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## **September 2018 Foreword**

**by Aradhna Malik**

The current issue of the AEFL Journal contains ten articles. The collection of articles in this issue reflects a diversity of issues in the teaching and learning of Asian English as a foreign language.

Copley discusses a very pertinent, oft forgotten aspect of foreign language teaching – the experience of teachers who teach foreign languages often in foreign countries, and their own notions of professionalism in conjunction with the notions of professionalism from the point of view of communities where they work.

Du discusses listening strategy use - another very important, lesser discussed aspect of language learning. Du proposes that even though all learners use similar listening strategies, the manner in which they use them affects how well they learn the language they are trying to learn. Her article emphasizes the importance of use of different learning strategies in learning languages as compared to the strategies themselves.

Liaw discusses the importance of support received during a read aloud activity in the learning of English as a foreign language. Her work also highlights the impact of read-aloud activities on the oral efficacy especially of students who lack “confidence in learning oral skills.”

Nguyen and associates discuss the impacts of two pre-writing tasks, namely group discussion and free-writing, on the writing of English by University students in Vietnam. They highlight the relative influence of both these tasks on the productivity and writing quality of students in a foreign language program and discuss the implications for such an intervention on the “learning of English as a foreign language in independent cultures.”

Le and Song bring to light the impact of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) on the development of Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) of pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

Murray and Coady highlight the language teaching needs of Chinese EFL teachers in a US based TESOL program by analyzing the experiences of a select sample of Chinese students enrolled in the Masters and PhD programs at the University of Florida who were teaching English as a Second Language in their home countries or communities.

Yeh describes the differences in language usage (L1 or L2) in peer reviews on L2

writing in English. Her study demonstrates the attitudes towards the use of peer reviews in L1 on the writing of L2 among University students in Taiwan.

Loan's study highlights the impact of genre based instructions as part of essay writing teaching to undergraduate students at a University in Thailand. The study demonstrated that genre based instruction had a positive impact on the "control of the internal structure and [the] use of appropriate linguistic features specific to each type of essay to achieve its communicative purposes."

Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad discuss the difference in the salience of error correction as a form of feedback at different locations in timed and untimed essay writing of undergraduate EFL students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Their study reveals some very interesting findings that may seem contradictory to the common belief or insight, especially among practitioners.

Qureshi and Nurmukhamdedov describe the differences in collocation use between Arabic and English and the impact of such differences on the learning of English by Arab students. Owing to the differences in collocation use between English and Arabic, Qureshi and Nurmukhamdedov propose several tools to help Arab learners of English.

This issue contains two book reviews. The book titled, *Complexity in Classroom Foreign Language Learning Motivation: A Practitioner Perspective from Japan*, by Nagatomo, reviewed by Makino, describes the experiences of native-speaking English teachers in Japan, and highlights the struggle between the negotiation of their identities situated in a foreign country and a culture and society very different from their own.

The book titled, *Complexity in Classroom Foreign Language Learning Motivation: A Practitioner Perspective from Japan*, by Sampson, 2016, reviewed by Vollmer, presents a practitioner's view regarding the complexity of motivation of second language learners in a first year high school classroom. ... recommends this book as a useful text especially for those "interested in motivation and/ or the Japanese language learning context."

This issue showcases very diverse aspects of the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language, and tries to cover as much ground as possible in covering a variety of issues ranging from the experience of EFL teachers to the impact of technology in EFL teaching, to the experiences of EFL learners in their home countries and in a foreign country. In accordance with the mission of this journal, the voices and writing styles of the authors have been preserved as far as possible.

## **Developing Oral Self-Efficacy in EFL Learners Through Read-Aloud Activities**

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### **Bioprofile**

**En-Chong Liaw** is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and Literature Studies at Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan. Her research interest is self-efficacy in both teacher training and language learning. She may be contacted at [liawec@cycu.edu.tw](mailto:liawec@cycu.edu.tw).

### **Abstract**

Learner self-efficacy had been investigated mostly in science education. However, such investigation was insufficient in the field of language learning. Without considering ways to promote learners' confidence in learning a language, the endeavor to create various learning activities may lose its effectiveness because of the learners' low self-efficacy and pessimistic attitude in learning originated from negative learning experience. With the fact that self-efficacy is a crucial predictor of success in academic performance (Bandura, 1986), this study investigated the influence of a read-aloud activity on the changes of self-efficacy of speaking and listening skills of learners in an EFL context. Regardless of its simplicity as it might appear, the read-aloud activity provides a less anxious environment in which students receive support both linguistically and affectively. The results suggested an enhancement on level of efficacy of listening but not speaking skills. Moreover, the read-aloud activity indeed had a significant impact on the development of oral self-efficacy in students who struggle with comprehending English because of their less sufficient proficiency in performing oral tasks. This study indicated the potential benefits of read-aloud activity and its effectiveness in promoting lower level students' confidence in learning oral skills.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, EFL, listening proficiency, teaching activity

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## Introduction

Language education had not received substantial attention until the development of psychology in the early twentieth century. Since then, linguists and language educators have attempted to discover how language is learned and have searched for effective methods to promote language learning. Various language teaching methods and approaches have been created, accompanied by teaching materials, techniques and strategies. Language teachers receive advice on potential classroom activities, and learners are required to try various approaches, hoping for a successful one. On the other hand, learners' beliefs regarding how well they perform in a classroom play a crucial role in explaining learning outcomes. Learner self-efficacy is the crucial predictor of success in academic performance (Bandura, 1986).

Examining and promoting students' self-efficacy should be at both the starting point and core of teaching and learning. However, instead of focusing on and promoting learners' confidence in learning a language, numerous language educators expend considerable energy creating various learning activities that may lose their effectiveness because of the learners' low self-efficacy and pessimistic attitude in learning originated from negative learning experience.

This study investigated the effectiveness of read-aloud activities for promoting learner self-efficacy in listening and speaking abilities, i.e. oral self-efficacy, in an EFL context. The read-aloud activity appears simple on the surface; however, it could provide a less anxious environment in which students receive support both linguistically and affectively when performing a task that promotes the basic components of successful communication (i.e., pronunciation and intonation). Misunderstandings can easily occur when a speaker mispronounces words or uses inappropriate intonation in communication (Jenkins, 2000). Furthermore, learners often avoid and become less confident in speaking English when they are mocked for their poor pronunciation or intonation. A lack of confidence in speaking English also hinders many EFL learners from improving their communication skills. Therefore, this study endeavored to change this situation by providing an environment where students received the assistance and feedback of native-speaker and peer models. The current study hopes to investigate if students achieve increased confidence in speaking and listening skills in such environment. The researchers also hope to investigate if such design has different influence on students of different English proficiency. The study results may raise awareness among language educators on methods for promoting self-efficacy in language learning.



## Literature review

### *Self-efficacy and learning*

Self-efficacy has been a concern in the field of education, and previous studies have mainly investigated the effect of self-efficacy on the learning of science subjects (e.g. Cheung, 2015; Kiran & Sungur, 2012; Lin, & Tsai, 2013). Self-efficacy is the learners' judgment of academic competence (Pajares, 2000) and their belief about the ability to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997) and to confront challenges (Ehrman, 1993). Bandura (1997) postulates four sources of self-efficacy: *Mastery experiences*, *vicarious experience*, *verbal persuasion* and *emotional arousal*. Mastery experiences account for the most influential resources because they relate to personal mastery experiences. Successes raise the expectancy of mastering the behavior, whereas failures diminish the chance of changing the behavior. As long as the efficacy is strong and established, occasional failures do not make much of an impact. In fact, the enhanced efficacy sustains the effort in overcoming some obstacles. However, in reality, not many people solely depend on successful experiences to develop stronger self-efficacy. *Vicarious experience* is the resource that people imitate models for stronger self-efficacy. If the model is successful, then the individual has a higher chance of success. This type of experience is similar to idol-worship that is popular among young people who attempt to imitate their idols. *Verbal persuasion* is widely used by many people because of its availability and commonality. People usually give suggestions and share experiences to influence others' belief that they are capable of accomplishing tasks. However, it is not as influential and powerful as performance accomplishments. In order to be confident in one's capability, one still needs to have some successful experiences. Finally, *emotional arousal* depicts the self-perceived psychological fear and anxiety that can determine one's capability emotionally. For example, learned-hopelessness makes the individual feel vulnerable. They also perceive certain circumstances as fearful and anxious. The desire to act is diminished by the emotion created by the individual who decides to avoid addressing the tasks or environment.

Self-efficacy appears to play a vital role in learning and explains variances in the prediction of academic outcomes (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Self-efficacy is what people believe they can achieve rather than what is objectively true. As Bandura (1986) claimed, "What people think, believe and feel affects how they behave" (p. 25); self-efficacy in educational contexts determines aspects such as the choice of behaviors, strategies, and interests or levels of anxiety. Students with a higher level of academic self-efficacy are proven

to demonstrate better academic performance (Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012), develop more interests in learning (Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012), expend more effort and demonstrate greater persistence in accomplishing difficult tasks (Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006), and adopt more cognitive strategies (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). In addition, students who are more efficacious are apt to develop more intrinsic motivation in learning and choose tasks that are more complex with goals that are more challenging to achieve. More self-regulation, effort, and perseverance are observed in such a course of action and consequently lead to higher academic scores. By contrast, students with a lower sense of efficacy tend to choose easier tasks and, when performing difficult tasks, to abandon tasks earlier and easier with less effort and fewer learning strategies. In the article that synthesized research on source, characteristics of high and low self-efficacy learners as well as the impact of self-efficacy on language learning, Jabbarifar (2011) claimed that dissatisfied learning is directly related to students' beliefs that they cannot learn and such belief consequently influence the choice they make. Pessimistic attitude in learning involves students believing that they cannot learn when the belief is not objectively true. Many students exhibit difficulty performing academic tasks; not because they lack the ability to perform the required tasks but because they believe that they are not capable of completing them successfully (Jabbarifar, 2011; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Consequently, pessimistic attitude in learning hinders students from trying harder and being flexible in using strategies to accomplish difficult tasks.

Student self-efficacy is also believed to be a source of anxiety arousal (Bandura, 1986, 1997) and causal attribution (Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Raoofi, Tan & Chan., 2012). As Bandura (1993) claimed, "Most courses of action are initially shaped in thought. People's beliefs in their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and rehearse" (p. 118); students with a high sense of efficacy often imagine a positive scenario entailing more support and successful results that would be less likely to arouse anxiety. However, those with a low sense of efficacy may imagine a scenario with detrimental events and unfavorable results and, thus, experience a high level of anxiety. Self-efficacy and anxiety form a negatively correlated cycle that shares a connection with casual attribution. In the study that examined the relationships between learners' attributions and self-efficacy and their achievements in learning English as a foreign language, Hsieh and Kang (2010) discovered that students with a higher level of efficacy are apt to receive higher scores because of more efforts and effective learning strategies. They also perceive greater personal control over learning outcomes and believe that failure in academic performance results from a lack of

personal efforts. The success that these students experience and the confidence they possess in their ability to control outcomes cause them to visualize more scenarios containing positive events, leading to less anxiety. Less anxious students perform more favorably in academic tasks and continue to develop higher levels of self-efficacy. However, students with a lower level of efficacy experience more failure and lower scores as a result of insufficient efforts and ineffective use of learning strategies. They attribute learning outcomes to external factors over which they have no power. Less successful learning outcomes and a feeling of no control over their learning lead such students to visualize scenarios with less promising results and support, inevitably causing higher levels of anxiety.

### *Self-efficacy and language learning*

Compared with the substantial number of studies that have investigated the influence of self-efficacy in areas such as science education, few studies have examined the sense of self-efficacy in the context of foreign-language learning (Raoofi Tan & Chan., 2012). However, in the past decade, studies on self-efficacy in the learning of foreign languages have flourished, and the results have suggested the influential role that self-efficacy plays in the achievement and performance of learners in language-learning contexts, especially those entailing reading and listening proficiency. Self-efficacy is vital for initiating foreign-language learning and plays a more powerful role than that of anxiety in determining the success of learning the target language in the future (Cotterall, 1999; Wen & Johnson, 1997). Studies have shown that efficacious language learners adopt various strategies when learning different language skills (Wang & Li, 2010; Yilmaz, 2010) and that this flexibility typically leads to superior performance in language-related tasks. Moreover, language-learning anxiety has been found to negatively relate to language self-efficacy, and efficacious language learners experience lower levels of anxiety than do those who have low self-efficacy (Chen & Hasson, 2007; Mills et al., 2006). Several factors may influence the development of self-efficacy, such as the learners' interests and attitudes toward the target language, their experiences as successful language learners, and their observations of peers' successful experiences (Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012). Language students with positive and intrinsic interests in the target language and with the willingness to be part of the target language group have been observed to develop a strong sense of language self-efficacy, which can further lead to superior language performance. In addition, language learners develop a higher level of self-efficacy under the instruction of efficacious teachers who expend more effort and try different methods to assist

students in achieving success. Teachers who are more capable of addressing the learning difficulties of students and have a stronger belief in the students' parental support can influence students to develop a higher sense of efficacy when learning a language. In other words, the self-efficacy and ability of teachers (Egel, 2009) and their trust in parents and students (Moghari et al., 2011) have an effect on the language self-efficacy of students.

Studies have suggested several classroom activities that promote the development of students' self-efficacy when learning foreign languages. A nonthreatening and supportive instructional environment increases the willingness of students to communicate using language structures with which they may be unfamiliar (Jabbarifar, 2011). Activities such as peer-coaching training (Goker, 2006) and collaborative discussions (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007) can provide both mastery and vicarious experiences for students when using the target language to achieve a certain goal in a specific context. As Bandura (1986, 1997) suggested, fostering successful learning experiences is the most powerful tool for fostering students' learning efficacy. Students obtain successful language-learning experience when acting as a model for other students to evaluate and learn from. The process of collaboration allows students to observe a level of performance that they may not be able to achieve themselves. When students observe the success of peers, despite not personally experiencing the success, their observations of others' experiences also promote their own language self-efficacy. Positive feedback from both peers and teachers during collaboration or discussions also influence the development of language self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2007). Students receive verbal persuasion and encouragement through positive feedback. Moreover, the suggestions and evaluations in feedback from peers with similar language abilities appear to be more acceptable and applicable to students.

A review of the literature indicated that classroom activities that foster students' successful learning experiences also provide opportunities to collaborate, give feedback, and observe others' performance and may cultivate students' self-efficacy in language-learning contexts (Goker, 2006; Graham, 2007; Mills et al., 2007). The current study attempted to integrate the activities, i.e. collaboration, giving feedback and observation of others' performance, suggested from previous studies into the read-aloud activity in a Freshman English course not only for its already known benefits in training reading fluency, comprehension and strategies (Fountas & Pinnell 1996) but also the potential possibility in enhancing students' oral skills. The read-aloud activity raises phonemic awareness and enhances the development of vocabulary through the context-embedded environment that

connects the meaning and pronunciation of vocabulary (Zehr, 2010). The ability to connect meaning and pronunciation of words establishes the familiarity of words being read and further becomes the ability to reflect on the structure of spoken English (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). It is hypothesized that the chances of practicing reading aloud in a supportive environment assist the development of recognition of spoken words which promotes self-efficacy in oral skills and lowers learning anxiety. In accordance with previous research, this study designed a read-aloud activity on international news to observe the enhancement of language self-efficacy as manifested by students' oral skills.

This study answered the following questions:

1. What is the effect of read-aloud and related activities on the development of students' oral (i.e., speaking and listening) self-efficacy?
2. Does the read-aloud activity have a different effect on students of different listening proficiency?
3. What are the students' perceptions of the read-aloud activity?

## **Methodology**

One common problem that EFL students face when learning oral skills is their resistance to speaking English. With the limitations of an EFL context, in which English is not spoken and used in daily life, many students are hesitant to speak in English and have low confidence in their oral skills. For solving this problem and encouraging students' sense of efficacy regarding their oral skills, this study designed the read-aloud activity according to the definitions of the four sources of efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states—proposed by Bandura (1997).

### *Participants*

This study took place in a freshman English course in a comprehensive university in Taiwan and the English course emphasized the training of students' reading and writing but not speaking and listening skills. Consequently, this read-aloud activity was the only possible training in oral skills for this group of students on the development of self-efficacy regarding speaking and listening skills. The sampling of the current study was convenient sampling since participants were students of three freshman English classes. No random sampling was allowed due to university policy and course design. One hundred and six students, who were

freshmen in an engineering department and had shown a high-intermediate level of English proficiency on a national standardized exam (roughly equivalent to TOEIC 500-550), participated in the study. Ranging from eighteen to twenty years old, male participants outnumbered female participants and covered close to eighty percent of the group (male=84, female=22). Participants received a consent form and the explanation on meaning and process of the read-aloud activity at the first meeting of this class. All of them understood the process of this activity and were willing to participate. The class met once-a-week for two hours and was the required and only English course for the group of students during this time of study. Due to heavy loading on other subjects, most participants in this study could only distributed limited time in studying English in average of three to five hours a week. In this EFL context, Freshman English course was the only course students had access to training of English skills.

#### *Read-aloud activity procedures*

At the beginning of each week, the news reports from the *Voice of America* were assigned to the students, and the audio recordings and linguistic explanations were uploaded to the Internet, which students had easy access to. *Voice of American* was chosen because it provided international news in a modified version to fit with students' level of reading comprehension. It also had vocabulary lists with explanation to made reading of it more convenient. Most importantly, this material contained audio recording of each news. Students could listen to this recording when preparing for the read-aloud activity. On the other hand, the researchers choose news reports as materials for read-aloud with the intention to provide students with a variety of topics and connection with the world. With the adaption of such materials, students are exposed to academic words and expressions used for various issues relating to their life. And the audio recordings of the news content by native speakers present standard and accurate pronunciation and intonation of words students may not be familiar with. The students were told that they would be evaluated according to their accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and intonation when reading the news report the following week. They had one week to carefully study the news report and listen to the audio recordings.

In class the following week, the students gathered in their groups of four and read the assigned news to each other. When a student read the news report in the group, the listening group members filled out an evaluation sheet on the reader, including feedback, and returned the sheet to the reader afterward. After all of the students in each group had read the assigned article aloud, the instructor randomly selected students to perform reading in front of the

whole class. The instructor invited those who performed well to share tips about how they had achieved such successful results. Students were assigned different news reports each week, and the same task was repeated on the same two-week cycle for three months (see Appendix A).

*Skills required in and demands of the read-aloud activity:* Each week, students were required to listen to and practice with the recording of one read-aloud news report for the purpose of mastery experiences. Mastery experiences, the most influential source, are authentic, personal experiences that are considered successful and meaningful to a learner. Vicarious experiences are observed successful experiences of social models perceived as similar to an individual. Students should be assigned tasks that provide them with a sense of success. Observations of classmates having additional successful experiences can also increase a sense of efficacy. In this study, students were assigned randomly into groups of four. Audio recordings of short news reports from the *Voice of America* and linguistic explanations of their content were used. The content of each news report was read-aloud and recorded by native speakers of American English. Students were encouraged to imitate the pronunciation and intonation shown in the recording of one read-aloud news report. The level of difficulty of the news report's content was higher than the students' current English proficiency and created difficulties for the students' comprehension and read-aloud pronunciation and intonation if the linguistic and vocabulary explanations for the audio recordings were not provided. When they came to class each week, the students read aloud the assigned article to the other members of their group. The linguistic explanations facilitated their comprehension of the content, and the audio recordings demonstrated the correct pronunciation and intonation.

Students were asked to provide feedback after listening to other students performing the read-aloud activity. The assistance provided by hearing the audio recordings made the students' experience of read-aloud in the group more successful and less stressful. The experience of listening to other students reading the news report also created a vicarious experience and formed a stronger sense of efficacy by acknowledging the fact that classmates with similar learning experiences could perform difficult tasks and that they could likewise do so. The read-aloud activity allowed students to speak English in a protective and well-supported context where students received successful experiences from both themselves and other students. Although no real communication occurred in this activity, the goal of augmenting the students' willingness to speak in English was achieved.

As suggested in previous studies, students can develop a stronger sense of efficacy when giving and receiving feedback on their performance. In this study, after listening to other students reading the news reports aloud, students were asked to evaluate the others' performance based on the clearness of their pronunciation and intonation. Furthermore, students who performed well in the group were asked to share their tips for practicing to read the news reports. The instructor of the course emphasized the tips and helped the students understand that they were already aware of these tips but had simply lacked of the willingness to try them. Providing feedback and sharing effective tips may not have directly contributed to the sources of verbal persuasion and physical and emotional states; nevertheless, students learned about their abilities from perspectives that were more objective and were reminded of additional effective learning strategies that they had already been aware of.

#### *Data collection and analysis*

Self-report on Likert-scale items is mostly adopted to measure self-efficacy. The majority of studies in self-efficacy was conducted in quantitative paradigm while limited numbers of qualitative studies provided descriptive information that quantitative data fail to provide, especially when statistical significant was not reached. For example, Gerges (2001) combined both qualitative and quantitative data and discovered that factors such as developmental ability of students or status as student teachers but not teacher efficacy in fact contribute to preservice teachers' variation in use of instructional methods. Through the quantitative and qualitative comparison, Herbert, Lee and Williamson (1998) extended the literature by providing external factors that influence both preservice and experience teachers' efficacy beliefs. It is evident that the mixed methods, i.e. combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, could investigate the research inquiry with better precision. Therefore, the current study adopt such method when designing the experiment .

The data for answering the research inquiries in this study were collected using a study-modified version of the Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy and semi-structured interviews. The study's questionnaire of English self-efficacy investigated changes in the students' perceived efficacy in four language skills during the time of the study. This questionnaire was chosen because the included items describe the learning activities university students would encounter in an EFL context. At the end of the study, students were randomly selected and invited to join semi-structured interviews. The students shared their opinions on the designed activities and discussed any differences in their oral self-efficacy beliefs.



*Questionnaire:* The questionnaire was originally developed to investigate the learning of English by young children in the United States. However, it was later modified and adopted to measure English-learning efficacy of South Korean university students in a Korean language context (Wang et al., 2013). Modifications were applied for this study to describe more effectively the study's target population and the English-learning context in Taiwan (Appendix B). The scale consisted of 32 items, asking participants to make judgments about their capabilities to perform certain tasks in English as a foreign language. The 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (I cannot do it at all) to 7 (I can do it very well), was designed to measure the following four areas: (a) self-efficacy for listening (Items 1, 3, 9, 10, 15, 22, 24, and 27); (b) self-efficacy for speaking (Items 4, 6, 8, 17, 19, 20, 23, and 30); (c) self-efficacy for reading (Items 2, 12, 16, 21, 25, 26, 29, and 32); and (d) self-efficacy for writing in English (Items 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 18, 28, and 31). This scale was translated into Chinese before distributing it to the study's participants. The Chinese version was tested for its reliability and had an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.95 for the overall items and 0.84 for the listening, 0.88 for speaking, 0.83 for reading, and 0.86 for writing items.

The questionnaire was distributed twice, at the beginning and end of the semester. Descriptive and inferential statistics were then used to analyze the data. The descriptive statistic consisted of the means and standard deviations of the questionnaire data. After the computation of the descriptive statistics, a paired sample *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine the significance of variation in the mean efficacy scores across the proficiency levels.

*Interviews:* Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the study to examine what the students' perceptions were of the designed activities and whether they had noticed any changes in their sense of efficacy regarding their English oral skills. Ten students were randomly selected and invited to be interviewed. The interview was conducted in the native language of participants, i.e. Chinese, for the purpose of clarity. During the interview, participants were asked the following questions: (1) Can you describe your overall impression of this activity (read-aloud)? (2) After this activity, do you feel more confident in performing English speaking and listening tasks? (3) Name the top three things that you benefit from this activity. Considering more students were grouped in intermediate and high-intermediate level of proficiency, three students from each of these two levels were randomly selected and two

students from low and high level of proficiency were randomly selected. Each interview required approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Data from the interviews were first analyzed by the researcher according to the responses provided by students on each question. This result was later check by another rater and a consensus was reached on the interpretation of the data.

## Results

To investigate whether the read-aloud activities had any effect on the students' developed level of efficacy in the four skills, especially in those of the speaking and listening self-efficacy beliefs, the paired sample *t*-test was performed. Table 1 answers the first research question and presents the changes of the students' level of efficacy in the four language skills. The results showed that the mean scores of all four skills increased over the period of the experiment. After the read-aloud training, the students developed a higher level of efficacy in not only speaking and listening skills but also reading and writing skills. However, the results of the *t*-test indicated that only the scores of listening efficacy ( $t = -4.30$ ;  $M = -.16$ ;  $SD = .38$ ;  $p = .00$ ), reading efficacy ( $t = -2.26$ ;  $M = -.09$ ;  $SD = .40$ ;  $p = .026$ ), and writing efficacy ( $t = -3.12$ ;  $M = -.15$ ;  $SD = .49$ ;  $p = .002$ ), but not those of speaking efficacy, were significant. The students developed a higher level of efficacy in their listening, reading, and writing skills but not in their speaking skills. The results also showed that the students grew more confident in their listening skills than in other skills, suggesting that the students became more confident in listening to English in various tasks, such as watching TV, listening to radio or lectures. The results suggested that the read-aloud activities not only influenced the students' listening efficacy but also enabled them to grow more confidence in their reading and writing skills. The vocabulary and writing styles of the presented news reports may have encouraged them to read and write additional varieties of texts.

**Table 1: T-test showing difference between scores of self-efficacy for four skills**

	Mean	Paired Differences Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	-.16	.38	.03	-4.30	105	.000
Speaking	-.06	.46	.05	-1.41	105	.161
Reading	-.09	.40	.04	-2.26	105	.026
Writing	-.15	.49	.05	-3.12	105	.002

*Effect of the read - aloud activity on students with different listening abilities*

A one-way repeated ANOVA was conducted to answer the second research question and

to determine whether the read-aloud activities had an effect on participants of different listening proficiency regarding their speaking and listening self-efficacy beliefs. Students were categorized into four proficiency levels (i.e., low, intermediate, high-intermediate, and high) according to their English listening scores on a revised version of Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency which was executed at the beginning of the semester as the tool to classify students into classes of proficiency levels. Students' listening scores from this proficiency exam were calculated and distribute into four quartiles. Students were categorized in accordance with the quartile where their scores were located, i.e. first quartile as low, second as intermediate, third as high-intermediate and forth as high level of proficiency respectively. The results showed that there was a significant effect for listening efficacy [ $F(3, 102) = 6.40, p = .001$ ] and speaking efficacy [ $F(3, 102) = 5.76, p = .001$ ]. The Scheffe post hoc test (Table 2) showed that significant differences existed between students with low and high proficiency, whereas no significant difference existed between the students with intermediate and high-intermediate levels of listening proficiency.

**Table 2: Post hoc test (Scheffe)**

Listening ability		Listening efficacy		Speaking efficacy	
		Mean Difference	Significant	Mean Difference	Significant
1	2	-.63(*)	.009	-.39	.324
	3	-.30	.454	-.19	.857
	4	-.77(*)	.004	-.96 (*)	.002
2	3	.33	.396	.20	.840
	4	-.14	.926	-.57	.142
3	4	-.47	.193	-.78(*)	.025

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

In addition, the greatest increases in levels of both listening and speaking self-efficacy beliefs during the study were observed in students with low listening proficiency (Table 3). However, the greatest decrease of self-efficacy beliefs was found in students with high-intermediate listening proficiency. The results suggested that the read-aloud activities were more beneficial for students with lower listening abilities. By contrast, the read-aloud activities seemed to decrease the speaking and listening self-efficacy of those with high listening proficiency.

**Table 3: Speaking and listening efficacy mean scores before and after the read aloud activity**

Listening proficiency	N	Speaking efficacy	Listening efficacy
Low	33	-.54	-.38
Intermediate	29	.09	.01
High-intermediate	26	-.24	-.19
High	18	.24	.58
Total	106	-.16	-.06

Note. Efficacy mean score = (mean score before the activity) – (mean score after the activity)

### *Students' perceptions of the read - aloud activity*

With the intention to answer the third research inquiry, ten students were randomly selected and interviewed for their perceptions of the news report read-aloud activity. Each interview required approximately 10 to 15 minutes. By and large, interviewees were aware of benefits on learning vocabulary and increasing awareness of current events throughout the world. And they also acknowledged the growth of listening confidence after the activity resulting from the exposure to both recordings from native speakers while preparing for the activity and the read-aloud from classmates during the activity. Through this activity, they were familiar with native accent and the accent of Chinese-speaking learners. And this recognition echoed questionnaire results that also suggested the development on the level of self-efficacy on listening ability. In addition, during the interview, most participants were extremely positive regarding the influence of this activity, especially in three aspects.

### *Pronunciation and intonation*

Many of them, especially students in low or intermediate level of proficiency, believed that their pronunciation and intonation had been improved through listening to the news reports and practicing reading them accompanied by the audio recordings with native English speakers. One interviewed student (intermediate level of proficiency) stated,

“The news read-aloud activity helped me with learning vocabulary and current events occurring in the world. Most importantly, I practiced pronunciation and oral skill in speaking English through this activity...”

In the days leading up to the read-aloud class, the students read the news report and listened to the audio recording of the news. They carefully listened to and imitated the intonation and pronunciation of the native English speakers on the audio recordings. The practice assisted them not only to gain superior pronunciation but also familiarity with the American accent. Another student (low level of proficiency) said,

...the model recorded by an American helped me become aware of the words that I mispronounced and the intonation that I could not master before. Moreover, the news I read in this activity broadened my view of the world. I think I got a bit closer to this world recently because of the different news I read every week in this activity.

The students were able to notice and self-correct mispronunciations and wrong intonation by comparing their oral renditions with those of the recorded native speakers.

### *Opportunities of oral practice*

Second, the students not only benefited from the audio recordings of native speakers for improving their pronunciation and intonation but were also influenced by the instructor and their peers when performing the read-aloud task in the classroom. Another student (intermediate level of proficiency) reported,

The opportunities for reading English articles after entering university became fewer than before. However, the news reports in the read-aloud activity had good content. Moreover, the most beneficial function of this activity was on oral practice... especially because I was always reminded of the words that I mispronounced when I or the other students were corrected by the instructor during the in-class read-aloud activity.

Observing the other students' performance and hearing the instructor's corrections reminded the students of the parts that they needed to practice more. The opportunities to listen to the other students' readings of the news seemed to be welcomed by most interviewees. The students' perceptions of their own performance were most likely influenced by observing the successful experiences of other students and comparing their performance with those of peers, who were perceived as having similar learning backgrounds and levels of proficiency. Some interviewees mentioned an enhancement of confidence in their speaking of English after listening to others speak. They realized that their pronunciation and intonation were not as poor as they had previously thought. However, a few of them experienced a decline in their confidence in speaking when they witnessed superior performance from other classmates. When this happened, "... I would start to practice reading the news aloud a couple of days before the class because I did not want to lose face again in the group..." expressed one interviewee (low level of proficiency).

### *Confidence to speak English in public*

Finally, to the researchers' surprise, the most commonly mentioned concern during the interviews pertained to the changes in confidence and willingness to speak English in public. One interviewee (high level of proficiency) voiced,

After training in this class, I felt that my English ability was greatly improved. Especially, the news read-aloud activity forced me to open my mouth and speak English in public. Now, I have more confidence in speaking English and will not shy away from speaking it in public like I used to before.

Students were forced to speak up and read English aloud in the class, with any one of them possibly being called in front of the class. Therefore, none of them were spared from practicing beforehand; none of them could be lazy or take a rest. The read-aloud activities in class, either in groups or as a whole class, motivated every student to practice and prepare for in-class presentations beforehand. And this activity encouraged the phonemic awareness to recognize and learn vocabulary in the content-embedded environment where students could connect the meaning and sound of words (Zehr, 2010). And this connection increased the familiarity of words that could further assist the ability to comprehend the structure of spoken language during communication (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). And this ability consequently lead to the grown of confidence to participate in a conversation. Every interviewee reported that, at first, it was stressful to read aloud in public; however, as time passed, all of them became accustomed to reading English in front of other people. The interviewees seemed to share more willingness to communicate because the read-aloud activity had trained them to have the courage to speak English in public.

In conclusion, one interviewee (intermediate level of proficiency) shared,

Personally, I believe the news read-aloud activity is a wonderful activity. On one hand, it helps students practice speaking English in front of everyone; on the other hand, listening to and practicing with the model on the audio recordings helps students pronounce words like a native speaker.

The interview data suggested the positive influence of the class on the students' oral skills and on their confidence in speaking English in public. Their confidence and courage to speak English were improved after the read-aloud activity. Although the confidence to speak English herein may not directly translate to the ability to communicate, this confidence is the foundation that leads to such ability in the future.

## Discussion

This study investigated the influence of the read-aloud activities on the changes of students' self-efficacy beliefs in English, particularly regarding oral skills. The results reveal a significant increase in the students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their English listening, reading, and writing skills, but not speaking skill. The increases determined in reading and writing self-efficacy beliefs may have resulted from the classroom instruction, as well as from the news content and the read-aloud activities, during the experiment. As for the enhancement on the self-efficacy on listening skill, the activity of reading aloud with the feedback from both peers and audio recordings made by native speakers help students in two ways. First, the read-aloud activity raised phonemic awareness (Zehr, 2010) to connect meaning and pronunciation of words that further familiarizes the words and develops the ability to reflect on structure of spoken English (Snow et al., 1998). In this class, students were able to connect the sight and sound of words so that they could better recognize words when listening to English materials and feeling less anxious when doing such task. And the better recognition of words and lower anxiety could lead to better comprehension of spoken text and enhance confidence in taking listening tasks. And such type of activity is also recommended as an effective strategy for college students' phonological deficits to develop self-efficacy in oral interpretation (Apthorp, 1995). Second, reading in a group generates both mastery and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1997) which contribute to the growth of self-efficacy of students. The personal experience to correctly pronounce each word and fluently interpret the meaning of the text with accurate intonation and stress creates the most powerful source to develop self-efficacy in listening skills. Through reading aloud the news, students learned the strategies of interpreting the text with accurate intonation and stress in accordance with the meaning of the text. They later applied these strategies when listening to other English-spoken materials. Consequently, students grow in their level of efficacy and interests in handling spoken materials when they could better comprehend spoken text with the assistant of these strategies (Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012).

The results suggest that the students had more confidence in understanding radio broadcasts from English radio stations, American movies, or English conversations overheard on the street after the read-aloud activity. However, the results do not indicate that the students had confidence in exchanges such as introducing themselves, explaining where they attend school, or participating in a basic conversation in English. Wang et al. (2013) found similar

results when examining changes in the self-efficacy beliefs of South Korean university students when learning English; speaking, as a productive skill, demands the ability not only to decode and comprehend a message (i.e., listening skills) but also to correctly assemble the learned linguistic knowledge and interact with others in a socially appropriate manner. They suggested that to enhance speaking self-efficacy beliefs, students should be exposed to a supportive environment where they learn and practice exchanging information with various communication strategies. Moreover, Graham (2007) also believed that instruction on learning strategies and feedback from peers and experienced others benefit the growth of language efficacy. However, the current study provided students with opportunities to listen to and imitate the pronunciation and intonation of native speakers, but not to exchange their ideas with others. They learned the ability to recognize spoken words that could further assist the comprehension of the content of the materials but not the ability to make their meaning across. In addition, as shared in the interviews, most students considered that such practice provided them with more courage and willingness to speak in English in public. Such confidence should not be interpreted as the confidence required in message-exchange contexts. Therefore, instead of communication skills, the read-aloud activities assisted the students in improving their abilities in pronunciation and intonation, which constitute the initial stage for developing successful communication skills.

The second inquiry in this study involved examining whether the read-aloud activity had a different effect on students with different listening proficiency. The results suggested a positive effect in students with low listening proficiency but a negative influence in those with high listening proficiency. It is clear that the instructor's corrections, feedback from peers, and the opportunity to listen to other students' readings may have nurtured the confidence of students with lower listening proficiency, who demonstrated low listening ability because of insufficient knowledge about pronunciation and intonation. However, the reason leading to the decline of self-efficacy on high level students requires further investigation in extended research. It is possible that the students who ranked at the top of the group may have felt bored by such basic-level activities. As discussed, the read-aloud activities focused on pronunciation and intonation without any intention of practicing communication. For the students who possessed a high level of proficiency, the news might have been interesting and broadened their world view, as mentioned in the interviews; nevertheless, such activities did not satisfy their need to practice communication strategies. Students were less challenged and motivated in performing these activities and consequently achieved less satisfied goals that



could lead to successful experience in learning. As a result, the lack of mastery experience negatively influences their level of efficacy in oral skills. Students may develop lower level of efficacy at the end of the activities. More research are demand to explain such interesting phenomena observed in the current study.

## **Conclusion**

With the intention to enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their learning of English, this study created a supportive environment where students read news articles aloud and received feedback from both peers and the instructor. The results suggest that such a design enhances efficacy beliefs of students regarding their listening skills but not their speaking skills. Moreover, the read-aloud activities, as simple as it may appear, are beneficial to students with low listening proficiency. These results indicate that the read-aloud activities have a significant impact on the development of oral self-efficacy in students who struggle with comprehending English because of their inability to pronounce English words correctly. As pessimistic attitude in learning or students' beliefs that they cannot learn contribute to great deal of dissatisfied learning among less sufficient learners (Bandura, 1986; Jabbarifar, 2011), this study provides educators with strategies to help student regain interests and confidence in learning. For example, especially for lower level of English learners, English educators should repetitively emphasize and enhance the chances of reading aloud English texts in the classroom. As for higher level of learners, discussions on the text after reading it aloud could be more challenging and lead to the development of speaking self-efficacy.

However, due to school policy on course design, this study could not consider the possibility of different read-aloud activities in accordance with students' levels of English proficiency. With the implementation of different design of read-aloud activities, this study could better contribute to better understanding on the effect of simple but commonly used classroom activities, e.g. read-aloud, on students' learning. Therefore, further research should focus on students with high oral proficiency and develop methods that enhance oral self-efficacy beliefs of this group of students.

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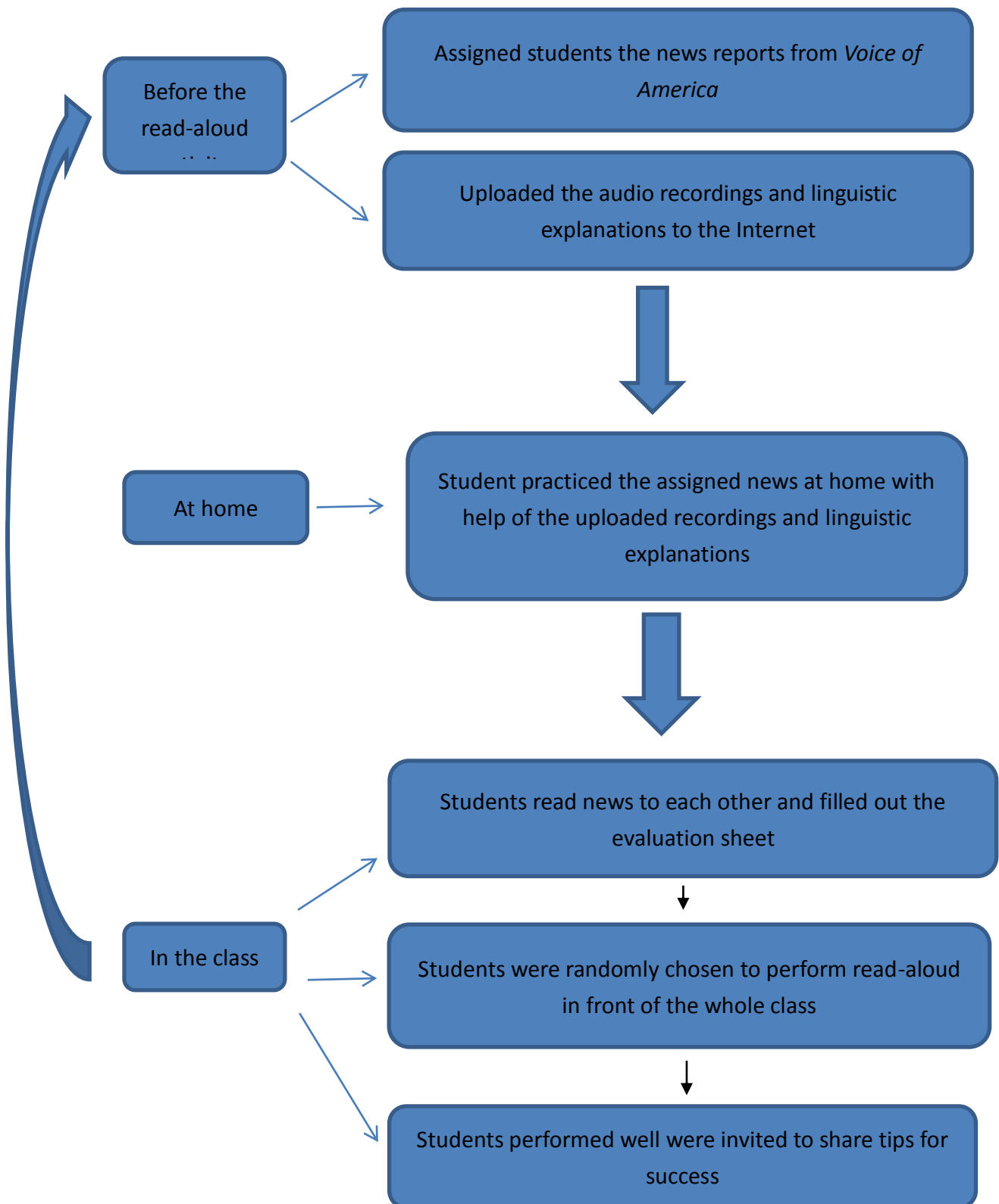
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**Appendix A**  
**Procedure of the read-aloud activity**



## Appendix B

### The questionnaire of English self-efficacy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
I am totally unable to do this	I am unable to do this	I am possibly unable to do this	I am possibly able to do this	I am basically and in principle able to do this	I am able to do this	I am able to do this well				
1. Can you understand stories told in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Can you do homework/home assignments alone when they include reading English texts?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Can you understand American TV programs (in English)?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Can you describe your university to other people in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Can you compose messages in English on the internet (facebook, twitter, blogs, etc.)?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Can you describe the way to the university from the place where you live in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Can you write a text in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Can you tell a story in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Can you understand radio programs in English-speaking countries?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Can you understand English-language TV programs made in Korea?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Can you leave a note for another student in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Can you guess the meaning of unknown words when you are reading an English text?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Can you form new sentences from words you have just learnt?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Can you write e-mails in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Can you understand English dialogs (audio recordings) about everyday school matters?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Can you understand messages or news items in English on the internet?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Can you ask your teacher questions in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Can you produce English sentences with idiomatic phrases?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Can you introduce your teacher (to someone else) in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Can you discuss subjects of general interest with your fellow students (in English)?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Can you read short English narratives?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Can you understand English films without subtitles?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Can you answer your teacher's questions in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Can you understand English songs?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Can you read English-language newspapers?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. Can you find out the meanings of new words using a monolingual dictionary?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Can you understand telephone numbers spoken in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. Can you write diary entries in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Can you understand English articles on Korean culture?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Can you introduce yourself in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. Can you write an essay in about two pages about your lecturer in English?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. Can you understand new reading materials (e.g., news from the Time magazine) selected by your instructor?				1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## TPACK in a CALL Course and its Effect on Vietnamese Pre-service EFL Teachers<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The study examines the content of a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) course at a Vietnamese university and discusses pre-service teachers' development of technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and their attitudes toward using technology in language classroom before and after the course. The results are

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interviews with the pre-service teachers in the course drawn from pre- and post-surveys and the curriculum analysis of the course. The survey data show no

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significant difference in those teachers' TPACK before and after the course. However, they indicate a mild positive correlation between participants' TPACK and previous teaching experience. Additionally, the interview data illuminate that other factors such as educational policy, classroom facilities, and participants' teaching philosophy affect the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward technology integration in language classroom. The article discusses pedagogical implications for teacher education on how to assist pre-service teachers' TPACK development.

**Keywords:** TPACK, CALL, educational policy; Vietnamese EFL teachers, pre-service teachers

## **Introduction**

Recent research has shown that language teachers' positive attitudes toward technology incorporation often do not lead to their real-life practice (Gilakjani & Lai-Mei, 2012; Haider, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2012; Hong et al., 2014; Spaulding, 2013). Reasons for such a gap between teachers' attitude and practice include their low information and communication technologies (ICT) skills resulted from a deficient training (Hismanoglu, 2012; Kusano et al., 2013) and lack of content-specific pedagogical skills for efficient technology application (Lee & Lee, 2014; Sadaf, Newby & Ertmer, 2012). In this regard, successful technology integration requires not only knowledge and skills concerning technology, but also content knowledge and relevant pedagogies (Cox & Graham, 2009; Lee & Lee, 2014; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Pamuk, 2012; Sadaf et al., 2012). This integrated knowledge of technology, content, and pedagogy has recently been theorized as "technological pedagogical and content knowledge" or its acronym "TPACK" (Cox & Graham, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

TPACK as a potential theoretical framework helps understand whether and how teachers acquire knowledge and skills necessary for using various technological tools to teach subject matters efficiently. Numerous studies have examined how the framework guides teachers' development of technology-related skills (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Cox & Graham, 2009; Graham, Borup & Smith, 2012) as well as the relationship between their technology use and other relevant factors such as self-efficacy, gender, and teaching experience (Lee & Tsai, 2010; Sadaf et al., 2012). Others have explored the effect of context and culture on the way teachers construct their TPACK (Koh, Chai & Tay, 2014; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014).

