big size of most classes in China, and in this case, a size of fifty students. It is, however, not expected in the sense that it shows students who are not satisfied with the teacher-fronted instruction they have been used to, desiring a change that is perhaps more in line with CLT informed approaches.

### *The issue of corrective feedback*

The interviewees seemed to agree that she did not give much corrective feedback. This is partly due to the fact that students do not get to talk much. While some were either satisfied with the status quo or not sure if more would help ("When we make mistakes, the teacher is not harsh", "she doesn't interrupt us ... after we have finished, she points out our mistakes." "... a little bit more, but not too much that we become discouraged", "... we don't like to 'lose face"), others felt that more correction would help. ("I don't mind that ... I think the more, the better").

** The quotations in the previous three sections were taken from the transcripts of the student interviews.*

## Findings from the survey

Due to the constraint of space, only items scoring more than 3 (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "the least preferred" and 5 indicating "the most preferred") are reported in tables 1 and 2.

Though there are not many differences in the average scores between the CLT and non-CLT practices (3.21 vs 3.22 out of a maximum of 5), a closer look at the data surfaces certain student preferences, albeit not very strong ones.

### *Readiness for CLT-informed practices*

There is clearly a desire for less teacher talk (the item, "Teacher talks most of the time" has a low score of 2.659) and more student involvement (Pair work has a score of 3.375 and group

**Table 1**: CLT practices with scores more than 3

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students speak English only in class | 3.125 |
| 2 | Teacher constantly introduces new words/phrases | 3.41 |
| 3 | Students engage in pair work | 3.375 |
| 4 | Teacher interacts frequently with individual students | 3.895 |
| 5 | Students present impromptu dialogues | 3.229 |
| 6 | Students engage in group work | 3.723 |
| 7 | Students carry out activities resembling real-world tasks | 4.083 |
| | **Average score for CLT instructional practices** | **3.21** |

**Table 2**: Non-CLT practices with scores more than 3

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Teacher explains new words/phrases using some Chinese | 3.673 |
| 2 | Teacher corrects my errors after I have finished speaking | 3.979 |
| 3 | Students present prepared presentations e.g. teamwork (done as homework) | 3.791 |
| 4 | Teacher interacts mainly with the class as a whole | 3.729 |
| 5 | Students read aloud dialogues and texts | 3.234 |
| | **Average score for non-CLT instructional practices** | **3.22** |

work, 3.723). Students are also quite open to sustained input of the target language ("Teacher constantly introduces new words/phrases" has a score of 3.41). Interestingly, the strongest preference registered is for activities resembling real-world tasks (a score of 4.083). These are indeed very promising findings for teachers eager to incorporate more CLT-informed practices in their classrooms.

*Appreciation for non-CLT practices*

There is clearly still appreciation for non-CLT practices such as the judicious use of the mother tongue ("Teacher explains new words/phrases using some Chinese" has a score of 3.673) and explicit error correction ("Teacher corrects my errors after I have finished speaking" has a score of 3.979 and conversely, "Teacher seldom corrects my errors" has a low score of 2.085).

*The teacher's role*

Regarding expectations about student-teacher interaction, there is an interesting tie between teacher-and-whole class interaction (3.729) and teacher-and-individual student interaction (3.895). This, taken together with the finding on desire for less teacher talk ("teacher talks most of the time" has a score of 2.659), and some resistance to the use of games (a low score of 2.77), seems to point to students' conception of the teacher's role as still central but not entirely subscribing to the traditional stance which accords supremacy to the teacher's utterances alone. However, there is clearly a leaning towards students having a voice in the classroom though the idea of games in which the teacher's role is clearly relegated to a less privileged position of games master is not quite acceptable.

*Openness to free practice and risk-taking*

While there is a fair degree of receptivity to the use of dialogues in the classroom, there is a slightly stronger preference for prepared/rehearsed production over free practice. (impromptu dialogues, 3.229, "reading out dialogues" has a score of 3.234; prepared dialogues done as homework, 3.791).

## Discussion and conclusion

If the communicative approach is understood to be seen in pedagogical practices such as pair and group work, exclusive use of the target language, use of information gap/transfer activities often in the form of games, simulation and role-play activities, focus on meaning rather than language structures, class time dominated by student talk rather than teacher talk, peer feedback rather than error correction from the teacher only, risk-taking and free practice (Hu, 2005, p. 645; Johnson & Johnson, 1998 , pp. 69-72; Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 153-174), then Yin's pedagogy seems to have few communicative features. It seems to bear a closer resemblance to the traditional teacher-centred classrooms that most of us think are characteristic of Chinese EFL classrooms.

However, a closer look at the data from both the lessons and the interviews with the teacher, shows that apart from the uncharacteristic focus on meaning (rather than language structures) and connections with real life and the teacher's professed concerns about student needs, there is evidence of attempts to involve students more in class.