In the field of language teaching, research has just begun to investigate issues relevant



to language teachers' TPACK development, focusing on the effect of a specific program/course (e.g., Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2010; Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Shinas, Yilmaz-Ozden et al., 2013) and learning activities (e.g., Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015; Tee & Lee, 2011). While numerous studies so far focus on EFL teachers' TPACK development, they are limited to a few contexts such as Singapore (Chai et al., 2010; Koh et al., 2014; Lee & Tsai, 2010; Liang, Chai, Koh, Yang, & Tsai, 2013), China (Dong et al., 2015) and Turkey (Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014). Given that social and institutional contexts and language teachers' TPACK development interact with each other (Hismanoglu, 2012; Teo, Su-Luan & Sing, 2008), more studies from diverse contexts will contribute to our understanding of language teachers' TPACK development and its interaction with various instructional and social factors.

Vietnam has recently invested in English education intensively through several major projects such as the National Foreign Language 2020 (NFL 2020), which emphasizes pre-service teachers' ICT training with newly introduced courses such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), E-Learning, and Technology in Language Teaching (TiLT). Therefore, Vietnamese context is a great place in which how technological training affects pre-service language teachers' understanding and development of TPACK. The current study aims to examine how a CALL course at a Vietnamese university addresses technology and pedagogies in language teaching and how the course affects pre-service teachers' development of TPACK. It also explores a possible relationship between TPACK and other factors, both individual (e.g., gender, age, teaching philosophy, and prior teaching experiences) and contextual ones (e.g., language policy and technology accessibility). By focusing on instructional, individual, and social factors, the study draws broad pedagogical implications for teacher education on how to assist pre-service teachers' development of TPACK that intersects technology, beliefs, and institutional and cultural contexts.

## **Literature review**

### *TPACK and pre-service teachers*

TPACK emphasizes the interrelationship among content information, teaching abilities, and technology integration (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). According to Mishra and Koehler (2006), there are seven constructs in the TPACK framework: content knowledge (CK), technological knowledge (TK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), technological content knowledge (TCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), pedagogical content

knowledge (PCK), and technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK). These constructs are described in detail in Figure 1, which has been modified from the original one on the TPACK website.

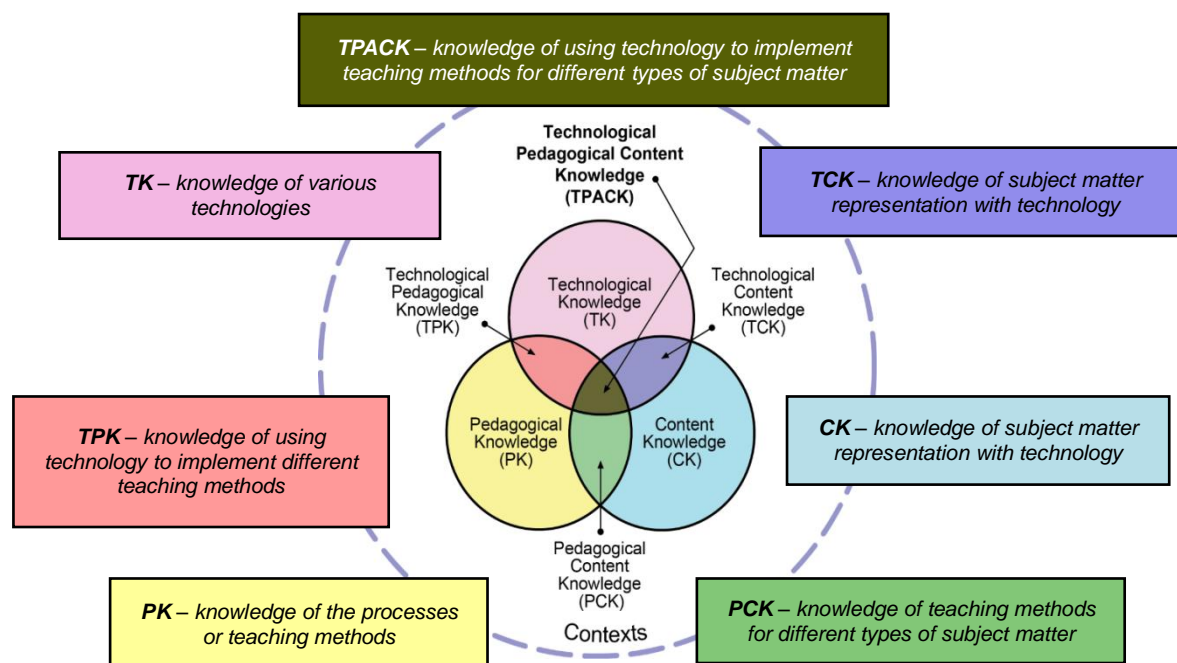


Figure 1. TPACK framework and its sub-constructs. Adapted from 'Using the TPACK Image', by M. Koehler, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.tpack.org/>. Copyright 2012 by tpack.org. Adapted with permission<sup>2</sup>.

TK, CK, and PK refer to specific knowledge of a certain area, and the rest are combination of these basic constructs. TCK is defined as knowledge of specific subject gained with the aid of technology without consideration of teaching methodology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). For instance, language teachers use Google apps (e.g., Google Doc, Google Forms, Google Site, etc.) to introduce the lesson contents while these tools were primarily designed for office workers and businessmen. On the other hand, the exclusion of content knowledge makes up a clear construct of TPK, which refers to the selection of certain technological tool to enhance teaching approaches without paying much attention to the content to be taught (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). An example of TPK is using Wikis to promote peer-feedback or online group discussions for any subject matter. A familiar term is PCK, which helps teachers choose effective teaching method to teach a specific subject

<sup>2</sup> As stated on the website, the authors grant permission to use the image under the following stipulations: "The source of the image is attributed as <http://tpack.org>" and "The image is captioned or credited as "Reproduced by permission of the publisher, © 2012 by tpack.org" (or something equivalent)".

content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). For example, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) would be beneficial for students to learn about solving social problems. The core construct, TPCK/TPACK, is an overlap of other constructs, that is, the knowledge to select appropriate technology to teach a specific lesson content effectively (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Teachers with high TPACK would know how to use Google Maps to give a lesson about asking for directions through communicative language teaching approach.

Among others, TK plays a key role in TPACK framework affecting language teachers' attitudes toward selecting suitable technological tools for their lessons (Gilakjani & Lai-Mei, 2012; Hismanoglu, 2012; Hong et al., 2014; Koh et al., 2014; Pamuk, 2012; Sadaf et al., 2012; Spaulding, 2013; Teo, 2008). For example, language teachers in Singapore showed their eagerness to adopt new technologies in classroom once the government implemented MasterPlan for IT in Education, which provided technological trainings for teachers (Koh et al., 2014). This finding is in line with other studies in that teachers with wider computer knowledge and experience have more positive attitudes toward potential use of computers in language education and those who lack technology knowledge and practice tend to be reluctant to utilize technology in classroom (Gilakjani & Lai-Mei, 2012; Hong et al., 2014; Sadaf et al., 2012; Spaulding, 2013; Teo, 2008). In terms of the correlations among the domains within TPACK framework, Pamuk (2012) shows that pedagogy and content are much more closely related than the domains of technology and pedagogy.

There are also variations in teachers' attitudes according to the disciplines and contexts of teaching. For instance, science teachers tend to have less positive attitudes because science-related subjects, like medical training, are mainly conducted through face-to-face methods (Khine, 2001; Teo, 2008). Furthermore, certain contextual and cultural aspects affect teachers' attitudes through educational policies. Several studies report that language teachers hold negative attitudes toward technology integration in the classroom due to their low IT skills, unpleasant IT-related experiences, and limited facilities or learning resources in the context (Hismanoglu, 2012; Teo, Su-Luan & Sing, 2008). For example, Hismanoglu (2012) reveals that the majority of the participants in Turkey had negative attitudes toward information and communication technology (ICT) integration although they considered it a potential learning tool. Hismanoglu (2012) also argues the major reason for teachers' negative attitudes is related to the ineffective distance training that lacked fully-designed lessons with ICT implementation, practical hand-on activities, and qualified educational technology teachers, to name a few.

Considering TPACK as a key factor in teacher professional development, quite a few

studies have examined the effect of specific learning activities on the growth of TPACK (Lee & Lee, 2014; Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015; Tee & Lee, 2011). Sancar-Tokmak and Yanpar-Yelken (2015) investigated how foreign language education pre-service teachers perceived their TPACK self-confidence after the activity of creating digital stories. Results drawn on through a self-confidence TPACK scale, demographic questionnaire, open-ended question and observations suggested that participants' TPACK improved significantly during the activity. Pre-service teachers' TPACK not only developed through one certain learning activity such as digital story creating (Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015), problem-based learning (Tee & Lee, 2011) or lesson planning practice (Lee & Lee, 2014), but technology training courses/programs also had a positive impact on this group's TPACK development (Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Kabakci-Yurdakul & Coklar, 2014; Lee & Tsai, 2010; Maeng et al, 2013; Sadaf et al., 2012).

So far, survey has been a major method to profile and measure teachers' TPACK (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Dong et al., 2015; Koh et al., 2010; Lee & Tsai, 2010; Liang et al., 2013; Shinas et al., 2013; Teo, 2008; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014). The results of these studies provide an understanding of the relationship between TPACK and its sub-constructs, along with correlation between teachers' self-confidence in TPACK and their teaching experience (Teo, 2008; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014). Nevertheless, only a few qualitative studies have explored how different teaching and social contexts interact with teachers' perceived TPACK (Koh et al., 2014; Kusano et al., 2013; Pamuk, 2012). Kusano et al. (2013), for example, show that U.S. participants in their study had more access to IT tools and hence used them more often for instruction than their Japanese counterparts who had limited access to digital resources in rural regions in Japan. Thus, to understand teachers' TPACK fully, it is important to explore it in relation to its context not only through pre-constructed questions, but also through participants' own voices (Dong et al., 2015).

### *Technology training for English teachers in Vietnam*

In Vietnam, English was introduced as a school subject for the first time in 1986 during the "Open Door" (Renovation) period, but no well-articulated policy on foreign language education had been available until recently (Canh, 2007). The government has recently implemented a number of projects that promote foreign language education especially English education for the country's economic development and cultural exchange in the global context (Canh, 2007). For example, Vietnam's National Foreign Language 2020 (NFL 2020) Project carried out by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) aims "to

renovate the teaching and learning of foreign language (mainly English) within the nation education system” (Nguyen, 2008). One of its main goals is that most Vietnamese youth graduating from vocational schools, colleges, and universities will have a good command of at least one foreign language by the end of 2020 (Nguyen, 2008).

Public schools in Vietnam offer a variety of foreign languages such as English, French, Chinese, and Japanese; however, English is the most popular subject by the students, and most of the schools make English significant and necessary for student’s academic career (Wright, 2002). According to UNESCO (2011), 76% of students in secondary schools and 88% in high schools learn English for at least five hours per week. At tertiary level, more than 90% of university students choose to learn English as one of their required subjects (UNESCO, 2011). Students who are majoring in both English linguistics and English education are required to have a minimum of 1,200 hours of general English studies (e.g., English Reading and Conversation) before taking upper-level major courses (UNESCO, 2011). Nguyen (2010) further asserts that English is used as the medium of instruction for those upper-level courses, which highlights the significance of English for Vietnamese college students, especially English majors.

In English teacher education programs, new courses have been developed and implemented to achieve the goals set by the NFL 2020. According to Nguyen (2010), the government planned to innovate school infrastructure to meet the demands for technology-infused classrooms. Most of universities in Vietnam now offer e-libraries where students can access the school library database virtually, e-learning courses that students can take either face-to-face, online or hybrid, as well as classrooms equipped with state-of-the-art computers and high-speed Internet access. As a part of this innovation, a CALL course has been offered to pre-service teachers at major universities. The objective of the course is to help pre-service teachers acquire sufficient knowledge and skills for technology integration in mainstream classrooms. While this course has been introduced to many university students in the past two decades, it is still considered a significant new development in Vietnam. Due to the government’s concern about unsanctioned political propaganda that may be propagated, public access of certain Internet contents and media such as Facebook had been banned until 2009 (Tan, 2011).

As CALL is a newly introduced course in Vietnam, no study has been conducted in regards to its effect on pre-service teachers’ TPACK. In other words, there is very little understanding of how technology training courses such as CALL affect pre-service teachers’ perceptions and implementation of the technology in language teaching and learning in the

context. Therefore, this study investigates the effect of a CALL course on pre-service teachers' TPACK in Vietnam by focusing on the following research questions:

RQ1. Which constructs of TPACK does the CALL course address?

RQ2. How do the Vietnamese pre-service teachers perceive their TPACK before and after the course?

RQ3. What are the factors that influence pre-service teachers' decisions to use technology in language classroom?

## Methods

### *Context and participants*

The study was conducted at VNU (pseudonym) in a Southern city of Vietnam. The university offers a variety of courses specializing tertiary-level training for pre-service teachers in numerous subject areas. The data were collected in a 15-week long CALL course offered for senior undergraduate students in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program in Fall, 2014. Due to the purpose of the study on pre-service EFL teachers, a purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants. Before the first week of the course, one of the researchers who had graduated from VNU and taught several courses there emailed the course instructor for his permission to contact the students in his CALL course. The students in the course received an email that includes the survey and the consent form stating the purpose of the study and voluntary nature of the study. By completing and submitting the online survey, the students would indicate their voluntary consent to participate in the study. Forty-two students agreed to participate in the study, and Table 1 shows the information about their gender and age.

**Table 1: Background information of students participating in the study**

	Gender		Age range			Total
	Male	Female	18-22	23-27	28-32	
Students participating in the study	6 14.3%	36 85.7%	40 95.2%	2 4.8%	0 0.0%	42

The students in the course had taken other methods courses (i.e., English language teaching or ELT courses) before taking the CALL course. These ELT courses provide the students with adequate knowledge of teaching methodologies and techniques, so they can gain sufficient pedagogical skills to teach English. The CALL course, on the other hand, aims to introduce students with current trends in instructional technology and offer hands-on

activities for them to apply specific technological tools such as Web design, productivity applications, social networks and virtual environments to language classrooms.

### *Instrument & data collection*

The data are triangulated by using mixed methods including course-related documents, pre- and post-surveys (see Appendix A for the full survey), and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for the list of guiding questions). As discussed earlier, TPACK is a developed and established theoretical framework that examines and guides teachers' technology-related knowledge and skills. Thus, it is highly reasonable to adopt the framework for this study. Additionally, previous studies show that pre-service teachers' TPACK is developed either through one certain learning activity (Lee & Lee, 2014; Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015; Tee & Lee, 2011) or through a technology training course/relevant program (Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Kabakci-Yurdakul & Coklar, 2014; Lee & Tsai, 2010; Maeng et al., 2013; Sadaf et al., 2012). Given that it is important to identify what activities are included in a technology training course, the current study analyzed the content of the CALL course. Specifically, it examined how each activity addressed the sub-constructs of TPACK and how these activities would affect participants' perception of their TPACK after the course.

The surveys were developed based on Schmidt et al. (2009a) and Chai et al. (2011). All the seven TPACK domains in the instrument gained high internal reliability ( $>.80$ ) (Schmidt et al., 2009b), which was then adapted to fit different content areas in various contexts and obtained high internal reliability (e.g., Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Lee & Tsai, 2010). Chai et al. (2011) also successfully identified all the factors and established validity on their instrument. During the second week of the course, 42 students completed an online pre-survey through Survey Monkey. The pre-survey was to collect specific information of the participants such as their technological knowledge and skills and other demographic information (i.e., gender, age, and teaching experience). At the end of the course, 35 out of 42 students (83.33%) completed a post-survey through Survey Monkey, which was compared with the pre-survey results to find out any change over the course in their TPACK and attitudes toward technology integration.

Survey tends to be a major way to evaluate TPACK and its constructs. There have been several qualitative studies conducted to explore how different social contexts have an impact on perceived TPACK (Koh et al., 2014; Kusano et al., 2013; Pamuk, 2012). Therefore, interview can play a key role in understanding teachers' TPACK fully. For this study, 30-

minute online semi-structured interviews with the course instructor and eight volunteer students were conducted at the end of the course. Pseudonyms were used to preserve participants' anonymity and confidentiality. The interview with the course instructor focused on the course objectives and learning activities along with his self-reflection on the effectiveness of the course. The interviews with the students involved their views of the effectiveness and applicability of the course activities and factors that would affect their use of technologies in the classroom.

## Results

The results consist of the analysis of the course content, TPACK pre- and post-surveys, and interviews. For the analysis of the course content, a table was created in order to see which TPACK constructs were addressed in different learning activities and projects. In terms of participants' TPACK, the data for pre-and post-surveys were first entered into SPSS to get descriptive statistics. Then, the results from these two surveys were compared with an independence t-test to check whether there was any statistically significant change in the participants' perspectives on their TPACK. ANOVA was also used in order to examine the correlation among TPACK and other factors such as gender, age, and teaching experience. Finally, all of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Any recurring and contrasting themes were identified and coded for the discussion.

### *RQ1. Which constructs of TPACK does the CALL course address?*

Overall, the course addressed all the sub-constructs of TPACK, but emphasized more on TK and TCK than others. All the topics in the course addressed TK, either independently or in combination of other areas of knowledge such as TCK, TPK, and TPACK. Table 2 describes topics taught throughout the course and their relevance to the constructs.

The midterm project required the students to use their TK and TCK in their creation of a photo collage of their own interests. The students prepared a presentation about their collage-making process, including the use of images, sounds, and video features that support presentation and teaching materials: one video created by *GoAnimate*, one comic created by *ToonDoo*, and one collage created by *Microsoft AutoCollage*. The final project was expanded to include TPK and TPACK in their application of learned technological knowledge and skills, such as video making, image editing, and web design. In particular, the students designed a resource CD for teaching English to high school students. In the CD, the digital portfolio contents are displayed in the website consisting of various resources for the unit



(e.g., two PPT files for teaching language aspects in an assigned unit, two Hot Potato quizzes, and one ED Quiz exercise). The students were also encouraged to use other tools (e.g., *AutoCollage* and *Windows Movie Maker*) to create movies and upload them to *YouTube*, to enrich and enhance their website.

**Table 2: TPACK constructs covered in the CALL course**

Week	Topic	TK	TCK	TPK	TPACK
1	Integrating Digital Assets into Language Teaching Materials	√	√	√	√
2-4	HTML and basis of web design ( <i>Adobe Dreamweaver</i> )	√	√		
5-6	Creating online quizzes and tests ( <i>Quia</i> , <i>ED Quiz</i> , <i>ED TOEFL iBT Quiz</i> , <i>Hot Potatoes</i> )	√	√	√	√
7-9	Digital storytelling ( <i>GoAnimate</i> , <i>ToonDoo</i> , <i>Pixton</i> )	√	√	√	√
	Mid-Term Project	√	√		
10-11	Hands-on activity: Practicing editing interview clips with <i>iMovie</i> , <i>Windows Movie Maker</i>	√	√		
12-13	Tools that encourage students' engagement ( <i>AutoCollage</i> , <i>Songsmith</i> , <i>Photosynth</i> , <i>OneNote</i> )	√	√	√	√
14	Social networking, online instructional materials & educational tools ( <i>Babbel</i> , <i>Busuu</i> , <i>Fixoodle</i> , <i>Duolingo</i> , <i>LingQ</i> , <i>Second Life</i> )	√	√		
15	Final project submission & Course Reflection	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Final Project	√	√	√	√

The interview with the course instructor points out his effort to design the learning activities that address all of the constructs. However, he also mentioned some challenges for implementing them in a course due to insufficient time, inefficient infrastructure (e.g., facilities, electricity supplies, and Internet connection), and mixed levels of the students. For example, he did not cover all of the topics during Week 14 about social networking, online instructional materials, and educational tools because of time constraint. He also reported that he had a few students from suburban areas who considered themselves as ‘digital illiterate’, which took him more time to explain the step-by-step tutorial in class. Sudden power outages and poor Internet accessibility were among other factors that affected the course’s effectiveness. While the students did not have much opportunity to practice what they had learned in class due to various factors, the instructor was quite satisfied with their learning performance:

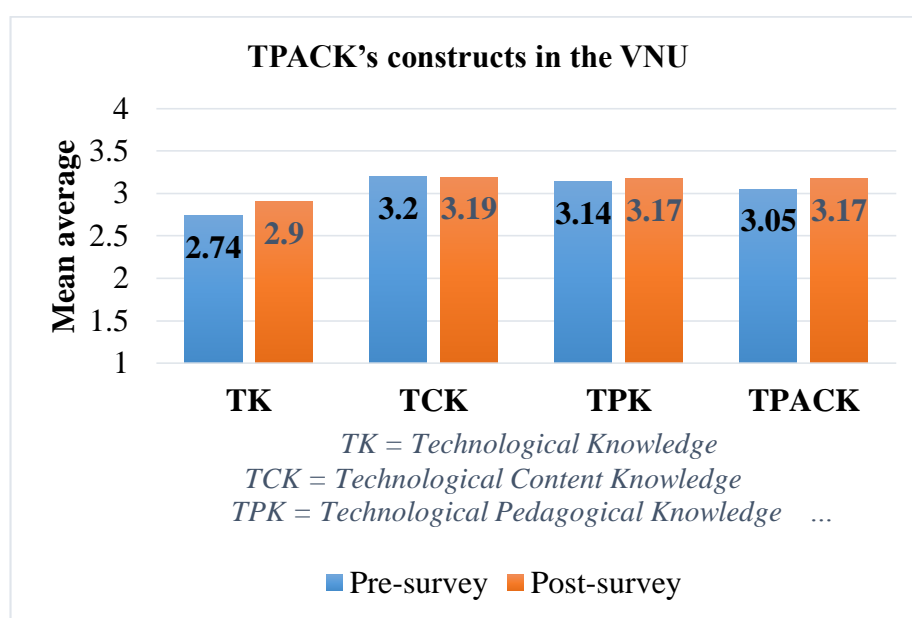
Some of their (the students’) projects are beyond my expectation. They not only knew how to apply what had been taught in class to create interesting online lessons for high school students, but also did more research to make their online learning websites more interactive and appealing.

*RQ 2. How do the Vietnamese pre-service teachers perceive their TPACK before and after the course?*

According to the pre-survey results, while the participants indicated that they did not know much about various technological tools (an average of 2.36 for item 4) nor feel very confident about their skills to solve technical problems (an average of 2.36 for item 5), they felt quite confident about their TK (e.g., I can learn technologies and technical skills easily) with a mean of 2.74 out of 4.0.

In terms of content specific technological knowledge, participants showed their confidence in combining TK and CK together with an average of 3.2. In terms of TPK, which is the knowledge of using technologies into language teaching, its average mean was 3.14. For their TPACK, most of the participants thought that they had pretty sufficient knowledge on how to integrate technologies into teaching certain contents of the language with a mean of 3.05 out of 4.0. In summary, pre-service teachers' technology-applied and technology-incorporated knowledge such as TCK and TPK are higher than their technological skill itself.

Figure 2 shows summaries of the results of the pre- and post-survey. The post-survey results show that their TK changed from 2.74 to 2.90 while other constructs (i.e., TCK and TPK) remained almost the same. The change concerning TK mostly came from their learning of different technological tools during the CALL course. The data showed that their confidence in problem solving skills has increased. The TCK average mean in the post-survey (3.19) did not change much from the one in the pre-survey (3.20). Similarly, there was only a slight difference between the average means of the TPK in the pre-survey (3.14) and in the post-survey (3.17).



*Figure 2. TPACK constructs before and after a CALL course*

The mean for overall TPACK increased from the pre-survey (3.05) to the post-survey (3.17). The change indicates that the course influenced participants' TPACK positively (TCK the most) although these changes are not statistically significant. The results of independent samples t-test (see Table 3) shows that all p-values of the constructs are bigger than the critical significance level of .05, indicating there is no statistically significant difference between means of the constructs in the pre- and post-survey. However, these constructs remain relatively high, which indicates that the participants seem to have attained these different types of knowledge before they took the course. A possible explanation is that most of the students had taken IT and/or ELT courses before taking the CALL course, so they had already acquired some basic knowledge of technology and pedagogy and how to combine them in lesson planning.

**Table 3: Descriptive data and results of independent samples t-test**

	Pre-survey (N=42)		Post-survey (N=35)		t	d
Constructs	M	SD	M	SD		
TK	2.74	0.41	2.90	0.27	0.93*	0.46
TCK	3.20	0.03	3.19	0.02	-0.60*	-0.60
TPK	3.14	0.05	3.17	0.00	1.17*	0.95
TPACK	3.05	0.58	3.17	0.51	-0.98*	-0.22

Note: \* $p > .05$

In terms of participants' attitudes toward the effectiveness of the course, Figure 3 shows their overall positive attitudes and their increase at the end of the course. The participants agreed that the course provided them with sufficient knowledge and skills required for the application of technology into teaching. Overall, the course helped the participants the most in their beliefs about how technology could facilitate language learning and teaching.

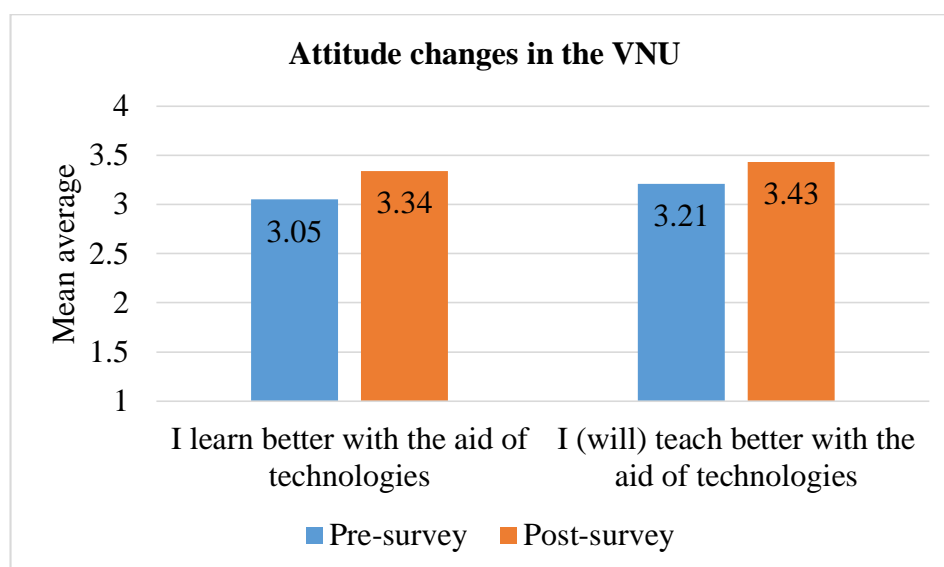


Figure 3. Attitude changes during the CALL course

The results of t-test (see Table 4) show that there is a significant difference between the attitudes toward *learning* English with technology aid while there is no significant difference between those toward *teaching* English with the same aid. Nevertheless, the participants still maintained positive attitudes after the course.

**Table 4: Descriptive data and results of independent samples t-test**

	Pre-survey (N=42)		Post-survey (N=35)		t	d
Attitudes	M	SD	M	SD		
Learn better	3.05	0.58	3.34	0.64	-2.12**	-0.49
Teach better	3.21	0.52	3.43	0.56	-1.74*	-0.40

Note: \* $p > .05$

\*\* $p < .05$

Additionally, ANOVA tests show that pre-service teachers' age and teaching experience have a mild correlation with their TPACK ( $r=0.27$  and  $r=0.40$  respectively at  $p<0.05$ ). The results indicate that pre-service teachers with more teaching experiences tended to have higher knowledge of technology integration into the subject area teaching. This result is somewhat opposite to the previous studies (Liang et al., 2013; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014) that indicate a negative correlation between teaching experiences and willingness to integrate technology. No significant relationship between gender and TPACK ( $r=0.13$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) was found.

*RQ 3. What are the factors that influence pre-service teachers' decisions to use technology in language classroom?*

Most of the participants in the interviews believed that it is a good idea to integrate technology into their teaching. First, technological tools can help teachers be more creative because they need to think of a new way to integrate different tools into the lesson. Moreover, they reported that using technology effectively and meaningfully can also increase students' interest, motivation, and attention:

First, we need to find a way to make our lessons more interesting. With the help of tech and visual aid, students can find the information easier to understand. I will apply, like downloading language learning games, designing activities, making quizzes and tests for students. So, we could apply tools learned in the class such as Hot Potatoes, or Quizlet.

Another reason comes from the fact that modern technology is such a convenient and time-saving tool for language teachers. One participant mentioned that he liked such tools as

*Hot Potatoes* and *ED quiz* to create tests because they saved a lot of time. Before taking the CALL course, he used to spend lots of time typing multiple-choice questions and answers for a paper and pencil test. It also took him some time to switch the questions to have different test formats. Therefore, using technology is a viable option since it can help the teachers to create a quiz or test more easily and quickly. Saving time for grading was considered another advantage of technology in the eyes of most participants.

Despite the fact that technology can bring many benefits to the language classroom, some students were still reluctant in using them in the classroom because of their inadequate technological knowledge (TK) as well as the ability to integrate technologies to teach certain lesson (TPACK). One student stated that teachers should have basic technological skills so that they can integrate various tools effectively into teaching and deal with technical problems in the class. The choice of using certain tools also depends on the contents of a lesson. For example, one participant described that she planned to use images to pre-teach new vocabulary by using *PowerPoint* while she preferred to use the blackboard, the traditional way for grammar teaching.

According to a report by MOET (2005), another major factor for teachers' integration of technology is related to the social context, especially educational policies pertaining to renovating the way of thinking and teaching. In Vietnam, most of the courses design follows the traditional style that has been used for a long time, and students are familiar with exams in their conventional format and contents (MOET, 2005).

The final project of the course, website design, is not very useful because students seldom use online to do their homework or use online assignments. It's because of Vietnamese curriculum. It is not possible for the students to learn using various technological tools.

A major challenge to curriculum renovation in Vietnam is that curriculum and policy makers pay little attention to the needs of learners (MOET, 2005). Therefore, curriculum tends to repeat traditions that emphasize the established and conventional ways of teaching and learning (i.e., a teacher-centered instructional approach). One participant pointed out that existing textbooks and teaching materials make it difficult to integrate technology into teaching: "Vietnamese textbooks are designed to be taught on the blackboard". In terms of assessment, school tests heavily focus on accuracy, especially in the domains of reading and writing, and ignore fluency and creativity in other domains. Therefore, high school students do not need to take oral proficiency tests that measure their listening and speaking skills, which discourages teachers' use of technology to facilitate oral communication skills:

Honestly, I could not use much technology I have learned during my internship. Even though the new textbook somewhat contained a variety of areas to teach, that is, Reading, Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Language Focus, uhm... I needed to spend most of the time teaching them (high school students) vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing because those are on their exams.

Participants reported that the availability of the equipment is another factor. Few high schools in Vietnam are equipped with a projector or Internet access. Further, some available computer labs in school are not offered for teachers to use on a regular basis, and they are often not up-to-date as one participant shared:

Well, there are only one lab in the school, and we need to uh... reserve the lab in advance. Therefore, I don't usually teach there. [...] And the computers are kind of old and run really slow.

Not to mention those rural areas where there is limited Internet access and lack of equipment, some schools in large cities do not have adequate facilities to support digital learning. Only private language learning centers (e.g., British Council, ILA, VUS) offer sufficient computer labs and other learning resources. One participant pointed out a challenge regarding the lack of resources:

I have learned lots of useful knowledge in the course. However, one thing that bothered me was that I needed to bring my own laptop to class. The classroom was too big with too many students, it is hard to deliver the lecture clearly to everyone in the class. And it's even hard to find a socket to plug my laptop when it ran out of battery. Sometimes, there was power cut, and we had to stop the class. The school provides Wi-Fi, but it's a big problem to use it in class because of too many students (who used it).

## Discussion

The curriculum analysis reveals that the course contents addressed all technology-related constructs in TPACK framework (i.e., TK, TPK, TCK, and TPACK). Some topics were selected according to popularity and effectiveness (e.g., web design, digital storytelling, social networking, and virtual learning environment) in language education. Other learning activities were included based on the availability of the software in the context such as creating multiple-choice tests with *ED Quiz* or creating *TOEFL iBT* tests with *ED TOEFL iBT*, the tools designed and developed by the English Department of the university. The midterm and final projects required the students to apply most of the contents introduced in the class and were used to evaluate students' TPACK competency. TK, which was entailed in all of the topics of the course, still plays a key role in TPACK framework. This finding

corresponds with the study of Pamuk (2012). Nevertheless, the contents of the course also placed an emphasis on other constructs such as TPK, TCK, and TPACK. Furthermore, this study, unlike other studies that examined the impact of a single learning activity on pre-service teachers' TPACK growth (Lee & Lee, 2014; Sancar-Tokmak & Yampar-Yelken, 2015; Tee & Lee, 2011), highlights how the entire course contents attributed to how this group of teachers perceive and develop their TPACK.

The results of independence t-tests, however, show that there is no statistically significant difference between the means of the constructs before and after the course. On the contrary, other similar studies show a significant development in TPK and TPACK, but a somewhat limited growth in TCK (Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Sancar-Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015). Sancar-Tokmak and Yanpar-Yelken (2015) suggest that the insignificant change in TCK may be relevant to the nature of the course design that does not include many effective activities to help teachers develop the area. Even though the CALL course in this study dealt with various technology-related topics, it did not lead to a significant change in participants' TCK. One possible explanation can be participants' tendency to merge TCK with TPACK (Chai et al., 2013). For example, geographic aspects represented by *Google Earth* are intended to enhance technological content knowledge (TCK) while functions in *Google Classroom* are intended for pedagogies (TPACK). Yet, pre-service teachers will be likely to perceive their understanding of *Google Earth* the same as that of *Google Classroom*, blending TCK and TPACK due to their constant consideration of pedagogical applicability of any knowledge and skills.

Although there is no significant change between teachers' TPACK before and after the course, the relative high level of TPACK throughout the course indicates that these pre-service teachers were confident in their ability to integrate technologies into language teaching. The findings show that the course had positive effects on the way the participants perceived their TPACK. They found the course helpful by providing them with not only technological skills but also techniques to adopt these skills effectively in different language teaching approaches and methods that they had acquired before. Therefore, they expressed high willingness to use technologies in classroom to facilitate language teaching and learning. The finding promotes a new type of the training course for language teachers, similar to those of other studies that highlight the effectiveness of ICT-based training courses for pre-service teachers (Hismanoglu, 2012; Hofter & Grandgenett, 2012; Kabakci-Yurdakul & Coklar, 2014; Lee & Tsai, 2010).

The interview data show participants' reluctance toward using technologies in their

teaching due to contextual factors pertaining to classroom facilities and curriculum-related constraints. This means a well-developed, quality CALL course may have a limited effect on teachers' TPACK as there are other constraints that teachers need to overcome to use technology efficiently in the classroom. For instance, some of the participants had willingness to use much technology, but the lack of a computer lab or a projector in the classroom prevented them from using it. This experience had a negative impact on their attitudes toward using technology in future classrooms.

Finally, the findings revealed the correlation between the participants' TPACK and their age and previous teaching experiences, which supports findings of other studies (Teo, 2008; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014). Unlike the current study, others show a significant difference in technology skill by gender (Margolis & Fisher, 2002; North & Noyes, 2002). This implies that technology skill itself and TPACK (i.e., how to apply technology in teaching) are not the same. The lack of a significant difference between gender and TPACK contributes to shifting a perspective about female teachers' use of CALL. Female teachers tend to feel more comfortable in using technologies in the classroom as they receive equal education/training and access to advanced technologies like male teachers in the modern time (Markauskaite, 2006).

In terms of age and teaching experiences, pre-service teachers at VNU who had more teaching experience felt more confident about their ability to integrate technologies into language teaching, which echoes the results of another study (Teo, 2008). However, other studies on this topic (e.g., Liang et al., 2013; Yuksel & Yasin, 2014) show that senior teachers hold a resistance toward technology-integrated teaching environments. A number of young participants in this study, who had learned computer skills from elementary school and taken a computer course as well as methodology courses during their first year at VNU, had more advantages when taking this CALL course, which may affect the positive correlation between age and TPACK score. Furthermore, the majority of the participants in the study (95.2%) are between 18-22 years old whereas the average age of those in Liang et al. (2013) is 35.3 years, indicating that there is a generational difference in the way the participants perceive their TPACK. This implied that younger teachers, so-called E-generation, have certain advantages over older teachers who find it more difficult to acquire technological skills for pedagogical purpose.



## Conclusion

This study examined TPACK constructs in a CALL course offered at a Vietnamese university and discussed how the course contents affect pre-service English teachers' development of TPACK. Overall, the course contents and activities addressed most of the constructs in TPACK framework (i.e., TK, TCK, TPK, and TPACK) while TK and TCK were the main focus. There was a relative increase in TK, TPK, and TPACK even though the change was not statistically significant. Additionally, senior participants with more teaching experience tended to feel more confident in their technology-integrated skills. All participants became increasingly positive toward the potentials of technology integration and more confident in using technology in their teaching after the course. Apart from the instructional activities in the course, other factors also influence participants' decisions to incorporate technology in language classroom such as educational policies about testing and curriculum design along with technological-educational infrastructure (i.e., technology-related equipment and facilities).

The results imply that the benefit of such a technology training course for pre-service teachers becomes more visible in the area of attitude and confidence than specific skills or knowledge. Therefore, a well-designed training course should emphasize participants' improvement of confidence and willingness to apply and utilize technology in language classrooms. This may be accomplished through setting up clearly articulated course objectives and rationales for technology integration and highlighting various benefits of the integration. It is also important to discuss social and contextual obstacles and difficulties that limit the use of technology in the classroom and possible solutions so that participants have a more realistic picture of what they can and will do in specific settings. Additionally, it is critical to take background of the teachers into consideration. Depending on their pedagogical and technological experiences, the course may weigh more on the participants' technological skills or pedagogical knowledge while they are not separate. Other contextual factors such as classroom facilities and educational policies should be taken into careful consideration to design a contextually appropriate technology training course that fosters local language teaching and learning.

There are, however, some limitations in the study. One of them is related to the small sample size of the participants at a particular university in Vietnam, which may limit the implications of the results to other contexts. Thus, more research on TPACK development in various contexts with both in- and pre-service teachers will contribute to deeper

understanding of how and what factors affect their development of TPACK. In addition, the current study only examined four constructs of TPACK framework (i.e., TK, TCK, TPK & TPACK) which were the main focus of the CALL course. Further research can be expanded to include all seven sub-constructs of TPACK to have a fuller understanding of the interrelationship among these constructs across courses, disciplines, and contexts.

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**Appendix A**  
**Survey of pre-service teachers' Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK)**

**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**CIRCLE the scale that best fits your opinion.**

*Key: 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. I can learn technologies and technical skills easily.	4	3	2	1
2. I frequently play around the technologies.	4	3	2	1
3. I frequently use social networking (blogs, wikis, Facebook, Skype).	4	3	2	1
4. I have technical skills to use technologies effectively.	4	3	2	1
5. I keep up with important new technologies.	4	3	2	1
6. I know about a lot of different technologies.	4	3	2	1
7. I know how to solve my own technical problems.	4	3	2	1
8. I know how to design and create the web pages.	4	3	2	1
9. I have learnt about computer and technical skills at school.	4	3	2	1
10. I have had sufficient opportunities to work with various technologies.	4	3	2	1
11. There are a lot of useful technological tools and apps.	4	3	2	1
12. There are a lot of free technological tools and apps.	4	3	2	1
13. I learn better with the aid of technologies.	4	3	2	1
14. I teach better with the aid of technologies.	4	3	2	1
15. Technological knowledge and skills are necessary skills at school.	4	3	2	1
16. I know about technologies that I can use for understanding English.	4	3	2	1
17. I think critically about the use of technologies in language education.	4	3	2	1
18. I can adapt technologies I have learned to my teaching activities.	4	3	2	1
19. I can choose technologies that facilitate my teaching approaches.	4	3	2	1
20. I can choose technologies that enhance the lesson content.	4	3	2	1
21. I can teach lessons that combine language knowledge, technologies and teaching approaches.	4	3	2	1

<i>(Items 22-30 were added in the post-survey)</i>				
22. The CALL course has made me to think deeply about how technologies can be used in class.	4	3	2	1
23. The CALL course has enriched my technological knowledge and skills.	4	3	2	1
24. The CALL course has provided me with useful technologies.	4	3	2	1
25. The CALL course should be made the required course in language teaching program.	4	3	2	1
26. The lab provides sufficient computers for the number of students.	4	3	2	1
27. All of the classrooms in school are equipped with Wi-Fi connection.	4	3	2	1
28. The Internet speed in the classroom/lab is fast.	4	3	2	1
29. There is sufficient time to practice technologies introduced in class.	4	3	2	1
30. I spend time practicing technologies outside class.	4	3	2	1

#### A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**ANSWER or CHECK ✓ the suitable answer.**

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age range: ☐ 18-22 ☐ 23-27 ☐ 28-32
3. How long have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU! ☺

## **Appendix B**

### **List of guiding interview questions**

- Background information (age, major, future plan, etc.)
- Topic questions:
  - When did you start learning computer skills?
  - Do you find computer skills useful to you? Why?
  - How about the CALL course? Is the course helpful to you?
  - How did you practice using the technologies in class? How about outside class?
  - Which technologies do you find the most useful in the course?
  - Did you have any difficulties or problems with technologies in the course? How did you do to solve the problem?
  - Are you teaching or doing any kind of internship right now?
  - If yes, are you applying those technologies? How? Why don't you use other technologies?
  - If not yet, will you use those technologies in your teaching in the future? How? Why don't you use other technologies?
  - What factors may affect your use of technologies in the classroom?
  - Do your computer skills influence the way you teach in the classroom?
  - Is it a good idea to use technologies in every lesson?
  - Is it always easy to integrate technologies into the contents of the lesson?
  - How about the availability of the materials and equipment such as free apps, e-books, computer labs and so on?
  - In your opinions, is it a must for the teachers to know how to integrate technologies into teaching?



## Learning to Write: Effects of Prewriting Tasks on English Writings of Vietnamese Students

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## Abstract

In learning to write in English, students from so-called interdependent cultures might face the clashes of the communication conventions of their mother tongue and of English as a Foreign Language. Prewriting tasks might overcome these difficulties in learning to write in English. The effects of two prewriting tasks, group discussion and free writing, on the length and the quality of English argumentative texts of Vietnamese university students were examined with a two-groups pretest-posttest design with switching replications. Repeated measures analyses of variance indicated both tasks had a positive effect on the productivity and the writing quality, with free writing showing a larger effect on productivity. Limitations as well as implications for learning English as a Foreign Language in interdependent cultures are discussed.

**Keywords:** prewriting tasks, English as a Foreign Language, group discussion, free writing

## Introduction

Embedded within a larger context of Asian culture, Vietnamese inherit the Asian typical traditions of avoiding the expression of their own thoughts towards an issue. Cross-cultural studies (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2009; Triandis, 1995) revealed communication issues that are typical for Asian collectivism culture which emphasize (a) the views, needs, and goals of the in-group rather than of oneself, (b) social norms and duty defined by the in-group rather than pleasure, (c) beliefs *shared* with the in-group rather than beliefs that *distinguish* oneself from the in-group, and (d) great readiness to cooperate with in-group members. In communication, society do not expect that writers express directly and strongly their *I* attitude, intentions and positions, but that they seek conformity to what is socially shared. Therefore, students from so-called interdependent cultures, like Vietnam's, where collective values take precedence over individualism, might lack individualized voice in their second-language (L2) writing (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Li, 1996; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a, 1996b; Rinnert, Kobayashi, & Katayam, 2015; Wu & Rubin, 2001).

A study on writing instruction in Japanese English as a Foreign Language context indicated that teachers focused their writing instruction on grammatical correctness at the expense of content and that free composition, which requires students to express their ideas, was seldom employed in classrooms (Yasuda, 2014). In English L2 classes, producing a

meaningfully written discourse in English requires a high cognitive effort of the students. The challenges they face are English-L2 word or grammar-related difficulties as well as L2 genre conventions which are different from what they are used to in their mother tongue (L1). In their L1 writing classes, they are expected to respect socially accepted points of view and traditional values of their culture, and express their personal thoughts in reference to what other people in their community might think. On the contrary, English L2 writing classes require them to set their own stance and support their stance with their own perspective. Prewriting tasks in Vietnamese English L2 classes, such as encouraging students' personal potential, autonomous learning, and sharing knowledge, might soften these difficulties and support students in their writing. In the current study, effects were examined of two prewriting tasks (free writing and group discussion) which aimed at supporting Vietnamese students in their cultural challenges in EFL academic argumentative writing.

*Learning to write in English in Vietnamese higher education*

“When I look at a new topic, I do not have any idea to write [about] the topic and consequently my text is a boring and not persuasive text.”

(Linh, one of the Vietnamese students participating in this study)

In the quotation presented above, student Linh, a Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writer student, shared her problems in the first meeting of this study when facing the writing task “writing for or against a crime punishment”, a task which is extracted from her Anglophone EFL writing text book.

In compliance with the essential requirements of Vietnam in the new era of an open, global-oriented economy, in academia, undergraduate Vietnamese students are required to reach the standard of writing academically in one foreign language. The emphasis is mostly on English because of its role as the most popular lingua franca at present. In teaching L2 writing skills, different genres can be distinguished of which the narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative are those commonly mentioned. Writing argumentative and expository texts is more cognitively demanding than writing a narrative and descriptive texts (Weigle, 2002).

Because of its relevance in academic discourse, the argumentative genre has been one of the most favoured genres in teaching writing skills. Vietnamese university students, embedded in a larger Asian community, are required to convey reproductive knowledge in academic writing and are most of the times not asked to go beyond the declarative knowledge stated in their course-book or provided by their teachers (Phan, 2011), although this view of

Asia students as passive rote-learners has been challenged by Wang (2011). Students get used to the method of teaching that tends to emphasize the memory of commonly accepted knowledge. From a sociocultural perspective, this non-availability of individualized voice of Vietnamese students could be traced back to the established norms embedded in the two different L1 and L2 cultures (Hamano, 2008; Peyser, Gerard, & Roegiers, 2006; Saito & Tsukui, 2008).

L1-L2 differences in what academic writing requires are also reflected in genres and conventions. First, academic writing in mother tongue of Vietnamese EFL writer students is not a subject per se; writing is about literary fiction instead. Linguistic features of mother tongue writing and discourse essays in simple forms, like narrative letters, are taught in lower education (primary, lower-secondary level). In upper-secondary level, academic writing is writing about aspects of literary stories such as writing about the character(s) or discussing the thematic issues of a story. How to write those literature-related academic essays, yet, is not taught in schools (Pham, 2007, 2011; Phan, 2011).

Second, writing in Vietnamese lessons is a means for Vietnamese students to show, and for teachers to examine, to what extent the students have internalized the transmittable traditions and values of their culture in a literary work and rearticulate them in a traditional writing form (see further discussions of Phan (2011) on Vietnamese writing). On the contrary, L2 academic writing places emphasis on writers' uniqueness, such as the writing task for student Linh above requiring the writer's own stance and supportive arguments. In conclusion, the argumentative writing genre and the writing conventions expected of that genre, which is closely related to L1 Anglophone cultures or settings, are far from the Vietnamese students' experience in their mother language writing.

### *Prewriting tasks in learning to write*

Prewriting tasks in Vietnamese English L2 classes might help to overcome students' experienced difficulties and support them in their writing. Prewriting can be seen as a process of discovery, allowing for mistakes and restarts. It mostly occurs at the beginning of writing process, but more and more, teachers are encouraging students to use this technique whenever they are writing. In a meta-analysis of single subject design writing intervention research, Rogers and Graham (2008) reported a few empirical research studies examining prewriting tasks: using a computer prewriting outline to generate and organize information (Channon, 2004), learning to use a graphic organizer for generating ideas prior to persuasive writing (Thanhouser, 1994), and learning to use a story web for generating ideas prior to

writing (Zipprich, 1995). Although these studies reported positive effects on improving writing quality, the effect sizes were small.

In another meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental studies on writing instruction, Graham and Perin (2007) found that studies on particular prewriting tasks before composing were found to have a positive, yet small impact on writing quality. These prewriting tasks included encouraging planning before writing (Brodney, Reeves, & Kazelskis, 1999), group and individual planning before writing (Vinson, 1980), organizing prewriting ideas by means of a semantic web (Loader, 1989), and prompting planning following a brief demonstration of how to plan (Reece & Cumming, 1996).

In a more recent review, Byrd (2011) lists six types of prewriting tasks and their effectiveness for generation of ideas and writing quality: 1) brainstorming, 2) clustering through e.g. mind maps, 3) drawing, 4) graphic organizers, 5) small-group discussions, and 6) free writing. The author suggests to grade student prewriting activities in order to stimulate students' participation as otherwise prewriting might not be taken seriously. He also concludes that prewriting activities will not become a cure-all for writing assignments and that with some encouragements students probably use these techniques on their own, regardless of where they may be in the writing process.

In a recent study of Joaquin, Kim and Shin (2016), these "spontaneous" prewriting activities were examined of students taking an English as a Second Language placement examination. They coded students' notes to examine five types of prewriting activities: 1) drafting, 2) freewriting, 3) outlining, 4) listing and 5) clustering. The small majority of the 513 students used prewriting with outlining (52%) and listing (29%) as the most frequently applied prewriting techniques. Students who prewrote outperformed those who did not and - although freewriting seemed to be related with higher essay exam scores- differences between the types of prewriting were not statistically significant. The authors did find a significant relationship between the elaborateness of students' prewriting and their essay scores: Students who were elaborated in their prewritings had higher exam scores compared to those who applied prewriting in a minimal way.

Based on the findings from the reviews and studies described above, we selected two prewriting tasks for our study that support the generation of content and consequently enhance the quality of argumentation as well as fit with the cultural context of Vietnamese higher education: free writing and group discussion.

Free writing has been reviewed as an effective tool for generating content which was sometimes even new to writers (Elbow, 1973). This activity can boost ideas embedded in

each person to come out. The writers' personal stance, belief in an issue at stake, can be revealed through an act of personal free writing. Moreover, unstructured, informal free writing is expected to prevent as well as ameliorate possible writing difficulties caused by L2 formal language usage constraints. Free writing is found to have an effect (compared to structured writing instruction) on text quality (Hillocks, 1986; Gomez, et al., 1996), although generally with small effect sizes. In free writing, arguments are generated by students individually, without being shared in a peer group.

Group discussion is a way to share ideas in a peer group before individual writing. Group discussion and its positive effects on idea generation was discussed in many empirical studies: effects of text-centred discussion on higher-order thinking and critical literacy (Engler, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006), of classroom discussion on development of subject knowledge and understanding (Corden, 2001; Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007; Weber, et al, 2008), and of discussion and arousing multiple viewpoints about complex issues and problems (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). Moreover, positive effects of group discussion and collaborative discourse were also found for the quality of L2 writing in general (Mirzaei & Islami, 2015). Group discussion offers students the possibility to share their ideas in their mother tongue, which might be particularly beneficial for beginning L2 learners (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012). Yet as with other writing pedagogies group discussion pedagogy should align with the Asian context in which it is implemented. Phuong-Mai et al., (2009) examined collaborative learning settings in Hanoi, Vietnam. The authors concluded that students showed more effort in learning and higher grades when collaborative learning was organized in way that were considered to be culturally appropriate (i.e., group composition based on friendship grouping and a formal group leader appointed).

### **Problem of the study**

In a Vietnamese English L2 context, two prewriting tasks -free-writing and group discussion- might affect both the number and the quality of ideas in students' writing assignments. The main research question of this study was as follows: "What are the effects of the two prewriting content generation tasks, free-writing and group discussion, on the productivity and the quality of EFL argumentative texts of Vietnamese students?" Three hypotheses were formulated:

- 1) Both group discussion and free writing result in an increase of students' productivity (indicated by the length of argumentative texts);

- 2) Both group discussion and free writing lead to an increase in quality of the argumentative text, and
- 3) Free writing results in a larger increase in productivity and quality of argumentative texts than group discussion.

## Method

The research design of this study was a two-groups pretest - posttest design with a triple pretest using switching replications, combining various quasi-experimental designs (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; see Table 1). The design allowed us to examine the effect of the two treatments (i.e. prewriting tasks) twice, at Time 2 (T2) and Time 3(T3), with the triple pretest as baseline measurement.

**Table 1. Experimental design**

Group	Baseline T1	Panel 1	Posttest 1 T2	Panel 2	Posttest 2 T3
G-F (n= 33)	O1-2-3	Group discussion	O4	Free writing	O5
F-G (n= 33)	O1-2-3	Free writing	O4	Group discussion	O5

Note: G-F = Group-discussion in panel 1 and Free-writing in panel 2;  
 F-G = Free-writing in panel 1 and Group-discussion in panel 2;  
 O = measurements (1 to 5).

### *Procedure and prewriting tasks*

The study was carried out in four weeks (three meetings of 2.30 hrs/ meeting for each group per week) in a large university in Southern Vietnam. Students received credits and grades for completing the course, a compulsory part of their Bachelor's degree. The teacher informed the students of the experiment's purpose and that the data from the course would be used for research and treated confidentially. She explained that all students would have exactly the same learning tasks and writing assignments, however, in a different sequence. Participation in this study was voluntary and although all students were offered the possibility to opt out at all times, no one did. All students had to do the assignments as part of their course work. Instead of a no-exposure/untreated control group in which the effect of intervention found in the experimental group would be simply attributed to the lack of treatment operation in the control group, we implemented two prewriting tasks, in which all students participated in, but in a different sequence. Time, the level of input materials and types of activities for each parallel operation in the sequence of the two prewriting tasks were

the same.

In Table 2, we summarize both tasks and present the sequence of all learning activities for both groups. After both groups swapped tasks, the same programme was implemented (panel 2). In the group discussion task, students were invited to look at two prompt pictures of their topic and note their immediate thinking (Stage 1. Topic involvement). Then they formed smaller groups of four members: each person shared his viewpoint and pros and/or cons of the issue in their group and noted the sharing on one large A3 paper (Stage 2. Exploring pros and cons). Students were asked to share individual ideas instead of judging or challenging their group members' ideas. In the free-writing task, students were invited to be involved in an argumentative topic with looking at the two pictures of their topic, and do the free writing on the topic through keeping on writing freely until time was up. After stage 2, both tasks were the same.

**Table 2: Six stages of the experimental course with two prewriting tasks (differences are written in italics)**

Group discussion	Free writing
1. Topic involvement (10 minutes)	
Looking at some pictures of the issue at stake	
<i>Jotting down the immediate thinking</i>	<i>Free writing</i>
2. Exploring pros & cons (20 minutes)	
<i>Sharing and discussing each member's own viewpoint and pro and/or contra of the issue in group</i>	<i>Forming a stance and figuring the rebuttals: examining pro and contra statements/arguments about the issue provided by the teacher; identifying the level of agreement to the statements and stating reasons</i>
3. Elaborating the topic (30 minutes)	
Reading documents (students read and select information from provided sources)	
4. Sample analysis (20 minutes)	
Reading and analyzing the context of writing, point of view of the writer, built-in audience, component and purpose of each component and what-could-be-improved of a sample text	
5. Writing preparation (20 minutes)	
Planning individually the organization and content frame of the essay on the issue at stake with a text-element schema provided by teacher (a 5-element schema with 5 blank spaces for one introduction, two arguments, one counterargument and one conclusion); students are free in adding more elements in the basic schema.	
6. Writing (60 minutes)	
Writing a full argumentative text on the issue at stake in 60 minutes, at the expected length of 250 words.	



### *Participants*

Participants were 66 students of EFL intermediate level and of two age groups (19-21 and 22-27) in a university in Vietnam. They were all from Mekong Delta Vietnam, sharing similar social, cultural, demographical and economic context. The proportion of females (69%) is common for language classes in Vietnam. Of the participants, 14% were from the ethnic minority group Khmer and they were equally represented in both intervention groups and both age groups. The younger age group included academic students who were full-time students of the undergraduate training programme of the university; the older group included post-academic students who had previously finished a part of the university undergraduate training programme and at the time of the experiment came back to the university, as part-time students in the evenings, to complete the undergraduate programme. From the two age groups students were randomly assigned to Group G-F (14 academic students and 19 post-academic students) and Group F-G (13 academic students and 20 post-academic students). Although there might be a difference in life experience, working experience, and problem solving ability between the younger students and the older students, both groups were ranked by the university as at intermediate level in EFL competence. Both groups were taught by the same teacher.

### *Data collection*

Data consisted of the final texts collected. Students wrote an argumentative text in 70 minutes. As shown in Table 1, data was gathered at three moments: just before the start of the course (pre-test scores were based on three essays on three argumentative topics per student, see Table 3), just after the experimental round 1 (panel 1; posttest 1) and after the experimental round 2, when both groups had swapped, at the end of the course (panel 2; posttest 2). Six students were absent at one of the pre-tests and one student was absent at the first posttest. In total, 192 texts during the pre-tests, 65 texts during the first posttest and 66 during the second posttest were collected. All handwritten texts were typed to reduce the effect of handwriting quality on raters' assessment. To create a replication as exactly as possible, two argumentative topics were assigned randomly to posttest 1 and posttest 2 (see Table 3). The two topics included Animal Testing (topic D) and Capital Punishment (topic E) and were considered as similar in the level of controversy. All assignments were from the course book used in English L2 writing classes.

**Table 3: Allocation of topic**

Group	Pretests 1,2,3	Posttest 1	Posttest 2
G-F (n= 33)	Topic A, B, C	Topic D	Topic E
F-G (n= 33)		Topic E	Topic D

### *Productivity and quality of the argumentative texts*

*Productivity* was measured by the length of the end text produced in terms of number of words with a range from 0 to  $\infty$ . *Text quality* was the quality of the argumentative text. We adapted the scale for the measurement of text quality of Hamp-Lyons (1991). We revised the layout of the scale, de-emphasized the language skills, such as grammatical structure and vocabulary, and focused on “position/stance support”, “complexity of arguments”, and “rhetorical features” which were the three main components of a good argumentative text that we expected the students to get improvement in. Each text was judged according to the rating scale, using an anchor text, a better and a worse text, and scored between 0 and  $\infty$ . We first organized one trial rating session to establish the clarity of the analytic description of the anchor text, the better text, and the worse text, as well as to clarify the scoring rule of judging a text in comparison to the anchor text and in reference to the rating scale. Then the 192 argumentative texts were rated by 17 Master students in English of a Dutch university. Each text was judged by three different raters. We used the mean score per text as the score for text quality although the inter-rater reliability between the 3 raters per text was high ( $r = 0.80$ ).

### *Analyses*

To observe an effect of the two prewriting tasks in panel 1 and 2 separately, we applied repeated measures analyses of variance with time and condition (i.c. prewriting task) as independent factors, and text length and text quality as dependent variables. Pre-test scores of productivity and text quality were included as covariates in all analyses. As the correlations between the dependent variables at posttest 1 and posttest 2 were not significant (posttest 1:  $r = 0.22$ ;  $p = 0.08$ ; posttest2:  $r = 0.20$ ), univariate analyses were performed.

## **Results**

### *Productivity*

The results are presented in Table 4. With respect to productivity our hypothesis was confirmed. As hypothesized we found an effect of both prewriting tasks, in panel 1 ( $F(1,62) =$

6.07;  $p = .02$ ;  $\eta^2 = .09$ ) and in panel 2 ( $F(1,63) = 7.04$ ;  $p = .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .11$ ). This means that both group discussion and free writing increased students' productivity in their texts. Yet, we also found an interaction effect of time by condition, which showed that free writing increased productivity more than group discussion, in panel 1 ( $F(1,62) = 6.01$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ;  $\eta^2 = .09$ ) and in panel 2 ( $F(1,63) = 12.28$ ;  $p = .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .16$ ). In all instances, the significant effects can be understood as medium to large effects (Cohen, 1988). The findings with respect to productivity are graphically presented in Figures 1a and 1b.

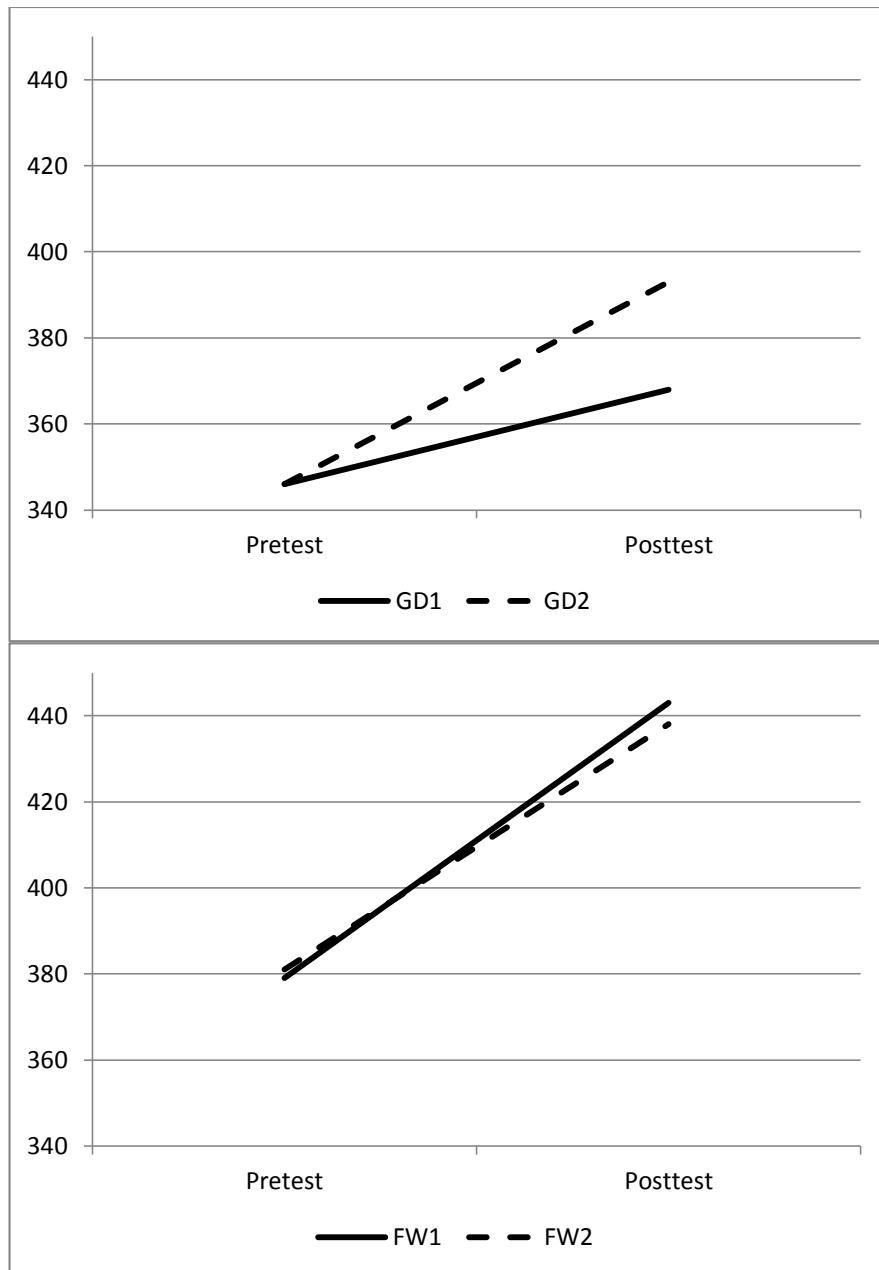
**Table 4: Results for productivity and text quality with means and standard deviations (in brackets)**

		Panel 1	
		Pretest	Posttest 1
Productivity	GD1	346.27 (77.07)	367.94 (76.46)
	FW1	379.07 (93.33)	443.28 (115.52)
Text quality	GD1	111.67 (39.44)	151.29 (74.05)
	FW1	135.80 (60.17)	160.81 (100.07)
		Panel 2	
		Pretest	Posttest 2
Productivity	GD2	346.27 (77.07)	392.70 (99.18)
	FW2	381.44 (92.87)	438.36 (108.19)
Text quality	GD2	111.67 (39.44)	163.18 (84.53)
	FW2	135.34 (59.28)	142.65 (72.49)

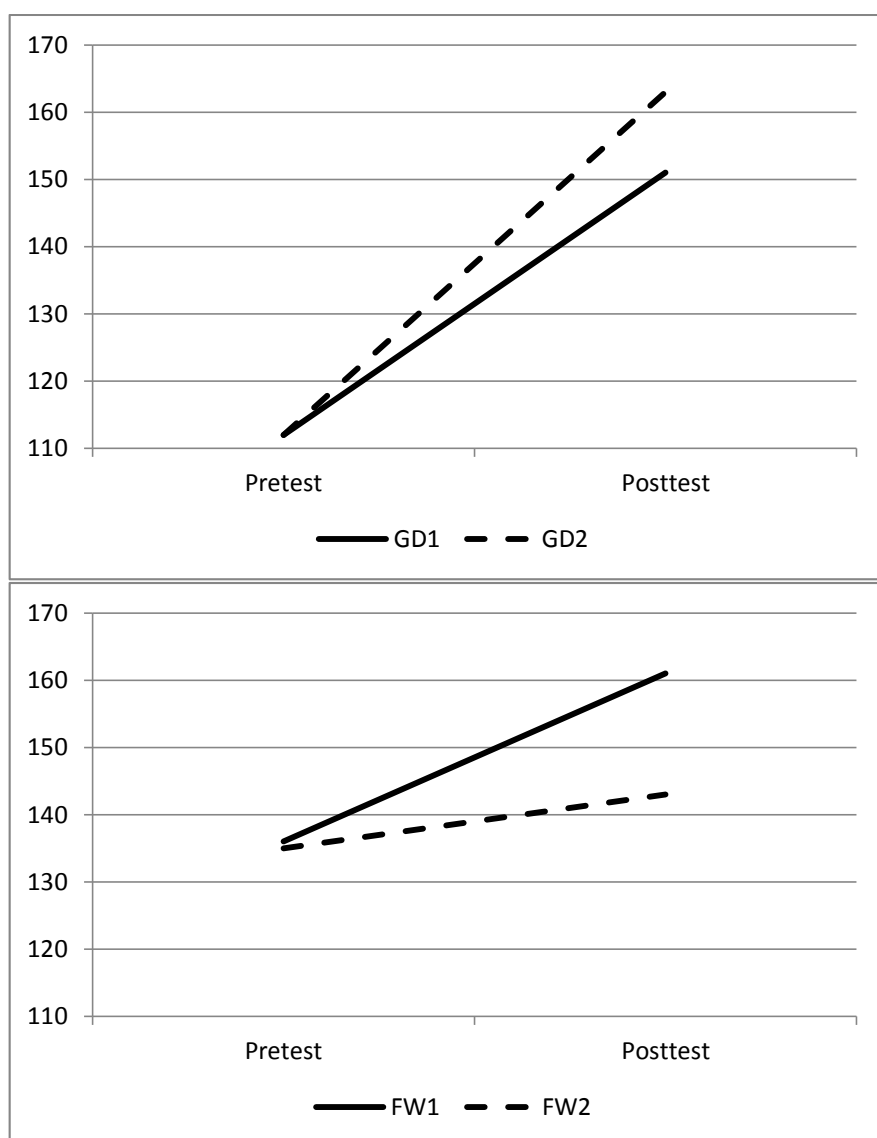
Note: GD = Group discussion and FW = Free writing

### *Text quality*

With respect to text quality, our hypothesis was partly confirmed. As hypothesized we found an effect of both prewriting tasks, in panel 1 ( $F(1,62) = 8.43$ ;  $p = .005$ ;  $\eta^2 = .12$ ) and in panel 2 ( $F(1,63) = 6.88$ ;  $p = .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .10$ ). This means that both group discussion and free writing increased the quality of students' argumentative texts. No significant interaction effect of time by condition was found, neither in panel 1 ( $F(1,62) = 0.06$ ;  $p = .81$ ) nor in panel 2 ( $F(1,63) = 0.07$ ;  $p = .79$ ). This means we cannot conclude that free writing and group discussion differed in their effects on text quality. In all instances, the significant effects can be understood as medium to large effects (Cohen, 1988). The findings with respect to text quality are graphically presented in Figures 2a and 2b.



*Figures 1a and 1b. Graphical presentation of the findings on productivity (with the two Group discussion groups (GD) in the figure on top and the two Free writing groups (FW) in the figure at the bottom)*



*Figures 2a and 2b. Graphical presentation of the findings on text quality (with the two Group discussion groups (GD) in the figure on top and the two Free writing groups (FW) in the figure at the bottom)*

## Discussion

Students' learning to write in English was studied in a university context in Vietnam. The effects of two prewriting tasks, free writing and group discussion, on students' productivity and the quality of their writings were examined. The first two hypotheses about productivity and text quality were confirmed: both group discussion and free writing had a positive effect on students' productivity and on the quality of their argumentative texts. These findings are in line with conclusions from literature on positive effects of prewriting (Joaquin et al., 2016) and of free writing and group discussion on idea generation in particular (Elbow, 1973; Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006) and text quality (Mirzaei & Islami, 2015). In

addition, we found an additional effect of free writing on students' productivity, which implies that an individual writing activity as a prewriting task leads to more extended final writings compared to sharing ideas with peers orally. Probably, the group setting directed students more to maintain group harmony instead of elaborating ideas, compared to the free - writing activity (cf., Phuong-Mai et al., 2005). Another explanation of this additional effect of individual freewriting compared to group discussion might be the way group discussion was implemented in the course of the current study. As Phuong-Mai et al. (2009) concluded in their study on collaborative learning, collaborative learning pedagogy should be aligned to the educational and cultural context in which it is implemented in order to be effective. According to the findings of their study, friendship grouping and formal leadership were two ingredients of effective collaborative learning settings. The way group discussion was implemented in the current study, without formal leadership in the groups, might explain the less positive effects of group discussion, compared to individual free writing.

### *Limitations*

In this study, we opted for the research design with switching replication to replicate the findings as fair as possible: both free-writing treatments (in panels 1 and 2) were measured with the same writing task and same writing topic (topic E), and, similarly, both group-discussion treatments (in panels 1 and 2) were measured with the same writing task and same writing topic (topic D). This choice for replication might be at the cost of generalization as topic knowledge might affect text quality (McCutchen, Teske, & Blankston, 2008). However, one counter finding that a topic effect did not occur might be that text quality was not different between posttest 1 and posttest 2 within each experimental condition.

### *Conclusions and implications*

Both prewriting tasks of this study -group discussion and individual free writing- positively affected students' argumentative writing in EFL classes. These two types of instructional tasks might help Vietnamese students to overcome their reluctance to put their ideas on paper and to achieve a better quality of their L2 argumentative writing texts. Free writing seems to have an additional positive effect on students' productivity, which might be an issue for Vietnamese students as illustrated by the quotation of student Linh in the beginning of his paper. While the result needs to be confirmed through further research, it may be interesting if we relate the finding of individual free writing and group discussion on increasing productivity and text quality to what cross-cultural studies revealed of

communication characteristics of Asian students: Asian students are reported to feel confident, certain in what is valued, suggested by the group, rather than what is individually valued and originated. Students seem to bring their L1 communication practice into L2 text performance, but a guided prewriting task that is closely connected to what is expected in L2 classroom might change this pattern.

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## **Investigating the Needs of Chinese EFL Teachers in a US-Based TESOL Program: A Case Study**

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### **Bioprofiles**

**Nathaniel Murray** is a doctoral candidate in ESOL and Bilingual Education. His current research focuses on the training of native Chinese speakers to be English teachers. He received his master's degree from the University of Edinburgh (UK) and was an English teacher in mainland China and Taiwan for four years. He may be reached at nmurray@ufl.edu.

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### **Abstract**

US-based TESOL graduate programs are experiencing a significant increase in the enrollment of international students who plan to teach English in their home countries. However, many of these TESOL programs were originally designed for local American teaching contexts, leading to a mismatch between the preparation that these programs provide and the kind of preparation that international students need. The present study investigated the teaching and learning needs of current Chinese students at a single TESOL program. On-campus focus groups were conducted with currently-enrolled students. Subsequently, recently-graduated students were visited at their current teaching sites in mainland China and Taiwan. Recommendations regarding how the TESOL program could make programmatic adaptations to better meet the needs of its Chinese population and implications for how other US-based

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TESOL programs could conduct similar needs assessments of their own international student populations, are offered.

**Keywords:** non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST), English as a Foreign Language

(EFL), teacher preparation, China, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

## Introduction

Most English teachers in the world today are not native English speakers, but native to the countries in which they teach (Crystal, 2012, p. 137). An increasing number of these teachers come to the United States in the hopes of improving their English teaching skills. They enroll in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) graduate programs, with the intent of returning home to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, many US-based TESOL programs were originally designed to prepare American teachers to work in English as a Second Language (ESL) settings, which focus more heavily on the social, civic, and academic integration of immigrants within mainstream American society (Stapleton & Shao, 2016). The mismatch between what ESL programs were designed for and what EFL teachers are looking for raises an important question about how such a program is able to meet the learning needs of international students who plan to teach in a non-English speaking country (Kamhi-Stein, 2009). However, while many studies have addressed this topic more generally, few studies have examined a specific TESOL program and made recommendations for how that program could be adapted to better meet the needs of its international students. The present study fills this gap.

The present study investigated the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program of one university in the southeastern United States. The ESOL program, based in the university's College of Education, was originally designed to serve the ESL needs of the state's large Latino immigrant population. The program was created following state legislation which mandated that public school teachers receive training to better serve the needs of the English language learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. In the beginning, most of the students in the ESOL program were American in-service or pre-service public school teachers seeking the state-mandated ESOL credentials. Since 1990, the state has required all K-12 public school teachers to receive varying levels of ESOL preparation. Over the past decade, however, the student demographic in the university's ESOL program has shifted significantly, to the point where Chinese students now comprise the majority of the program's

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the term *TESOL* will be used to refer to US-based English teacher training programs generally, while the term *ESOL* will be used to refer specifically to the program under study. In student body, while the originally-targeted American teachers have become the minority. In

effect, a program that was designed for ESL contexts in the US now has a majority of students who plan to teach in EFL contexts in mainland China and Taiwan.

The present study investigated currently-enrolled and recently-graduated Chinese students' perceptions of the program. It further sought to analyze how the program might be adapted to meet the needs of Chinese students who will return home to teach EFL. Recommendations are offered for programmatic changes. In addition, this study attempts to provide a model for other TESOL graduate programs in the US who may be considering making their own programmatic adaptations to better meet the needs of the growing number of international graduate students in their classrooms.

## **Literature review**

Since the late 1980s, there has been extensive literature on the subject of non-native English speakers (NNES) who are teachers of English. Much of this literature has focused on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of native versus non-native speakers as English teachers (Kang, 2015; Lee & Lew, 2001; Liu, 1999a, 1999b; Ma, 2012; Medgyes, 1994; Nemtchinova, 2005; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Collectively, these authors conclude that NNES have several advantages: they are typically from the same cultural background as their students, which enables them to establish a greater rapport; and they are English learners themselves, which makes them more aware of their students' particular language learning challenges. At the same time, however, some studies (e.g., Ma, 2015) concede that native English speakers (NES) are sometimes able to create communicative lessons, while NNES may be more grammar-focused and, hence, less enjoyable from the students' perspective (pp. 34-35). In addition, scholars have been questioning the usefulness of the native-nonnative dichotomy in the first place, and have advocated a new theoretical paradigm that focuses on teachers' current abilities instead of on their linguistic backgrounds (Crandall & Christison, 2016; Farrell, 2015).

Other scholars have focused on the need to better assist NNES TESOL students with their language anxieties, to better integrate them into professional communities, and to provide them with greater opportunities to actually shape the TESOL field (Braine, 2010; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; England & Roberts, 1989; Kamhi-Stein, 1999, 2000; Snow, 2005). Along those lines, Park (2012) conducted a life history of a Chinese NNES and concluded that US-based TESOL programs should become more culturally-responsive to international students and provide them with the skills to develop or modify existing materials for their particular teaching contexts. Several studies have also explored the need to

build NNES students' language fluency as part of their TESOL training (Kamhi-Stein, 2009; Medgyes, 1999). These studies demonstrate the importance of treating NNES TESOL students not as having a deficiency but as being uniquely qualified to lead the TESOL field as it continues to internationalize and respond to growing international demands for English.

Addressing that trend, some studies have investigated how TESOL programs might be adapted to become more relevant to the NNES'EFL teaching contexts. Studies such as Liu (1999) and Lo (2005) collectively had some of the following findings: First, second language acquisition (SLA) theories needed to be modified based on data gathered from EFL contexts, and TESOL program faculty should not assume that everyone regardless of home country learns English in the exact same way. Second, TESOL programs needed to provide their international students with greater opportunities to modify curriculum materials and pedagogies, in order to make them more suitable for the EFL contexts in which they will be used. Third, American higher education faculty often make a distinction between research-oriented work and practitioner-oriented work, whereas educational environments in foreign countries often integrate the two much more closely; this means that international students should be provided with greater opportunities to engage in both types of work during their TESOL studies. In addition, Li and Tin (2013) found that international students needed more classroom teaching opportunities. These studies highlight the need to provide international students with more opportunities to contribute their own background knowledge and experience to their TESOL studies, instead of simply being told how to teach or how languages are learned.

More recent studies have explored the complex processes of Western-trained Chinese English teachers' identity formation and implementation of their Western training in China. For instance, Hong and Pawan (2014) found that Western-trained EFL teachers in China met with mixed results as they attempted to navigate the complex cultural and institutional factors of their home classroom environments. Similarly, Ileva, Li, and Li (2015) found that Chinese students in a Canadian TESOL program tend to have a hybrid sense of identity, occupying a "third space" (n. p.) that is neither Chinese nor Western, thus finding it difficult to know where exactly they fit within their home teaching environments. Studies such as these ones underscore the ways that globalization and super-diversity are shaping twenty-first century English language teaching and learning environments (Blommaert, 2010; Spring, 2007).

In addition to the studies just described, several meta-studies and literature reviews have identified gaps in the academic literature that require further attention. Moussu and Llurda (2008), in their comprehensive literature review of NNS in TESOL, found that there

needed to be more classroom observations of what actually occurs inside EFL classrooms. Likewise, Soheili-Mehr (2008) conducted a comparative meta-study of several edited volumes (including Braine, 2005; Khami-Stein, 2004; and Llurda, 2005). The study concluded that much of the literature remains aimed largely at Western readers and focuses largely on the TESOL programs themselves, whereas more literature needed to focus on the actual classroom environments in which the NNES teachers teach. Collectively, this literature points to the need to conduct more field research on the campuses and in the classrooms of the EFL environments themselves.

Despite the breadth and timeliness of the research to date, several gaps in the research still exist. Firstly, many prior studies discuss general issues relating to TESOL programs without examining a specific program. In cases where they did examine a specific program, they usually examined an individual course or component of that program rather than the program as a whole. Few studies have conducted a holistic examination of an entire TESOL program and the skills that it teaches. Secondly, many studies have focused on a single participant or small group of participants from diverse geographic regions. Few studies have made a detailed examination of a large number of current and former students from the same geographic region, with a focus on the specific teaching contexts in that region. Thirdly, while many studies have involved geographically-neutral collection methods such as surveys and journals, their onsite collection of data has generally been limited to a single research site—the US campus of the TESOL program. Few studies have involved onsite data collection at the graduates' EFL teaching environments in their home countries. Fourthly, most studies have addressed the collective needs of the graduate students of a program. Few studies have conducted a detailed inquiry into the differing needs of Master's and PhD students. The present study is intended to fill these four gaps.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

Participants were selected from among the Chinese graduate students of the university's ESOL program, both Master's and PhD. Participants were either currently enrolled in the program, or had already graduated and were teaching English in their home communities. In total, 20 current Master's students (17 female, three male) and six graduates of the program (two Master's and four PhD, all female) were recruited through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Participants were selected based on four criteria: (a) their mainland Chinese or Taiwanese nationality; (b) Mandarin as their first language; (c) current enrollment or

graduation within the past three years; and (d) intent to or currently returned to their home communities to teach.

### *Data collection*

Data collection was conducted in two phases. In the spring of 2015, the 20 currently-enrolled students were divided into three focus groups, with each focus group interview lasting approximately two hours. Focus groups were chosen as the collection method because of the potential for interactions between the participants to further stimulate ideas (Hatch, 2002). Later that summer, the first author traveled to mainland China and Taiwan to visit the six graduates at their individual schools. The graduates were geographically varied: two were in Beijing, one was in Shenzhen, one was in Guangzhou, and two were in Taiwan. Their teaching positions were equally varied: one was working as an assistant professor at a university of science and technology, one was a lecturer at a vocational college, one was a lecturer at a language training and research college, one was an SAT and TOEFL instructor at a standardized test preparation school, one was an assistant professor at a liberal arts university, and one was the principal of an experimental private school.

Most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in Mandarin by the first author, who had been an English teacher himself at various schools and universities in Beijing and Taipei for four years, and who speaks Mandarin. Twenty-three hours of audio recordings were collected and transcribed, leading to 154 pages of verbatim and thematic transcripts. Translation was conducted by the first author. The most salient findings are described in the Findings section.

All the interviews and focus groups were conducted in a semi-structured format, with overarching questions to frame the discussions while providing flexibility to cover different topics depending on the interests and experiences of the individual participants (Bernard, 2013). The following were the three overarching questions:

1. What motivated you to apply to the ESOL program?
2. What knowledge or skills from the program do you find most useful and relevant for your current or future teaching contexts?
3. What other knowledge or skills do you believe are necessary in order to become an effective teaching in your local teaching contexts?

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis began with Merriam's (2009) guidelines for category construction. Open coding was used, with themes being identified through participants' repetitions, analogies, and comparisons (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Analysis then transitioned from inductive



discovery to deductive confirmation (Merriam, 2009). At this stage, the authors engaged in a process of pattern coding, the consolidation and recombination of codes into a smaller and smaller number of ‘baskets’, and the gradual transition from descriptive codes to inferential codes to explain reasons for the participants’ beliefs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This transition to inferential codes led to the identification of principal themes (Hatch, 2002).

## **Findings**

The three principal themes that emerged from the data were: (1) the need for improved career development support, (2) the need for more diversified teacher preparation, and (3) the need for more explicit training of personal qualities.

### *Career development*

#### *Professional skills*

Roughly half of the participants had prior EFL teaching experience and sought to further develop their teaching skills to continue in that career. This was especially true of the PhD graduates, all of whom had previously received their Master’s degrees in the US or Australia, and all of whom were planning to be—or had already been—university faculty in their home communities. The participants who did not have prior teaching experience, namely, many of those participants enrolled at the Master’s degree level, were considering a teaching career and were seeking broader exposure to international education issues while simultaneously gaining a variety of job-related skills that could serve them in any career. As one participant put it: “I like education, but I’m still exploring what I want to do in the future. I came here because I would like to learn English, but I’m also interested in culture, the whole context, the whole system. Because I don’t know what I want to do, so just see, look around” (Focus group 2, participant 2). Other participants were less specific about their careers: “Even if you don’t plan to be an English teacher, you can still learn many skills, such as research, writing, public speaking, many skills that are useful in any career” (Focus group 1, participant 1). This comment demonstrated how many of the students who were pursuing their Master’s degrees abroad tended to do so partly for the degree, to build broad skill sets related to employment, and to gain experience from foreign travel.

#### *Common L1 and cultural background*

Regarding employment, many of the participants believed that it would be generally infeasible for them to attempt to teach ESL in the US. One of the participants put it as follows:

For most of the Chinese students, I think most of them are not capable of teaching in the United States. For example, the advantage of us Chinese as teachers is that, first, we can speak Chinese. Second, we can speak English. But if our students are Hispanic, from Hispanic or other countries, we no longer have an advantage, we lose our advantage. So our competitiveness is not as strong as native speakers, we have no advantage compared with native speakers. (Focus group 2, participant 3)

In other words, the participants believed that one of their primary advantages as EFL teachers was that they came from the same cultural background as their students. They felt that in EFL contexts, they could use their first language (L1) as an additional tool if necessary. In addition, since they had been through the same EFL classes and English learning process as their students had, they felt that they could connect with their students more deeply. Participants viewed these as important advantages for their future teaching contexts. However, they were seldom given the opportunity to make use of these advantages during their ESOL studies, because the ESOL material was highly specific to American public school contexts where those advantages often did not exist. Yet many of the participants also felt that much of the material they did receive would not be as helpful to them back in China. In effect, many participants believed that they were at a double disadvantage, unable to teach English either in the US or in China:

We cannot use our first language as a tool in the real teaching settings [in the US]. So in my opinion, most Chinese students will not find teaching jobs in the US. Most of us need to go back to China. But what you teach us is also not useful to us back in China. (Focus group 2, participant 4)

### *Teacher preparation*

#### *Linguistics*

One of the ESOL program's core courses is Language Principles, which focuses on language acquisition theories such as behaviorism, cognitivism, and social interactionism. These theories were generally taught with an emphasis on making American pre-service teachers more aware of the linguistic challenges that immigrant children often face in American public school classrooms. There were two principal objectives in teaching these theories. Firstly, to correct many of the misperceptions that American teachers might have about second language learning. Secondly, to train those teachers in how to provide the necessary linguistic supports to better facilitate their English learners' social integration and academic performance in their regular K-12 subject classes. Participants found certain parts of this content useful, such as the distinction between social and academic English. However,

on the whole they felt that the course placed too strong of an emphasis on the social aspects of language learning and less on how to analyze the structures of language itself: linguistics. One participant noted:

I believe linguistics is very practical, very helpful for education. Linguistics is a support for English, it includes phonetics to phonology, it has many diverse uses in a teaching environment. For example, the “T” sound in English, it can be pronounced as a stop or as a flap, like “tap” or “letter.” But the ESOL program does not provide us with that linguistics support. (Focus group 2, participant 3)

Participants were encouraged to take courses from the Linguistics Department when their programs of study, their individualized study plans, had space or gaps for elective coursework at the university. However, those participants who went to the Linguistics Department generally found the material to be too challenging and technical in terms of language and background knowledge required to do well in the linguistics course. Another participant stated:

Those linguistics courses were made for undergraduates in the Linguistics Department who wanted to concentrate on education. They were extremely technical, you have to have the linguistics background, but I did not. I did not realize that you needed to have the prerequisites for the course. Even though I actually spent so much time and energy in the course, I still did not get a lot of helpful information from it, because it was too abstract for me. If you don’t have the background, then you essentially do not understand the basic concepts. (Focus group 2, participant 5)

The linguistics courses were typically designed to be taken in a certain sequence by majors of that department. They were generally not designed for people outside the department to come in and take individual courses. Thus, participants felt that their needs were not being met either by the Linguistics Department or by the College of Education. In fact, participants found that these two departments were often institutionally and ideologically antagonistic to each other:

I think their understanding of the learning approach is different. The Linguistics Department sees language as something that you can deconstruct, as something that you can acquire step by step, stage by stage. But most of the professors in the College of Education, they see language as something related to culture. (Personal interview 6)

Participants found that many of the Education faculty were ideologically opposed to

linguistics because they perceived it to be reductionist and decontextualized, which ran counter to their belief in language learning as being a primarily social activity. However, most of the participants agreed that more linguistics instruction was precisely what they needed: They believed that training in the structures of language itself, such as syntax and morphology, was necessary to help them strengthen their own language proficiency as non-native English speakers, and to improve their explanations of language concepts to their future students.

### *English for specific purposes*

Participants also emphasized the importance of learning how to conduct a needs analysis and teach English for specific purposes (ESP). The ESOL program did not address how to conduct a needs analysis, because it was designed to prepare Americans for immigrant and Native American minority populations, many of whose needs were already known. Moreover, ESP—which often centers on professional communication skills in business and higher education—was also not covered, because the ESOL program’s training centers on the academic needs of language minority schoolchildren. For instance, the program’s Bilingual Education (BE) course focused on American state and federal policies regarding immigrant children, while the program’s Curriculum Materials Development course focuses on text modification strategies to build the immigrant children’s literacy skills for K-12 courses. The latter course was designed to prepare public school teachers to develop differentiated instructional materials, with a focus on making the content of mainstream K-12 subject classes more accessible to English learners. However, many of the graduated participants subsequently taught (or will likely teach) in English departments where they must be able to equip their students with professional, job-related English skills that the students will use in the workforce after graduation and will not need the skills which the BE course provides. One PhD graduate participant explained the situation in the English department where she currently teaches:

We have to collaborate with professors from other disciplines, we’re talking about English for specific purposes. It’s important for us to redesign a curriculum that fits the needs of our students. They want to learn English, but they’re not interested in pure literature or pure linguistics, but that’s the traditional training of English departments. Somehow the department has to transform itself in order to survive, because English is now a language that everyone can speak, it’s not a privilege anymore. (Personal interview 5)

This emphasis on training professional English was not limited to PhD graduates working in four-year universities. Three-year vocational colleges, such as the one that a Master's graduate currently works at, must also be able to train their students for specific professions and industries as well. In many cases, teachers at these colleges must also be able to design the ESP courses themselves. As one participant described:

Business English courses include electronic correspondence, business writing, reading, and business English negotiation. And for Tourism English, because it's a new major, so we are still developing the curriculum, designing the courses, such as Tour Guide Fundamentals, and Food for Tour Guides. (Personal interview 4)

This reflects the applied nature of the English instruction at these institutions. It also reflects the fact that vocational colleges in China are currently seeing a rapid expansion, with many majors and departments still under development. The vocational participant discussed how vocational colleges are becoming increasingly widespread and well-funded, especially in the larger industrial cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai.

#### *Large classes and little authentic input*

The ESOL program's Teaching Methods course focused on how to teach based on K-12 textbooks, and on how to create an inclusive classroom environment where minority children would feel welcome and able to participate more fully in class activities. Participants found some parts of this instruction useful, such as the different types of syllabus design, and the distinction between language objectives and content objectives. However, participants noted that they would generally not be creating an inclusive environment for lower-proficiency minority students in a mainstream classroom; they would be dealing with a classroom that was likely to be ethnically homogeneous, where all the students were English learners at a similar proficiency level, and where there was little authentic English-language input. Moreover, participants noted that they would not be modifying American K-12 textbooks; instead, they would be creating two types of materials: those that prepared students for government-mandated standardized tests and final examinations, and those that approximated English daily-life situations in the absence of full immersion (such as role-plays, cultural events, and task-based activities). One graduate described a reading class where she must prepare her students for final exams designed by her city's local education bureau:

The topics are just ‘containers’, but the content is the reading strategies that they are focused on. We have pre-readings, vocabulary, fast reading—because the Chinese English exam has this part to test your reading skills—so fast reading, skimming, scanning, inference, summarizing, identifying details. (Personal interview 4)

### *Content focus versus skills focus*

In a sense, the ESOL preparation was more content-focused: the end goal was for the ESL learners to acquire the content knowledge of their subject area classes such as third-grade social studies or high school science. By contrast, many of the graduated participants’ EFL classes were more skills-focused: their end goal was for EFL learners to use content knowledge—whether it be trade and tourism articles at the vocational college, or science-related content at the university of science and technology—as ‘empty vessels’ to develop specific communication skills.