These attempts are seen in her educational activities which may be deemed leaning towards a CLT approach: the frequent use of open-ended questions (which, one may surmise, could well have stemmed from her major focus on meaning) and the *out-of-class* strategies such as the *duty report* and *team work*, which seek to both arouse student's interest beyond language structures and prepare them for a heightened focus on and interest in the topic/theme of the lesson.

The discriminate use of Chinese rather than an outright rejection of its use in strict adherence to a CLT approach, may be seen as a tribute to the "good sense" of the teacher or in other words, an example of "principled pragmatism" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 30). This good sense has been borne out by more recent research which has shown the potential value of the use of L1 in the L2 classroom (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003).

The scant corrective feedback is rather uncharacteristic of our usual perception of the traditional Chinese classroom but unfortunately, this aspect was not explored during the interviews with the teacher and one could only remark that, while it is consistent with CLT-informed approaches which discourage explicit and direct corrective feedback, one is not sure if it was a deliberate choice on the part of the teacher to refrain from direct corrective feedback so as to encourage students to speak up.

While the teacher in the Zheng and Adamson study (2003) was constrained by the time available to cover the syllabus and the national matriculation examination, Yin was in a more enviable position of having students deemed competent enough to be able to manage the Band 4 national English examination for college students without too much drilling on the part of the teacher. With these circumstances, one could see that she chose to focus on meaning rather than language in her approach, in contrast to an approach which focuses on language structures which she was accustomed to as a student. This, one may say, is consistent with one of the tenets of the CLT approach which puts meaning above grammar for its own sake. However, in terms of classroom procedure, Yin had yet to adopt more CLT-informed practices such as pair and group discussion and games which require greater participation from students and yield more opportunities for students to express meaning. However, though there were not many instances of group/pair work, the instances in her lessons were rather successful in engaging the students' attention.

One out of the two instances happened during the sixth lesson observed where students were asked to arrange forces of "nurture" in descending order of importance. This was an extension activity after discussing the theme of human nature and cruelty in the text. The students embarked on this pair activity with much enthusiasm, as could be seen especially in the lively class discussion which ensued as individual students presented their responses to the ranking activity. This activity was motivated by the teacher's concern to raise students' "understanding to a higher level", rather than any conscious adherence to a CLT creed.

One interesting observation is that this rather lively section of the lesson came after a sustained period of about 20 minutes of teacher monologue in which the meaning of a section of the text in question was explicated. This shows that teacher talk is not necessarily unhelpful as it seemed to have paved the way for a round of lively discussion. This episode also reminds us of the "deep learning approach" (Biggs, 1996) of Chinese learners where silence which takes place during teacher talk may not necessarily mean that students are not engaged or learning. Apparent passivity on the part of the students belies the thinking or reflection that could be happening at a deeper level.

These two instances of successful student engagement corroborate the finding on students' desire for more opportunities for student talk and involvement in class, in the student interviews. There is definitely room for Yin and perhaps her colleagues, to allow students more time to talk and participate in class, which will be more in line with the promoted CLT approach. There is also evidence from the student interviews that they would welcome "more varied methods" such as games, holding a meeting, group work, songs and acting, which are more characteristic of the CLT approach. These findings were confirmed in the results in the survey which showed some readiness on the students' part for CLT practices such as group/pair work, less teacher talk, and tasks resembling real-world tasks.

Yin's professed focus on culture (rather than language) and the observed emphasis on meaning (rather than language structures) in her lessons are surprising and promising findings which point to teacher beliefs which are perhaps more resonant with the tenets of the CLT approach. However, one must bear in mind that the context here is of tertiary students of at least an intermediate level of proficiency and Yin herself did qualify that there is a need to strike a balance between focus on language and focus on culture/ideas as weaker students would not be able to benefit so much from such an approach. What this finding points towards is a possible direction for development that ELT at the higher educational levels in China may take: a greater focus on culture and meaning rather than grammar or language structures which will facilitate a deeper understanding of the target language. In fact, there are already some signs that a similar approach is being adopted on a small scale in this university where the study was conducted, in the form of CBEI (content-based English instruction) for some core subjects such as accounting and management. I say a "similar" approach as the focus here is on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) content areas rather than culture in general.

Yin's focus on connections with real life, which is an attempt to show that the significance of what students are learning goes beyond the classroom, is another encouraging finding. It shows teacher beliefs that are resonant with philosophies of learning which deem knowledge to be of practical use, and not merely for its own sake. This seems contrary to Chinese/Confucian beliefs which place emphasis/value on knowledge for its own sake. According to Hu (2003), the most prominent feature of the traditional Chinese culture of learning is "the conceptualization of education more as a process of knowledge accumulation than as a practical process of knowledge construction and use" (p. 306).