### *Meeting local education bureau guidelines*

Many of the skills just mentioned—such as skimming, inferring, and summarizing—are tested on standardized exams mandated by the city or provincial education bureau. These exams are sometimes written by the education bureaus, sometimes by the teachers themselves under bureau guidelines. Teachers must therefore be familiar with the education regulations of their particular city or province, and be able to develop educational materials to meet these regulations.

### *Balance between testing and interaction*

In addition to designing materials for local standardized exams, participants discussed how they needed the ability to balance this focus on testing with a focus on interactive activities to cultivate their students’ practical communication skills. One participant noted,

If you want to achieve higher education or if you want to be the top student, there’s no choice, you must be a good test taker. The second thing, now I think the purpose is more focused on your oral production and what you can really apply in your daily communication. And I think Chinese parents and the students themselves have already noticed that. So you need to give them [students in China] more chances for them to practice their oral English or their more practical or communicative tasks. You want to have both these things. (Focus group 3, participant 7)

In other words, EFL teachers in China must often be able to walk the line between

testing and interaction: they must be able to prepare their students for standardized tests on the one hand, while still providing them with ample opportunities for building their oral and interactive proficiency on the other. Many participants felt that the ability to prepare their students for standardized tests does not come simply by being an effective teacher; rather, that the ability to help students prepare for standardized tests is a specialized skill in itself that requires explicit preparation.

### *Cross-cultural communication*

The ESOL program's Cross-Cultural Communication course was designed to sensitize American public school teachers to the diverse cultural backgrounds that their immigrant students may come from, and the potential misunderstandings that may arise in the classroom as a result. While participants found some of this material interesting - such as the theoretical paradigm of collectivist/individualist societies (Spring, 2007) - they generally agreed that they would not be teaching classrooms of culturally diverse backgrounds and varying proficiency levels: "In mainstream Chinese classrooms, students do not come from different backgrounds, and their proficiency level in a class will probably be at a similar level" (Focus group 3, participant 2). In addition, the participants would be of the same cultural background as their students, meaning that the need to bridge cultural gaps with their students would be less relevant. The concept of *cross-cultural communication* therefore had different meanings to the ESOL program and to this study's participants: For the ESOL program, cross-cultural communication meant sensitizing teachers to their students' diverse cultural backgrounds and enabling them to bridge the cultural divide with their students. But for the participants, for whom there would be little cultural divide with their students, cross-cultural communication often meant preparing their students to interact with foreign cultures in English, or preparing students to live and travel abroad. One participant described her experience studying a foreign language during high school:

The Japanese textbooks I used had many units designed to describe Japanese culture, how to behave in Japan, what is valued in Japan, how traditional Chinese behavior may be misunderstood by Japanese because they have different cultural values. So this kind of knowledge may be included in teaching English, such as how to travel in English-speaking countries. Because you can go there with your English skills, but you may not know what cultural aspects to be careful about. We learn English to go to other countries. (Personal interview 4)

The cross-cultural training that most participants felt they needed more of was how to

explain and introduce various aspects of American and other Western cultures to their students, how to prepare their students to live or study abroad, and how to coach them for business negotiations businessmen from countries such as Japan and the US. Participants also felt they needed to better understand the cultural sources of English phrases and idioms, as much for their own English fluency as for that of their students'. As one participant summarized: "Cross-cultural communication should be about teaching our students to use English to communicate with people from different countries" (Personal interview 5).

However, it should be noted that there was one exception to this theme, reflecting trends in international migration in the twenty-first century: The Taiwanese PhD graduates discussed how Taiwan is currently seeing a large migration from Southeast Asian countries. This trend has caused a growing number of mainstream schoolchildren to be of mixed Taiwanese and Malay or Filipino or other Southeast Asian ethnicities. Elementary school teachers, many of whom were not originally trained to manage this level of cultural and linguistic diversity, were often caught unprepared. The Taiwanese participants are currently using the knowledge from their ESOL studies to help train local elementary school teachers to better accommodate this diversity.

#### *Research methods for Master's students*

Finally, participants frequently raised the issue of research methods. While the research methods courses were technically outside the direct control of the ESOL program, many participants placed a strong enough emphasis on research methods training, though Master's and PhD participants had slightly different needs. The research methods courses were generally not intended for Master's students, because the College of Education appeared to assume that Master's students would be preparing for teaching jobs, not careers as scholars. However, many higher education positions in China, particularly in vocational colleges, were available to Master's prepared graduates. Many of the positions require publications as part of the university promotion process. A graduate commented:

If you're a Master's student, you don't get much research training. But that is an essential part for a college teacher in China. I need to publish papers. Right now my position is lecturer. But after five years, I can apply for associate professor, and the requirement will be, you need to have papers published, ten papers published in general journals, and two or three papers published in 'core' journals of your field. They are difficult to publish there, because every English teacher around the country is trying to get it. (Personal interview 4)

Several of the Master's participants enrolled in research methods courses. However, they



withdrew from the courses after several weeks because they found the material too advanced, given the language barrier and the technical complexity of the material. Master's participants also found that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative courses made it difficult for them to establish a strong general foundation. One participant put it this way:

I think you can create a Research Methodology class that is specifically for Master's degree students. Because when we write our thesis, we find if we haven't taken this class then we don't know how to start. And even if you do an interview, or you collect a lot of data, how do you analyze it? How do you do it the right way, how do you even get started? The research methods courses are for PhD students. I attended one before, but it was too abstract. Those PhD methods courses are separated into qualitative and quantitative. If you can combine them in a simple, introductory-level course that introduces the concepts to us, that will be enough. PhD students have five years. But Master's students have to write their thesis in the second year. So you need to learn everything in the first year, so we can use it in the second year. (Focus group 2, participant 2)

#### *Research methods for PhD students*

The PhD students do have more time than the Master's students to develop their methodological skills. However, the PhD students encountered some resistance from faculty with regard to the types of topics that were believed to be important to research:

If I had a chance to write the dissertation again, I would insist on creating an experimental design to test different teaching methods, such as one group using the communicative language teaching methods and one group without it, then measure the change in their abilities. But for my dissertation, they asked me to interview participants and spend a lot of time with them. So that dissertation helped me understand in a deep level how the participants survive in the US, but it didn't help me learn how to actually teach them English, so I can't use any of it in my current teaching work. (Personal interview 6)

In other words, some faculty members tended to discourage their PhD students from conducting studies that bordered on 'quantitative' or 'experimental'. Instead, faculty members often expressed a preference for qualitative studies where research subjects' thoughts and feelings were interpreted through various theoretical frameworks. This type of research might be suitable for higher education environments in the US. However, some of the PhD participants felt that they were prevented from conducting the types of practitioner-oriented research that they believed would be the most relevant for higher education contexts they intended to work in.

The [US-based] professors really have their ideas about what higher-level research should be, and one of them even told me that there should be a separation between teaching-related work and research-related work. When you're in a PhD program [in the US], you're supposed to focus on something more higher-level than teaching issues. Most of their [US-based faculty] time is doing research. The professors spend only about four to six hours per week teaching. So for them, teaching is not everything. But for us, it is almost everything.

(Personal interview 5)

In sum, many higher education environments in mainland China and Taiwan tend to have a stronger teaching focus, with faculty often being expected to conduct research related to teaching methodologies. One PhD graduate discussed how purely 'researcher-oriented' work was often limited to a few top research universities; other universities were expected to be more 'practitioner-oriented', including in the research they conducted.

### *Personal qualities*

#### *Credibility, fluency level, and knowledge of American culture*

One salient theme that arose during the interviews was the issue of credibility, which was derived primarily from two sources: fluency in English, and a deep understanding of American culture based on personal experience. One graduated participant recounted that before coming to the US, "when I taught speaking in a training center, students challenged my authority. They asked, 'Have you ever been abroad?' I said no. So they said, 'The pronunciation you are teaching is just Chinglish.'" (Personal interview 4) This demonstrates the importance that the participants placed not just on teaching skills but also on accent and English usage, which requires some explicit instruction and may not be automatically developed simply by living in the US. Participants also emphasized that knowledge of American culture—from sports to social customs—may not be automatically acquired merely by living in the country; it required some explicit instruction. The ESOL program did not address its students' accents or build their English fluency, nor did it explicitly introduce different aspects of American culture and politics. Rather, the program content was designed for Americans for whom English was already a first language, and who were already familiar with American culture and norms. However, many participants found that these were precisely the topics and training that they needed upon return home.

#### *Charisma*

A second subtheme revealed the need for the development of a teaching 'charisma.' By this, the participants meant the ability to establish a working rapport with their students. This

is especially true in private learning centers that specialize in standardized test preparation for study abroad. In these types of institutions, a teacher's performance evaluation is based not only on how high the students' test scores rise, but also on whether the students (and the parents who are paying for the classes) subjectively like the instructor and his or her personal manner. The instructors are expected to develop a charismatic teaching style with confident body language and a combination of focused, practical, yet encouraging feedback. However, as with the issue of credibility, the ESOL program did not explicitly cultivate these 'soft skills', because it was designed for Americans who were already acquiring those skills through their local public school teaching experience.

### *Consulting and client relations*

In addition to personal charisma, a successful career as a standardized test instructor in China often requires the ability to build relationships with students over time, where the instructor is not only focused on teaching individual lessons but also on designing a plan for achieving the students' long-term testing goals. The participant who teaches SAT and TOEFL at one such nationwide chain school described how her responsibilities are often closer to those of a consultant: Most of her students are local area high school students who apply for undergraduate studies in the US. She must be able to identify her students' specific areas of weakness on the SAT and TOEFL, determine the most effective testing strategies to strengthen those weaknesses, map out a timeline of multiple testing dates over the course of a year, and do all of this with a likable and charismatic personal style that will keep the students wanting to continue working with her. She noted those challenges:

Students and parents both evaluate you, they each get a scoring sheet. The students are the 'users', the parents are the 'clients', and they will rate you on your attitude, professional quality, teaching level. And sometimes the students will ask us questions about the college application process. And even though there is a department that specializes in helping them complete their applications, the more you know about it, the better. (Personal interview 1)

### *Putting it all together*

All of the qualities just described are acquired partly through experience but also partly through explicit preparation. However, at the time of the study, the ESOL program did not explicitly cultivate teachers' body language, teaching style, speaking confidence, or personal charisma. As it was designed, the program assumed that public school teachers within the state already possessed teaching experience and a corresponding style of teaching. For

example, one participant noted:

Many local [American] students already have teaching experience before they enter this Master's degree. For example, they have already taught in public schools for one or two years. They already have that experience, and that is why they specifically choose this program. But most of us do not have that kind of full-time teaching experience, apart from some part-time work during college. (Focus group 2, participant 3)

In contrast, participants noted that at least half of their out-of-classroom experience was limited to passive classroom observations in local schools. One participant phrased it this way:

We just take the course to learn the methodology of teaching, but we don't have the chance to really teach students. Anyone can take this course online and know the content. But for us, if we can have more opportunity to really teach students, that's our advantage. (Focus group 2, participant 1)

## **Discussion**

The findings demonstrate the tensions and misunderstandings that can arise when EFL-oriented teachers study in an ESL-oriented training program. Such programs, particularly in the United States, often prepare teachers to address the linguistic and sociocultural needs of lower-income Latino immigrants and their children in mainstream public schools (Liu, 1999, p. 200). The ESOL courses addressed the complex interplay of social, economic, and linguistic challenges facing these immigrants, both inside and outside the classroom. As participants of this study described, however—with the exception of the Taiwanese participants—they would generally not be helping lower-income immigrants overcome social inequalities, nor would they be helping lower-proficiency students gain more equitable access to American K-12 course content. They would be helping classes of mainstream Han Chinese, whose language needs include high performance on standardized tests, preparation for travel abroad, and training for specific professions such as trade and business. This mismatch between what the Chinese students needed and what the ESOL program provides caused many of the participants to feel neglected and alienated, as they attempted to navigate a program that was not designed for them.

In addition, the structure and curriculum of the ESOL program were designed to be integrated into the classes and teaching schedules of American pre-service and in-service public school teachers. The classroom observations in the ESOL program's courses provided students with the opportunity to observe practicing teachers putting theory into practice in local ESL settings. In addition, the graded lesson plan assignments once or twice a semester

provided ESOL students with the opportunity to implement the theoretical concepts from the courses and receive feedback from the program faculty. This format was useful for Americans who already have enough public school teaching experience to know how they would implement the course material in their own classes. The format was also useful for those pre-service teachers who currently have their own internships or practicums where they can put those theoretical concepts to immediate use. In addition, several of the classes were in online format, because they were simultaneously taken by in-service public school teachers from around the state. These teachers took the courses for continuing education credits, as well as for an ESOL endorsement required by state regulations.

However, those who came to the ESOL program from outside of this context often felt frustrated and excluded, viewing much of the material as being too theoretical—especially with the online format and the Chinese students’ lack of background in the politics of American education. Many of the participants were left not knowing how the material could be applied to their future EFL classes. The classroom observations tended to be passive, and many of the Chinese students did not develop a clear idea of how they might implement the material in their home contexts. The participants further noted that the occasional lesson plan assignment—which the students usually did not teach but simply received feedback and a grade from the professors—was not enough to make the material ‘stick.’ The Master’s graduates generally used little of this material in their subsequent teaching environments. The PhD graduates had a slightly greater advantage, because they already had significant prior EFL teaching experience, a TESOL Master’s degree, and at least two or three more years to conduct in-depth research on a topic that interested them. However, some of the PhD graduates felt that they were prevented from conducting the types of teaching-focused mixed methods research that they viewed as necessary for publishing in academic journals at home. This reflects what Lo (2005) described as a “mismatch of theoretical orientations” (p. 138) between TESOL program students and faculty. The following are some recommended changes within individual courses of the ESOL program.

### *Recommendations for modification within individual courses of the ESOL program*

#### *Bilingual education*

An introduction to the history of language policy and ideology in China might be provided (useful references include Pan, 2015 and You, 2010), including the ways in which

bilingual immersion programs are currently being piloted across China (Knell et al., 2007; Qiang et al., 2011). In addition, Chinese students could be given greater opportunity to explore the many dilemmas concerning the cultural and linguistic influence of English on Chinese culture and society (Gao, 2009).

### *Curriculum materials development*

Chinese students would benefit from increased opportunities to create more skills-focused materials that are appropriate for EFL contexts, such as skimming business articles, role-playing travel scenarios, or analyzing the plot of a classic novel. Students should be encouraged to create their own source materials, adapt them from the Internet, or use source materials they themselves bring from China. In fact, the ESOL program could start assembling a library of authentic Chinese-printed English textbooks and other teaching materials that its students bring from China. This would allow future cohorts of Chinese students to begin creating lessons based on the actual textbooks that they would be using when they return home. For a historical reference, Adamson (2004) provides an analysis of Chinese English textbooks as they evolved throughout China's modern history.

### *Cross-cultural communication*

Students could be assigned research projects that involve students conducting their own firsthand data collection on different aspects of American society. They could include both 'surface culture' aspects such as food and sporting events, and 'deep culture' aspects such as values and family structures (the 'iceberg model' by Hall, 1976). Ideally, projects should involve interviewing local residents, enabling the students to become more familiar with different viewpoints and opinions firsthand. Students would then present their findings in class, which would provide them with the opportunity to practice explaining the culture as they would in their future teaching jobs. This type of activity would accomplish several other things as well. It would increase the students' firsthand exposure to the culture, strengthening their credibility as English teachers. Moreover, this increased firsthand interaction would also help to strengthen their English fluency.

### *Language principles*

The teaching of linguistics could be increased: the use of phonology, morphology, and syntax to analyze the structures of the English language. Becoming aware of the English phonemes should assist in the development of the Chinese students' own accents. For

instance, in the first author's experience as an English teacher, native Chinese speakers often have a difficult time distinguishing between "s" and "th": they may unconsciously substitute the former for the latter because the "th" sound does not exist in Chinese. Developing an explicit awareness of the difference between alveolar fricatives (i.e. "s") and interdental fricatives (i.e. "th"), coupled with accent drills such as short speeches or controlled conversations with specific communicative outcomes (Seidlhofer, 2001), should assist in the development of the Chinese students' accents, thus increasing their sense of confidence and credibility for their future teaching. Freeman and Freeman (2004) provide guidelines for how to use linguistics concepts in English language teaching. In addition, given that the Chinese ESOL students likely learned English differently from the way that immigrant children in the US do (Braine, 1999, p. 200), the Chinese students might also benefit from the opportunity to share their own English learning experience, as well as to discuss the ways in which they would modify the language acquisition theories to better account for this difference.

### *Teaching methods*

An increase in time spent on coaching basic public speaking skills such as eye contact, body language, and pauses and intonation would be beneficial. In addition, it would be useful to spend more time covering pedagogical approaches that are appropriate for EFL contexts, such as role-plays, language games, and small-group discussions. The course might also introduce the basics of English for specific purposes, for which many of the chapters in Paltridge and Starfield (2013) would prove helpful. The linguistics knowledge in the Language Principles course should equip students with the ability to analyze the specialized vocabulary and syntactic structures that each professional field has. For example, one class assignment might involve ESOL students picking a specialized topic from business, scientific, or academic English, and designing a lesson where their classmates (acting as the 'students') would practice using these specialized sentence structures in task-based exercises that introduce some basic schema of that topic (Goh, 2013: 58). Li & Tin (2013) emphasized the importance of providing international students in TESOL programs with increased opportunities for teaching. Some of these opportunities could be provided both in the ESOL classes as just discussed.

### *Recommendations for modification of the program as a whole*

#### *Active teaching and mentoring opportunities*

Each of the Chinese students in the ESOL program could be partnered with a younger Chinese student who is struggling linguistically and academically. The younger student could

come from one of the city's local elementary, middle, or high schools, all of which have English learners. In addition, the university itself has an increasing number of undergraduate students from China, many of whom might need mentoring as they adapt to life in the US or attempt to meet the language demands of American college coursework (see Ballard, 1996 for more information about the language demands of international students in Western universities). In addition, the ESOL students might be given the opportunity to teach individual lessons in various local educational settings, such as K-12 ESOL classes, adult education ESOL classes, or other community-based English classes. Such partnership arrangements could benefit the ESOL graduate students by providing them with both the one-on-one mentorship experience as well as the classroom teaching experience. At the same time, the arrangements could benefit the local schools and community by providing some additional assistance to those who are struggling with language and social adjustment.

#### *Making use of the students' and teachers' common L1*

Many of the participants placed importance on the use of the common L1 (Chinese) during teaching. Mahboob and Lin (2016) describe how the students' L1 might serve a variety of ideational and organizational functions in the EFL classroom (p. 33). However, because the ESOL program was designed to prepare Americans for ESL contexts where the students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and where the teacher is usually of a different cultural background from the students, the program spends much of its time preparing pre-service teachers to overcome cultural barriers with students and less time helping pre-service teachers develop teaching strategies that make use of students' L1. However, the participants of this study felt that they needed precisely the opposite: less time on how to be sensitive to their students' cultural backgrounds (since they are typically of the same cultural background as their students), and more time developing pedagogical strategies that capitalize on their common L1 as a teaching support.

#### *Difference between Master's and PhD*

Many participants discussed how the ESOL program generally expects Master's students to focus more on teaching and less on research. This might be appropriate for American educational contexts, where Master's students are often expected to be K-12 teachers. However, in China, some higher education positions are still open to Master's graduates, particularly in vocational colleges. Faculty at these institutions often have research requirements. Therefore, many of the Master's participants felt that they needed a greater



degree of research methods support than was provided to them. While research methods courses in the College of Education are outside the direct control of the ESOL program, many international and perhaps even some domestic Master's students would benefit if the various academic departments and the research methods department within the College collaborated in the development of an introductory Master's-level course that covers the basics of qualitative and quantitative research. Regarding the PhD students, university faculty positions in mainland China and Taiwan often have a heavier teaching load than similar faculty positions in the US. Knowing this, some of the PhD participants attempted to develop dissertation topics that dealt with various teaching pedagogies. However, they tended to be discouraged from these topics by faculty advisers who considered the topics to be too practitioner-oriented for the more scholarly types of research that they usually expected their PhD students to pursue. American higher education environments often tend to make a clearer distinction between research-oriented work and practitioner-oriented work. However, in Chinese higher education settings, the distinction is often less clear. Moreover, tenure and promotion in the US tends to be based primarily on publications and secondarily on teaching. In many Chinese universities, however, it is often the opposite: Tenure is not as common, and promotion is often based to a greater extent on teaching than on publications—though both are necessary. Therefore, the American emphasis on cultivating scholars first and teachers second can leave Chinese PhD students less well-prepared for the more teaching-heavy higher education environments that they expect to be returning to. For these reasons, Chinese PhD students would benefit more from heavier training in teaching pedagogies, as well as from the flexibility to use their doctoral dissertations to refine or explore such teaching pedagogies if they so choose.

## **Conclusion**

Yilin Sun (2016), former president of TESOL International, discussed how the TESOL field is becoming increasingly internationalized as the global uses of English become increasingly diversified. EFL teachers around the world, being on the front lines of this development, should be appreciated as pioneers and change agents of the TESOL profession. Yet many US-based TESOL programs continue to be focused on a specific set of local immigrant-related teaching contexts, even when the majority of their student body will no longer be teaching in those contexts. This can cause many international students in these programs to graduate without being prepared or able to be English teachers, and to view themselves as having a deficiency for not possessing native English proficiency. It should be

the opposite: These international students should be encouraged to view themselves as uniquely qualified to lead the changes in the TESOL field. They should be equipped with the training and resources to do so, and be provided with the flexibility to conduct research on how they would modify the materials for their own particular EFL teaching contexts.

It might be argued that TESOL program faculties across the US do not possess the knowledgebase to modify their programs for various non-US teaching contexts. However, much of the knowledge that they need lies with the international students themselves. Thus, TESOL programs could view their international students as knowledgeable resources to inform programmatic changes.

The authors of this study recognize the logistical challenges to adapting a well-established program to a new audience. That is what motivated them to undertake this study. Previous academic literature has made general recommendations about the types of knowledge and skills that NNES need in order to teach in EFL environments. However, individual TESOL programs might consider that these recommendations may not be specific enough to be actionable. The present study is an attempt to examine a single TESOL program in detail and provide actionable recommendations that are useful to that particular program. In so doing, the authors have not intended to provide the same set of recommendations to all TESOL programs—although if other programs find some of these recommendations to be useful to them, so much the better. Rather, the authors have attempted to provide a set of methodological guidelines by which other TESOL programs might conduct similar research on their own particular body of international students and make adaptations that are specific to the needs of those students.

Kamhi-Stein (2016) considers NNES in TESOL as a ‘movement’ (p. 180), one which has succeeded in raising its visibility over the past twenty years and which must now focus on establishing a more equitable environment for NNES professionals globally. TESOL graduate programs, where these English teachers are commonly trained, have a part to play in providing that equity. They can do this by empowering their international students to become leaders of the TESOL profession, and by providing them with the resources and opportunities to do so.

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## **The Theory & Practice of Professionalism in ELT**

*Keith Copley*

### **Bioprofile**

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### **Abstract**

Professionalism is a term that is often used to describe practices within English Language Teaching (ELT), but rarely precisely defined and is therefore amenable to widely differing interpretations. Within ELT the discourse of professionalism co-exists alongside practices that would not normally be associated with a traditional understanding of the term, such as low pay, job insecurity, a lack of any coherent career structure and an absence of any agreed professional standards. Are such concepts, then, either applicable or useful for teachers in ELT? Twenty years ago, Johnson (1997) conducted a study based on life-history interviews with seventeen EFL teachers based in Poland, to uncover whether their working lives could "best be conceptualised in terms of career and profession or whether other theoretical approaches might be more fruitful" (Johnson, 1997, p. 681). Based on interviews with a small sample group of seven experienced teachers working in south-east Asia, drawing upon Johnson's research and taking up his appeal for more empirical data on teachers' lives to be collected, this paper attempts to address the question of what is it like to work in the ELT industry, how teachers conceptualise professionalism and how those conceptions match the reality of working in the industry, and in doing so poses the question of how much has changed in the intervening years since Johnson's study.

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**Key words:** EFL, professionalism, neoliberalism, industry, teacher life histories

## Defining professionalism

Johnson (1997) pointed out twenty years ago, the concept of ‘the professional’ is used widely within English Language Teaching (ELT). This is no less true today. In the mission statement of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), for example, the word ‘professional’ or ‘professionalism’ is mentioned no fewer than eight times. The organisation’s stated goal is to help teachers in their ‘professional development’, and furthermore states that “all ELT professionals should be respected” (IATEFL’s mission, goals and practices, 2016, para 6). And one of the key aims of the Cambridge Diploma (DELTA), which remains the highest practical teaching qualification in ELT, is to “broaden candidates” understanding of the standards of professional practice” (Delta Syllabus Specifications, 2011, p.4).

Even at a brief glance, then, we can see that a discourse of professionalism pervades ELT at an institutional level. Less often, however, is any precise definition of the term either offered or discussed, leaving us to rely on only the broadest ‘common-sense’ conceptions. The online edition of the *MacMillan Dictionary* (*Profession*, n.d.), for instance, offers us the following definition of *profession*: “a job that you need special skills and qualifications to do, especially one with high social status.” It is reasonable to assume that such a broad ‘common sense’ definition would be generally accepted by most people. However, as we will examine further, it is problematic in a number of ways. Although ELT may arguably require certain acquired skills, the bar in terms of qualifications is in practice set notoriously low throughout significant sections of the industry globally, and the question of status is both culturally determined and may in any case not be of much practical help for teachers.

One difficulty in settling upon an agreed understanding of professionalism is the fact that ELT is by its nature a global phenomenon, and as Wang and Lin (2013, p. 6) point out, “There is no single and consistent definition of teacher professionalism because the definition needs to reflect local socio-cultural circumstances.” However, they argue that there are “common themes”, those being possession of professional knowledge, a professional attitude (although what this means is not clearly defined), and a certain degree of autonomy.

It would seem that, as Farmer (2011, p. 22) acknowledges, professionalism is a “slippery concept.” It is worth briefly looking in a broader sense at what changes have occurred in our understanding of professionalism, particularly as it relates to teaching. For although mainstream teaching and ELT are in many ways very different worlds, our frames of reference for conceptualizing our role as English language teachers rely heavily on both our own experience of mainstream education as well as the socially-constructed notions of



professionalism that contribute to shaping our view. For many of us, particularly in the West, post-war constructions of professionalism, broadly shaped by embedded liberalism and social democratic orthodoxies of the time, still retain some influence at least in terms of how we make sense of such concepts. Articulating the dominant sociological discourse of this period, Millerson (1964) characterised the accepted common features of the term as incorporating theoretical knowledge, recognized training, a code of conduct based notionally at least on public interest and powerful professional organisation. Drawing upon these more traditional notions, Farmer (2011) categorises the three broad conceptions of professionalism as ‘accountable professionalism’, ‘artistic professionalism’ and ‘moral professionalism’. Each one displays a number of specific and identifiable traits, and he argues that there are aspects of teaching in different contexts that bear a resemblance to each one. The prototypical example of ‘accountable professionalism’ would be doctors or lawyers. Such people, we at least expect, have a depth of knowledge, expertise and experience that is invaluable if and when their services are required. In the vast majority of cases we simply cannot diagnose and treat ourselves if we are ill or represent ourselves in court if we are going through a legal process. The stakes are too high and the depth of knowledge is too complex. The difficulty involved in acquiring the necessary knowledge to work in such a profession should be great enough, argues Farmer, “that the members of the society view the profession as possessing a kind of mystery that is not given to the common man” (2011, p. 30). Such professions also tend to have “rules, standards and arrangements,” and “the knowledge and skills should be abstract and organised into a codified body of principles” (2011, p. 29). This cannot reasonably be said to be the case with teaching, either in mainstream sectors, and certainly not within ELT. The category of professionalism characteristic of most teaching contexts, according to Farmer, is closer to the ‘moral professionalism’ category in which practitioners are respected for their knowledge and there are certain ethical expectations, although these are less formally codified and regulated, but they may also not necessarily get paid very much. However, this is more than simply the “being good at something difficult” required for ‘artistic professionalism’, although the financial remuneration for that is likely, for the successful few at least, to be far higher.

The relevance of these ‘trait models’ of professionalism has been challenged by Runte (1995), amongst others, who argues that they are discredited and outdated. In support, he draws on the work of Larson (1977), who even forty years ago was arguing that the “persistence of profession as a category of social practice suggests that the model constituted by the first movements of professionalism has become an ideology [...] a mystification which

unconsciously obscures real social structures and relations” (Larson, 1977, p. 37). Runte’s point is that what is left of such outdated conceptions simply amounts to an appeal for special status. However, as what we traditionally regard as professions have lost their monopoly over particular areas of knowledge, so have they lost any rationale for bestowing special status. Instead, the trend over the past forty years has been to de-skill. The term itself, he argues, has now become a liability for teachers as well as other occupational groups, as a discourse of professionalism is often used as a cover under which to introduce educational changes that limit teacher’s autonomy, in a shift from a learner-centred to a curriculum-centred system, based on standardization, high-stakes testing and targets.

It is certainly the case that the concept of professionalism has been significantly transformed, certainly since the term first assumed popular usage, but particularly over the past fifty years or so, firstly as those previously regarded as belonging to certain elite professions have tended to become ‘proletarianized’ (Openheimer, 1972), and secondly, and more crucially, as the notion of doing a good job has been reduced from one grounded in some sense of public service to a version of professionalism principally concerned with narrower measurable outcomes, increasingly aligned to the priorities of a more commercially-minded, marketised system. The following description of what this has meant in practice in the tertiary sectors in the UK applies equally to the long-commercialised world of ELT, and is one that many English language teachers will no doubt recognize: “practice itself is commodified. Value replaces values. Moral reflection is unnecessary, indeed obstructive. What is needed is flexibility, in terms both of skills, interest, application and morality” (Ball, 2004, p. 16).

Angus (1994) has characterised this changing conception of professionalism as “technical-managerial” as opposed to “participative-professional.” Educational ideas and values are, he argues, largely absent from top-down technical-managerial notions of professionalism, which is more concerned with the ‘delivery’ of imposed requirements. This stands in contrast to a more principled, participative-professional framework, where “socio-educational concerns and issues prevail with an emphasis on being answerable to educational, social and community needs and to professional, educational values” (Angus, 2013, p. 171). Mockler and Sachs (2012) similarly argue that measurement-oriented performance cultures have had a corrosive effect on teacher autonomy and professional identity. Elsewhere, Mockler (2013, p. 37) has argued that there has been a subtle but decisive shift from a focus on *teaching* quality to *teacher* quality. Whereas the former encouraged “pedagogical and curricular innovation,” the latter represents a desire to standardise and quantify practice and

attribute blame to teachers where their students fail to “measure up.” This emphasis on standardization, according to Taubman (2009, p. 117) has given rise to a new occupational culture, which “transforms individuals into self-monitoring and monitored selves, ”stripped of any “autobiographical idiosyncrasy” Hall and McGinty (2015) argue that this reconceptualization of professionalism has been broadly successful in re-shaping teachers’ identities.

Why have these changes occurred? Understanding the shifting conceptions of professionalism unavoidably requires situating them in a broader socio-political framework. A key weakness in Johnson’s original study, despite formally acknowledging the importance of context, is the focus given to his respondents’ subjective reflections as his overriding category of analysis, without fully situating them in the objective reality of the ELT industry, specifically in his case the unregulated expansion of ELT in Eastern Europe following the collapse of Communism. The underlying reason for these changes are linked to the rise of neoliberalism, from a marginal theory to a hegemonic orthodoxy over the past forty years. The impact of neoliberalism on both applied linguistics and ELT has been well documented (Block, Gray and Holborow, 2012). The central, defining idea of this new orthodoxy is based on the presumption that all human action should be brought within “the domain of the market”, which alone can best determine all allocative decisions (Harvey, 2015, p. 3). Although there are limitations on this process, neoliberalism has been successful in pushing back the boundary lines of commodification established after WW2 in ways that would have previously been unthinkable. The introduction of markets and quasi-markets into education through targets, testing and outright privatisation, and the instrumentalist alignment of education solely to suit economic priorities, has represented, a fundamental shift in the way we view the function of education in society and role of teachers and learners. As Gray and Block (2012, p. 121) point out, the growing marketization in education has meant that “students are increasingly seen as customers seeking a service and schools and teachers are [...] seen as service providers.” Whilst this may still seem disconcerting and novel within mainstream education, it has long been the dominant framework within ELT.

Within mainstream teaching, these changes have meant the steady erosion of teachers’ professional autonomy, and an increasing ability on the part of employers to strip away collective protection previously enjoyed by this group of skilled workers, introducing less favourable working conditions, often including zero-hours contracts, performance related pay and the ability to dismiss teachers who don’t ‘fit in’ sufficiently to the new business-friendly workplace culture. In many respects, global ELT has been a trailblazer for these changes,

given that it has long been sustained by such practices, achievable largely through its fragmented structures and the existence of an ever-renewable supply of globally-mobile native-speaker teachers (NESTs) who are often low-skilled and almost always unrepresented in terms of either trade unions or even effective professional advocacy groups, what Clayton (1989) unflatteringly characterised as ‘unreal’ teachers (cited in Johnson, 1997, p. 685). In this sense they are perhaps the archetype of the “individualized and relatively powerless worker” characteristic of the new neoliberal times (Harvey, 2005, p. 168). Rather than forming a stable professional group, many English language teachers could perhaps be more usefully included into the admittedly problematic category of the ‘precariat’ (Standing, 2011), in the sense that low pay and the pervasiveness of short-term contracts contributes to an inability to form sustainable or stable occupational identities, and would certainly exclude them from relating to the model of a mainstream teaching career-cycle put forward by Fessler (1985).

### **Academic research into professionalism in ELT**

It is remarkable that despite the constant employment of terms such as professionalism within ELT, there is noticeably little in the way of research that seeks to uncover the realities of teachers’ working lives within the industry, or to map how they are developing and changing. Despite the massive growth of ELT from the cottage-industry of the immediate post-war period to the powerful global hydra it is today, underpinned by the consolidation of English as the lingua franca of corporate globalization, there is very little in the way of empirical data as to precisely what this multinational industry *is*, and certainly not in terms of what it means to work within it. There remains Johnson’s landmark study, in which he highlighted some key issues in terms of the reality of teachers’ lives in ELT and the ways in which working conditions impacted on their self-conceptualizations of their roles and, closely linked to that, the pedagogical approaches they adopted, and issues around professionalism have been fleetingly explored elsewhere (Nunan, 2001; Walker, 2011).

One does not have to fully accept Johnson’s theoretical framework to appreciate the importance of this contribution to our understanding of ELT as a practice. Despite the limitations of his analytical approach, what is brought to attention through his interviews was a widespread cynicism encouraged by unstable working conditions and low pay that characterises ELT for many teachers, revealing that most of those who participated in the study were holding down at least two jobs and working long hours, leaving little time for conscientious lesson planning or entertaining notions of professionalism, with respect to

either classroom pedagogy or their own career development. Furthermore, the teachers that he spoke to “presented their entry into teaching as accidental or as a second choice and did not draw on notions of vocation.” Rather than seeing themselves involved in a long-term career, “Leaving teaching was a possibility that was constantly present in the teachers’ accounts.” In contrast to the lofty notions of professionalism that characterise ELT journals and conferences, he also found that “a discourse of professionalism was absent from the teachers’ discursive construction of their working lives” (Johnson, 1997, pp. 691-2).

Whilst most of them expressed a genuine desire to help their students to progress, they reported being under intense pressure from an exam-passing culture enforced upon them by the institutions they worked for, and in conclusion, Johnson made the observation that “Teachers in many national contexts [...] tend to be underpaid and overworked” and as a result of this and other factors, EFL/ESL teaching lacked the status of established professions such as medicine and law. He concluded that conditions within ELT should at the very least give “pause for thought” (Johnson, 1997, p. 681).

In the intervening two decades since Johnson published his study, have any significant improvement in terms of teachers’ working conditions and overall morale been achieved? It would be difficult to sustain an argument that this has been the case. On the contrary, the conditions he described have if anything become more generalized as the ELT industry has further expanded. My own discussions with teachers for this paper, and a recent study in France reported in the *English Teaching Professional* magazine in March 2016, have revealed that many of the issues he identified as problematic still characterise the working lives of teachers in ELT. Wright (2016) reports on a survey conducted by herself and a number of her colleagues in the summer of 2014 of some 800 teachers working in the field of ELT in France, a far wider data sample than that of either Johnson or myself. 66% of respondents had more than ten years’ experience in language teaching. Despite this, what they found was that the number of teachers working in precarious conditions for more than one employer appeared to be on the increase.

Similar to Johnson’s findings, the majority of respondents (45%) had at least three employers and 16% were working for up to six. Just under half had the security of a continuous, rolling employment contract. 13% were on the equivalent of zero-hours contracts, with barely any entitlement to benefits such as sick pay and paid leave. Fewer than 10% had experienced any improvement in pay or working conditions in the three years leading up to the time of the survey. In fact, 50% felt that conditions had worsened over this period. In terms of qualifications, 31% indicated that their native-speaker status was held in higher

regard by employers than a teaching qualification. In fact, roughly a third of the respondents had no formally recognised teaching qualification at all. Of those that did, for the majority it was the basic CELTA, with only 10% holding a Diploma and 8% an MA in a related field.

### **Voices in ELT**

The far smaller sample of teachers that I conducted interviews with were all similarly experienced, with a range of between four and fifteen years teaching experience in ELT. Although the interviews were conducted individually, all of the teachers I spoke to were working in south-east Asia at the time the interviews took place, a region that appears to have been a growth area for global ELT over the past few decades, in a variety of locations and for a variety of employers, including private language schools and university. They shared in common a reasonable length of time and depth of experience spent working within ELT. The participants were as follows:

**Table 1: Participant details**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Place of work at time of interview</b>
Alya	Iran	DELTA / Masters (TESOL)	Malaysia
David	UK	Initial CELTA	Malaysia
Karen	UK	Initial CELTA	Malaysia
Ralph	UK	DELTA / Masters (TESOL)	Thailand
Robert	South Africa	DELTA	Vietnam
Sarah	UK	DELTA	Thailand
Valerie	Canada	Masters (TESOL)	Thailand

The interviews were semi-structured in that the same set of questions were put to each person (see Appendix 1), although the interviewees were allowed to develop their answers in any way they chose, in order to allow them the scope to freely elaborate in their responses, bearing in mind the point made by Bell (2005, p. 161) on the importance of allowing respondents the scope to “talk about what is of central significance to them.” The sample included one teacher from Canada, one from South Africa and the only ‘non-native’ speaker was from Iran. The remainder came from the UK. The interviews were recorded for accuracy, transcribed and permission to use them was granted by the participants. In common with Johnson twenty years earlier the central focus of the interviews was to find out to what extent

the teachers felt that their participation in ELT amounted to a professional career, and to uncover what was understood by such frames of reference. The interviews were conducted, and should be read, on an understanding that, as Thomas (1995, p. xiv) points out, whilst no individual teacher's narrative can be regarded as wholly typical, there is nevertheless within each story "episodes, experiences and emotions with which teachers can readily identify." In the following discussion of their responses to this, pseudonyms have been given to protect anonymity and the intention to do this was explained to the participants before they took part, in order to ensure that the teachers' responses were as candid as possible.

### *Teaching as vocation*

It was interesting that Johnson (1997) reported that for most of the teachers he had spoken to, teaching English had not been an intentionally planned career move, confirming the common perception that ELT is something often 'stumbled into.' This also appeared to be the case for all but one of the teachers that I interviewed, whose decisions to enter ELT were often based on chance or unforeseen circumstances and who, with the one notable exception, did not draw on notions of vocation, as Johnson had similarly reported. Fairly typical of this was Valerie, a Canadian teacher currently working in a university in Bangkok, who told me that she had never dreamt of being a teacher while studying for her degree:

In fact, when I was completing my first BA in French, and people would ask me if I wanted to teach, I was very adamant about saying NO! While I was living in Montreal, I met someone on a teaching course. At that time, it was possible to transfer credits from your first BA and just do the teaching methodology courses and practicum. It was an easy way to get a qualification that would actually lead to a job. Being able to travel and work abroad was a real plus.

Another teacher, Ralph, who is also currently teaching in Thailand was already living in the country and trying to run a small business when he decided to try teaching. The business wasn't going well, and he saw an advertisement in a bar for English teachers. "I gave it a go and discovered it was quite fun and took it from there", he says. It should be pointed out that the common practice of 'stumbling into' ELT does not necessarily preclude a conscientious approach to the job, however. Despite his haphazard entry into teaching, the teacher in question has now been working in ELT for over ten years and is a well-qualified senior teacher, the only teacher in the sample group holding a middle-management position. Robert talked about entering ELT as a second option after he failed to obtain a scholarship to pursue a career as an academic in another field.

While they may be more difficult to find, there are some teachers who do set out

deliberately with the intention of being an English language teacher. Karen did her first degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at a British university. “I just loved it”, she said. “I’ve always wanted to teach in some kind of capacity. When I was at school, I wanted to be a German language teacher.” Whilst there were extrinsic motivations to teaching English such as the possibility of travel, teaching itself was also a motivating factor.

Whatever the diverse motivations for entering ELT, it is the subsequent experience that often proves to be the crucial factor in determining whether the job comes to be seen as a long-term ‘career’, or merely a temporary interlude.

### *Defining and evaluating professionalism*

Although also not drawing on notions of vocation, unlike Johnson’s sample group the teachers I spoke to did indeed draw on notions of career and professionalism, mainly in terms of the qualifications and experience they had gained that allowed them to do the job well, as well as a means of measuring how their experience of working within ELT matched up to their expectations of what they felt a professional career should involve. With any length of time spent in the job, it is common for most teachers to undergo a diversity of experience in terms of employers and job satisfaction, and will evaluate these experiences against their pre-existing conceptions of professionalism. This was evident in all of the teachers’ accounts, although it appeared to be the more negative experiences that predominated. Karen says that she was lucky with her first employer in London, where she described the atmosphere as “very professional.” When pressed on what this meant for her she highlighted issues connected with management taking what she perceived as a principled approach to pedagogy, feedback and support, which as a newly qualified teacher was particularly important. “They gave you lots of training, there was an observation every two weeks and lots of feedback from your manager, so, you knew when you had done well.” However, that experience was not matched on her first job outside Britain. Working at a summer school in Russia, there was a strong sense that professionalism was absent in terms of all these things. “We arrived, there was no resources, nothing (*sic*)”, she recalls. Teachers were given “a white board and a pen” and were then expected to “make up the syllabus yourselves.” After training on a TEFL degree course in the UK, where there was a clear focus on effective pedagogy and best practice, this came as something of a genuine shock to her:

They didn’t care. They were just taking the money from the students. There were no observations, drop ins, no senior teacher to come in and see what we were doing.



Notions of teaching professionalism including ongoing development, observations and constructive, effective feedback emerged as the most recurring themes, as being key factors in providing a sense of professionalism, as well as a worthwhile educational experience for the students. When she got her first full-time teaching position outside the UK with a well-known private language school in Hong Kong, Karen recalls that the management favoured ad-hoc, unannounced observations, but that “the feedback would be silly things like the kids are lining up too close to the door, or you didn’t put the pencils out early enough.” She was also shocked to discover that the career and promotion structure within the private language school she was working at was based on such shallow foundations:

The management there (in Hong Kong) were basically people who had finished their contract and had got made up. So, when I finished my year they asked me if I wanted to stay on and be a senior teacher! It was my first full-time contract!

Similarly, when asked about the key factors that transformed a job into a career and ensured an atmosphere of professionalism at work, Alya, a teacher from Iran currently working in Malaysia, replied “Enthusiasm, support, being recognised and encouraged. Promotion.”

### **Professionalism in a commercialised industry**

Teachers repeatedly returned to the theme of a perceptible gap between the focus on teaching professionalism on the courses they had attended and the realities of the industry. David talked about his first experience in a classroom in a private language school in Penang, Malaysia after he had completed his initial CELTA:

They didn’t give you much support. They gave you a book, like, here it is, now crack on. And I’d never taught kids before. You’re just thrown in, very little training, very little materials(sic), very little supervision. They were in it to make money, basically. I don’t think they cared that much. They’d got a native speaker, and the perception is that a native speaker knows what he’s doing.

Such early experiences can help to imbue a corrosive sense of cynicism towards the job which can persist even if more positive experiences occur later on. This might be particularly the case in east and south-east Asia, where ELT is aggressively marketed. A highly competitive educational culture and a widespread perception that English is vital for economic advancement have all contributed to a favourable environment for the unprecedented growth of ELT over the past forty years (Park, 2009). Standards of

professional practice are decidedly mixed, and unscrupulous business practices were perceived to be fairly widespread amongst the teachers I interviewed. Before relocating to Thailand, Valerie spent three years working in both secondary and primary schools in South Korea. She complains that:

All you need is a passport from an English-speaking country and a BA, which doesn't necessarily need to be relevant to the profession. Qualified teachers are in the extreme minority. I was one of three out of hundreds in my city. What a waste of money for the Koreans.

Robert made the point that the concept of professionalism itself can differ sharply for working teachers and employers. The company he had worked for in China, a huge education multinational, had adopted a distinctive brand of corporate professionalism, which was not only qualitatively different to but in many ways incompatible with principled pedagogical practice, as Robert saw it:

The marketing was very slick. There was a kind of generic style business corporate culture, the branding was very good. So, it was weird, it was professional in the sense that it was a big, impersonal corporation, but if you mean professional in terms of, like, the teachers were serious and the managers were serious in the sense of trying to develop teachers and trying to do the best for their students, then I'd say no.

In terms of both professionalism and ethics, Robert raised an even more interesting question. Was it even possible to resolve the contradiction between a discourse of principled pedagogical professionalism and working within a commercially-based industry? "Some private language schools try to be as professional as they can, but at the end of the day we're all trying to make money out of Asia's new middle class". This echoes the point made by Hall and McGinty (2015) that the dominant concepts of professionalism today are overshadowed and often defined by the commercial logic of the market. This impacts sharply on issues of both pedagogy and ethics, and was a theme that was touched upon by a number of other teachers. Karen spoke about the unease she felt with the way the company she worked for in Hong Kong would pander to parental expectations, as they constituted their main customer base, despite the fact that there was little sound pedagogical reasoning behind the practices they encouraged, thus positioning her as a 'service provider' rather than a principled professional:

In Hong Kong, the parents wanted certain things. And even if it's not beneficial to the kids' education, we would give it to them. Like phonics, every

lesson they would do phonics, because the parents wanted to go home with a worksheet that said ‘we’ve done phonics.’

Sarah, a teacher who has worked in South Korea and Thailand, similarly voiced concerns regarding the nagging doubt she felt that the practice she was drawn into was not compatible with a sense of professional ethics:

ELT relies on competitive parents. We see this stream of kids trooping in and out of our classes, and we know they’re under so much pressure and they really need to be just given some space to relax and just be kids, but at the same time our bread and butter relies upon them studying English all weekend. It does worry me.

### **Qualifications**

The saturation of the ELT industry with often at best minimally qualified teachers and, crucially, the prioritisation of marketing native-speakers and commercial considerations over pedagogical professionalism by employers was an area of acute concern amongst the teachers. Despite the fact that for the most part their own entry into teaching was not prompted by any sense of vocation, many teachers appeared to believe that the ease with which such minimally-qualified individuals could find employment undermined a sense of professionalism. Robert, for example, said that it worried him that “the industry rests a lot upon young people doing the job for reasons other than a desire to be an English teacher.” Alya also acknowledged this when she said:

A lot of native speakers just want to travel, and teaching English is the easiest way for them to do that. It’s easy. It’s as easy as just going online, do a one-page written assignment, pass it, get your TEFL certificate, go to somewhere like China and teach. They’re prepared to do it for less money, they’re native speakers so they can be sold easily as a white, native-speaker by the companies that employ them.

Robert, who has worked in three countries in the region, recalls that when he worked for a language school in Vietnam, “everyone had to have a CELTA to get in”, and all managers were expected to have the higher-qualification Cambridge Diploma (DELTA). However, even the minimal requirement of a CELTA is far from the common experience in the region. “Where I worked in China”, said Robert, “you didn’t have to have a CELTA, almost anybody could get in there.”

Overall, there was a sense of resignation at this state of affairs. Some teachers were more optimistic than others that low standards could be turned around. Valerie, for example,

believed that although an uphill struggle, it was possible to begin to transform the situation for the better. She says that the university she worked for in Thailand is “is getting more professional.” She went on to elaborate:

Amongst recent changes there is a new professional development scheme, including free CELTAs for teachers who were hired without any teaching qualifications. It is Thailand, after all. There’s diagnostic and peer observations, and more in-service training for staff. There is paid academic leave if you deliver a workshop or paper at a conference. There are still a few guys who have zero teaching qualifications, who are hangers-on from a few years ago, but they are realizing that their days are numbered, and are upskilling.

The interviewees appeared to have differing opinions on who was to blame for the low standards of what they understood as professionalism within the industry, with a shifting emphasis on both unqualified teachers themselves and the companies that dominate commercial ELT. Ray described a company he previously worked for that owned a chain of language schools as “not always a professional place to work”, and appeared to blame this primarily on his perception that “a lot of the teachers didn’t take teaching seriously. They didn’t prepare lessons and were unqualified and inexperienced.” At a government school he worked for, standards were better, “but there were still a lot of lazy teachers”, with some teachers having “no idea about how to teach EFL” However, although he now works for a language school with a reputation for higher professional standards that does not employ unqualified teachers, it was interesting that he later went on to say that he considered that the management there had recently “become un-professional”, due to a “self-serving culture” within the organisation and a cynical attitude that prioritised business over student needs.

### **Re-shaping professional identity**

The generic corporate culture that Robert talked about in terms of his experience in China, is, as we have already noted, now dominant throughout sectors such as education that were once assumed to be primarily public services. It has tended to encourage what Mayer, Luke and Luke have termed the “generic teacher, branded as a corporate entity” (2008, p. 81). Part of this corporate identity which manifests itself particularly sharply within global ELT is the conceptualisation of the teacher in a primarily individualized sense, as a ‘go-getter’, an ‘edupreneur’ always alert to the opportunities to ‘add value’ to the corporate brand or to find individualized solutions to problems they face in their working lives. This new business culture thinly masks an intensification of the atomization and powerlessness of teachers as skilled workers, as competitive market pressures lead to management cultures that

place increasing demands on them. Referring directly to her own experience in one of the world's foremost language schools, Alya articulates the frustration and alienation that this top-down managerialist culture breeds when she complains that:

There's no consultation. They make policies, but teachers are the ones on the battlefield who have to carry it out. For management, it's all about ticking boxes. If you want to prove you are better, you have to do everything, sacrifice your free time and your energy, be committed to the company, but they don't define what you get in return. There should be less managing, and more supporting people. That's what is missing.

Teachers are increasingly evaluated not in terms of their pedagogical competency, but in terms of their 'attitude' and how much of their own free time they are prepared to sacrifice for whatever corporate brand they work for. This may very well exist alongside a superficial lip service on the part of employers to notions such as 'work-life balance' and 'professional development.'

### **The viability of a long-term career**

In practice, however, this culture tends to lead to increasing demoralisation and a reluctance to remain within teaching or to see it as a viable, stable career path. Kumaravadivelu (2003) has defined the semantic differences between job and career in terms of the degree of long-term involvement and, to a certain extent, the autonomy and respect the person engaged in it will receive. Karen, one of the few people I spoke to who had set out from university with a sense of 'calling' to be an English teacher was no longer so certain about the long-term viability of such a choice:

I think it depends on the person. More recently I've been thinking it's not a career for me because of the prospects in the future. I would like to go back to the UK eventually, and it's quite limited in what you can do. There are things you can do, but the money isn't very good compared to the cost of living in the UK.

Robert concurs:

You're always stuck in a foreign country, basically. Opportunities in English-speaking countries are limited, and it's always quite low pay, so you have to accept, like, exile. If I wanted to buy a house, or buy a car or, if I had kids, send them to university I think that would be extremely difficult to do, as an English teacher.

Robert's sense of what a professional career should entail and enable him to do is clearly clashing against the reality of his experience as a teacher. He is currently on a two-year contract, which is fairly standard for the industry in south-east Asia. "I'm 31, I have

about one more of these contracts in me”, he says, “Then, I’ll have to take a good look at what I’m going to do.”

Alya has similarly found the reality of working in ELT has gradually sapped her initial enthusiasm. This has been felt particularly acutely for her as a non-NEST, given the institutionalised discrimination that she feels exists within global ELT providing another barrier:

If someone had asked me two years ago whether this was going to be my long-term career, my answer would have most probably been yes. But now, I have doubts about it. Now I feel that, after doing all those courses and professional development, I’ve reached a ceiling and breaking that ceiling is quite tough. Do I have that much energy left to fight, to work harder, to start a new chapter in my career? I’m not so sure.

However, for some teachers who stay in the industry, ELT *is* viewed as a career. Valerie, for example, is adamant that it can and should be viewed as such:

Yes! It’s my career! It’s the only thing I know how to do. I’ve studied just about every aspect of it, and it’s what I’ve been doing professionally since 1998.

## **Conclusion**

Those concerns highlighted here are illustrative of the continuing tensions between the discourse of professionalism found within ELT organisations such as IATEFL and TESOL and the practice on the ground, as daily experienced by both teachers and students.

Although in common with Johnson’s (1997) study the teachers I spoke to did not, with one noted exception, draw upon any notion of vocation, unlike Johnson’s interviewees they did draw upon concepts of professionalism in the ways they framed their experiences within the ELT industry. It would appear that, while undoubtedly a contested concept, professionalism is also a resilient one. Largely their conceptions of professionalism conform to a model in which principled pedagogical approaches, alongside an emphasis on training, subject knowledge and collegiality, are emphasised, together with the expectation that employers should recognise these skills within a supportive framework. The inconsistency between the rhetoric of professionalism that long-term practitioners are very much aware of and the reality they are often faced with clearly leads to tensions which can be expressed in terms of cynicism and sometimes anger. Generally, morale appeared to be low amongst the majority of interviewees, which can at least partly be attributed to a perception that their professionalism was compromised by the practices and priorities of the industry they work in. Certainly, the voices of such teachers need to be heard and taken seriously if the

contradictions within ELT we have discussed here are ever to be resolved. And if one accepts this proposition, then we cannot but regret the fact that, despite the studies by Johnson (1997) and Wright et al. (2016) quoted here and a small number of others, the fact remains that the social position and predicament of the post-war phenomenon of the globally mobile English language teacher has yet to be either adequately researched or theorised. There is a troubling gap in both quantitative and qualitative data in this area that needs to be addressed.

In order for such research to be as productive as possible, however, it needs to adequately account for the complex, reciprocal relationship between objective conditions and subjective responses to them. Here, the theoretical weaknesses embodied in Johnson's analytical approach are again worth highlighting. Supposedly drawing upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Johnson is keen to stress that professional identity is not a 'unitary concept' but rather a subjectivised discourse. Furthermore, it is discourse itself that is "constitutive of reality", and therefore through language that individuals "constantly (re)create their world" (1997, p. 683). It follows for Johnson that whether teachers have professional careers cannot finally be established, "only how they talk about their life stories can be" (1997, p. 687). However, as Holborow (1999, p. 84) asks, if the materiality of social relations is "subsumed into discourse" in this way, "where does that leave power relations outside discourse?" In fact, as Whitty (2006) makes clear, the state has increasingly set out in specific ways to re-define the qualities of professionalism, through a combination of so-called market reforms combined with increasing levels of central government coercion. Within ELT, the focus of professionalism has been largely both shaped, and I would suggest compromised, by its positioning as a commercially-driven service industry (Farmer, 2006). And as Alsalahi (2005) points out in a discussion on teachers' professional development, it is actual social relationships and the conflicts they generate that are crucial in how occupational identities are constructed. He goes on to make the important observation that although teachers may be positioned by others in certain ways, for example as service providers rather than teaching professionals, "teacher's identity and agency can resist that position" (Alsalahi, 2005, p. 676).

Twenty years ago, Johnson (1997) described teachers and students as the people most disempowered in the educational process. Reasserting a framework of professionalism that reflects the best intentions of teachers to develop their practice in principled ways, make a socially worthwhile contribution and provide the best environment in which their students can develop can go some way to check the increasingly corporate version of 'technical-managerial' professionalism that is dominant within ELT and, increasingly, the wider world of education. For that to stand any chance of success, however, would mean that teachers in

the many diverse strands of ELT, often thought of as a fundamentally fragmented and unorganisable occupational group, would need to find ways to coordinate and act together, make their voices heard, and become genuinely empowered, reflective practitioners.

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## **Appendix 1**

### Questions:

- 1) How long have you been teaching English?
- 2) Why did you become an English teacher?
- 3) Where have you worked as an English teacher?
- 4) Do you consider being an English teacher as a career? Why / why not?
- 5) Would you describe the places you have worked as being 'professional environments'?  
Why / why not?
- 6) Do you think you will still be working within ELT in ten years?
- 7) How could your working life as a teacher be improved?

## **L1 Versus L2 Use in Peer Review of L2 Writing in English**

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### **Bioprofile**

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### **Abstract**

While peer review has gained increasing popularity in second language (L2) writing classrooms, the use of the first versus second language during the review task has remained under-explored. This study recruited 17 Taiwanese EFL undergraduates and investigated four rounds of peer reviews, two performed in learners' first language (L1) and the other two in their L2, to examine the differences brought by the L1 and L2 during peer review of L2 writing in English. Data collected included questionnaire responses, interview accounts, and peer comments, which were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings suggested that despite a greater tendency to digress, students made more comments in L1 than in L2 review sessions. Yet, in contrast to a previous finding they made more global comments in the L2 than in the L1. Additionally, instances of L2-to-L1 code switching found in the L2 review data indicated that learners' L1 use may contribute to meaning negotiation and mutual scaffolding. Results also revealed that although some students believed that L2 use was beneficial and obligated in L2 learning tasks, they mostly held positive attitudes towards L1 use in peer review of L2 writing. The article concludes by suggesting implications including instructing students of the roles of the L1 in L2 learning.

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**Keywords:** peer review, L2 writing, L1 use, L2 use

## Introduction

Peer review has gained increasing popularity in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing classrooms. It has been lauded as offering multiple benefits, such as encouraging collaborative learning (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Lee 1997; Tsui & Ng, 2000), developing audience awareness and critical thinking skills (Lee, 1997; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000), fostering learners' sense of ownership of text (Tsui & Ng, 2000), raising students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses (Tsui & Ng, 2000), and providing a more authentic audience as compared with teacher response (Caulk, 1994). Research has focused on different aspects of peer review, such as learners' attitudes towards peer review (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Sengupta, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000), linguistic and sociocognitive behaviors in peer review (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Mendonça & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996), benefits for receivers (Berg, 1999; Min, 2005, 2006) and for givers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Notwithstanding some documented problems (Liu & Hansen, 2002; Rollinson, 2005), empirical research has found a generally positive effect of peer review on writing improvement. For example, in a Japanese context, Kamimura (2006) found that peer review led to writing improvement for both high- and low-proficiency students. Research has also pointed out that students were largely receptive to peer feedback and incorporated a high number of peer comments into their revisions (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). Furthermore, in a Hong Kong context, Lee (1997) reported that students revised their work both based on and independently of the peer comments they received, suggesting that peer review may stimulate revision in writing. Despite a consistent interest, an issue remains regarding the language of communication during peer review of L2 writing. More specifically, should students use the L2 exclusively for negotiating meaning as well as making and receiving both oral and written comments? Can the use of the L1 or the L2 contribute to varying amounts and kinds of peer comments? The past decades have seen a growing interest in research on L1 use in L2 writing and peer oral feedback, but scarce attention has been paid to the use of the L1 in peer written feedback, with the exception of Yu and Lee (2014). Since learners' L1 is increasingly viewed as a resource for language learning (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012), an investigation of its influence on peer review as a popular instructional strategy in L2 classrooms (Chang, 2016; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) is of both theoretical and pedagogical relevance. The current study investigated four rounds of peer reviews of L2 writing in English, two performed in learners' L1 (Chinese) and the other two in their L2 (English), to explore the differences brought by the L1 and L2 during peer review of L2 writing in English.

## Literature review

### *L1 use in L2 learning tasks*

In L2 classrooms, the L1 has traditionally been either avoided or ignored, if not banned altogether (Howatt, 1984). Advocates of an L2-only policy argued that the amount of exposure to the target language impacted positively on learners' L2 development (Turnbull, 2001) and that excessive use of the L1 could deprive students of opportunities to use the language they were learning (Ellis, 1984). Cook (2001), however, espoused teaching methods that deliberately involve learners' L1, arguing that monolingual L2 use in the language classroom has no theoretical rationale. Cook further contended that code switching between L1 and L2 is normal when the interactants share two languages. Moreover, when doing classroom activities, learners through the L1 can scaffold each other with the goal of completing tasks. They can, for example, "explain the task to each other, negotiate roles they are going to take, or check their understanding or production of language against their peers" (p. 418). Therefore, the L1 should be treated as a valuable resource rather than a frustrating hindrance.

Empirical research has systematically examined learners' use of the L1 in L2 learning tasks and found that learners used their L1 for multiple functions. Among the first studies in this line of research, Antón and DiCamilla (1999) found that the L1 served both interpsychological and intrapsychological functions. That is, learners used their L1 to scaffold each other, establish intersubjectivity, and vocalize their thoughts. Swain and Lapkin's (2000) investigation reported students' use of their L1 for managing the task, searching for vocabulary items, retrieving grammatical information, and for off-task interaction. In an Arabic-speaking context, Storch and Aldosari (2010) identified five functions of student L1 use in a text reconstruction task and a joint composition task: task management, discussing and generating ideas, grammar deliberations, vocabulary deliberations, and mechanics deliberations. Although these categories of functions varied depending on the tasks involved, researchers have generally agreed that L1 use contributed positively to L2 learning.

Research has also examined learners' attitudes towards using the L1 in the L2 classroom. In Storch and Wigglesworth (2003), learners expressed reservations about using their shared L1 in L2 activities. On the one hand, students explained that using the L1 would necessitate an additional translation stage and therefore slow down the activity; on the other, they felt that in L2 activities they should speak as much L2 as possible so as to maximize their practice opportunities. Despite these reservations, learners admitted that using the L1 could help complete tasks more efficiently. In particular, they pointed out that their L1 was

useful in arguing a point and in explaining difficult vocabulary and grammar to each other, particularly when they lacked the required metalanguage.

### *L1 use in composing L2 writing*

Researchers have extensively examined L1 use in composing L2 writing. Studies have identified both quantitative and qualitative differences between higher- and lower-proficiency writers' use of the L1. Quantitatively, lower-proficiency L2 writers were found to use or translate from their L1 more frequently than higher-proficiency writers (Murphy & Roca de Larios, 2010; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002). Qualitatively, higher-proficiency writers tended to switch strategically between their two languages while their lower-proficiency counterparts' switching was unidirectional and decontextualized (Wang, 2003). Furthermore, research has shown that L2 writers of all proficiency levels may use their L1 for purposes such as generating ideas (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Friedlander, 1990; van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009; Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002), planning (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; van Weijen et al., 2009; Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002), controlling the process (Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002), evaluating the text produced (Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002), and solving linguistic problems (Lay, 1982; Wang, 2003; Woodall, 2002).

However, writers' L1 use was found to vary among these individual conceptual activities during the writing process. For example, Wang and Wen (2002) examined 16 Chinese undergraduate students' use of the L1 in L2 writing and reported that writers' L1 use was related to the text itself. That is, writers relied more on their L2 when the activities were involved with text generating. Conversely, when the cognitive processing was least directly related to the textual output, such as in idea generating and idea organizing activities, writers were more likely to use their L1. To summarize, L1 use during L2 writing is a complex phenomenon (van Weijen et al., 2009) and research is yet inconclusive, but the L1 has been established as a ubiquitous tool among L2 writers and an important mediational device in the writing process.

### *L1 use in peer review of L2 writing*

In recent years, peer review has become a common practice in L2 writing instruction. While a large body of research has accumulated on various aspects of peer review, L1 use has received little focused attention. Studies of peer oral feedback have repeatedly reported the beneficial role of learners' L1 in peer interaction. For example, Investigating 54 Spanish-

speaking university students of English, Villamil and de Guerrero (1996) found that learners used their L1 (Spanish) to facilitate the peer revision process. More specifically, they used Spanish to make meaning of text, retrieve language from memory, explore content, and sustain dialogue. Zhao's study (2010) of 18 Chinese learners' use and understanding of teacher and peer feedback also reported that learners' L1 facilitated peer interaction during peer review activities. Despite these consistent findings regarding its facilitative role, in some peer review studies L1 use was deliberately prevented in favor of either an implicit or explicit English-only policy, as in DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001), where learners with different L1s were grouped together only to ensure the use of English in peer review sessions. Such an English-only policy apparently does not take into consideration that "L2 students may be further handicapped when they are required to give oral or written feedback in the L2, the language they are learning" (Hu & Lam, 2010, p. 374).

As yet, the only known research focusing on L1 use in peer written review was Yu and Lee's (2014) Hong Kong study. They investigated L1 and L2 use of 22 Chinese EFL learners providing written feedback on a peer text and found that students tended to use the L1 to comment on content and the L2 on form. Through interviews, Yu and Lee identified factors influencing students' L1 and L2 use, including their beliefs and goals (e.g., L2 use was deemed more suitable in an L2 learning task), linguistic and affective factors (e.g., L1 was preferred by students with lower English proficiency), teacher requirement and teacher feedback practices, and ease of communication and power relationship between reviewers and writers. While their study has identified learners' preference in using the L1 and the L2 to give written feedback and how their preference was influenced by a myriad of interacting variables, still little is known about learners' capability in making comments, and comments of different kinds, in their L1 and L2. This paper reports on an investigation of four peer reviews of L2 writing, two conducted in learners' L1 and two in their L2, to explore the influence of the language factor on feedback making and perception. Two research questions were addressed:

1. Does the language of communication, i.e., learners' L1 or L2, affect EFL students' task engagement and peer comments in peer review?
2. How do students perceive the use of the L1 and L2 in peer review?



## Method

### *Research context and participants*

This study was conducted in an English composition course at a public university in southern Taiwan. The course was mandatory for first-year English majors but open to all other students on campus on a first-come, first-serve basis. The class met twice a week for a total of 150 minutes. The primary medium of instruction was English, but students' L1 use was not prohibited. All the 17 students, averaging 19 years old, agreed to participate in the research, and written consent was obtained. Their estimated English competence levels ranged from intermediate to low-advanced. As shown in Table 1, a majority of the participants were first-year English majors without prior peer review experience.

**Table 1: Participants' profile**

Feature	Profile
Gender	12 (71%) female; 5 (29%) male
Major	12 (71%) English major; 5 (29%) non-English major
Year of study	11 (64%) first year; 3 (18%) sophomore; 3 (18%) junior
Years of English learning	4 (24%) 6-9 years; 8 (47%) 10-13 years; 5 (29%) 14+ years
Self-rated English writing ability	4 (24%) good; 10 (59%) fair; 3 (18%) poor
Prior peer review experience	6 (35%) yes; 11 (65%) no

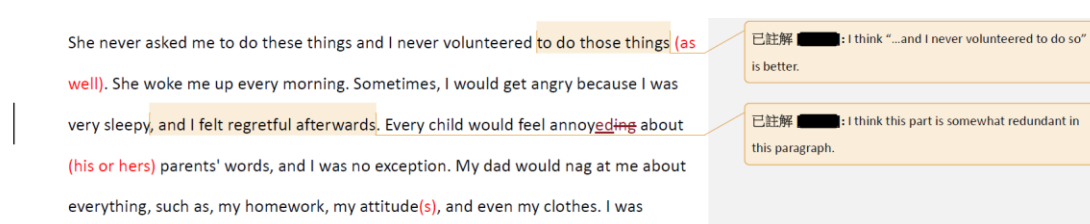
### *Writing assignments and peer review tasks*

Students were required to write five paragraph assignments in the semester. For each assignment, the instructor-researcher introduced a rhetorical mode by explaining its organizing patterns and presenting two or three sample paragraphs, either selected from the course book or provided in the instructor's handouts. Then, students were given a list of topics to choose from to draft a paragraph. Time allowed, students were paired to brainstorm and develop ideas for their writing before they went away to complete the first draft. Then, each assignment went through a writing cycle consisting of the following steps: first draft → peer review → second draft → teacher feedback → final draft. Students were randomly assigned a partner to review each other's writing. The first peer review was designed as practice, so this study collected and analyzed only the data of the peer reviews for the last four assignments: description, exemplification, analysis by division, and process analysis.

topics for the four assignments can be found in Appendix A. With a few exceptions (9%), the length of student texts ranged between 239 and 358 words, with an average of 284.

To investigate the impact of language on peer review, students were required to conduct the first two peer reviews in Chinese and the last two in English. Furthermore, this study adopted computer-mediated peer review (CMPR) for two reasons. First, the instructor was able to better monitor the peer review process and intervene to give assistance when needed (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001). Second, computer-mediated peer comments and archived online discussion allowed students to review suggestions that were provided (Breuch, 2004), thereby facilitating their revision based on peer feedback. In addition, these four computer-mediated peer reviews adopted synchronous and asynchronous modes alternately because each of these two modes has its own strengths, such as synchronous interaction providing opportunities for learner negotiation and asynchronous communication allowing time for more thoughtful response (Chang, 2012). Nevertheless, both for space constraints and for better focus, this study did not specifically address the influence of the two modes although it is acknowledged that modes of peer review could affect both cognitive and affective aspects of peer feedback (Chang, 2012; Liu & Sadler, 2003).

The two asynchronous CMPR tasks adopted email and the “insert comments” and “track changes” features in Microsoft Word. Figure 1 shows a snapshot of a student’s feedback in one of the asynchronous CMPR tasks.



*Figure 1. A student’s feedback in an asynchronous CMPR task.*

In the two synchronous CMPR tasks, Hangouts, an instant messaging platform developed by Google, was chosen for its accessibility and ease of use. To prepare students for the CMPR tasks, a workshop was held in a computer lab to provide training in how to give feedback and use the selected technologies. Table 2 presents the designated language and mode of communication in each peer review.

**Table 2: Peer review activities**

	Language of Communication	CMPR Mode
Peer Review 1	L1 (Chinese)	Asynchronous
Peer Review 2	L1 (Chinese)	Synchronous
Peer Review 3	L2 (English)	Asynchronous
Peer Review 4	L2 (English)	Synchronous

### *Data collection and analysis*

Data for this study included questionnaire responses, interview accounts, and peer comments drawn from student online discussion logs, emails, and student drafts.

Two survey questionnaires were used at the beginning and end of the semester, respectively. The pre-study questionnaire asked for participants' demographic information, self-rated writing ability, and prior peer review experience. The post-study questionnaire, adapted from Chang (2012), consisted of four 5-point Likert-scale questions (5 being *strongly agree*, 1 being *strongly disagree*), followed by two questions examining participants' preference for the language used in peer review. Space was also provided for students to indicate reasons for their language preference.

Ten of the participants volunteered for follow-up interviews conducted one week after the project. The interviews, each lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, were conducted in the student's L1 to ensure free expression of their experience and opinions. The Likert-scale items in the questionnaire were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Responses to the open questions, together with interview transcripts, were subjected to qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), through which topics were identified and categorized, allowing themes to emerge.

In addition, two levels of analysis were performed on the peer comments extracted from Hangouts and email feedback sessions. First, following de Guerrero and Villamil (1994), students' online feedback was segmented and classified into three types of episodes: on-task, about-task, and off-task.

- On-task episodes are utterances that are “semantically related in topic or purpose to one discrete troublesource or a series of connected troublesources” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 486).
- About-task episodes refer to dialogue concerning task procedures rather than specific troublesources.
- Off-task episodes involve comments that are unrelated to text revision or

improvement.

Then, peer comments generated in on-task episodes were categorized by area (global versus local), nature (revision-oriented versus non-revision-oriented), and type (evaluation, clarification, suggestion, and alteration), following Liu and Sadler (2003). While comments in global areas focus on “idea development, audience and purpose, and organization of writing” (Liu & Sadler, 2003, p. 202), comments in local areas relate to problems in wording, grammar, and punctuation. Revision-oriented comments refer to suggestions that could lead to text improvement when incorporated properly in revision. Non-revision-oriented comments involve discourse unrelated to revision. Evaluation comments are feedback on “good or bad features of writing” (Liu & Sadler, 2003, p. 202), clarification comments seek explanations and justifications from the writers, suggestions give directions for changes, and alteration comments provide specific changes.

To ensure reliability, the researcher and a trained research assistant separately coded approximately 20% of the collected comments. Any disagreement that arose was resolved by discussion. Then the research assistant coded the remaining data, which the researcher spot-checked for accuracy.

## **Results**

### *Students' task engagement in L1 and L2 peer reviews*

As shown in Table 3, on-task episodes occurred the most frequently both in L1 and L2 peer reviews, suggesting that students tended to focus on the review task regardless of the language that it was performed in. Nevertheless, while peer reviews conducted in Chinese generated roughly equal percentages of about-task (14.6%) and off-task (16.6%) episodes, the number of off-task episodes produced in the two English peer review sessions (10.3%) was perceivably smaller than that of about-task episodes (17.7%). These findings suggested that students, when conducting peer feedback in their L2, were less likely to digress from the review task into discussion of matters unrelated to text revision.

**Table 3: Task focus in peer review in Chinese and English**

Task focus	Occurrence		Percentage	
	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
On-task	212	146	68.8	71.9
About-task	45	36	14.6	17.7
Off-task	51	21	16.6	10.3

*Note.* Total unit number = 511. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

This contrast is evident when the same pairs of students are compared across the two synchronous reviews performed in the L1 and the L2. In the L1 Hangouts session, John and Patricia, two participants, reviewed each other's exemplification paragraphs, John writing about a good teacher's characteristics and Patricia the anguish of waiting in line. Before starting to suggest changes for text improvement, the two students spent approximately 20 minutes giving each other general comments about the subject matter of their writing. These comments, although generated from the drafts, were irrelevant to writing problems and thus classified as off-task talk. Furthermore, these lengthy comments were apparently made to show empathy and establish rapport at the start of the peer review, as revealed in the following:

- a. 我還滿同意你的 一個好老師理應具備這些特質 [*I quite agree with you. A good teacher should possess these characteristics.*]
- b. 我覺得排隊真的是一件很煩人的事，我就你舉的例子一個一個的講吧 [*I think waiting in line is really annoying. Let me elaborate using your examples one by one.*]

In contrast, in the Hangouts session conducted in the L2, John and Patricia moved directly on to the writing problems after a brief discussion of task procedures. Although at the end of the session Patricia related a story of hers in response to the content of John's draft, they did not converse elaborately as they did in the L1 Hangouts session.

#### *Peer comments made in Chinese and English*

Peer comments generated in on-task episodes were further analyzed by area, nature, and type. Table 4 shows the frequencies and percentages of peer comments made in Chinese and English by area.

**Table 4: Peer comments in Chinese and English by area**

Comment area	Occurrence		Percentage	
	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
Global	37	41	17.5	28.1
Local	175	105	82.5	71.9
Subtotal	212	146	100	100

*Note.* Total unit number = 358.

Overall, students made more comments in Chinese ( $n = 212$ ) than in English ( $n = 146$ ), but they made a notably greater percentage of global comments in English (28.1%) than in Chinese (17.5%). Yu and Lee's (2014) comparison study of L1 and L2 use found that when given choice, students were far more likely to use the L1 to give feedback on global aspects of writing (content and organization) and the L2 on language form. However, students in the current study seemed to feel rather at ease with giving content and organization feedback in the L2, as exemplified in the following excerpts.

- c. How wonderful the restaurant is, but I will like to know is there anything special then others that will make me want to go there again.
- d. I think the second paragraph is too short. You should probably add more details about the food, like its taste, its smell, its appearance, etc.
- e. Moreover, this paragraph is really well-organized // Really!!

In addition, a majority of peer comments were revision-oriented whether they were written in Chinese (83%) or English (78.8%), as indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5: Peer comments in Chinese and English by nature**

Comment nature	Occurrence		Percentage	
	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
Revision	176	115	83.0	78.8
Non-revision	36	31	17.0	21.2

*Note.* Total unit number = 358.

Further observation suggested that the non-revision-oriented comments were mostly

praises or approval, and the language factor did not seem to play a significant role here, as exemplified in the following comments:

- f. 很棒的詞彙! (色彩設計) [*Wonderful vocabulary! (The color design)*]
- g. I think your introduction about Mudlark is quite clear and attractive! :)

Analysis further suggested that alteration feedback occurred the most frequently among the four comment types, while clarification was the least used type. As shown in Table 6, In both L1 and L2 peer feedback, alteration comments accounted for over half of the collected comments, with a higher percentage in L1 feedback (56.1%) than in L2 feedback (50.7%). Next to alteration, evaluation was the second most common feedback type in both L1 and L2 peer comments, but students made more comments of this type in L2 feedback (26.7%) than in L1 feedback (21.2%).

**Table 6: Peer Comments in Chinese and English by Type**

Comment type	Occurrence		Percentage	
	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
Evaluation	45	39	21.2	26.7
Clarification	16	7	7.5	4.8
Suggestion	32	26	15.1	17.8
Alteration	119	74	56.1	50.7

*Note.* Total unit number = 358. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

An overview of the 16 commentary categories, formed from combinations of area, nature, and type, shows a considerable similarity between peer comments made in Chinese and English. In both Chinese and English reviews, revision-oriented alteration in local areas was employed the most frequently and accounted for around half of all peer comments (54.2% in Chinese vs. 50% in English), while global/non-revision/evaluation feedback (10.8% in Chinese vs. 19.2% in English) and local/revision/suggestion comments (9.9% in Chinese vs. 9.6% in English) ranked second and third, respectively, in both L1 and L2 feedback.

**Table 7: Peer omments in Chinese and English in the 16 commentary categories**

Commenting area/nature/type	Occurrence		Percentage	
	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
Global/revision/evaluation	2	0	0.9	0
Global/non-revision/evaluation	23	28	10.8	19.2
Local/revision/evaluation	13	9	6.1	6.2
Local/non-revision/evaluation	7	2	3.3	1.4
Global/revision/clarification	0	0	0	0
Global/non-revision/clarification	0	0	0	0
Local/revision/clarification	13	6	6.1	4.1
Local/non-revision/clarification	3	1	1.4	0.7
Global/revision/suggestion	11	12	5.2	8.2
Global/non-revision/suggestion	0	0	0	0
Local/revision/suggestion	21	14	9.9	9.6
Local/non-revision/suggestion	0	0	0	0
Global/revision/alteration	1	1	0.5	0.7
Global/non-revision/alteration	0	0	0	0
Local/revision/alteration	115	73	54.2	50.0
Local/non-revision/alteration	3	0	1.4	0

*Note.* Total unit number = 358. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

#### *Code Switching in Peer Comments*

Although students in this study were instructed to conduct peer review either exclusively in the L1 or exclusively in the L2, instances of code switching were found in the data, particularly in the two synchronous CMPR sessions. Analysis of learners' L1 review data suggested that students switched to the L2 for three functions. Predominantly, students switched from the L1 to the L2 to refer to text and related revision, as is inevitable in discussion of L2 texts. In the following example, the reviewer switched to the L2 to identify a troublesource and suggest changes:

- h. 覺得這裡用 [*I think here using*] place 較為妥當 [*is more appropriate*]。Glance 的話是一瞥的意思，用來描述第一眼看見的地方好像怪怪的。或許可以改成 [*means a brief look, and it's a bit weird to use the word to refer to what you see first. Perhaps you can change it to*] where you can see at first glance after opening the door

These students also used English to refer to grammar concepts learned through the L2



(English). The following two excerpts demonstrate learners' reference to such two grammar concepts, comma splice and dangling modifier.

- i. 這句是 [*This sentence is a*] comma splice
- j. 覺得以下兩點可以注意一下：//1.主詞不一(就是這星期教的 [*I think you may want to pay attention to the following two points: 1. Different subjects (which is this week's grammar focus)*] Dangling Modifiers) //2.需要斷句 [*You need to start a new sentence here*]

The final group of learner code switching instances in L1 review sessions seems to reflect participants' habitual language use. In other words, students may be accustomed to inserting certain English words in their daily use of Chinese.

- k. 我按到 enter 了 [*I have accidentally pressed the enter key.*]
- l. 無法連接。 [*This cannot connect to the next sentence.*] 我試著 [*I'll try to*] rephrase。 There is a huge window through which the bright sunlight percolate every morning as my natural alarm clock. 很讚的 [*A wonderful*] metaphor

On the other hand, students were also found to switch to the L1 during L2 peer reviews for various reasons. First, they may resort to the L1 when encountering vocabulary problems in their writing. For example, during a Hangouts session, Chris, the reviewer, presented the definitions of a vocabulary item to show Yvonne, the writer, that the vocabulary item might have been used incorrectly. Consequently, Yvonne switched to Chinese both to clarify her meaning and seek help:

Chris     Do you mean getting dressed? Dressing up has some meanings. / 1.  
              To wear special clothes / 2. To wear formal clothes / 3. To make  
              something more interesting or attractive

Yvonne   I want to write 穿上衣服 [*put on clothes*] / so what do I say 穿上衣服 [*put on clothes*]

Chris     put...on

Yvonne   yeah I know I want to write put on

The second reason for learners' L2-to-L1 switching was to refer to grammar concepts to account for their own or their peer's perceived lack of L2 grammatical terms. In (m), the student tried to explain by analyzing the grammatical structure of her sentence, but she had to switch to Chinese for want of the English word for the grammatical term.

m. just one subject / two verbs / subject is the melody, her nagging / the melody, her nagging 同位語 [*appositive*]

Students may resist switching to the L1 immediately. In the following excerpt, Ken, the writer, first tried to explain his sentence by inventing a grammatical term "fake article," resulting in apparent communication breakdown. Eventually, Ken resorted to the L1 in order to continue the meaning negotiation.

Sandy I think it shouldn't use "it." / It makes reader confussed. / because dog "it" / and trick / also "it"

Ken the first meaning of "it" / is the fake article / not a pronoun

Sandy what do u mean?

Ken 前面那個是虛主詞阿/它真正的主詞在後面 [*The first one is an empty subject! The real subject is what follows.*] /To teach a little creature

In (n), the student also switched to the L1 when referring to a grammatical term. Yet, he made the switch apparently not because he lacked the English word but because he considered that his peer might lack the metalinguistic vocabulary to understand his feedback.

n. Let me give you an example. / There is a drunkard. / (Correct) the solution to drinking / (Not good) the solution to quit drinking / Do you see what I mean? / The solution is not supposed to be followed by an infinitive. /不定詞 [*infinitive*]

A third use of the L1 in these L2 review data pointed to the affectivity aspect, thought to be essential in collaborative interaction (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). In the following excerpt, Stanley, the reviewer, started the review session by praising Sandy's writing, which Sandy acknowledged with a "thank you" followed by the L1 transliteration of the reviewer's English nickname, apparently as a show of affection.

Stanley Hello there, this is Stanley. / I finished my job.

Sandy okay / we can start it

Stanley Your writing is quite clear.

Sandy thank u~ 史丹利 [*shǐ dān lì (Stanley)*]

### *Student perception of peer review in the L1 and the L2*

To answer the second research question, responses to the post-study questionnaire were analyzed together with interview transcripts to explore students' perception of L1 versus L2 peer review. All of the participants reported that peer review using English helped improve writing quality, although over half of them acknowledged that L1 peer review also helped text improvement (58.8%). In terms of convenience and efficiency, however, slightly more students found Chinese (82.3%) convenient and efficient to use in peer review than English (76.5%).

**Table 8: Attitudes towards peer review in Chinese and English**

Item	SD/D	Neutral	SA/A	Mean	SD
1. Peer review using <u>Chinese</u> helps to improve my overall writing quality.	3 (17.6%)	4 (23.5%)	10 (58.8%)	3.47	0.87
2. Peer review using <u>English</u> helps to improve my overall writing quality.	0	0	17 (100%)	4.47	0.51
3. Peer review using <u>Chinese</u> is convenient and efficient.	0	3 (17.6%)	14 (82.3%)	4.29	0.77
4. Peer review using <u>English</u> is convenient and efficient.	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	13 (76.5%)	3.71	0.92

To find out whether students differed in their language preference when playing the roles of feedback givers and receivers respectively, two additional questions were posed in the survey. Table 9 shows that the respondents were equally divided in their language preference between Chinese and English when receiving feedback, but they tended to prefer using Chinese (62.5%) when acting as feedback givers.

**Table 9: Preferences for peer review language**

(N = 16)		Chinese	English
5.	In which language do you like to <i>receive</i> feedback more?	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
6.	In which language do you like to <i>give</i> feedback more?	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)

Responses to open questions and interviews provide reasons for participants' language preference. In terms of receiving feedback, those who preferred Chinese found it easier to understand peer comments written in their shared mother tongue, particularly when the feedback contained grammar explanations. On the other hand, those who preferred English offered two explanations. Some found it easier to incorporate comments written in English into their own revision. Others believed that reading English feedback provided opportunity to enhance their skills of reading and feedback giving in the L2.

When acting as feedback givers, slightly more students preferred using Chinese. They explained that using the L1 to give feedback could ensure better, fuller expression and fewer grammar or vocabulary errors in comments. Using the L1 also meant more efficiency and less work in executing the peer review task, as acknowledged by an interviewee:

I think I'll opt for Chinese . . . because it's more direct. You don't really need to think . . . to translate [thoughts] into English . . . kind of . . . an easy way out.

However, one respondent noted that although she preferred L1 use for its efficiency, she also found giving feedback in English useful because it would provide more English practice opportunities, the very reason held by a majority of those who indicated their preference for English use in feedback giving. Furthermore, those who preferred to consult English-language resources during peer review also found it more convenient to give feedback in English because they could simply "copy and paste" online grammar explanations without having to render them into Chinese. Finally, a number of students found it more consistent "language-wise" to use English in computer-mediated peer review, as one respondent reported, "[using English] would save me the trouble of switching between two input languages [on the keyboard]."

While students developed preferences for the language of communication after experiencing the two approaches, the interviews revealed factors affecting their language preference including teacher feedback practice and language learning belief. For example, one interviewee explained why he disagreed with the statement that peer review using

Chinese helped improve writing:

I just thought that we should comment on English writing in English. It's like what I said earlier, we should, whenever possible, study grammar by reading grammar books written in the original language. How shall I put it? It's like, we should comment on assignments written in a certain language using that very language. It's like, we don't comment on Chinese writing using English.

But after further reflection he began to feel uncertain why he should insist on making comments in English, except that it was the language chosen by his previous teachers to give feedback on writing:

The teachers back in my high school commented in English on my [English] writing. That's why I find it odd to make comments in Chinese. But, having said that, I can certainly provide corrections using Chinese. Giving comments in Chinese is also not a problem to me. In fact, using Chinese and using English are not that different in terms of effectiveness. I cannot see much difference. I just find it a bit odd to use Chinese.

## **Discussion**

This study has addressed whether Taiwanese EFL students behaved differently when required to use either the L1 or the L2 in peer feedback and how they perceived the language factor in peer review of English L2 writing. It was found that when using the L2 in peer review, participants were more likely to stay on task and less prone to digress into discussion of matters unrelated to text revision. In contrast, they tended to engage more frequently in about-task and off-task behavior when using the L1, a finding that lent support to a previous observation that learners used the L1 for task management and interpersonal interaction (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Nevertheless, despite a greater tendency to digress, students actually made more comments in L1 review sessions, suggesting that L1 use may have helped reduce the cognitive load involved in planning L2 production, thus allowing learners to expend more effort on the review task itself. Consequently, they were able to identify more troublesources in peer's writing and suggest changes accordingly.

Furthermore, this study found a similar distribution of the 16 commentary categories in peer comments across the two languages, indicating that the Taiwanese EFL students were capable of using both the L1 and the L2 to provide feedback on either content or form, in either evaluation, clarification, suggestion, or alteration, for revision or non-revision purposes. Nevertheless, despite this similarity, these students made more global comments in the L2 than in the L1, a finding in contrast to that reported by Yu and Lee (2014), who also

investigated Chinese-speaking undergraduate students' peer review behavior. This divergence may be explained by the different teacher feedback practices in the two studies. Participants in Yu and Lee were recruited from eight English classes. These classes were taught by different instructors, whose feedback practices varied from using only English in both written and oral feedback to using both English and Chinese in written feedback. On the other hand, participants in the current study came from the same class, where the instructor used only English in written feedback, which featured comments in global areas. Students may have modeled their peer comments on the instructor's feedback, thus generating more global comments in the L2 than in the L1.

Additionally, instances of both L1-to-L2 and L2-to-L1 code switching were found in the data. In particular, students were observed to switch to the L1 in L2 review sessions when encountering vocabulary problems, referring to grammatical concepts, and showing appreciation and affection. These uses corroborated the findings in multiple previous studies (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2000), where learners were observed to use the L1 to scaffold each other, resolve grammar and vocabulary problems, and establish interpersonal relationship. Among them, the metalinguistic function served by the L1 seemed to be the most conspicuous, as seen in the instances where students switched to the L1 to accommodate either their own or their partner's perceived lack of L2 grammatical terminology, thus contributing to students' meaning negotiation and mutual scaffolding in the review task.

The current study also observed that a majority of the students believed that L2 use was not only beneficial but also obligated in L2 learning tasks, a finding corroborating those found in previous studies (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Yu & Lee, 2014). Furthermore, these attitudes seemed to relate to a multitude of factors including learner beliefs and teacher feedback practices (Yu & Lee, 2014). On the other hand, while previous studies found learner reservations about L1 use in L2 tasks (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003), this study witnessed apparently much less reluctance in using the L1 in peer review of L2 writing. This disparity may be accounted for by the role of the L1 in the present study context, where students and teacher shared the same L1 while English was learned as a foreign language. Furthermore, unlike in many L2 learning classrooms, where the L1 was discouraged or even banned, students in this class were asked to use the L1 in two of the peer reviews. This task requirement may have conveyed to students a message that both languages in their repertoire were legitimate in L2 learning, thus contributing to their more positive attitudes towards L1 use.