Teo (2008), citing Dewey, in *Outside in/inside out: Bridging the gap in literacy education*, describes "productive pedagogy" as one where lessons are "motivated and impregnated with a sense of reality by being intermingled with the realities of everyday life". He stressed the importance of teachers doing "linguistic and cultural bridge building" (p. 413) to help students see the connection between what goes on in the classroom and what goes on in the real world. Students are led to see the practical value of what they learn in the classroom. Yin's "dictum", "to learn the word to know the world", seems to be very much in line with this thinking. Her frequent attempts to point her students beyond the text to larger meanings in their own experience, as a means to raise students' "understanding to a higher level", are evidence of rather progressive teacher beliefs in the teaching of EFL in China.

In conclusion, one could say that Yin's pedagogy bears promising signs of an approach which leans towards CLT practices though there could be a greater effort to incorporate communicative features in her pedagogy, especially since she holds beliefs that are in line with a CLT approach and there is evidence that students would welcome more CLT-informed practices in the classroom.

On the basis of the findings presented in this study, it seems Chinese students in this context are ready for more CLT-informed practices such as pair and group work, activities resembling real-world tasks and provision of more opportunities for students to talk. This is also supported by the positive results observed of the two instances of group activities/games used in Yin's lessons. Secondly, as highlighted by Yin's focus on culture rather than language, a possible direction for development that ELT at the higher educational levels in China may take is a greater focus on culture and meaning rather than grammar or language structures, so as to facilitate a deeper understanding of the target language.

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**Appendix A: A survey on students' attitudes towards instructional activities**
关于学生对课堂教学态度反馈问卷表

Dear Student,
The following statements are descriptions of activities carried out in the Oral English class. Please indicate your preferences by circling the appropriate number:

亲爱的同学们:
以下是口语课堂教学活动的描述。请将能代表你感受的数字画圈。

1: Don't like at all — 点也不喜欢
2: Don't quite like — 不是很喜欢
3: No feelings of like or dislike — 无所谓喜欢或不喜欢
4: Quite like — 比较喜欢
5: Like very much — 非常喜欢

Your feedback will help me/us to improve my/our lessons in the future. Thank you!
你们的反馈会有利于我/我们改进未来的教学, 谢谢!

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The teacher explains the passage sentence by sentence.<br>老师逐句解释文章。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | The teacher corrects my errors instantly. i.e. while I am talking.<br>老师马上纠正我的错误,如:我正在发言时。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | The teacher explains new words/phrases using Chinese some of the time.<br>老师在某些时候用中文解释词语或短语。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Students speak English only in class.<br>英语是学生在课堂上使用的唯一语言。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | The teacher constantly introduces new words/phrases.<br>老师不断的介绍新词汇和短语。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | Students play games most of the time.<br>学生大多数时间要做游戏。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | The teacher corrects my errors after I have finished speaking.<br>老师在我发言结束后再纠正我的错误。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | The teacher never explains new words/phrases in Chinese.<br>老师从不用中文解释不认识的词汇或短语。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | The teacher talks most of the time.<br>上课的大部分时间由老师讲解。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | Students present prepared language performances(done as homework).<br>学生在课堂上表演或展示以家庭作业的形式事先准备好的节目。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | The teacher seldom corrects my errors.<br>老师很少纠正我的错误。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | Students engage in pair work.<br>学生参加两人一组的口语活动。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | The teacher interacts frequently with individual students.<br>老师经常与学生进行一对一的互动。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | Students present impromptu dialogues(i.e. little preparation time given during class time.)<br>学生进行即席对话,课堂上几乎不给准备时间。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | Students engage in group work.<br>学生参加分组活动 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | The teacher interacts mainly with the class as a whole.<br>老师主要与班级整体互动(而非与个别学生互动) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | Students carry out activities resembling real-world tasks.(e.g. assuming role of tourist guide in tourist guide-tourist dialogue or customer in customer-salesperson dialogue).<br>学生开展模拟真实社会情景的活动,(如:在旅游场景的对话中扮演导游,或在顾客与销售人员的对话中扮演顾客) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | Students read aloud dialogues and texts.<br>学生朗读对话和课文。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

End of survey—问卷结束

## Appendix B: Two instances of games used in the lessons

**A. Ranking activity**

The activity was carried out as an extension activity to the reading comprehension passage which carries a theme on human weakness/nature. After showing a PPT slideshow on pictures of human cruelty taken from current Chinese newspapers, the teacher posed the question: "What is your idea about human nature? Are men born good or evil?" After a slight pause for reflection, she proceeded to give another PPT presentation on different viewpoints on the issue from Chinese philosophers such as Confucius and Xunzi. She highlighted the debate between nature and nurture and differing views. Subsequently, she asked the students to rank the following forces of nurture in descending order of importance and to discuss their answers with their group members: parenting, genes, family, schooling, peers, and socio-economic order. After the group work, a whole-class discussion was carried out.

**B. Guessing activity**

This activity was carried out after a character analysis of a key character in the comprehension passage covered in the lesson. The teacher began with some instructions on how to write a character sketch and then proceeded to give the students the task of writing a short description about a classmate in around 80 words. The activity was framed as a game. After writing, any student could read his/her description and let the rest of the class guess who the subject of the description was.