The findings of the current study can assist writing teachers in adjusting their instructional strategy to better facilitate students' learning to write. Certain implications can be drawn regarding peer review implementation. First, the data suggested that using the L1 in L2 peer review can potentially be beneficial to students' writing development. Therefore, when assigning peer review of L2 writing, teachers should not prohibit L1 use without first considering the functions and benefits of learner L1 use. Furthermore, students can be invited to participate in the decision regarding the language policy in peer review tasks. This can be achieved in two stages. Teachers can discuss explicitly the functions and implications of using the L1 in peer review so that students are made aware of the roles of the L1 in L2 learning as well as the learning and practice opportunities involved in using the L2 for peer review. Learners can then be guided to regulate their language use and negotiate in pairs or small groups which language to use or how and when to switch between their two linguistic resources.

Participants in this study were just 17 students from one educational institution in a particular cultural context. Therefore, care must be taken in generalizing the results to larger and different populations. Also, this study did not investigate individual peer review performance and attitudes although the class comprised of both English and non-English majors with varying L2 proficiency and years of English learning. It was possible that students' command of the L2 played a role in their feedback behavior and attitudes. In addition, this study did not examine individual comments and their adoption by peer writers. Further research can be conducted to investigate whether the feedback language would affect the quality of peer comments and the subsequent adoption of comments by the writer.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Topics for the Four Assignments**

#### **Description**

- Describe a room in your home.
- Describe your dorm room.

#### **Exemplification**

- High school is not a waste of time
- People cannot be trusted
- Waiting in line is tiresome
- What good teachers have in common

#### **Analysis by division**

- Write a restaurant review.
- Write about a successful or praiseworthy person.

#### **Process analysis**

- Write a paragraph of advice to people your age about the process involved in succeeding at some task.
- Write an entertaining description of the steps involved in making a dish.

## Reflections on Modified Genre-Based Instructions to Teach Essay Writing to Thai University Students

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### Abstract

Thai university students' English language performance has been reported to be unsatisfactory and their writing ability is of particular concern as most writing programs are still taught using the grammar translation model. Therefore, an effort to help Thai students improve their writing skills in English has been exerted. The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a modified genre-based instruction to teach essay writing to Thai university students whose major is in English. This approach was modified to suit these students' difficulties, needs and expectations in studying writing in English as revealed in the questionnaire and the suggestions from previous studies on Thai learners. Besides the supplementary materials on the basic structure of an academic essay and four target types of essays (explanation, problem-solution, comparison-contrast, and persuasion) which were developed and taught together with the course book employing the modified genre-based approach, a 5-point Likert scale survey and a focus group interview were also conducted and 296 essays were graded to learn about the effectiveness of this modified instruction. In addition to these students' topics of interest, writing strategies, difficulties, and expectations from the writing course and their teacher, the results showed their positive attitudes to the new teaching approach, activities and exercises and a positive signal for autonomous learning

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despite their slight resistance. Moreover, their writing was found to be successful in terms of their control of the internal structure and their use of appropriate linguistic features specific to each type of essay to achieve its

communicative purposes. These findings would suggest a new model for effectively teaching writing in a culturally-based context of English learning that exists in Thailand and in other Asian countries with similar cultural values.

**Keywords:** essay writing, Thai university student, writing instruction, genre approach, EFL learner

## **Introduction**

Essays are considered as a genre because they are written for the intended audience and in a recognizable structure in order to achieve a particular communicative purpose. Hyland (2004) and Martin (1989) state that essays which narrate, report, explain, recount, describe, or account for something are factual genres or various forms of communication in a situated social context. An essay, therefore, is understood in the way social purposes are linked to text structures and these structures are realized as situated social and linguistic actions. To achieve a particular goal of an essay, writers thus need to structure the essay in a way that they can get things done as intended. Because the communicative purposes represented in essays are realized through their generic structural elements and lexico-grammatical features, these purposes, elements and features are identified when the genre is taught, based on examples of this particular genre. This teaching approach is defined as a genre-based approach or “a framework for language instruction” (Byram, 2004, p. 234). Providing students with generalized, systematic guiding principles about how to produce meaningful texts in this genre-based approach is claimed to be necessary for them to recognize these features in the texts that they read and use them in the texts that they write (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyland, 2007; Hyon, 1996).

Although genre-based approaches were mainly criticized for offering teachers and learners a formulaic, mechanic, rigid, and prescriptive how-to-do-lists (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998), they have been reported to have a positive impact on students and their writing in various EFL settings, namely Brunei, India, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand (Changpueng, 2012; Henry & Roseberry, 1998, 1999; Johnson & Lin, 2016; Y. Kim & Kim, 2005; Kongpetch, 2006; Swami, 2008; Yang, 2012a, 2012b). In fact, through genre-based instructions, learners in EFL contexts become more confident and better writers (Johnson & Lin, 2016; Yang, 2012a). Swami (2008) also emphasized that genre-based approaches enable Indian learners to gain insight into the working of the genre, the formal and functional properties of a language,

and how and why linguistic conventions are employed for particular rhetorical effects. Such information will form a kind of background knowledge that students can activate in the next learning situation and will make it easier for them to produce acceptable structures in their writing tasks (M. Kim, 2007). Although Matsuda (2003, p. 69) describes process-centered approaches of four stages: prewriting, composing/drafting, revising, and editing as “the most successful pedagogical reform”, Hyland (2003a, pp. 18, 20 & 25) argues that these teaching approaches “leave students innocent of the valued ways of acting and being in society” and “lacking cultural and linguistic resources necessary for them to engage critically with texts”.

Knapp and Watkins (2005, p. 8) also add that treating language learning mainly as “an individualized phenomenon” and in under-valuing instruction in textual form, process-centered approaches result in students’ failing to develop an adequate understanding of contextualized language knowledge. Stewart (2016), in addition, advises that because the writing process is as important as the product, writing instructors need to model what they would like their students to do. Her advice tends to be in line with Badger and White (2000) and Y. Kim and Kim’s (2005) suggestion of balancing these two approaches in teaching writing. Research on process-genre approaches has been reported to have positive impacts on EFL students’ writing abilities in Indonesia, Nigeria, and Yemen (Assaggaf, 2016; Babalola, 2012; Gupitasari, 2013).

In Thailand where English has been taught as a foreign language for decades, students in higher education have to be fluent in English writing because some courses or programs require them to write essays, reports and research papers in English (Wongsothorn, 1994). This is in accordance with the national objectives as expressed in the Thai education reform agenda, which aims to ensure that Thais are able to actively participate in the global economy rather than to serve as a source of cheap labor in multinational corporations (Office of the National Education Commission, 1996). Furthermore, due to globalization and industrialization, especially among ASEAN countries, research is increasingly globalized in Thailand and Thai graduates who have a good command of English will be more easily able to compete for international research funding for both domestic and international research projects. In the global competitive environment it is also the case that Thai graduates who are good at English will have an edge over their peers in terms of their career choices or professional advancement.

At the university level, however, the English proficiency of Thai students is often less than satisfactory (Boonpattanaporn, 2008; Komin, 1998). This is because English is taught as a separate subject rather than being used as the medium of communication. In Wongsothorn’s

(1994) view, the writing ability of Thai students is of particular concern because extended writing is not widely taught. Siriphan (1988) and Clayton and Klainin (1994) added that most writing programs are still taught using the traditional model, emphasizing the accuracy of grammatical structures and vocabulary. In addition, Wongsothorn (1994) found that the formative tests in most writing programs stress objective-type questions, which require sentence completion, reordering sentences, reordering words and error correction. Students have very few actual opportunities to represent their ideas and knowledge through the written mode. More recently, Boonpattanaporn (2008) found that Thai university students had difficulties in organizing their essays in English. In particular, they often planned their essays in Thai language, and then translated them into English using Thai-English dictionaries without noticing the different nature of each language. Similar to what is stated in previous studies (Ballard & Clanchy, 1993; Hyland, 1990; McKay, 1993), one of the problems that students from EFL and ESL backgrounds have in English writing is their inadequate understanding of how texts are organized. Besides theses, Thai university students admitted that their ideas were blocked as teachers asked them to attend to both content and form at the same time (Boonpattanaporn, 2008).

The problems about the Thai university undergraduates' low-level writing ability, as pointed out by previous researchers (Boonpattanaporn, 2008; Wongsothorn, 1994), have made the researcher reconsider her own teaching situation in a small province of Thailand where she has been assigned to teach essay writing (Writing 3), an obligatory subject for fourth-year English-majored students. Although these students are English-majored, they have not been taught four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) until their third year. What English-majored students at this university study in their first two years are general subjects in Thai language, and English is considered as one of their general subjects. For the writing skill, there are three main courses, namely Writing 1, 2 and 3 and each of which is taught in three successive terms of fourteen weeks each, starting from their third year of study. Furthermore, the absence of English in the area where these students are from and where the university is located tends to lead the students to great difficulties in writing in English or even in learning other skills (listening, speaking and reading). In fact, in informal conversations with these students, it was known that writing is their most difficult subject, and what they often did in their paragraph and short composition courses (Writing 1 and 2, respectively) was similar to what Boonpattanaporn (2008) reported. In fact, as revealed in the questionnaire by two successive groups of the fourth-year English-majored students at this university (Appendix A, Question 3), their ideas were translated into English after they

planned them in Thai (68.6% and 61.5%). Even worse, a quarter of them even reported that they first wrote in Thai language and then used google to do the translation (Question 3). This information could explain the finding in Honsa's (2013) study at a Thai university that Thai students' mother-tongue interferes with the way they write in English. Although a majority of these students reported that they tried to organize their writing by following what the teacher instructed in class and the lessons in the textbook (Appendix A, Question 2), they still found it strange, new and difficult when organizing a paragraph or composition in the way they were taught in class.

Despite the identified problems for teaching and learning writing in Thai educational contexts, a few studies were conducted to help Thai students improve their writing in English. In studying the effective ways of providing written feedback, Wongsothorn (1994) reported that right-on correction with teachers' writing over students' errors and the feedback with explanations and examples for improvement helped improve Thai students' writing. However, Boonpattanaporn (2008, p. 79) argued that "simply reading students' texts, pointing out errors and giving feedback by instructors might not be enough to help students improve their writing ability". In order to encourage learner autonomy and to check whether self-assessment increases learners' writing ability and there are any obstacles that inhibit their improvement in writing, Honsa (2013) studied Thai university students' implementation of the self-assessment program in writing. The results supported Brown's (2005) argument that self-assessing their own writing improved students' writing ability. To the author's best knowledge, there were a couple of studies which implemented a genre-based model to teach writing to Thai university students (Changpueng, 2012; Kongpetch, 2006). Although both studies reported that students' writing abilities were improved, Kongpetch (2006) recommended that this approach could be effective to teach writing to Thai students if some factors are taken into consideration.

First, topics and genres should be of students' interest, followed by making students understand the nature of this new approach: its similarities and differences from approaches they have experienced in previous English courses. Furthermore, because "the genre-based approach has a number of features that are not normal part of the teaching of writing in Thai universities", teachers and students' expectations should be changed (Kongpetch, 2006, p. 24). In other words, in Thai educational contexts, students have not been required to engage actively in class activities, so working cooperatively and independently at the same time leads to students' resistance and confusion. Finally, changes should also be made in order to help students learn a language through authentic contexts and enable them to examine how other



writers construct texts, and then apply these techniques in structuring their ideas and expressions in their own texts by the explicit teaching of genre and about genre. From the reviewed literature and from the suggested considerations by Kongpetch (2006), what can be done to help the researcher's Thai university students to write good basic essays in English, as indicated in the subject objectives (Writing 3), is to modify the genre-based approach in order to respond to their difficulties and expectations, and not to confuse them in class activities.

This study therefore plans to examine whether or not the genre-based approach modified according to the reported difficulties and expectations of Thai students at a university in the countryside is effective in teaching them essay writing.

## **Methodology**

An action research approach was chosen within an interpretative paradigm to understand and interpret fourth-year students' difficulties and expectations in studying in English and their evaluations of the effectiveness of the modified genre-based lessons. In accordance with the cycles of action research described by Coghlan and Reinders (2010), the research contained four stages: constructing, planning-action, taking-action, and evaluating-action.

The constructing stage began a year ago when the researcher taught Writing 3, using the course book selected by the English division (*Writers at work – the essay* by Dorothy E. Zemach and Lynn Stafford-Yilmaz, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2010) to a senior group of 105 fourth-year English-majored students who reported that this subject was their “nightmare”, and their average grades for four essays of *explanation*, *problem-solution*, *comparison-contrast*, and *persuasion* were low. In the planning action stage, a questionnaire was developed and administered at the end of the term to learn about these students' writing strategies, difficulties, topics of interest, and expectations from the course and their teacher (Appendix A). In order to verify whether or not fourth-year English-majored students at this university shared the same strategies, difficulties and expectations in learning writing, this questionnaire was also administered on a new group of 74 students, who were the target group of this study, a year later at the beginning of the term when the researcher was assigned to teach this subject again. As can be seen in Appendix A, their strategies, difficulties, topics of interest and expectations were almost identical.

The taking-action stage involved the development of lessons to supplement the required course book in order to help these students write academic essays effectively and enjoyably.

These lessons were developed with the consideration of what was found from the questionnaire because it is stated that students will be motivated if teachers know students' interests and expectations and organize appropriate class activities (Dörnyei, 2001). In fact, as revealed in the questionnaire, more than two thirds of the students expected to have supplementary materials on both grammar and essay samples because the knowledge in the text book is not enough for them (Question 8, Appendix A). These extra materials also responded to these students' difficulties and expectations about adding more useful language related to each writing task (Questions 6 & 10, Appendix A, respectively). Furthermore, the lessons were developed from the suggestion by Kongpetch (2006, p. 24) that learning activities associated with the new teaching method should be "reiterated as supportive feedback" to students. Such reiteration in the tasks in each supplementary lesson is believed to make Thai students understand and get used to the new teaching approach. In general, the criteria for developing the writing lessons were 1) provide learners with achievable tasks (Harmer, 2001), 2) design and organize writing tasks that help students master the language and skills needed to complete the tasks before asking them to write a coherent and well-organized essay, and 3) select tasks of interest to students if possible (Dörnyei, 2001).

Applying the modified genre-based approach, the researcher taught these lessons together with those from the course book. A 5-point Likert scale survey (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, not sure = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5) was then used to collect students' opinions on the effectiveness of the lessons at the end of the term. The survey was constructed in light of the components and aspects in which the modified genre-based instruction was implemented. Besides the survey data, the study included 296 essays (4 types of essays, 74 each), and they were graded to investigate the extent to which the modified genre-based approach enabled students to write texts that approximate the model ones. As advised by Lin (2006), writing assessment should only focus on those language features that are highlighted during the course. The current study, therefore, applied two criterion-reference grading schemes: one for student scores that are related to what was specifically taught in class and the other for those related to general criteria often applied in writing courses (Appendix B).

Thus scores on students' control of the generic structure and language features specific to each kind of essay accounted for 50% of the total score of each text while the general criteria decided the other half. The grading process was conducted independently by the researcher and an inter-rater, and the reliability of the two raters was assessed by using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation values between the two

raters of four essays (*explanation*, *problem-solution*, *comparison-contrast*, and *persuasion*) were 0.82, 0.91, 0.84 and 0.89, respectively. Discussions between the two raters on grading disagreements were finally conducted until the agreement was reached.

The evaluating action phase involved the researcher performing a thorough interpretation of the data collected from the first three stages. In this final stage, the researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with a focus group of fifteen students to triangulate with the findings from the survey and the text analysis and to shed light on the effectiveness of the modified genre-based instruction.

### *The teaching*

The objective of Writing 3 subject at Division of English of this university is to enable students to write a five-paragraph essay of *explanation*, *problem-solution*, *comparison-contrast*, and *persuasion*, using the course book “*Writers at work – the essay*”. To help these fourth-year students to find this subject less tough and write effective essays in a fourteen-week semester, the author modified the Sydney School’s Teaching and Learning Cycle proposed by Hammond, Burns, Joyce, Brosnan, and Gerot (1992, p. 17), so the four learning cycles were renamed to fit the modified instruction.

At the first stage, named *Teaching the generic structure of an academic essay*, the author familiarized students with the basic structure of an academic essay through step by step instructions as well as thorough practice with the materials developed by the researcher.

This first stage, which took six weeks of 150 minutes each, is a minor genre-based lesson because the tasks were designed to teach each “stage” or element of an essay. Besides the theories on each element (*Introduction*: General and thesis statements; *Body paragraphs*: Topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence; *Conclusion*: Summary/Restatement and Final comments), the supplementary materials provided a wide range of tasks for students to do (Appendix C). Through various samples of the target elements in the tasks, students are expected to know the function and structure of each element and grammatical and rhetorical features necessary for composing each. This way of teaching aims to not confuse these students who used to learn English in the grammar translation method as the teacher meticulously guided them to compose each element of an academic essay before asking them to write a complete one. However, through the activities designed to get them participate into the discovery of the lessons, students were gradually trained to work independently and cooperatively in groups or in pairs, a feature reported to be absent in Thai educational context, and this is an important part of the genre-based approach

teaching. After this first stage, four types of essays (*explanation*, *problem-solution*, *comparison-contrast*, and *persuasion*) were in turn taught in eight weeks (two weeks each), following the last three stages as follows.

At the second stage, *Modelling of the target essay*, the generic structure and grammatical features of each type of essays were explicitly taught so that the students became aware of how each is structured to achieve its overall communicative purposes. The supplemented lessons were studied first as students reported that the lessons in the course book are insufficient for them (Question 8, Appendix A). Besides the functions and requirements for each essay type, essay samples were provided in the supplementary materials. Students were asked to read these samples and do exercises focusing on the schematic structure and linguistic features of the target essays (Appendix D). From reading these samples and doing exercises with their friends, students discovered the internal discourse structuring of texts, their realizations and signaling in each target essay. For example, in problem-solution essays the semantic relations in focus were ‘*Situations, Problems, Solutions* and *Evaluations*’, and the realizations for stating *Problems* and evaluating *Solutions* were the cause-effect structure words and conditionals to hedge in order to avoid overgeneralization, respectively. The model texts and exercises in the course book “*Writers at work – the essay*” were then examined for students to see the variations in the rhetorical structures and linguistic elements of each essay type. Exercises on key language were also practiced in this stage to respond to their expectations to have supplementary materials on grammar (Question 8, Appendix A) and to ensure that these students would be able to use them effectively in their own essays.

After gaining greater understanding of the generic structure and language features of the target essay, students entered the third stage called *Joint construction of texts or Prewriting*. At this stage, they were asked to work in groups and with the help from the teacher if necessary to generate the ideas for a given topic and to discuss how to organize them in their essays. Discussions on appropriate written language used in the essay were also included. Group ideas were then shared with the whole class for all students to have possible ideas and relevant support for their essays. By discussing their ideas in English and sharing how to organize them in groups, these students were expected to avoid their old habit of thinking and organizing their ideas in Thai (Questions 3 & 4, Appendix A). Furthermore, directing students towards the ideas and language they needed for writing their own essays was believed to guarantee the students that they would be successful in performing the tasks (Dörnyei, 2001).

After having the experience of collaborating with friends in generating ideas for writing, students entered stage four called *Independent construction of texts or Composing-Editing-Revising*. At this stage, students practiced their writing skills and demonstrated their understanding of the target genre at home by writing an essay of approximately 250 words on the given topic independently (Appendix E). However, they were encouraged to edit and revise their writing or ask their peers to proofread their essays before submitting them to the teacher via email. The guidelines for self-assessment adapted from Min (2006) were also given to students for their reference in editing and revising their writing and that of their friends (Appendix F). The reason for them to do the writing homework was to give them extra time both to review the rhetorical structures and linguistic features particular to each kind of essays and to better their essays by editing and revising them based on the provided self-assessment guidelines and their friends' feedback. Furthermore, allowing them to write their essays at home also responded to the problem reported by Thai university students in Boonpattanaporn's (2008) study that their ideas were blocked as teachers asked them to attend to both content and form at a given time. Grades and feedback on generic structures, development of arguments and use of grammatical features relevant to each essay type and in general were provided by using *Track changes* software.

## **Findings and discussion**

### *Students' topics of interest, writing strategies, difficulties and expectations*

As seen in Appendix A (Section I), the two groups of fourth-year English-majored students of the two successive years at a university in a small province in Thailand shared almost identical topics of interest, writing strategies, difficulties and expectations. Topics of daily activities were most favored by these students, followed by sports, television programs and news, suggesting that these students were interested in topics closely related to their daily lives. As noted by Kongpetch (2006) in engaging Thai students in writing, these students' preferred topics were taken into consideration in selecting sample essays for the supplementary materials and topics for them to write at home (Appendix E).

Besides the shared strategies that the senior and current groups of students employed in their writing (Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4), it was interesting to know these students' beliefs that accurate grammar and sentence structures made good essays (38.1% & 44.1%, respectively) (Question 5). Although more than half of these students thought a well-written essay consists of all grammar/sentence structures, vocabulary, good organization, interesting ideas and appropriate writing style, very few of them knew that appropriate vocabulary, good

organization and writing style played an important role in the success of their writing. Moreover, these students reported that grammar/sentence structures made their English writing difficult (Question 6) and they were their frequent mistakes (Question 7), with the highest percentages (86.7% and 70.5%; 43.8% & 33.3%, respectively). Grammar/sentence structures were also what a majority of these students (77.1% & 55.1%) (Question 8) expected their friends/teacher to focus on in correcting their writing, and they believed that adding grammar/sentence structures to the supplementary materials would make the teaching writing better (Question 9).

These findings are likely to reflect the influence of these students' previous English learning experiences at schools where traditional teaching is still predominant despite the country's need for reform (Clayton & Klainin, 1994; Siriphan, 1988; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016). In fact, most students in the interview said that "without correct grammar, I can't do anything with English". These students' deeply-rooted wrong assumption about the decisive factor for their success in English learning may hinder the progress of their learning English in the future.

#### *Students' evaluations of the modified genre-based lessons*

To learn about these 74 fourth-year English-majored students' opinions on each stage of the modified genre-based instruction in teaching essay writing, the 5-point Likert survey was administered at the end of the semester. The findings are presented and discussed in the order of the teaching stages, namely *Teaching the generic structure of an academic essay* (Table 1), *Modelling of the target essay* (Table 2), *Joint construction of texts (Prewriting)* (Table 3) and *Independent construction of texts (Composing-Editing-Revising)* (Table 4). As suggested by Sullivan and Artino (2013) that a mean score is not a very helpful measure of central tendency of Likert scale data, the percentages of students' positive (*strongly agree* and *agree*), neutral and negative (*strongly disagree* and *disagree*) attitudes are also included in these tables.

### Teaching the generic structure of an academic essay

**Table 1: Supplementary materials on how to write an academic essay**

ITEMS		Means	Percentages		
			Positive	Neutral	Negative
1	The lessons are useful	4.57	91.7	8.3	0
2	I learn a lot from these supplementary materials	3.99	77.4	17	5.6
3	These lessons are detailed enough for me to learn about the essay structure	4.19	91.1	6.1	2.8
4	The lessons are not difficult for me to learn about essay writing	4.23	84.8	13.4	1.8
5	The lessons help me learn how to write 4 types of essays in the book more easily	4.23	83.2	14.6	2.2
6	The lessons are necessary for me to learn before I learn 4 types of essays	4.46	90.6	8.1	1.3
7	The lessons help me a lot in writing each kind of essays later	4.28	86.1	9.6	2.3
8	The lessons give me enough practice to learn about how to write each part of the essay	4.15	73.4	21.2	5.4
9	I understand how each part of an essay should be written from these lessons	4.00	87.5	8.2	4.3
10	I think these lessons are very necessary for all of us to learn about academic essays	4.54	94.1	5.9	0

As suggested by Wiboolsri (2008) for the mean score of 3.5 as the acceptable value representing a positive attitude, it can be concluded that these students were very positive towards the supplementary materials on the basic structure of academic essays as means of all the surveyed items are much higher than 3.5 (Table 1). Moreover, the percentages of the positive attitudes are far higher than the neutral and negative ones. Besides their great satisfaction with the content (Items 3) and tasks (Item 8) in these materials, their evaluations on the usefulness of the materials are very satisfying. For example, Items 1, 10 and 6 (*The lessons are useful*, and *very necessary for them to learn about academic essays* in general and *before studying essays of explanation, problem-solution, comparison-contrast, and opinion* in particular, respectively) gained very high mean scores from more than 90% of the these students. The other two items (5 & 7) which aim to learn about whether or not these lessons help ease their writing of four essays later also achieved a high level of agreement from these students (83.2% & 86.1%, respectively). The interview information from the focus group also confirmed that with the knowledge of a basic academic essay structure and of how to write each element of an essay, they could structure other essays with ease. This finding tends to support the principle of scaffolding EFL learners in teaching writing suggested by Kim and Kim (2005) and proved to be effective with Yemeni students in Assaggaf (2016). In fact, this kind of assistance helped these Thai learners to move towards understanding of what an academic essay looked like and acquiring new skills of constructing each essay element (Gibbons, 2002). During this beginning stage, such direct instruction was crucial as these learners gradually assimilated the task demands and procedures for constructing various types of essays later. Furthermore, scaffolding these students with hand-on practice from genre-based activities for each essay element tended to involve them into the knowledge discovery instead of being passive learners in their traditional language learning classrooms (Clayton & Klainin, 1994; Siriphan, 1988; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016). As suggested by

Kongpetch (2006, p. 24) about “reiterated supportive feedback”, such learning activities could make these Thai students understand and get used to the new teaching approach which required them to be active. It is true that these students became active in class when discussing the possible answers for the exercises on the function and structure of each essay element in pairs, in groups and with the whole class. However, a much lower percentage of these students (77.4%) had a positive opinion on Item 2 which says “*I learn a lot from these supplementary materials*”. As revealed in the interview, it was known that they expected to have more tasks for practicing writing each essay element. This information was validated by the similar percentage (73.4%) of their answer to Item 8 “*The lessons give me enough practice to learn about how to write each part of the essay*”. This finding is likely to suggest that a period of six weeks of 150 minutes each is not sufficient for a number of students to acquire the knowledge and skills to write their own texts with confidence.

### *Modelling of the target essay*

**Table 2: Lessons on four main types of essays**

ITEMS		Mean	Percentage		
			Positive	Neutral	Negative
11	The sample essays and exercises are easy for me to understand what to write in each essay	4.04	73.5	21.4	5.1
12	The sample essays and exercises are good enough for me to learn about the structure of each essay	4.20	84.8	11.9	3.3
13	With the essay samples and exercises, it is clear to me about how I will write for each kind of essays	4.08	73.4	22.8	3.8
14	I know more about what to write each essay from the samples	4.04	78.5	17.8	3.7
15	I follow the structures of the sample essays when I write my own essays	4.27	79.7	18.6	1.7
16	I learn how to organize my essays from the sample essays	4.23	81.2	16.7	2.1
17	I use the key structures from the sample essay in writing my essay	3.19	67.1	27.1	5.8
18	From the sample essays and exercises, I know about the key language I should use in each essay	3.49	70.9	26.3	2.8
19	The sample essays give me a clear meaning of why I need to use particular structures in each essay	4.03	79.8	18.2	2
20	I think the sample essays are very necessary for all of us to see before we write each kind of essays	4.51	91.1	7.8	1.1

This section discusses the students’ evaluations of the second stage at which the generic structure and grammatical features of each type of essays were explicitly taught, first with the supplementary materials and then with the course book to make students aware of how each is structured to achieve its overall communicative purposes. As described previously in *The teaching* section, the supplementary tasks were developed to get these students’ focus on the schematic structure and linguistic features of the target essays (Appendix D). Items in Table 2 thus mainly focus on the supplementary materials that were organized in a way to raise these students’ awareness of the typical rhetorical patterns of each essay. As seen in Table 2, although all means except that of Item 17 were much higher than 3.5, a value representing a positive attitude (Wiboolsri, 2008), and more than two thirds of these students showed their



favorable responses towards all the surveyed items, these values were the lowest as compared with those in stages 1, 3 and 4 (Tables 1, 3 and 4, respectively). However, the percentages of students with neutral attitudes to the lessons in this stage were likely to be the highest. This could reflect a certain degree of these Thai students' unfamiliarity with and resistance to this genre-based teaching as reported in Kongpetch (2006). In fact, as revealed in the interview with these students, the idea of generic structure and language features particular to each essay type was too complicated for them as it was their first time to know them. Such resistance can be clearly seen in their response to both Items 11 (*The sample essays and exercises are easy for me to understand what to write in each essay*) and 13 (*With the essay samples and exercises, it is clear to me about how I will write for each kind of essays*) where almost a third of these 74 students showed their neutral and negative attitudes. Even worse, a third of them revealed their hesitance in using key structures and language in their own essays (Items 17 & 18). Despite the higher percentages of neutral and negative attitudes to this teaching stage, a great majority of these students agreed that “*the sample essays are very necessary for all of us to see before we write each kind of essays*” (Item 20) and the sample essays and exercises were good enough for them to learn about the structure of each essay (Item 12), and they learned how to organize their essays from the sample essays (Item 16).

These results tend to suggest that this modified genre-based instruction had a positive impact on Thai students although they were not familiar with it. Therefore, if this teaching approach is maintained, it will enable them to better recognize the relation between language structures and the roles they play in conveying appropriate meaning (Y. Kim & Kim, 2005). In fact, “learners can be made aware of the generic features before their consciousness is raised to lexico-grammatical features associated with the genre” (Swami, 2008, p. 10). Furthermore, such awareness and consciousness are believed to be transferred to processing various other texts and provide them with adequate confidence to effectively handle writing in academic settings (Hyland, 2007).

#### *Joint construction of texts (Prewriting)*

**Table 3: Group discussions**

ITEMS		Means	Percentages		
			Positive	Neutral	Negative
21	Group discussions are new to me	4.24	79.8	16.4	3.8
22	These activities are very useful for me to build up the ideas for my answer	4.20	85.3	8.6	6.1
23	These activities help me save my time at home	4.14	83.6	9.8	6.6
24	I make use of what we discuss in the group	3.96	69.6	14.2	16.2
25	I like working with my friends in these activities	3.12	41.8	23.6	34.6
26	These activities make my writing classes less boring	3.32	62.0	21.4	16.6

Like Thai university students in Kongpetch (2006), more than half of these fourth-year students showed their neutral and negative attitudes to the *joint construction of text* stage (Item 25, Table 3). In fact, only 41.8% of them liked to work with their friends in sharing their ideas and how to organize them in their answer to the given topics that they would write by themselves at home. It could be due to the fact that working in groups is a new learning experience to a majority of them (Item 21). Additionally, their likely resistance to group discussion can be clearly understood in Thai educational contexts, as mentioned in previous studies, where Thai students have not been required to engage actively in activities in their previous writing courses (Clayton & Klainin, 1994; Kongpetch, 2006; Siriphan, 1988; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016). Although the researcher chose the topics of their interest (Appendix E), adequately explained to them how to work in groups effectively and intentionally grouped students of different levels together in groups, some students still kept quiet during the group discussion. As revealed in the interview, they were passive in these activities because they did not have sufficient English vocabulary and language to talk about the given topics. A few of the interviewed students even added that they felt “clumsy” in group discussion because of being unable to express their ideas in English. This finding could suggest that these students’ previous habits of thinking in Thai language before writing in English tend to render these interactive activities uninteresting and negative. In fact, less than two thirds of these students agreed that “*These activities make my writing classes less boring*” (Item 26). Despite their slight resistance to this stage, however, very high percentages of these students showed their favorable attitudes towards the usefulness of these activities, as seen in Items 22 and 23 (*These activities are very useful for me to build up the ideas for my answer* and *These activities help me save my time at home*) (85.3% & 83.6%, respectively) and 69.6% of them admitted that they made use of what they discussed in the group (Item 24). Given their unfamiliarity with this interactive learning activity, these Thai students in general disclosed their positive attitudes towards the benefits of the *joint construction* stage of this modified genre-based instruction. This can thus suggest that when students’ needs are taken into consideration in organizing learning tasks, students will be motivated (Ellis, 1996).

In fact, in these activities students’ needs for sufficient correct information to organize answers to given tasks and key language features were taken into account (Question 10, Appendix A). As argued by Dörnyei (2001), by directing them towards the skills and language they need, teachers can guarantee that their students will be successful in performing the tasks.

# *Independent construction of texts (Composing-Editing-Revising)*

**Table 4: Writing essays at home**

	ITEMS	Means	Percentages		
			Positive	Neutral	Negative
27	I like writing essays at home	4.46	81.1	14.2	4.7
28	It is difficult to write essays alone at home	3.92	65.9	26.8	7.3
29	Writing essays at home is a good opportunity for me to practice what I have learned in class	4.28	88.6	7.3	4.1
30	I apply what I have learned in class in writing my essays at home	4.07	81.1	14.6	4.3
31	I always look back at the sample essays when I write my essays at home	4.16	77.2	19.1	3.7
32	I make use of the self-assessment guidelines and friends' feedback in revising my essay	4.45	87.3	9.5	3.2
33	I write the essays in Thai and translate them into English	2.08	25.1	21.5	53.4
34	I always ask my friends to check my writing before I submit it to the teacher	4.20	78.5	18.6	2.9
35	I think the writing essays at home helps improve our writing skill	4.46	88.6	9.6	1.8

At this stage, students were asked to write an essay of about 250 words for the target essay that they learned and practiced within two weeks of 150 minutes each at home and submitted their work to their teacher's email three days before their next class in the following week. As can be seen in Table 4, despite two thirds of them finding it hard to write essays alone at home (Item 28), most of these students liked doing this at home (Item 27), and they believed that this stage helped improve their writing skills (Item 35) and was a good opportunity for them to practice what they learned in class (Item 29). As reported in the interview, these students liked writing essays at home because they had sufficient time to search for the necessary vocabulary, organize their ideas, write the essays up and revise them many times. Additionally, they added that they learned and improved their own essays from reading their friends'. This interview information tends to clarify the high mean score and percentage of their positive attitudes to Item 32 which says "*I make use of the self-assessment guidelines and friends' feedback in revising my essay*". Besides these, 77.2% and 81.1% of these 74 students reported that they looked back at the sample essays and applied what they learned in class to composing their essays at home, respectively (Items 30 & 31).

As argued by Kim (2007), when people at low level of proficiency learn something new they absolutely need something that they can rely on or consider as samples. Although it could be argued that it is not normal for students to write an essay in a few days, this *composing-editing-revising* stage of the modified genre-based instruction tends to be appropriate to these Thai students who used to learn English with the traditional grammar translation method and who are at a low level of English proficiency and have little exposure to English writing. As indicated by Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) that writing tasks can be more demanding than other language skills, giving these students with sufficient time is believed to reduce their anxieties about the writing tasks, which positively influence their composing each kind of essay. Moreover, these students' favorable attitudes to this last stage

(with all means scores much higher than 3.5) could also indicate that this last stage of the modified genre-based instruction worked well with this group of Thai English-major students in the countryside as it helped activate their autonomous attitude towards writing in English and reduced their old habits of writing in Thai and then translating into English. In fact, as seen in Item 34, 78.5% of these students showed that they always asked their friends to check their writing before submitting it to the teacher and more than half of them did not write their essays in Thai and translate them into English (Item 33).

### Essay scores

**Table 5: Average scores for each grading element in each essay type**

Grading criteria		Points	Essay types			
			Explanatory	Problem-solution	Comparison-Contrast	Persuasive
Specific to what was taught in class	Overall essay structure	10	9.08	9.2	9.23	9.18
	Appropriate paragraphing/linkage	10	8.45	8.77	8.54	8.68
	Semantic-relational occurrences	10	8.35	8.5	8.78	8.45
	Accurate/appropriate semantic-relational signaling	10	7.5	7.42	7.86	7.68
	Language appropriate to the genre	10	7.4	7.6	8.06	7.78
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>40.78</b>	<b>41.49</b>	<b>42.47</b>	<b>41.77</b>
General	Overall impression and length	10	9.1	7.97	8.15	7.93
	Ideas and ideas development	10	7.2	7.14	7.54	7.32
	Grammatical accuracy	10	6.85	7.49	7.68	7.5
	Appropriate lexical selections	10	7.34	7.61	7.76	7.77
	Punctuation	5	3.99	4.08	4.3	4.16
	Spelling	5	4.64	4.63	4.69	4.64
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>38.87</b>	<b>38.91</b>	<b>40.13</b>	<b>39.33</b>
<b>Average scores</b>			79.65	80.4	82.6	81.1

Table 5 shows the scores of four essays graded both on students' control of the generic structure and language features specific to each kind of essays specifically taught in class and on the general criteria often applied in writing courses, and each accounted for half of the total score of each text. In general, these students' average scores for each essay type are pretty high, and *comparison-contrast* essays gained the highest, followed by *persuasive*, *problem-solution* and *explanatory* ones (82.6, 81.1, 80.4 and 79.65, respectively). Their controlling of the generic structure and language elements specific to each essay type also achieved high scores and these scores followed the same trend as that of the overall scores for each kind of essay (42.47, 41.77, 41.49 and 40.78, respectively). These results tend to suggest that this modified genre-based instruction is an effective method to teach essay writing to these Thai university students in the countryside as their texts approximated the modeled ones. Although their lowest scores on the *explanatory* essay were due to their first attempt to write an academic essay, their highest grades on the *comparison-contrast* essay were accounted for its simplicity in terms of its linguistic elements. In fact, as revealed in the

interview with the focus group of students, it is known that the language for comparing and contrasting specific to the *comparison-contrast* essay is the easiest as compared with that of others. This information is validated by their highest scores on each of these linguistic elements of the *comparison-contrast* essay, as can be seen in Table 5. Furthermore, a closer look at Table 5 also reveals that these students obtained very high scores for the overall essay structures, paragraphing and linkage within essays. Therefore, it can be said that explicit instruction of internal discourse structure and specific language features associated with specific genres proves to be effective in helping EFL students compose the texts in the recognizable structures and with realized linguistic features to achieve their intended communicative purposes as reported by previous scholars in different contexts (Assaggaf, 2016; Changpueng, 2012; Henry & Roseberry, 1998, 1999; Johnson & Lin, 2016; Swami, 2008). However, despite the students' success in controlling the generic structures and linguistic features of the target genres, their weakness in grammar and vocabulary in general was also evident with the scores ranging from 6.86 to 7.77 (Table 5).

On the one hand, this could be due to their low level of language proficiency which probably resulted from the inappropriate curricular allocation at the School of English of this university. Although they were English-majors, they had not been taught the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of the language until their third year of study. Moreover, during their first two years at this university, these English-majored students studied general subjects in Thai language, and English was one of their general subjects. Beside the inappropriate arrangement of the subjects taught at this School of English, their low scores on the admission tests into the English program at this university could also account for these students' insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in general.

## **Conclusions and implications**

This paper reported the implementation of the modified genre-based instruction developed from the suggestions of previous studies on Thai learners and the difficulties and expectations of Thai English-majored students at a university in the countryside in their studying English writing to teach essay writing in a fourteen-week semester. First, the questionnaire to learn about these students' topics of interest, writing strategies, difficulties and expectation and the supplementary materials on the basic structure of an academic essay and four target types of essays (*explanation*, *problem-solution*, *comparison-contrast*, and *persuasion*) were developed. The teaching of four stages modified from the Sydney School's Teaching and Learning Cycle proposed by Hammond et al. (1992, p. 17) was then conducted

by using the supplementary materials and the selected course book “*Writers at work – the essay*”. The effectiveness of this modified instruction was then evaluated by 74 students through a 5-point Likert survey, a focus group interview and 296 essays. Despite their slight resistance to this new teaching approach, these students revealed the positive attitudes to all four teaching stages, activities and exercises and there was a positive signal for their autonomous learning when they were instructed in this modified genre-based model. Moreover, their writing was found to be successful in terms of their control of the internal structure and their use of appropriate linguistic features specific to each type of essay to achieve its communicative purposes.

These findings tend to suggest that this modified genre-based instruction was effective to teach essay writing to these Thai university students. Furthermore, this study also indicates that when students’ culturally-based context of language learning, difficulties and expectations are taken into consideration in organizing learning activities, success is likely to be achieved.

Despite the small scale of the study, to a certain extent, these findings can be generalized to other universities in Thailand and those in other Asian countries which share similar teaching situations and some implications are obvious from these findings. First, in EFL contexts, where exposure to English is extremely limited, more effective approaches to writing and teachable skills should be applied to writing instruction. However, teachers’ motivation to apply new teaching approaches to teaching writing should come from an analysis of learners’ difficulties and expectations, rather than from a prescribed syllabus. Also, as Muncie (2002) indicates, students in EFL countries are likely to be used to traditional grammar instructions in their composition courses, writing teachers need to help their students understand the relationship between linguistic forms and their functions in the discourse in order for them to be able to reproduce the typical rhetorical patterns they need to express their meanings (Hyland, 2003b). In other words, genre-based approaches still prove to be helpful in teaching writing in EFL settings. In fact, with teachers’ facilitation regarding the appropriate input of knowledge and skills at different stages, learners are believed to be progressing steadily (M. Kim, 2007). Finally, although this study revealed that this modified genre-based instruction was effective in this Thai university, more studies of this kind at other universities in Thailand as well as in countries with similar educational conditions should be conducted to provide a more complete picture of how teachers conduct their writing classes in the various cultural contexts of EFL learning and teaching.

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## Appendix A

### Summary of students' topics of interest, difficulties, needs, and expectations

Questionnaire		Senior group (105 students) %	Current group (74 students) %
<b>I. Topics of interest (more than one option is accepted)</b>	sports	31.4	32.1
	television programs	40	28.2
	news	38.1	28.2
	celebrities	12.4	10.3
	celebrations	13.3	9.0
	life-related activities	45.7	44.9
	animals	34.3	26.9
	cultures	34.3	21.8
	others	family, music	-
<b>II. Strategies</b>			
1. Do you spend time brainstorming and planning your ideas before you write about a given topic?			
a. yes		76.8	64.1
b. no		9.5	2.6
c. sometimes		13.7	33.3
2. How do you organize your writing?			
a. to follow what teachers instruct		29.5	41
b. to follow the lessons in the textbook		61.9	42.3
c. to write it the way I like		8.6	16.7
3. How do you write your essay?			
a. think in Thai and then translate into English		68.6	61.5
b. think and write in English		5.7	17.9
c. think and write it in Thai, and then use google to do the translation		25.7	20.6
4. How do you express your ideas in writing in English?			
a. use English grammar/sentence structures		44.8	66.7
b. follow Thai language structures		17.1	15.4
c. word by word translation		38.1	17.9
5. To have a well-written essay, you would pay more attention to (more than one option is accepted)			
a. accurate grammar/sentence structures		38.1	44.1
b. appropriate vocabulary		23.8	5.1
c. good organization		7.6	9.5
d. interesting ideas		33.3	16.7
e. appropriate writing style		6.7	2.6
f. all of the above		50.5	65.4
<b>III. Difficulties in writing in English</b>			
6. What are your difficulties in writing academic English? (more than one option is accepted)			
a. lack of vocabulary		44.8	57.7
b. lack of grammar/sentence structures		86.7	70.5
c. lack of ideas		41.1	52.6
d. lack of knowledge of linking words		42.9	44.9
e. lack of knowledge of how to organize your writing		44.8	64.1
f. lack of time		7.6	9.7
g. all of these above		-	-
k. others (write down)		-	-
7. What kinds of mistakes have you often made in writing in English? (more than one option is accepted)			
a. verbs		36.2	5.1
b. nouns		16.2	9.0
c. prepositions		13.3	6.4
d. vocabularies		21.0	16.7
e. sentence structures		43.8	33.3
f. articles		13.3	5.1
g. all of these above		43.8	52.6
<b>IV. Your expectations</b>			
8. Do you think the knowledge/information in your textbook is enough for you in learning writing in English?			
a. yes		12.4	20.5
b. no, I need more supplementary materials on grammar		11.4	6.4
c. no, I need more supplementary materials on essay samples		8.6	12.8
d. no, I need more supplementary materials on both grammar and essay samples		67.6	63.3
9. What would you like your teachers/friends to correct your writing? (more than one option is accepted)			
a. to correct all mistakes in my writing		72.4	61.5
b. to focus on the overall structure of the essay		35.2	29.5
c. to focus on grammar/sentence structures		77.1	55.1
d. to focus on vocabulary		46.7	28.2
e. to focus on spelling		37.1	17.9
f. to focus on ideas		37.1	37.2
g. to focus on cohesion/coherence		19	41
k. others (write down)		-	-
10. If you had a chance to suggest a better approach to teach English writing to your teachers, you would say (more than one option is accepted)			
a. provide useful language for writing (expressions and vocabulary related to each writing task)		81	59
b. focus more on grammar (words, phrases, sentences)		60	44.9
c. focus more on interesting topics		23.8	24.4
d. focus more on corrections of mistakes		35.2	28.2
e. give more writing practice		19	14.1
f. give more writing/essay samples		22.9	21.8

## Appendix B

### Grading criteria

<i>Features</i>		<i>Points</i>
<b>Specific to what was taught</b>		
Generic structure	Overall essay structure (Introduction, Body, Conclusion)	10
	Appropriate paragraphing and paragraph linkage within essays	10
Semantic relations and their signaling (e.g. occurrence of <i>Situations, Problem, Solution</i> , and <i>Evaluation</i> in Problem-solution essays)	Semantic relational occurrences	10
	Accurate and appropriate semantic relational signaling	10
Language characteristic of the genre	Language that is appropriate to the genre (e.g. cause-effect structure words in Problem-solution essays)	10
<b>General</b>		
Overall impression and length	Remove 1 point for every 10 words short of 250	10
Ideas and ideas development	Logical organization of supporting ideas	10
Grammatical accuracy	Delete 1 point for each grammatical error (maximum of 2 point deduction for same grammatical error occurring more than once)	10
Appropriate lexical selections	Delete 1 point for each inappropriate lexical selection (maximum of 2 point deduction for same lexical selection error occurring more than once)	10
Punctuation	Delete 1 point for each punctuation error	5
Spelling	Delete 1 point for each spelling error (maximum of 2 point deduction for same spelling error occurring more than once)	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

## Appendix C

### Task instructions in the supplementary materials for the essay introductions

Task 1: Read the following essay question and identify “task, topic and focus”.

Task 2: Look at the introductory paragraphs below and identify the thesis statement and sub-topics.

Task 3: Which of the following pairs of sentences can be a thesis statement? What is wrong with the other sentence in the pair?

Task 4: Correct the following thesis statements if necessary.

Task 5: Among the four ideas given, one gives the most general idea and the other three are its supporting points. Identify them and then write a thesis statement for each.

Task 6: Read the following essay questions and sentences written for their introductions. Rearrange these sentences to make a good introduction for each topic.

Task 7: Read the following introductions written for the given topics and say whether they are good or not, and why they are not good.

Task 8: Write an introduction for each given topic below.

## Appendix D

### Extract of tasks in the second stage “Modelling of Target Essays” for the comparison-contrast essays

*Task 2: Read the model essay again and answer the following questions*

1. What is the purpose of the first paragraph of the essay?
2. Underline the thesis statement. What does it tell you about the organization of the body paragraphs?
3. How many paragraphs are in the body of the essay? Which paragraphs discuss differences? Which discuss similarities?
4. Which are discussed first – the similarities or the differences? In which paragraph does the changeover occur? Underline the transitional phrase that introduces the changeover.
5. What expressions are used to introduce the similarities and the differences?
6. Circle words and phrases that show comparison and contrast. Then compare your results with your partner.

*Task 3: Read the sample essay again and check its outline below*

## Appendix E

### Four given topics for students to write the essay independently

Explanatory essay: Choose a topic from the list below to write a five-paragraph essay 1) An event that changed my life, 2) How I got interested in \_\_\_\_\_ (hobby or sport) and 3) A person who influenced me or whom I admired

Problem-solution essay: Write a five-paragraph essay on the given topic: “Writing essays in English is really hard.”

Comparison-contrast essay: Write a five-paragraph essay on the given topic: “Which methods of payment (credit cards or cash) do you prefer to you?”

Persuasive essay: Write a five-paragraph essay on the given topic: “Schools (universities, colleges, high schools) should teach students about specific careers/jobs instead of general subjects.”

## **Appendix F**

### **Guidelines for self-assessment**

#### **1. Read the introductory paragraph.**

- Is there a thesis statement at the end of the introduction?
- Underline the thesis statement and circle each of the main idea.
- Are these main ideas at the same level of importance?
- What is the sequence of their importance?
- If you cannot find a thesis statement, write a sentence based on what you have read so far and what you expect to read in the following paragraphs?

#### **2. Next, read the first few sentences in the second paragraph.**

- Can you find what you expect?
- Is it one of the main ideas in the thesis statement?
- Is it the most important of all the main ideas you circle in the introductory paragraph?
- If it is not what you expect, you should make changes here by writing a sentence which states one main idea of the thesis statement.
- Then look for any examples or quotations or explanations that support this main idea.
- If not, add supporting details to convince your readers

#### **3. Read the first few sentences of the third paragraph.**

- Did you see any transition words that connect this paragraph to the second paragraph?
- If not, can you add one transition?
- If there is one already, check whether that transition word needs a comma.
- Is there any topic sentence that contains the second main idea in the thesis statement?
- If not, add one sentence.
- Are there any examples, quotations or explanations that support the main idea?
- If a quotation was used, were there any quotation marks?
- Do you think the details support the main idea appropriately?
- Will that be very convincing for the readers?
- If not, can you make any appropriate changes?

#### **4. Read the first sentence of the fourth paragraph.**

- Does this paragraph connect well with the third paragraph?
- Any transition signals?
- Any punctuation needed?
- Is there any topic sentence that contains the third main idea in the thesis statement?
- If not, add one sentence.
- Are there any supporting details relevant to the main idea in the topic sentence you have/have just added?
- Is the use of pronouns consistent throughout the paragraph?

#### **5. Read the conclusion.**

- Does this paragraph begin with a transition signaling a conclusion of the essay?
- If not, add one.
- Does the conclusion restate the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph?
- Does the conclusion have irrelevant information?
- Does it introduce a new topic rather than what are in the thesis statement?
- If so, delete the irrelevant information and the newly introduces topic.

## Use of Collocations in Freshman Composition: Implications for L1 English and Arabic ESL Writers

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### Abstract

The production of English collocations by Arab ESL writers is an under-researched area. To fill this gap, the current study explores Arab ESL writers' use of adjective-noun (AN) collocations as compared to L1 English writers. In contrast to some previous corpus-based research, this study exercises several controls: type of writing assignments, prompts, and rubrics were the same for the ESL and English L1 groups. Findings of the study reveal that Arab ESL writers use collocations with a greater frequency; however, they tend to repeat the

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same collocations tokens and types. This is true for both the shared and non-shared collocations. Moreover, Arab ESL collocation use in context has been more often judged as 'not

appropriate' and 'somewhat appropriate' by native English instructors. Teaching implications that include form focused instruction, specialized collocations lists, and online collocation resources are suggested as potential solutions to promote accurate collocation production in L2 writing.

**Keywords:** adjective-noun collocations, MI scores, Collocate software, Arab ESL writers

## Introduction

Collocations, frequently occurring words that commonly go together, are pervasive in spoken and written English because of their formulaic nature. Thus, collocations (e.g., *effective implementation*), idioms/expressions (e.g., *by the way*), and lexical bundles (e.g., *in such a way*), are investigated as 'formulaic language' (FL). Research during the past two decades has shown that FL comprises between 21% to 58% of analyzed language in English (e.g., Schmitt, 2013). Collocations are particularly important for L2 writers because exposure to two-word collocations (*effective implementation*, *major difference*) can lead L2 learners to the awareness of three-word (*in order to*, *by the way*), four-word (*it was found that*, *in such a way*), or five-word (*due to the fact that*, *this case has shown that*) combinations that are common in academic writing (Howarth, 1999).

Despite their importance in writing, collocations pose challenges for many learners of English from various L1 backgrounds. In response to learners' challenges with collocations, the last two decades have witnessed a flood of research investigating the receptive and productive collocation knowledge of participants from various L1 backgrounds: Chinese (Fan 2009; Li & Schmitt, 2010), French (Granger & Bestgen, 2014), German (Nesselhauf, 2005), Hebrew (Laufer & Waldman, 2011), Japanese (Webb & Kagimoto, 2009), and Spanish (Fernandez & Schmitt, 2015), and many more. Although L2 English writers' collocation use in comparison to native-speaker norms has been systematically studied over the past two decades, little is known about the adjective-noun (AN) collocation use by L1 Arabic ESL writers and their L1 English peers.

### *L2 Writers' knowledge and use of collocations*

There are different types of collocations (see Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1997 for other types of collocations); however, verb-noun (*make a decision*), adjective-noun (*useful skill*) and preposition-noun (*be of interest*) collocation types have been extensively investigated due to their frequent occurrences in speech and writing, and because these types are known to



pose challenges to learners (e.g., Henriksen, 2013; Wolter & Gyllstad, 2011; Zareva & Shehata, 2015). Due to the interest of the current paper, we mostly highlight findings that investigated adjective-noun (AN) collocations in learner writing.

One of the common shared characteristics among learners of English regarding collocations is that learners tend to produce awkward (or inappropriate) collocations that are different from native-like norms. This happens because it is difficult for learners to decode the literal and figurative meaning of some two-word combinations (Macis & Schmitt, 2016). For example, the word *tight* in *tight jeans* (literal) and *tight schedule* (figurative) contain different meanings. Sometimes learners are also confused by polysemy, that is, certain English words - even though synonymous – carry particular connotations (see Stubbs, 1995). For instance, words such as *famous*, *notorious*, and *expensive*, *valuable* are synonymous but they carry specific connotations: *famous criminal* vs. *notorious criminal*; *expensive advice* vs. *valuable advice*.

In addition, learners tend to overuse collocations with very frequent adjectives while their native-speaker counterparts use a variety of collocations. Takač and Lukač (2013) reported that essays produced by Croatian learners of English included the most frequent general-use adjectives such as *bad*, *big*, *different*, *good*, and *important*. Most of the students wrote *a good person* instead of *a kind person* or *a responsible person* in their essays. In a similar study, Fan (2009) examined the collocation production of 60 L1 Cantonese and 60 L1 English writers using a picture elicitation task. His findings showed that L1 English students produced more adjective collocates and more types (unique words) while L1 Cantonese speakers produced fewer adjective collocates and repeated the same collocations. For example, L1 Cantonese speakers mostly used the adjective *fat* to describe a man in the picture while L1 English speakers used other adjectives: *chubby*, *plump*, *well built*, *short*, and *stocky*. Both of these authors concluded that the overuse of general-use adjectives in students' essays may be due to learners' limited vocabulary size. In fact, previous findings suggest that there is a positive correlation between learners' vocabulary levels/size and collocation knowledge (see Gyllstad, 2009; Nguyen & Webb, 2016).

It is not only that native speakers were found to know a variety of collocations but they also tend to produce word combinations that are strongly associated and/or collocations with higher mutual information (MI) scores (see Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). MI score is a statistical measure that demonstrates the strength of association between collocate pairs. For example, collocations such as *good method*, *good opportunities* have a low MI score because 'good' collocates with many words. Collocations that include low-frequency words have a high MI

score: *effective/reliable method, valuable/unique opportunity*. Durrant and Schmitt (2009) reported that AN collocations produced in non-native essays included small numbers of strongly associated collocations (high MI scores) in comparison to native English writers despite the fact that both groups produced a comparable number of highly frequent collocations. In a related study, Siyanova and Schmitt (2008) reported that 45% of the AN collocations produced by Russian university students included frequent and strongly associated word combinations – the percentage that was similar to the native-speaker group. This discrepancy in the findings can be due to issues related to corpus compilation because these two studies involved different learner population (Russian vs. different L1 backgrounds) and their native-speaker corpus also differed from each other. It is also possible that learners do not know infrequent vocabulary in producing collocation with high MIs because strongly associated collocations (high MIs) contain infrequent words.

In sum, previous research reports that AN collocations are problematic for L2 learners, and they tend to produce awkward collocations, overuse the same collocations, and use collocations with a relatively weaker MI score as compared to L1 speakers.

#### *Arab English learners' knowledge and use of collocations*

Some of the abovementioned collocational challenges have also been observed among EFL Arab learners. In addition, it was found that receptive collocation scores of L1 Arab learners were found to be far better than their productive collocations (Brashi, 2009; Shehata, 2008). The same is true for English learners with different L1s (see Bahns & Eldaw, 1993). This is not necessarily surprising because even with general English vocabulary, L2 learners' receptive vocabulary is larger than their productive vocabulary (Nation, 2013). In other words, receptive and productive vocabularies do not develop in a linear fashion and the same can be applied for L2 collocational competence. It is also important to point out that ESL and EFL Arab learners also differ in their knowledge of productive versus receptive collocations. Zareva and Shaheta (2015) reported that ESL participants ( $n=34$ ) who on average lived in the US for 4.5 years performed significantly better in a productive collocation test than those EFL participants ( $n=33$ ). A similar finding was found in Fernández and Schmitt's (2015) study who reported L1 Spanish learners who were immersed in English-speaking countries had better knowledge of collocations than those who were not exposed to such an input-rich environment.

The most discouraging fact with regards to L1 Arab English learners' knowledge of

collocation is that collocation error rates in productive tasks such as free translation, fill-in-the-blank, or essay-format compositions accounted for were surprisingly comparable across the studies that involved EFL Arab participants: 60% (Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah, 2003), 62% (Brashi, 2009), 63% (Shammas, 2013), and 64% (Mahmoud, 2005). These findings suggest that despite the differences in the productive collocation measures and EFL setting of the learners (from Egypt to Saudi Arabia), over 60% of the time L1 Arab learners of English produced awkward/wrong collocations. This is particularly alarming given the fact that collocations are often linked with native-like lexical selection; thus, accurate production of collocations contributes to the lexical quality of academic writing (Hinkel, 2004).

Some of these errors may be due to ineffective collocation strategies. L1 Arab advanced-level speakers of English tend to use ‘lexical simplification’ while translating collocations from Arabic into English. Instead of writing *light food* or *heavy drinker*, the participants wrote *food little fat* and *drinks too much* (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995). Collocation error rates have also been attributed to negative ‘interlingual transfer’. L1 Arabic learners, like other learners of English such as Hebrew (Laufer & Waldman, 2011), German (Nesselhauf, 2005), Korean (Ha, 2013), stick to their native language to generate English collocations in productive tasks without paying attention to the arbitrary nature of word combinations (see Brashi, 2009; Mahmoud, 2005). Formal similarity was found to be another reason for collocation mistakes. Arab learners tend to do erroneous replacement due to phonological or morphological confusion, thus end up producing miscollocations such as *prickled face*, *cash fish* instead of *freckled face*, *catch fish* (El-Dakhs, 2015). This may happen due to phonetic differences between English and Arabic or simply the omission of diacritics that represent certain vowels in Arabic. In fact, most everyday Arabic writing (unlike formal or religious documents) does not include diacritics in words. For example, words such as *fish*, *cash*, *prickled* can be written like *fsh*, *cash*, *prckld* which are considered misspelled English words. Unlike English readers, “an experienced reader of Arabic knows, by habit, the exact vowel sound in each phonetic environment” (Khan, 2013, p. 233), thus they might unintentionally omit vowel letters in their English writing.

Although a number of studies have so far examined the productive collocation skills of EFL Arab learners, little is known about the collocational competence of ESL Arab learners enrolled in US-based universities. Understanding the Arab ESL writers’ productive collocations is particularly important for Intensive English Program (IEP) administrators, IEP instructors and English-medium university professors in times when L1 Arab EAP learners enrolled in US universities represent growing numbers among the student population.

According to the 2015 report from the Institute of International Education (IIE), there were approximately 90,000 students from the Arabic-speaking countries, mostly from Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, who were enrolled in regular US-based universities and Intensive English Programs (IEP) in the USA. These EAP learners obviously need help to improve lexical quality of their writing, especially in the areas of collocations, in order to write lexical error-free reports, manuscripts, and research papers for their respective course projects. To further understand the Arab ESL learners' collocation use, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. How do Arab ESL learners and native English writers compare in terms of overall AN collocations they produce in writing?
2. How do Arab ESL learners and native English writers compare in terms of shared AN collocations they produce in writing?
3. Can native English speaking teachers distinguish between Arab ESL learners and native English writers' collocation use?

### **Corpora and methodology**

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, two corpora of L1 English and Arab ESL writing were compiled. Each corpus contained 44 portfolios of writing by students enrolled in freshman composition. A freshman composition course - *ENG105 – Critical Reading and Writing in the University Community* - is offered to undergraduate students and serves native as well as non-native English speaker populations. The course is designed to develop critical reading, academic reading and writing, and technological literacy skills of the students.

Portfolios consisted of five major types of writing assignments: rhetorical analysis, evaluative/analytical writing, informational argument, extended argument, and reflective essays. As a result, two corpora of 218,890 (L1 writers) and 152,338 (Arab ESL writers) words were created. Here it is important to mention that all the writing assignments, prompts, and rubrics were the same for both the groups. The methodology adopted in the current study is relatively more sound as compared to other studies that have compared the L1 and L2 use of collocations. For example, Durrant and Schmitt (2009) compared British EAP project, Turkish EAP project, and Bulgarian subcorpus of ICLE with L1 postgraduate writings and essays written in current affairs magazines. As the current study is based on the corpora obtained from freshman writing for both L1 and L2 learners, this makes the comparisons

more sound because the learners' educational level, writing assignments, and grading criteria were kept constant for both the groups.

### *Collocation sampling*

In this study, a collocation refers to “a group of two or more words that occur frequently together” (Shin & Nation, 2007, p. 341). This study examined adjective-noun collocations and only adjectives that were adjacent to nouns were explored (e.g., *controversial issue*, *effective instruction*). The following steps were taken to extract collocations from the corpora. Any adjective-noun (AN) combinations that occurred five or more times were extracted from the corpora using Collocate software (Barlow, 2004). In the corpus-based collocation studies, a minimum number of occurrences to select a cut-off point vary from three (Hunston, 2002), four (Li & Schmitt, 2010), and five occurrences (Granger & Bestgen, 2014). Once AN collocations were extracted, they were counter-checked against the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and those that did not confirm the frequency (5-times) and mutual information (MI) score of 2.5 were excluded from further analysis. Combinations that included the following semi-determiners such as *same*, *other*, *former*, *latter*, *last*, *next*, *certain*, *such*; *numbers/ordinals* were not included. In addition, proper names (e.g., *American government*; *French law*; *Arabian Gulf*) and two-word adjective constructions (e.g., *same-sex marriage*; *first-time experience*) were deleted. Furthermore, quotations that the writers had used in their papers were not included in the analysis.

### *Collocation judgment*

In order to examine the use of collocations by L1 and Arab ESL writers, a Collocation Judgment Survey (CJS) was created. In the survey, five AN collocations shared between L1 and L2 writers were randomly selected. The selected collocations included *controversial issues*, *different aspects*, *side effects*, *credible sources*, and *critical thinking*. Then concordance lines were checked for each selected collocation using AntConc (Anthony, 2014). Finally, two instances of each collocation with its contextual sentence were extracted with mutual agreement by the two authors and included in the survey. As a result, a set of 20 sentences (two instances for each collocation) was created for both L1 and Arab ESL writers. In the survey, collocations were underlined and placed in bold.

*Example:* Two sample sentences from Arab ESL (item 2) and L1 (item 11) writers are presented below.

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Item 2: Assisted suicide is a **controversial issue**, especially when it becomes public.

Item 11: The next project was to choose a **controversial issue** with arguments on multiple sides.

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While choosing sentences, shorter sentences were preferred to save participants' time and have a better response rate. Moreover, minor edits were made in the selected sentences, so that the grammatical inaccuracies would not act as intervening variables. However, the changes made were very minor in nature, and efforts were made to keep the originality of the sentences.

The Collocation Judgment Survey were administered to 11 raters who were all native-speakers of American English, enrolled in MATESL and Ph.D. Applied Linguistics programs in a university in the southwestern part of the USA, with an average teaching experience of 2.25 years. The survey was distributed electronically. Raters were provided with the following instructions: "Please read the following sentences with particular focus on the underlined words. After you have read each sentence, rate the underlined words on a scale of *not appropriate*, *somewhat appropriate*, and *very appropriate* based on how appropriately/correctly these words are used in the sentence."

*Example:* For each sentence, participants were given three options. Participants were requested to rate the use of collocation in each sentence and mark a check sign (✓) in the appropriate box.

Item 11: The next project was to choose a **controversial issue** with arguments on multiple sides.

<i>not appropriate</i>	<i>somewhat appropriate</i>	<i>very appropriate</i>

## Results

### *Overall AN collocations produced by L1 and Arab ESL writers*

The first research question investigated to what extent L1 and Arab ESL groups differed in the AN collocations they produced. To answer this question, raw and normed collocation tokens and types were extracted for both the groups. If a collocation type reoccurred more often than once, all of its occurrences were separately counted as *tokens*; however, it was counted as only one collocation *type*. For example, if the collocation *controversial issues* occurred five times in a text, it was counted as five tokens, but only one

type.

Findings from the current study indicated that L1 and L2 learners differed in the total number of collocation tokens and types they produced in writing (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Raw and normed frequencies\* of adjective noun collocation tokens and types by group**

	L1 English	L1 Arabic
Raw Tokens	1420	1593
Raw Types	118	130
Normed Tokens	1297	2091
Normed Types	108	170
Type-Token Ratio	8.33	8.1

\*Normed Per 200,000 words

Table 1 indicates that Arab ESL learners produced a greater number of AN collocations, both tokens and types. When the raw frequencies were compared for the two groups, the differences appeared to be small. However, after the raw frequencies were normed per 200,000 words, L2 writers were the ones who produced more collocation tokens (2,091) than L1 writers (1,297). L2 writers also used a greater number of collocation types: 170 as compared to 108. To illustrate, L2 writers used 38% more tokens and 36% more types than L1 writers per 200,000 words of text. The use of tokens with a greater frequency indicates an overuse issue. This is also confirmed by the type-token ratio, which indicates that L2 use of collocation is less varied. The less types in comparison to the number of tokens, the less varied is the language ESL writers produce.

#### *Shared Collocations by L1 and L2 Groups*

In order to further explore the overuse issue, shared collocations between L1 and Arab ESL writings were further analyzed. Table 2 displays results of the shared collocations for L1 and L2 groups.

**Table 2: Detailed information about common/ shared collocations by group**

	L1 English	L2 (Arab)
Shared collocation types	22	22
Raw frequency	309	368
Normed frequency (per 1,000 words)	1.4	2.4
Normed frequency	282	483

Table 2 shows that L1 writers repeated 22 shared collocations 309 times, whereas Arab ESL writers repeated the same collocations for 368 times (raw frequency). Once the raw frequencies were normed, differences between the L1 and Arab ESL writers became more pronounced. L1 writers repeated the same 22 shared collocation types 282 times while Arab ESL writers reused the same collocation types on 483 occasions. This means that Arab ESL writers repeated the shared collocations 42% more often than L1 writers per 200,000 words of text, or, they repeated 2.4 collocations per 1,000 words of text as compared to L1 users, who repeated them only 1.4 times per 1,000 words.

*Collocation appropriacy as judged by L1 English instructors*

In addition to the frequency and types of collocations produced by L1 and Arab ESL writers, the current study also investigated whether native speakers of English, who were experienced teachers of English, would differentiate collocations used by L1 and Arab ESL writers. Since there were only 11 participants in the study, analysis involved examining raw frequency of participants' responses per each item. Table 3 presents the results for CJS.

**Table 3: Results of Collocation Judgment Survey: L1 English group**

L1 English Items	<i>not appropriate</i>	<i>somewhat appropriate</i>	<i>very appropriate</i>
Item 2	0	1	10
Item 3	0	1	10
Item 6	0	2	9
Item 7	0	0	11
Item 8	0	0	11
Item 9	2	2	7
Item 10	0	0	11
Item 11	3	0	8
Item 18	0	1	10
Item 19	0	0	11



Table 3 indicates that native English instructors recognized most of the collocations used by L1 English writers as ‘very appropriate’. For example, for items 7 and 8, all respondents chose ‘very appropriate’. Only two items (9 and 11) were recognized as ‘not appropriate’ by two and three instructors, respectively, which constitute a minority of items and teachers, whereas remaining collocations were deemed appropriately used by a majority of the instructors.

We also examined the native English instructors’ perception of the collocations used by L2 writers (see Table 4 next page). For the L2 group, on the other hand, only four collocations (items, 12, 15, 17, and 20) were recognized as ‘very appropriate’ by nine or more instructors. Six or fewer instructors considered the remaining seven collocations as ‘very appropriate.’

**Table 4: Results of Collocation Judgment Task: L2 (Arabic) Group**

<b>L2 English Items</b>	<b><i>not appropriate</i></b>	<b><i>somewhat appropriate</i></b>	<b><i>very appropriate</i></b>
Item 1	3	7	1
Item 4	2	4	5
Item 5	1	4	6
Item 12	1	1	9
Item 13	2	3	6
Item 14	2	4	5
Item 15	0	0	11
Item 16	11	0	0
Item 17	1	1	9
Item 20	0	1	10

Table 4 shows a range of responses for the ‘not appropriate’ and ‘somewhat appropriate’ categories by native English instructors. This variation in judgment on L2 use of collocation, as opposed to a greater consistency of ‘very appropriate’ responses for L1 collocation use, indicates weaknesses in Arab ESL writers’ ability to use collocations appropriately. The results of the CJS demonstrated that L1 and L2 writers differed in their use of collocations in writing.

## Discussion

In this study, we compared to what extent L1 English and Arab ESL writers, at the level of freshman composition, differed in producing AN collocations. The findings revealed that Arab ESL writers produced a greater variety of collocations compared to L1 English speakers (170 types as compared to 108 types), which contradicts previous research findings that claim L2 writers lack the ability to produce a greater variety of strongly associated collocations (e.g., Fan, 2009). Such a finding might have occurred because the current study investigated a corpus of L1 and L2 English writers whose essays were more or less polished because the student writers – as a part of the course requirement - had to undergo around two rounds of revisions (i.e., outline, first draft, peer feedback, second draft, and teacher feedback) before submitting their final drafts to the instructor. Another reason could be the academic level of native speakers. In the present study, native speaker essays included writings from undergraduate-level students while previous studies used corpora comprising graduate-level writings. This variation may explain why our finding differs from the findings reported in earlier studies (Durrant & Schmitt, 2009; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008).

The results for the second research question confirm previous claims, that is, L2 writers tend to repeat the same collocations more often than L1 writers (e.g., Nesselhauf, 2005). Based on our analysis, the same is likely to be true for advanced Arabic writers of English. The results reveal that L2 writers repeat the same collocations more often than L1 writers. This was true for both overall use of collocation tokens (i.e., Arab ESL learners repeated collocation tokens 38% times more than L1 writers) and for shared collocation types. Arab ESL writers repeat the same collocations in their composition because they know them very well; therefore, they feel comfortable using them repeatedly. However, this finding should be carefully interpreted because this was based on a total of only 22 collocations that were shared among L1 English and Arab ESL writers.

In terms of appropriate use of collocations in context, the findings reveal that L2 writers produced fewer ‘very appropriate’ and ‘somewhat appropriate’ collocations in their composition compared to their native-speaker counterparts. This confirms previous findings that collocations are problematic for L2 learners, particularly for university-based writers of English. This finding can be explained by two reasons. First, learners may not know words that occur together or they may select wrong adjectives for nouns without knowing that the combinations sound awkward in English. Martelli (2006) compiled several collocation types, including AN collocations, in essays by advanced Italian learners of English and examined their accuracy utilizing two reference sources: native English-speaker judgment and the BNC.

She reported that AN errors accounted for 47% of the total errors and these errors were associated with poor choice of adjectives (e.g., *affectional environment, a world problem*).

Poor lexical choice may be due to learners' lack of vocabulary knowledge or unawareness of congruent and incongruent collocations. 'congruent collocations' are those that have word-for-word L1 translation equivalent while 'incongruent collocations' have no direct translation in learners' L1. In a study that examined EFL and ESL Arab learners' collocation production, it was found that both groups performed better with congruent collocations in comparison to incongruent ones (Zareva & Shehata, 2015). The finding of Zareva and Shehata (2015) is consistent with the growing body of research that learners are prone to collocation errors on incongruent items compared to congruent ones (Wolter & Gyllstad, 2013). Second, the issue of inappropriacy can be due to L1 transfer. Learners might know a combination in their L1 and translate the L1 collocation into their L2 word for word. In Nesselhauf's (2005) study, 79% of the English collocations produced by L1 German writers were awkward and 45% of the collocation errors were influenced by their L1.

In sum, Arab ESL writers show some patterns that are typical of EAP writers with regards to collocation production. The first pattern pertains to lack of appropriate collocations in production, and the second is the production of less varied collocations compared to native writers. Recognition or production of appropriate collocations can be due to saliency. Salient collocations are easily recognized and used by native speakers to convey meaning "while learners often express meaning with unidiomatic combinations of words" (Li & Schmitt, 2010, p. 23).

### **Pedagogical implications**

EAP teachers might wonder how they can help L2 writers improve the production of collocations in writing and expand on their collocation repertoire. Below are some suggestions for how English language teachers can help university-based students cope with collocation problems in various ways.

#### *Form-focused practice activities*

Nowadays, most published textbooks designed for English language learners include a few collocation exercises; however, important collocations are not systematically highlighted in most textbooks (Tsai, 2015). To address this issue, English language teachers can introduce resources such as *Academic Vocabulary in Use* (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2008) and *Focus on Vocabulary* (Schmitt, Schmitt & Mann, 2011). Specialized resources like these list

collocations that are typically used in academic writing (research papers, technical reports, academic essays) and offer set of form-focused exercises that promote collocation accuracy. One positive aspect of using these resources is that exercises are based on the Academic Word List, words that are frequent in written academic discourse which are helpful for EAP writers. Second, a set of collocations and example sentences in the exercises are derived from previously published academic texts.

Sometimes learners might struggle with the meaning of collocations they are exposed to. To ensure that learners know the meaning of the listed collocations in/out of context, teachers can add a ‘meaning-driven element’ to their instruction. What this means is that learners do not just know that a collocation signifies the co-occurrence of two word combinations, but they also distinguish the differences between literal (*broken cups*) and figurative (*broken French*) meaning of the collocations (Macis & Schmitt, 2016). To do so, teachers can elicit from learners the meaning of the figurative collocations in plain English. Or, teachers can also encourage learners, especially in an EFL context, to use their L1s to identify figurative and literal meaning of collocations in exercises. Because some collocation errors occur due to L1 transfer among Arabic learners (El-Dakhs, 2015), that is Arab speakers know two-word combinations in their L1 and directly translate those combination word for word. To avoid the production of awkward collocations due to L1 transfer, teachers can raise their learners’ awareness of collocation differences between their L1 and L2.

#### *Specialized collocation lists and online resources for ELLs*

L2 writers can also benefit from specialized collocation lists such as *Academic Collocation List* (Ackerman & Chen, 2013) or *Phrasal Expressions List* (Martinez & Schmitt, 2012) that contain a list of collocations that are used in spoken and written discourse. Teachers should systematically integrate these resources into their course syllabi so that learners are exposed to frequently used collocations in their four-level skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. An advantage of these lists is that EAP students can learn collocation independently outside of class.

In addition to the specialized collocation lists and supplementary textbooks that contain collocation exercises, English language teachers can introduce freely available English-English online learner dictionaries such as (1) [www.macmillandictionary.com](http://www.macmillandictionary.com) (2) <http://www.ldoceonline.com/> (3) <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/> or a corpus-based collocation resource like (4) [www.wordandphrase.info](http://www.wordandphrase.info). Using online resources can be helpful because nowadays most writing is done using the Microsoft Word software. In fact, EAP

writers tend to prefer online collocation resources to hard-copy ones because learners do not have to thumb through dictionary pages when in need of collocation choices. As long as learners are properly trained to use the online resources, they should be able to benefit from the resources to improve their collocation fluency and accuracy. In fact, there is a relationship between knowledge of collocations and learners' activities that promote language use, such as reading texts, watching movies in L2 and engaging in social networking activities (Fernández & Schmitt, 2015).

## **Conclusion and future research**

The present study has shown that Arab ESL writers produce ample adjective noun collocations in their compositions but they tend to repeat the same collocations. This suggests that Arab ESL writers have collocation fluency in writing but they use limited number of collocations. In terms of accuracy, L1 English writers produce more accurate collocations compared to their Arab ESL peers. This finding corroborates earlier studies that suggest that achieving collocation accuracy poses a challenge for even advanced ELLs (e.g., Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009; Nesselhauf, 2005).

More research is needed to understand L2 writers' productive collocation knowledge. The current study compared Arab ESL and L1 English freshman writers' collocation production in academic writing. It would be interesting to compile a corpus comprised of essays produced by junior and/or senior Arab ESL and L1 English writers and examine whether their productive collocation knowledge differ from their freshmen counterparts. Following the same methodology, we may compare the collocation use in graduate-level written assignments by Arab ESL and L1 English writers. Another study may explore collocation use in academic writing produced by ESL and EFL Arab learners; we hypothesize that ESL Arab writers might have more accurate and varied collocations in their writing compared to EFL Arab writers because socio-cultural integration contributes to the development of formulaic language (see Adolphs & Durow, 2004). Another possible area of future research would be to investigate L2 writers' productive vocabulary size and its effect on productive collocation use in writing. L2 writers' productive vocabulary size may be estimated by administering Computer-Adaptive Test of Size and Strength (CATTS), developed and maintained by Batia Laufer and Tami Levitzky-Aviad. Because future research aims to explore L2 writers' productive collocation knowledge in writing, it might be worthwhile to see the relationship between L2 writers' productive vocabulary size and their productive collocation knowledge.

## Notes

1. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (<http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>) is a freely available online corpus that contains words from genres such as fiction, popular magazines, and newspapers, and academic texts, including spoken language from 1990 to 2012. At the time of analysis, the COCA contained approximately 450 million words.

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## Question Type, Language Proficiency and Listening Strategy Use: An Exploratory Study

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### Abstract

While much has been written about EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) listening strategies, research examining how listening strategies are used by individual students remains limited. This paper examines the differences in listening strategy use of successful and unsuccessful EFL Chinese university students for diverse listening question types. Nine participants were selected from a larger program on the basis of their scores on listening proficiency and linguistic knowledge tests. Qualitative data on these listeners' strategic behavior were gathered from immediate retrospective verbalization while they were completing listening tasks. Results show the most frequently used strategies by all groups of listeners are: elaboration, comprehension monitoring and real-time assessment of input. The study also indicates that listening strategy use is highly individualized. The pedagogical implication is to equip learners with the idea that listening is strategic to compensate for gaps in understanding. The individual nature of strategy use also suggests a mode of strategy instruction beginning with an analysis of current strategy use in terms of how strategies are used rather than which ones.

**Keywords:** listening strategies, immediate retrospective verbalization, question types, EFL

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## Introduction

Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), there is a lack of research looking specifically at how listening. Despite the wide range of areas investigated in listening strategy research (Rost, 2011; strategies are employed under different circumstances that give rise to them. In his introduction to the 2008 Special Issue of *System* on second language listening research, Field (2008) proposes that listening strategies usually constitute a response to a specific problem of understanding and are only effective if the response is appropriate. This means that a strategy cannot be considered independently of the circumstances that give rise to it. Specifically, the circumstances here refer to diverse listening question types that place different demands upon the listeners.

On the other hand, the issue of listeners' language proficiency has not been adequately addressed in second language listening strategy research (Macaro, Graham, & Vanderplank, 2007). In other words, do some listeners perform well in listening because of their strategy use, or simply because they are more advanced in language proficiency or some combination of both? One of the few studies (Santos, Graham & Vanderplank, 2008) addressed this issue by measuring language proficiency in two aspects: linguistic knowledge and listening proficiency. Linguistic knowledge was evaluated by scores on a grammaticality judgment test and vocabulary recognition test while listening proficiency was tested by listening comprehension. The purpose of measuring language proficiency in analyzing listening strategies is to explore the specific causes of successful and unsuccessful listeners. For instance, are unsuccessful listeners caused by their poor use of strategies or simply by their low proficiency?

There are two research traditions in the field of listening strategies. One (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodatari, 2006) depends on questionnaire data to provide insight into listeners' beliefs about listening and estimates of their own strategy use. The other (Goh and Taib, 2006; Graham, 2003; Vandergrift, 2003) makes use of verbal report—no easy thing to do with on-line listening, but possible retrospectively if the participants are given a comprehension task and asked to report back on how they arrived at their answers. Each tradition has its own merits, but verbal report seems to capture the characteristics of online processing in terms of the nature of listening.

There are three studies which use verbal reports as the main method to explore L2 learners' listening strategies. Previous research into listening strategies seems to focus on broad strategy use with little attention paid to the different mental techniques by which each strategy is operationalized. Goh (2002) distinguishes “tactic” as individual techniques

through which a general strategy is operationalized. She argued that it could benefit listening strategy research in three ways. Firstly, listening strategies reported by students may be validated by the corresponding tactics identified in verbal reports. Secondly, we can scrutinize students' tactics for operationalizing the same strategy. In this way, qualitative differences can be examined in strategy use. Finally, by analyzing the interaction of tactics, we have a way to examine the relative effectiveness of different learners' strategic processes. Her study was intended to work out a preliminary inventory of comprehension tactics consisting of those that may validate existing categories of strategies in the literature as well as new ones that may be revealed through the study. 80 Chinese ESL learners were enrolled in this experiment and the data were collected mainly through immediate retrospective verbalizations or "think-aloud" sessions. Both cognitive and metacognitive tactics were examined.

Graham, Santos and Vanderplank's (2008) study sought to explore the relationship between learners' listening proficiency and strategic behavior and to map out how this relationship develops over time when there is no explicit strategy training. Two main findings and the respective discussions are as follows: first, there are strategy differences between one subject, a high scorer in the listening proficiency test, and the other one, a low scorer on the same test. In terms of "selective attention" strategy, the higher scorer demonstrated an outstanding ability to identify the key information. However, it differs from the low scorer's use of the same strategy in that it usually occurs at phrase and passage level instead of word level. Second, both subjects were consistent in their strategy use over the six month. This is particular true of the low scorer's use of prediction, visual prompts and selective attention.

Although their study has been the only longitudinal study that was concerned with listening strategies and mainly responded to an immediate problem of understanding, possible limitations to the study include the case study approach by looking at two students only. In addition, it is possible that the low scorer's largely "word level" approach to the task was partly attributable to the rewinding facility and to the use of multiple-choice questions.

The challenges involved in researching L2 listening have not been systematically debated. Santos et al. (2008) argued that a number of central questions regarding research methodology in second language listening strategies were unexamined. Three key methodological questions are listed: (1) To what extent is a verbal report a valid and reliable way of eliciting information about strategies? (2) Should we control for learner's level of linguistic knowledge when examining their listening strategy use? (3) What are the problems surrounding the analysis of data gained through verbal reports? Their study discusses each of

these three methodological questions within the framework of specific research project within the context of a particular set of listening tasks. The use of verbal reports to elicit information about strategy use involve decisions regarding participants' training, control for tape, interruptions made by the researcher and type of task. This study, however, still has several methodological limitations. Using multiple-choice tests for stimulating verbal reports gives rise to the possibility that listeners are likely to pay attention to specific issues. Furthermore, the permission to rewind the listening text is doubtful because this does not replicate real-life listening, where the listener does not have unlimited opportunities to hear sections of speech not understood.

Therefore, measures were taken in the present study to minimize these problems. First, open-ended questions were added to compensate for the specific issues caused by multiple-choice tests. Second, participants could hear listening passages only once in order to replicate the real-life situation. Third, more subjects were recruited and further grouped on their language proficiency by two measures--linguistic knowledge and listening proficiency. Also required is an approach to analysis that takes into consideration the problems posed by different types of listening comprehension questions and the strategies used to deal with these questions. In this regard, listening question types were formed based on their similar demands upon the listeners on the assumption that similar question types would lead to similar strategic behavior. Therefore, the present study sought to explore the relationship among listening question types, language proficiency of listeners and their strategic behavior. In particular, the following questions are addressed:

1. What strategies do students with different levels of listening proficiency and linguistic knowledge use?
2. How do students use strategies in diverse listening question types?

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

Nine students out of forty-two participants from a prestigious university in eastern China are the focus of this study. All forty-two participants volunteered to participate in a larger program. The results of the listening comprehension in this larger program were used to group 42 participants into two listening proficiency groups: high (above the mean) and low (below the mean). We also did the same for their linguistic knowledge scores, based on a grammar test (Murphy, 2001), and a vocabulary recognition test (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001), thus dividing 42 participants into four groups. Nine students were then

chosen because they are mainly top or bottom 10 in both listening comprehension and linguistic knowledge scores. They were informed of the purpose and procedure of this study and also volunteered to participate in it. Their profiles are shown in a matrix in Table 1. It is important to compare students who do differ greatly in terms of their demonstrated linguistic knowledge since such knowledge is a likely variable in strategy use (Macaro et al., 2007). Once these groupings are established, we sought to discover how listeners in different groups used strategies on listening tasks. We are aware that the limited number of participants in our study prevents us from generalizing our results to other populations. However, we believe that it is precisely this small number of students that enables us to look at the data in detail and therefore to gain insight into these individuals' strategy use.

**Table 1: Linguistic knowledge and listening proficiency: Students per group**

	High listening proficiency (HLP)	Low listening proficiency (LLP)
High linguistic knowledge (HLK)	student 4, student 8, student 11 (S4, S8, S11)	student 37, student 39 (S37, S39)
Low linguistic knowledge (LLK)	student 9, student 3(S9,S3)	student 32, student 41 (S32, S41)

### *Materials*

Two listening passages with multiple-choice questions are from CET (College English TEST) 4 and CET (College English TEST) 6 and another passage with open-ended questions was from a well-known listening textbook called *Listen to This 2* (He, Jing, Wang, & Xia, 1995). The passages chosen were of comparable difficulty in terms of length, words per minute, percentage of unknown vocabulary and genre (description and information report text type). Comprehension was tested by a number of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, a format chosen for the purpose of this experiment and because the strategies we examine usually constitute a response to a specific understanding, i.e. the different types of listening comprehension questions. In fact, any discussion of strategies is necessarily linked with what gave rise to these strategies, i.e. the task set. Ultimately, comprehension can only be inferred on the basis of task completion (Vandergrift, 2007).

### *Data collection*

Verbal reports have emerged as one of the key ways of accessing strategy use (White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007) and are variously referred to as “think-aloud”, “introspection”, and “retrospection”. Think-aloud is concurrent with the performance of a task, and participants verbalize only the thoughts entering their consciousness while performing the task. Introspection is also performed concurrent with task, but it usually entails a time delay between task performance and inspection because participants are asked not just to verbalize their immediate thoughts but also to observe, inspect and explain their thoughts while performing a task. Retrospection, on the other hand, takes place upon completion of a task. Participants are prompted to think back upon and report the mental processes and thoughts they observe as the task is being carried out. The relevant information needs to be transferred from long-term memory to short-term memory, which may result in incomplete reporting or additional thoughts.

In this research, retrospective verbalization is preferred over other types of verbal reports (e.g., think-aloud or introspection) because it is a methodology which best suits the study of strategy use in L2 listening. Introspection involves the inspection of specific language behavior within 20 seconds of the mental event (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). However, the present experiment aims to find out strategies employed to compensate for gaps in recognition or understanding. Listening strategies usually constitute a response to a specific problem of understanding. To put it another way, listening strategies could be only reported when participants are faced with listening problems, listening comprehension tasks in this case. In fact, the methodology in the present experiment combines retrospective verbalization with think-aloud protocol together. When they come across a listening comprehension question (either multiple-choice or open-ended), they are prompted to think back upon and report the language features they attend to—that’s the retrospection part. After they recall the information in the mind, they begin to report their cognitive process while they are completing the corresponding comprehension question—that’s the think-aloud part and where the strategy use occurs. Some people may argue that the retrospective verbalization should be arranged immediately after the paused transcription to minimize the memory effect. It may be a good suggestion for L1 listening research. However, for some L2 listeners, the tasks of processing the incoming speech sounds and reporting on their thoughts at the same time may become too daunting. To minimize the memory effect, participants could take notes when they are listening and report their cognitive process based on the comprehension questions one by one.

Data were collected through verbal reports by using the information-processing model proposed by Ericsson and Simon (1993). It specifies the amounts and kinds of mental information that can be retained for reporting, and the conditions for accessing and reporting this information. For this experiment, the implications are as follows: 1) Verbal reports on listening processes are predominately retrospective. The working memory has to be freed for processing continuous input due to the rapid flow of information. What listeners typically do is to process the speech signals first before reporting through immediate retrospective verbalization. 2) Immediate retrospective verbalizations do not interfere with students' processing of input. In other words, no extra demands are made on processing capacities when students perform retrospective verbalization. 3) Due to the inaccessible nature of listening processes, students' verbalizations are maybe incomplete. However, it does not invalidate the verbalizations reported already.

The students were reassured that they were not taking a test and that the researchers were primarily interested in how they listened in English. Data collection sessions were conducted in a quiet room where the researcher met one participant individually for about 30 minutes. They could choose to report in English, Chinese or a mixture of both languages. The researcher explained to them that they would hear each passage only once. Before listening to the passage, they would have 2 minutes to preview the questions. During the listening, they could take notes to help them. Immediately after listening to the passage, they had to go over the question one by one and report how they understood the recording and answered the questions, particularly why comprehension broke down and how they arrived at the current answer. The procedures were the same with two other passages. Participants' verbalizations were tape-recorded with their permission.

The data were collected mainly through immediate retrospective verbalization. Some data were also obtained from unstructured interviews after the retrospective verbalization. The retrospective verbalizations were transcribed and interviews that showed strategic processing were identified, interpreted and coded in QSR Nvivo8. We read each transcript several times and made a preliminary qualitative analysis individually with four scripts. This initial analysis involved the coding of the data under four main categories: (1) Statement; (2) Strategy; (3) Coding; (4) Other comments.

#### *A framework for the analysis*

To identify strategies from the data, we used Ericsson and Simon's (1993) principle of human information-processing to distinguish verbal data on actual strategy use from general



statements about strategies. The retrospective verbalizations were transcribed and reports that showed strategic processing were identified, interpreted and coded. For example, one participant said, *“I can guess the meaning. Though there may be several words I did not understand. What I heard seemed that her daughter had been hit by a car. Therefore, I think A and D are probably right according to what I heard. However, D is better here because failure to concentration makes more sense to me.”* This was interpreted as follows:

**Table 2: The correspondence between verbalization and strategy**

Verbalization	Strategy
1. <b>“there may be several words I did not understand”</b>	Comprehension monitoring
2. <b>“what I heard seemed that her daughter had been hit by a car”</b>	Hypothesis formation
3. <b>“I think A and D are probably right according to what I heard.”</b>	General deduction
4. <b>“D is better because failure to concentration make more sense to me”</b>	Monitoring for sense

Two researchers made this preliminary qualitative analysis, focusing on instances of strategy use and listening style of each learner. After discussing agreements and disagreements, a taxonomy of strategies was developed (Appendix 1) which would serve as a framework for the present study. During this process we drew on well-established taxonomies (Goh, 2002; Graham et al., 2008; Santos et al., 2008), but we also felt the need to address important distinctions emerging from our data.

The next step was to make a comparison among the multiple-choice and open-ended questions in each passage in terms of the problems they posed to participants. Therefore, we were able to form groups of questions from three passages placing similar demands upon the participants. During this process we drew on well-established listening question types in TOEFL iBT (ETS, 2007) and “local” and “global” listening question categories by Shohamy and Inbar (1991), along with pairings of listening questions as Graham et al. (2008) demonstrated. This enabled us to compare strategies across different groups of students, on the assumption that similar question types would be likely to give rise to similar strategic behavior. Table 3 illustrates these groupings based on the three passages.

**Table 3: Categories of questions**

Question pairs		Potential problems posed/ Question type/Demands
Category A	Passage 1 Question 1; Passage 2 Question 1	Aimed at students' global understanding of the passage; However, clues were available in the opening lines/ global questions
Category B	Passage 3 Question 1, 8;	Required understanding at word-level, including numbers/ detail questions
Category C	Passage 1 Question 3; Passage 3 Question 2, 5, 6	Required fairly local understanding at phrase and sentence level/ detail questions
Category D	Passage 1 Question 2; Passage 2 Question 2, 3; Passage 3 Question 3, 4, 7	Required the understanding and integration of several pieces of information; Other lexical items were present in the passage as distracters, which were also plausible within the context / local questions
Category E	Passage 1 Question 4; Passage 2 Question 4	Aimed at reaching a conclusion based on facts presented in the listening passage. Little direct correspondence between lexical items in the text and the options / making inferences questions

## Results

The following analysis compares the different groups of students' strategy use, using the question categories identified in Table 3. Each piece of data cites the relevant part of the recording, with key aspects highlighted in *italics*. The correct answer to each question is underlined. The analysis of question categories B and C has been combined, as both pairs made similar demands on participants.

### *Category A (global questions)*

Category A includes global questions that aim at students' global understanding of the passage. The following example shows the questions with correct answers in Category A and the relevant parts of the recording.

*Patricia Pania never wanted to be a public figure. All she wanted to be was a mother and home-maker. But her life was turned upside down when a motorist, distracted by his cell phone, ran a stop sign and crashed into the side of her car.*  
(Passage 1)

1. What was the significant change in Patricia Pania's life?
- A) She stopped being a homemaker.      B) She became a famous educator.  
C) She became a public figure.      D) She quit driving altogether.

For Question 1 in Passage 1, S4 and S9 in HLP group both deployed the strategy of selective attention, i.e. noticing how information is structured. S4 noticed the transitional word "but" in the third sentence at the beginning of the recording. He did hear the sentence "all she wanted to be was a homemaker, but..." and then determined that the answer should

be the opposite of the sentence before “but”. Therefore, he chose A “she stopped being a homemaker” (wrong answer). In the post-listening interview, S4 admitted that he did not identify the words “public figure”. Unlike S4, S9 extracted both “public figure” and “home maker” from the recording. Nevertheless, she formed a hypothesis that there were two negative determiners before these two words and made inference based on negative evidence, i.e. on what she had not heard.

In addition, S41 in LLK & LLP group chose C (right) by elimination deduction although he did not know the meaning of “public figure”. However, he claimed that he knew the woman in the recording became a public speaker and other options were not the equivalent meanings of public speaker. The last point worth mentioning for Question 1 in Passage 1 is the strategy of incompleteness. S32 in LLK & LLP group didn’t understand the general meaning of the recording concerning Question 1. By using information in a later question (Question 2, *what had led to Pania’s personal tragedy?*), he left his incomplete proposition in memory to see if it fitted in with the passage as a whole.

To summarize, the dominant strategy for global questions was elimination deduction, although students employed it in different manners. Students in HLP group tended to use hypothesis monitoring and selective attention strategy. The former means checking whether hypothesis is verified or contradicted by text while the latter means using discourse markers to help them make a hypothesis. In contrast, students in LLP group preferred to match words heard in the recording to words in options. Nevertheless, S41 in the same group made an exception in checking which option fits the rest of the passage.

### *Category B and C (detail questions)*

Category B comprises detail questions that require understanding at word-level, including numbers while Category C consists of detail questions that require local understanding at phrase and sentence level. The following example shows the questions with correct answers in Category B and C as well as the relevant parts of the recording.

The native Americans, the people we call the “Indians”, had been in America for many thousands of years before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492.  
(Passage 3)

1. When did Christopher Columbus arrive in what he believed to be “India”?

Answer: 1492.

For questions in Category B, S11 in HLK & HLP group could write down 1492 for

Question 1 in Passage 3 without listening because she had learned it from history books in high school. For questions in Category C, S3 and S9 in HLP & LLK group both assessed the importance of problematic parts in answering Question 2 in Passage 3. S3 struggled with numbers in the previous question and omitted this one, although he knew the answer was after numbers. Similarly, S9 could also locate the answer but she realized it was too late. The following information was so overwhelming that she could not remember the answer of Question 2. S39 in LLP group also adopted the same strategy for this question. However, she just skipped it because she didn't identify any information related to this question. In a word, the frequently used strategy for detail questions was real-time assessment of input, although students adopted it under different conditions.

#### *Category D (local questions)*

Category D refers to local questions that require the understanding and integration of several pieces of information. The following example shows the questions with correct answers in Category D and the relevant parts of the recording.

But her life was turned upside down when a motorist, *distracted by his cell phone*, ran a stop sign and crashed into the side of her car. The impact killed her 2-year-old daughter. (Passage 1)

2. What had led to Pania's personal tragedy?

- |                                    |                                                |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| A) A motorist's speeding           | B) Her running a stop sign.                    |
| C) Her lack of driving experience. | <u>D) A motorist's failure to concentrate.</u> |

These questions were probably the most difficult of those posed, requiring the integrations of several pieces of information and a degree of interpretation, particularly Question 2 in Passage 1 where there was no straightforward lexical match between passage and options.

For Question 2 in Passage 1, students in HLK group such as S4 and s37 tended to use the strategy of elaboration while S41 in LLK & LLP group preferred monitoring strategy and checked from the rest of the passage. S11 in HLK & HLP group vaguely thought she had heard something like "her daughter has been hit by a vehicle." Based on her deduction, option A and D are both possible answers. Unfortunately, S9 in LLK & HLP group didn't know "tragedy" and "motorist" in the question and the option, which made her more difficult to figure out the general meaning of the recording. S39 heard "a stop sign" and adopted the strategy of match lexis again.

As one of the most frequently used strategies, real-time assessment of input was largely

deployed by HLP students for open-ended questions. Another most frequently used strategy was hypothesis formation mainly among students in HLP & HLK group. Elaboration was the second frequently used strategy for local questions and employed by students in all groups except LLP & LLK. Besides, the combined use of comprehension monitoring and hypothesis formation was largely found among students for both multiple-choice and open-ended question.

*Category E (making inference questions)*

Category E includes global questions that aim at reaching a conclusion based on facts presented in the recording. The following example shows the questions with correct answers in Category E and the relevant parts of the recording.

Her campaign increased public awareness of the problem, and prompted over 300 cities and several states to *consider restrictions on cell phone use*. (Passage1)

4. What could be expected as a result of Pania's efforts?

- A) More strict training of women drivers.
- B) Restrictions on cell phone use while driving.
- C) Improved traffic conditions in cities.
- D) New regulations to ensure children's safety.

These questions were also probably difficult, requiring a conclusion based on facts presented in the listening passage, although there were lexical match between passages and options. For Question 4 in Passage 1, about half of the students employed the strategy of integration. However, S39 in LLK & LLP group extracted the meaning of the right option B but was not confident enough about her interpretation. She then gave up on the original interpretation and chose option C which she believes a more general interpretation. Unlike majority of students, S11 in HLP & HLK group checked her interpretation with Question 2 because she thought they were related. Another point worth mentioning is that S9 in HLP & LLK group seemed hampered by identification of only a limited amount of language, elaborated upon to arrive at a hesitant answer. The worst situation happened to S41, who didn't extract any information for this question. He believed that option A, option C and option D are too general to be the right answer.

To sum up, integration was the dominant strategy employed by students in all groups. Elaboration was also the second frequently used strategy for making inference questions and employed by students in all groups except LLP & LLK. Comprehension monitoring was also one of the students' favorite strategies but even students in the same group adopted it in a quite different way. Besides, general deduction was usually a companion to comprehension monitoring.

## Discussion

Before answering the first question of every passage, participants were likely to comment on how they would tackle the task as a whole. This was the case for S3, S37 and S41. They all reported that they tended to take a more global view of the listening text. S37 even said that he had to understand all the text before he began to answer questions. Surprisingly, all of them received perfect or almost perfect scores on their multiple-choice questions of this experiment, although two of them (S37 and S41) were categorized in low proficiency group. The interviews showed that S41 was not accustomed to the British accent in Passage 2 of the paused transcription experiment and could not understand the whole text, which led to a low score on this text. On the other hand, S37 reported that his listening performance was quite inconsistent, which echoed the situation of S9 who received a low score in this experiment although she was primarily in high proficiency group. Another interesting finding is that students' strategy use is closely related with their level of psychological maturity, in this case, undergraduate or graduate student. In the following paragraphs, we are going to discuss students' strategy use based on four different types of questions: global questions, detail questions, local questions and making inference questions.

### *Category A (global questions)*

For global questions, HLP students noticed discourse markers by adopting selective attention strategy. As a strategy normally associated with effective listening (e.g. Vandergrift, 2003), it does not necessarily mean that the strategy is in itself helpful. A global question requires considering the gist of a passage instead of just one sentence containing a transitional word "but". In this sense, any strategy used needs to be used well and appropriately for it to be helpful (Vann & Abraham, 1990). "Simply counting the presence or absence of certain strategies and trying to establish a cause-effect relationship between strategy use and listening performance" (Graham et al., 2008:66) is not a proper way to analyze listening strategies. Nevertheless, discourse markers themselves are very useful. They do not only relieve readers and listeners of a potential processing overload but also inform them of the relative importance of propositions in the text (Jung, 2003). If the same incident happens in reading, students are bound to recognize the importance of information. Unfortunately, listeners don't have the luxury of being able to return to the text.

Another point worth mentioning is the influence of vocabulary. Two students, one in LLK & LLP group and the other in LLK & HLP group, both encountered vocabulary problems in global questions. One LLK & LLP student employed elimination deduction

because he didn't know a key word both in the recording and in the option. Although he chose the right answer, his strategy use was definitely influenced by his insufficient linguistic knowledge. Elimination deduction is notoriously considered as a test-wise strategy which compensates for the lack of understanding. It is recognized as a guessing strategy and certainly not a high proficiency student desires to adopt. One LLK & HLP student didn't know a word in the option and crossed it out although he already made out the general meaning of the passage. The above two students could prevent employing strategies such as elimination deduction. It proved the assertion made by Macaro et al. (2007) that limited linguistic knowledge may be the underlying reason for different in strategy use.

Comprehension monitoring is one of the most frequently employed strategies among participants. For instance, S11 in HLK & HLP group seemed less confident about what she heard but did hear the phrase "popular among young people" and word "motorcycle". She then elaborated on this to believe that option D (*they are getting more popular as a means*) was right, but at the same time questioning her interpretation and evaluating whether the other options were possible given the rest of what she had understood:

In option A, water sports are not correct here. In option C, transportation seems not right. In option D, recreation is a positive word, but water scooters do not seem a good thing. So I prefer C.

Matching lexis heard to lexis in options is usually a strategy employed by low proficiency students because they can only extract isolated words from input. For example, S32 in LLK and LLP group only heard "motorcycles" and decided to choose it because he could not inference from just one word. It is coincident with Hasan's (2000) study, which show that lower-level learners report much less successfully on the global meaning of a listening text than do more advanced ones.

The following two participants are graduate students with low listening proficiency. Nevertheless, they adopted certain kind of strategies that were very effective. S41 took a more global view of the listening text and knew Patricia Pania had become a public speaker in the rest of the text. Comparing four options, he concluded that "public figure" in option C was the closest answer although he did not know the meaning of "figure". On the other hand, S32 in the same group was not a global listener but made inference from Question 2 in the same passage. He was wavering between options C and D and then Question 2 in Passage 1 seemed to help him. Thus he claimed to extract the meaning from the recording that it was using cell phone while driving that made Patricia Pania kill her own children. He formed a

hypothesis and chose D (incorrect) as the result of this incident.

*Category B, C and D (detail & local questions)*

For detail questions, S39 in HLK & LLP group did not get any clue from the input for Question 2 in Passage 3. The original sentence in the recording is “He thought he had arrived in India”. It contains three levels of difficulties. The first one is the subjunctive mood. It is a difficult point in grammar and often taught in reading. The second difficulty is the verb “thought”. It is in past tense and tends to be unfamiliar to students. The third level is the pronunciation of “had” in weak forms. All together three difficulties prevent S39 from capturing this sentence in the speech stream. It seems that detail questions are not only related to student in LLP group, but also HLP student. S3 in HLP & LLK encountered a vocabulary problem again. He had a slow reaction to the year “1492” in the recording due to lack of practice in sound-form connections on numbers, especially for years. S3 adopted a strategy called fixation which was only found among students in LLK group. Concerning the fleeting nature of listening, fixation is not a desirable strategy.

For local questions, Question 2 in Passage 1 is definitely one of the most difficult questions in this experiment. From the transcriptions of verbalization, we know that no one get the correct meaning from the recording. Two students incorrectly chose option (B) and explained that they had heard isolated lexical items such as “stop sign”. Students in HLP and HLK group such as S4 tended to use the strategy of elaboration while two students in LLK group preferred monitoring strategy and checked from the rest of the passage. One interesting finding is that S8 chose the right answer but arrived at the meaning of Pania killed her own daughter. As Wilson (2003, 336) argues that “learners’ ultimate aim is to rely less on contextual guesswork, and more on hearing what was actually said”, in this case, S8 is only right by good luck. If he does not notice this gap and find out the problem, next time he will not be lucky again. We believe this could be one possible reason explaining listeners’ inconsistent listening performance.

*Category E (making inference questions)*

For making inference questions, HLK and HLP students were all correct on Question 4 in Passage 1, except one student explained that this had been an educated guess based on her answer of Question 2. If a motorist’s failure to concentrate led to Pania’s personal tragedy, restrictions on cell phone use while driving should be the result of her efforts. Fortunately, other students also managed to arrive at the correct answer either by making inference on the



overall text or just from the options, as S37 explained that options A, C and D were all too general to become the correct answer. Nevertheless, S39 who claimed to hear the option B failed to choose it because she thought she just heard isolated lexical items. She seemed less confident about what she heard this time (in Question 2 in the same passage, she chose to rely on the isolated words she heard) and made inference on the other options:

I heard option B, but from the overall passage, it seemed that option C was more appropriate.

Reviewing four options in this question, option C should be the last choice because it has nothing to do with the main idea of the text. Therefore, we could conclude that S39 did not understand the entire passage and caught two questions right for this passage (all together four questions) by chance.

To summarize, for employing listening strategies which compensate for the gaps in understanding, they must be used with some caution, and always weighed carefully against any evidence that the input provides. One of the factors is confidence. L2 listeners, especially novice ones, treat the information extracted from decoding with some caution, because they do not fully trust their ability to identify sound in the target language or to match sounds to words. For instance, S39 reported that she seemed to extracted the meaning of option B for Question 4 in Passage 1, however, she was not confident that she heard overall meaning of the sentence so that she chose C based on inference (wrong answer). Some place undue faith in a strategic interpretation based upon world knowledge and co-text. Long (1990) also acknowledges that background knowledge “can have dysfunctional effects on comprehension”.

A parallel danger is that individual words trigger interpretations of what has been said. When learners can only extract meaning at word level, the larger-scale understanding depends critically upon how accurately the word in question has been identified and matched to the appropriate sense. A listener who interprets “kill” as “fill”, will create entirely wrong expectations as to what might come next. Likewise, someone who accesses wrong words will activate schemas that are inappropriate.

Compensatory strategy use is a valuable way of supporting L2 understanding when one’s linguistic knowledge or listening experience is limited. But it also carries dangers which the teacher needs to recognize and the student has to learn to avoid.

## Conclusion

The present study explores the quantity and type of strategy deployed by students with different levels of listening proficiency and linguistic knowledge. The results indicate that the most frequently used strategies by all groups of students are: elaboration, comprehension monitoring and real-time assessment of input. In terms of frequency, students' use of strategies is related to their linguistic knowledge level. The subsequent qualitative approach allows us to see more clearly how strategies are used and in what combinations. It is more common for HLP&HLK students to use general deduction strategy together with hypothesis confirmation strategy. For LLP&LLK students, they are more likely to use the strategy of elimination deduction and monitoring for sense. While higher linguistic knowledge often leads to more effective deployment of strategies, this is not always the case, leading us to conclude that it is not a guarantee of effective listening or effective strategy use.

Whatever strategies listeners use, they need to know how to use them effectively and appropriately. It is teachers' responsibility to equip the learner with the idea that listening is strategic which does not aim for complete understanding. Listening strategies that compensate for the gaps in understanding are employed by the learner to deal with an actual or anticipated breakdown in communication. Therefore, this type of strategy bring considerable benefits to second language listeners, enabling them to overcome some of the limitations imposed by their incomplete knowledge of the target language and uncertain decoding skills. This suggests that instructing learners in how to use these strategies might be of value and might assist them to listening comprehension. In this regard, the results of the present study may have at least one application. Immediate retrospective verbalizations can be used to show learners how listening strategies are applied. By examining other learners' verbalizations, learners can do some verbalizations themselves. They can record and transcribe their own verbalizations and reflect on the strategies they use. Effective as well as counter-productive strategies can be highlighted and discussed.

The individual nature of strategy use displayed by nine participants in this study also suggests a mode of strategy instruction beginning with an analysis of current strategy use (in terms of how strategies are used rather than which ones) and individual feedbacks on how well strategies are employed. Thus, we should argue for a form of strategy instruction in which students are not only made aware of a wide range of strategies, but are also encouraged to select and evaluate their use, so that they can learn to use whatever strategies they find helpful in a more efficient manner. In this sense, teachers need to require knowledge about the role of strategies and strategy development in order to assist their students in this process.

The limitation of this study is the types of listening comprehension questions and the relatively small sample. Multiple-choice questions run the risk of drawing students to specific issues and using test-wise strategies. The sample in this study is not big enough to reflect that students with different listening competence employ various types of listening strategies because it only tests students once. Therefore, a longitudinal research is suggested, together with bigger samples and different levels of students, to investigate various types of listening strategies. In the future study, multiple-choice questions should be all replaced by open questions that more resemble the real-life listening situation and a longitudinal study should also be proposed to see whether strategy instruction is of value and assists students to communicate better in L2. It would also be useful to find out how the choice of strategies and strategy combinations affect individual performance in listening tests that contain a variety of text types.

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## Appendix 1

### Taxonomy of listening strategies used for coding

Strategy name		Definition
Match lexis heard to lexis in options (Match)		Hears item in text then chooses option containing that item
Elaboration (Elab)		Builds up meaning from one or two items heard, using prior/world knowledge to fill in gaps
Hypothesis formation (Hypform)		Suggests a possible answer/interpretation
Selective attention (SA)		Notice how information is structured (e.g. discourse markers)
Monitoring	Comprehension monitoring (Moncomp)	Establishes whether one has or has not understood
	Hypothesis monitoring (Hypcheck)	Checks whether hypothesis is verified or contradicted by text or subsequent information
	Hypothesis confirmation (Hypconf)	Confirms that interpretation or hypothesis is correct
	Monitoring against the passage (Monfitq)	Checks whether interpretation fits the rest of the passage
	Monitoring for sense (Monsense)	Checks whether interpretation makes sense
Integration (Int)		Draws together two or more pieces of information to reach a conclusion
Deduction	General deduction (Dedgen)	Deduction based on general information
	Frequency deduction (Dedfreq)	Deduction based on frequency of item heard
	Negative deduction (Dedneg)	Deduction based on what is not heard
	Elimination deduction (Dedelim)	Deduction based on a process of elimination
Real-time assessment of input (RAI)		Assess the importance of problematic parts that are heard
Fixation (Fix)		Stop to think about the meaning of words or parts of the input and omit the following information
Transfer (Transf)		Hear an item in one section of the passage but then applies it to interpretation of another part of passage
Avoidance strategy	Generalization	Accept a version of the message that is not very specific
	Message reduction	Accept a partial message but remain aware of gaps in it
	Message abandonment	Abandon the message as unreliable
Incompletion		Maintaining an incomplete proposition in memory, waiting until clarification can be obtained
Filtering		Compressing a longer message or set of propositions into a more concise one
Approximation		Using a superordinate concept that is likely to cover the essence of what has not been comprehended
Skipping		Omitting a part of text from processing

## Effects of the Location of Feedback on the Linguistic Accuracy in EFL Students' Timed and Untimed Essay Writing

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### Abstract

The main goal of the study reported in this article was to find out if there were any differential effects for the location of feedback on the linguistic accuracy of low intermediate EFL learners' essay writing. The methodology was experimenting with three distinct classroom practices (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral corrective feedback) on three target structures (namely articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions). The goal was to find out which of these three practical error correction provision techniques was more effective for each target structure in this EFL context. Believing that error correction should be approached as a problem-solving activity (e.g. Doughty & Williams, 1998; Chandler, 2003;

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Ferris, 2002, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008), no overt correction was provided. Instead, only codes (e.g. Art. For articles, T for tense, and Prep for prepositions) were provided in three locations on our

students' timed and untimed compositions. Quite unexpectedly, the main finding was that the Direct group benefitted the least from the feedback provided. Another main finding was that the interaction of the location of feedback with timed and untimed writing produced a differential effect on the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions only. Working under the pretext that research on salience of feedback has not provided definitive answers, it is hoped that the study reported below would add to the growing body of research theorizing for a more systematic approach to error feedback.

**Key words:** location of feedback, salience of feedback; timed/untimed feedback; corrective feedback, error correction.

## **Introduction**

Error correction is surely a painstaking task for both teachers and learners in EFL contexts. Part of the problem lies in finding the optimal pedagogy of error feedback in the writing classroom. Writing researchers have available to them a wide range of error feedback techniques to experiment with. Their goal has always been to lend writing teachers a helping hand to make informed decisions about error treatment in writing classes. Writing teachers always aspire to find out the most practical and effective classroom practice which would ultimately help EFL learners locate, correct, and edit their compositions on their own. Constrained by the adverse realities of the learning environment, teachers' choice of the feedback option in EFL writing classes is hardly theoretically motivated. Teachers in FL contexts often choose the error feedback techniques which they think work best for them on their own accord (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Al-Jarrah, 2016; 2017). This is probably so because current research on error treatment has not as yet made clear-cut answers as to how to correct L2 students' writing, a major goal of research on L2 written corrective feedback. One interesting research inquiry that, we believe, is still under researched is the detrimental effects of the location of feedback, as one component of "salience" of feedback, on improving the student writers' linguistic accuracy in EFL contexts. Not only is there paucity of research on this issue, but the findings of the very few research studies available to date on the cover term "salience of feedback" have been conflicting. For instance, Stiff, who chose to provide only marginal and terminal feedback, found that "a full correction (both marginal and terminal) seems to have no more effect upon student composition" than do partial corrections (Stiff, 196, pp. 62-3). Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) have also found that their students' performance was not affected positively by the salience of feedback. Lee (1997), however,



has shown that the more salient (direct prompting vis-à-vis indirect prompting) the correction was, the more errors students were able to correct.

At the level of detail we are considering here, three main options are always available for the writing teacher as common practices in FL contexts. These include providing feedback immediately above the error, providing feedback opposite the error on the margins of the page, and/or providing feedback at the bottom of the page. In the research reported below, these three options are termed *Direct*, *Marginal* and *Peripheral*, respectively. The goal was to see which of these three feedback techniques was most effective for correcting students' writing in our context.

However, we should mention that we have made at least two points of departure from previous studies on feedback options (e.g. Truscott, 1996; Ferris, 2002, 2003; Chandler, 2003; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010a; Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010b; Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011). First, we chose to operationalize direct and indirect feedback in a relatively new fashion. Second, we chose to adopt a modified version of the focused approach to corrective feedback.

As for the direct versus indirect distinction, we chose to draw a distinguishing line between providing general feedback of students' errors (indirect feedback) and actual correction of these errors (direct feedback). The new dichotomy is triggered by whether the feedback tackles global issues that affect meaning and organization or just refers to providing sentence-level language corrections for local and mechanical errors such as improving grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. For machinery purposes, the former is referred to as corrective feedback, but the latter is termed error correction.

As for the second point of departure, two lines of research have been in use: unfocused feedback and focused feedback. The unfocused approach refers to providing feedback comprehensively, i.e. correcting all errors in a student's text (Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beuningen, 2010; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008). The focused approach (e.g. Sheen, 2007, 2010; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, 2008, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008), on the other hand, refers to providing feedback selectively, i.e. focusing on specific treatable linguistic features of a certain linguistic structure (Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 2002; Reid, 1998;). Recently, the unfocused approach is losing ground for its traditional rival (e.g. Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Lyster, 2004;). In this current research endeavor, we adopted neither the comprehensive unfocused approach nor the selective focused approach. Our choice was motivated by the observation that studies adopting either approach are making contradictory findings. Until now, no conclusive

evidence has been found for the effectiveness of either approach.

Following Al-Jarrah and AL-Ahmad (2013), we chose to experiment with a relatively novel approach: providing focused corrective feedback comprehensively, i.e. correcting all misuses for the structure(s) currently under the teacher's focus domain. For example, if the target structure is the past tense form, the writing teacher would mark all students errors on this target structure only, not just a few "treatable" functional uses of the past tense (cf. Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). Misuses of other structures are not corrected at all. What this basically means is that the technical jargon "*focused*" applies here to the target structure, and "comprehensive" applies to all its functional uses. This is probably sanctioned on the grounds that, "the more intensive the attention, the more likely the correction is to lead to learning" (Ellis, 2008, p. 102).

In order to see whether the feedback provision options (Direct, Marginal, Peripheral) were constrained by the time restrictions, we chose to experiment with both timed-writing and untimed-writing. The general holistic impression is that writers will perform better when given more time. Following this line of reasoning, we provided focused corrective feedback comprehensively on students' timed and untimed compositions for three target structures: articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions. Our current research endeavor then addressed how the linguistic accuracy in the use of the target structures (articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions) of low-intermediate EF learners, was affected by the interaction of three internal variables: the location of corrective feedback provided (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral), with the time constraint (timed or untimed writing). We hope that the findings might be helpful in theory-building, and thus help in bridging the gap between the theory of corrective feedback provision and the actual classroom practices in FL contexts.

In the literature review section (2) below, we try to show that there is paucity of research on the role of the location of feedback in improving the student writers' linguistic accuracy in FL contexts. Concisely, we have found that location of feedback, as an internal variable, is often relegated to a marginal role, especially when the more umbrella term "salience of feedback" is addressed. In the methodology section (3), information about the instructional context, participants, pre-writing, writing and post-writing treatments, data analysis, etc. is provided. In the outcomes section (4), the results of the three correction provision techniques are tabulated. In the discussion section (5), the three methods of providing feedback on written error (Direct, Marginal, Peripheral) are contrasted in terms of their salience. Given the implications that arise from the study, we try to establish a line of research on writing instruction by showing how our current research ties up with previous

investigations. Most notably, we try to make the argument that the location of feedback is one of the internal variables that could have biased the findings of research on corrective feedback provision techniques. Some implications for future research on this and other FL contexts are suggested in the conclusions section (6).

## **Literature review**

Current debate on the role of corrective feedback on improving the linguistic accuracy of EFL student writers has crystallized into two competing lines of thought. For one, corrective feedback is ineffective, and could possibly be harmful (Fazio, 2001; Kepner, 1991; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007). To the advocates of this line of thinking, the slight gains of grammatical accuracy reported in some investigations on corrective feedback could be attributed in part (or possibly on whole) to some external forces such as research design, classroom instruction, etc. (for an illuminating discussion, see Guénette, 2007; Truscott, 1996, 2007).

For the other (e.g. Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Brown, 2007; Chandler, 2003, 2004; Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011; Ferris, 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lee, 2004; Russell & Spada, 2006), corrective feedback is indispensable on some theoretical and practical grounds. At the theoretical plane, numerous studies have shown that corrective feedback does have significant positive effects on learners' abilities to write accurately. Research (e.g. Cohen, 1987; Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2001; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Lee, 1997, 2004; Leki, 1991) has also shown that students value teacher's feedback for error correction in improving their writing. At the practical plane, although some writing teachers "tend to treat error feedback as a job with little long-term significance" (Lee, 2003, p. 216), they still view error correction as an indispensable pedagogic strategy. What this basically means is that they cannot make do without providing corrective feedback on their student writers' written assignment (Brown, 2007; Goldstein, 2008). It would be unpractical for many of them to give up the practice merely on the grounds that this "would fit in better with some theorists' preferred approaches to teaching" (Caudery, 1990, p. 124).

However, to those who have chosen to experiment with corrective feedback (e.g. Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009, 2010; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lalande, 1982; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Sheen, 2007a; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009), two serious research inquiries should be investigated thoroughly. These are (1) what to correct in a student's writing product, and (2) how to correct a student's

writing product. To them, a major part of the problem then lies in how corrective feedback is administered (Cf. Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Cohen & Robbins, 1976; Hyland, 2003;). According to Guénette (2007), for error correction to be maximally effective, it has to be "the appropriate feedback, given at the right time, and in the proper context" (p. 11). This is what we call the treatment which, to Guénette, (2007) is considered "the crux of the matter", and here research on the location of corrective feedback and its more cover term "salience of feedback" (p. 13) can be glued. Location as a subcomponent of salience of error feedback is, the argument goes, one of these parameters whose role still needs further investigation.

Lee (1997) showed that the more salient the error was made to the learner, the more they were able to correct. But the question that rises here is: how should the writing teacher draw the attention of the learners to these linguistic forms when providing corrective feedback on students' compositions? Writing researchers have only addressed this under the umbrella term of "salience of feedback", which has bifurcated into two main lines of research. On the one hand, we find the line of demarcation drawn between direct (more salient) and indirect (less salient) feedback; on the other, the line is drawn between overt (more salient) and nonovert (less salient) feedback. Overt feedback has been further divided into coded and uncoded feedback (cf. Lee 1997). According to Ferris (2004) & Hyland & Hyland (2006), the provision of the codes (and therefore explicitness of the feedback) should be dependent on the learners' meta-linguistic awareness.

Most writing researchers (e.g., Ashwell, 2000 ; Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998) have provided evidence that writing teachers favor the indirect coded approach. Lee (1997) argues that whereas overt correction puts the onus of error correction on the teachers, indirect feedback shifts it to the learners themselves, one good reason to believe why nonovert correction techniques are, for many researchers (e.g. Lee, 1997; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986), preferred in a learning context. Classic work such as Semke (1984) has shown that overt correction has proved harmful on students' subsequent compositions as learners become entirely reliant on teacher's corrections. Robb, Ross, & Shortreed (1986) have provided some evidence against direct correction of error. Lee (1997), who distinguishes between surface errors which require overt correction and meaning errors which require error feedback, has provided good piece of evidence against overt error correction: students fail to correct because they fail to detect the errors not because of a lack of knowledge. Lee's argument is then like this: teachers should provide overt corrections in

case students lack the knowledge to correct; otherwise they should be encouraged to correct for themselves (also see Ellis et al., 2008).

However, what is worth noting here is that the cross-classification of corrective feedback into direct and indirect, one of the widely used distinctions, is still after years of research not always crystal clear. For example, whereas Bitchener & Knoch (2010) consider the provision of a code to show the category of error (e.g. PS for past tense) as a form of direct feedback, Ferris (2003) considers it as a form of indirect feedback. According to Guenette<sup>1</sup>, (2007), one reason why studies on corrective feedback still produce conflicting findings is that these investigations into the effects of corrective feedback on the learners' performance fail to operationalize these terms systematically. In her article "A typology of written corrective feedback types", Elis (2008) further subdivides indirect feedback into two options: (1) indicating and locating the errors and (2) indicating errors only. Whereas the former involves the provision of a code (or even a cursor) near or immediately above the error as employed in studies such as (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003), the latter involves the provision of this code in the margin of the learners' compositions as employed, for example, by (Robb et al., 1986)<sup>2</sup>.

The conflicting findings of previous research might have been constrained not only by the type of the feedback (coded/uncoded or direct/indirect), but also by its location. For example, Lee (1997) experimented with the two types of indirect feedback and found that indicating and locating the errors was more effective than just indicating the error by a check in the margin. Ellis (2008), however, wrote:

It might be claimed that indirect feedback where the exact location of errors is not shown might be more effective than indirect feedback where the location of the errors is shown (p. 100).

What is evident to date is that most research on direct versus indirect feedback and/or overt versus nonovert feedback has overlooked the exact location of the feedback. For this, we aim to show that this could be an internal variable that could have detrimental effects on the performance of low-level learners in EFL contexts.

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1 First published online in ELT J: May 20, 2008. Then as print (2009) 63 (2): 97-107. doi: 10.1093/elt/ccn023

2 The research concern that we need to voice here is that although these two options are viewed as forms of indirect feedback, they still differ in their degree of explicitness. At least, they differ in showing the precise location of the error. We argue that the former is definitely more explicit (and therefore more salient) to the FL learner than the latter, especially for students with low levels of FL proficiency (for details see Ferris & Robert, 2001). For the former, the student writer can work immediately on the error, but for the latter the student writer needs to first locate the error and then work out the correction

For error corrective feedback to be maximally effective and for research findings on feedback provision in various FL contexts to be comparable (so that generalizations can be safely made), we find it urgent to operationalize our terms, most notably error feedback versus error correction. To date, these two technical terms are used almost interchangeably (cf. Lee, 1997). No clear-cut distinction has so far been drawn between providing the student writers with error feedback (EF) or providing them with error corrections (EC). In the research reported below, we argue that whereas indirect feedback is a form of error feedback, direct feedback should be viewed as a form of error correction. Therefore, the two prevalent correction techniques (namely indirect correction and direct correction) are thus operationalized like this: Indirect correction, which can be either coded or uncoded (Lalande, 1982; Frantzen, 1995; Ferris, 2003), refers to providing feedback on global issues that affect meaning and organization, and so require error feedback in (Lee's, 1997) words. Direct correction which can also be coded or uncoded, on the other hand, refers to providing sentence-level language corrections for local and mechanical errors such as improving grammar, spelling, and vocabulary, and so requires overt correction in Lee's (1997) words or error correction (EC) in our current words.

Irrespective of the debate on the categorization of errors which is still contradictory (see Ferris, 1999 vis-à-vis Truscott, 2001), the machinery in this research endeavor is to identify sentence-level errors and to provide some correction whether coded or uncoded. However, the nontrivial concern to us here is: where to provide the prompt. Writing teachers' existing practice has been crystallized in three options: (1) direct prompting: circling or underlining the error and providing correction above it immediately, (2) marginal promoting: indicating on the left- and right-hand margins that there is an error on a certain line, and (3) peripheral promoting: indicating at the bottom of the page that there is/are some error(s) in a certain paragraph. Although these are three different ways, writing teachers still use them indiscriminately and writing researchers investigate them uncritically (see Stiff, 1967; Robb et al., 1986). However, irrespective of the current common classroom practices, these three techniques differ in the degree of salience to the student writer: the closer the correction to the error, the more its salience. Therefore, direct prompting is more salient than marginal prompting which, in turn, is more salient than peripheral prompting. However, "salience of feedback" is still a cover term that should be parameterized. And the exact location of the corrections provided, i.e. where they appear on the students' compositions, is surely one issue that deserves to be addressed thoroughly. At the level of detail we are considering here, the

research reported below is possibly the first to tackle the detrimental effects of this internal variable on L2 learners' performance.

## **Methodology**

### *Research questions*

This study was designed to address the following questions:

- 1) Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of the three targeted structures (articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions) due to the feedback locations (Direct, Marginal and Peripheral corrective feedback)?
- 2) Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of articles due to feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?
- 3) Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement due to feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?
- 4) Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions due to feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?

### *Participants and setting*

This study was conducted at Yarmouk University, Jordan. Forty-seven EFL undergraduate students participated in this study over a semester of 16 credit hours of writing instruction. The participants were all second-year English majors taking a required writing course in the English Department. Their English language proficiency can be rated as low-intermediate, or as Basic users A2 (Waystage), with reference to Common European Framework (p. 24), according to which, they “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)
- communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters
- describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need”

Their foreign language proficiency skills were judged to be homogeneous in at least three ways. First, they all had the same native language background in that they were all native speakers of Arabic with an average of 10 years of English language instruction in a foreign environment. Second, most of them had approximately similar scores in the General Secondary Certificate Examination (high school graduation exam) which is an indispensable condition for admission to the program. Third, their writing capabilities were assessed in terms of their general English language proficiency level by the researchers themselves.

The participants were divided and arbitrarily assigned to three groups according to the locations of the corrective feedback they received on their writing assignments (15 for the Direct corrective feedback group, 16 for the Marginal feedback group, and 16 for the Peripheral feedback group). All the groups received the same type of feedback (indirect coded feedback, e.g., *art.* for articles, *prep.* for prepositions, *agr.* for subject-verb agreement, etc.) provided in the three locations on their writing assignments. The Direct feedback group received feedback directly over the linguistic error, the Marginal group received it on the left- and right-hand margins of the page (opposite the line where the error was made), and the Peripheral group received feedback down at the bottom of the page.

### *Design*

Polio (1997) indicated that "In cases of homogeneous population, a more fine-grained measure of accuracy such as an error count may be a better option" (p. 117). Since our participants were considered homogeneous, the error count with classification method (Bardovi-Harlig & Boffman, 1989; Chastain, 1990; Frantzen, 1995; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992) was used to measure the subjects' linguistic accuracy in the use of the three different linguistic features including articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions over a semester in two writing tasks: timed and untimed essay writing. For the timed-writing, the participants were given a two-hour class to write at least a 5- paragraph essay about a topic of their own choice. For the untimed writing, the student writers were asked to write at least a 5- paragraph essay on a topic of their own choice under no time constraints. For this, the essay was started in class, but the student writers were asked to finish the work at home and to hand it in approximately two days later. Only one coded indirect feedback was provided on students' assignments on different locations of the writing texts (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral).



### *Target structures*

As we chose to adopt a modified version of the focused approach to error correction, all incorrect uses of the target structures (e.g. article, subject-verb agreement, etc.) were corrected in the students' texts. These linguistic features were targeted for a number of reasons. First, we noticed from our own field experience that these are among the persistent error types that writing teachers in this FL context keep correcting in their student writers' compositions. Second, we strongly believe that students' failure to correct misuses of these target structure will be due to their failure to detect the errors rather than a lack of knowledge. This is probably so because, as English majors, they receive enough classroom instruction on these structures. What this basically means is that their failure to correct will be due to the influence of the location of corrections rather than to their inability to correct. Third, misuses of these structures are still easy to tabulate as they relate to sentence-level errors.

### *Treatment*

The instructor/researcher divided the participants into three groups in terms of the location of the feedback they were given (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral). Without being informed about this division, the participants were provided with the same type of corrective feedback (indirect coded feedback) but in different locations of the text. During class meetings, students were trained to work with multiple drafts of essays, so students had to write two drafts about the same topic of their own choice at home.

Right from the beginning of the semester, as part of planning the classroom activities, the students were consulted about the topics and themes they'd like to write about. Some typical prompts such as living in a city or in the country, friendships via the internet, abolishing school uniforms, etc. were suggested. In order to engage all students in this pre-writing activity, each was encouraged (and in fact requested) to suggest his/her own favorites and make justification for their own choices. In order to bring content learning to the maximum, Byrnes (2011) believes that writing instructors should let learners "focus on content that is worth learning, that is worth writing about, and that is worth making one's own through the act of writing" (p. 149). Therefore, over a couple of classroom meetings, again as a pre-writing activity, we encouraged oral general group discussions about the suggested topics and themes in and outside the classroom, basically trying to get inputs from the learners themselves as to which topics we should be "letting ourselves in" throughout the whole semester. The learners suggested tens of candidate topics and themes, including but not limited to, mixing in schools, fashion, polygamy, cell phones, unemployment, life expectancy,

etc.

During the semester, students wrote two assignments, two drafts each. The instructor researcher provided his feedback on the first draft in the form of codes, and students were asked to revise it in light of the comments provided on their writing products. As a classroom feedback practice, the researcher instructor drew the attention of students to the type of linguistic errors they made in their first drafts and how to avoid such errors when submitting their revised drafts of the assignment for grading purposes. Missing articles or prepositions, extra articles or prepositions, or incorrect use of articles or prepositions, and incorrect uses of subject-verb agreement were counted as errors. After the students finished revision, they were asked to write the second drafts, and the instructor provided his feedback again on the second draft. In order to encourage students to take the feedback seriously, the second draft was corrected and given a score based on the student writer's positive use of the feedback. Half of the grade was given to the first draft and the other half was given to the second.

The same three location groups (Direct, Marginal and Peripheral) were subjected to a timed writing situation, where they were asked to write impromptu one draft about a different topic. They were given two hours to finish this time-constrained writing assignment. The instructor researcher provided the similar feedback as that given to them on their untimed-written assignments. In order to make sure that they take it seriously and that they do further work on their essays at home themselves, the instructor researcher was careful to inform the students that he will make comparisons between their performance in the timed and untimed compositions (For details about the specifics of this instructional context, see Al-Jarrah, 2017 and Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013).

### *Measuring Accuracy*

The researchers counted both the number of correct and incorrect uses of each of the targeted linguistic forms (articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions) in both timed and untimed essays. The figures were tabulated for statistical purposes. The linguistic accuracy for the three targeted structures in the three groups' writing products (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral ) was worked out by dividing the number of the correct uses of these grammatical features by the sum of the correct plus incorrect uses of each targeted structure for each student writer (see Frantzen, 1995).

### Data Analysis

One of the researchers, a writing instructor for a about ten years, made error identification and correction on the students' texts. For reliability purposes, the same researcher rescored the subjects' correct and incorrect uses a month later after the initial scoring. The texts were also scored by another experienced writing instructor. The inter-rater reliability was 90%. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was implemented to account for descriptive and referential statistics for the timed and untimed writing tests. MANCOVA of Repeated Measures (split-plot design) and Bonferroni's test for post-hoc comparisons were used to address the research questions.

### Results

This part presents the results of investigating the effect of the location of feedback on improving the linguistic accuracy in the use of three grammatical features (articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions) in students' timed and untimed essay writing. The findings for the questions addressed in this research are presented below.

*RQ 1: Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of the three targeted structures (articles, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions) due to the feedback locations (Direct, Marginal and Peripheral corrective feedback)?*

Table 1 below shows the means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of the linguistic accuracy in students' writing for the repeated measure variable (timed and untimed writing) and the feedback location variable.

**Table 1: Means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of the linguistic accuracy in students' writing.**

Essay Writing Accuracy	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Adj. Mean	Std. Error
Untimed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	88.179	6.443	88.179	1.32
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	91.040	4.616	91.040	1.27
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	90.902	4.007	90.902	1.27
	Total	47	90.080	5.153	90.040	0.74
Timed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	65.364	5.650	65.364	2.43
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	72.825	10.964	72.825	2.35
	Peripheral corrective Feedback	16	75.835	10.444	75.835	2.35

	Total	47	71.469	10.193	71.342	1.37
Total	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	76.771	6.046	76.771	1.47
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	81.933	7.790	81.933	1.43
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	83.369	7.226	83.369	1.43

Table 1 shows differences among the means of grammatical accuracy in students' writing resulted from variations in time constraint (timed and untimed writing) and variations in the levels of feedback location variable. To verify whether these differences are significant, MANOVA of repeated measures (split-plot design) was used to measure linguistic accuracy in students' writing according to the independent variable-feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and Peripheral corrective feedback) on the one hand and timed and untimed writing variable on the other and the interaction between both as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2: MANOVA of repeated measures test (split-plot design)**

Effects	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Tests of		8209.10		8209.10	<b>166.90</b>	0.00	79.14
Within-Subjects	Accuracy	1	1	1	<b>6</b>	0	%
	accuracy *	234.256	2	117.128	2.381	0.10	9.77%
	Group	2164.09	4	49.184		4	
	Error(accuracy)	7	4				
Tests of		739.032	2	369.516	<b>5.678</b>	0.00	20.51
Between-	Group					6	%
Subjects	Error	2863.68	4	65.084			
		8	4				

Accordingly, it turned out that there were two levels of effect: (1) one which examines differences between individual student writers, i.e. if the student writers differ on the independent variables (timed versus untimed) depending on their group (Direct, Marginal or Peripheral); and (2) the other which measures how much an individual student writer has changed over time. To use some technical jargon, the former is referred to as between-subject effects, the latter is called within-subject effects.

1. Between-subjects effect: The results indicate that there were statistically significant

differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among the average of the adjusted means of the grammatical accuracy in timed and untimed essay writing due to feedback location (Direct, Marginal, or Peripheral). Since feedback location is a multi-level variable, Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons was used to uncover these differences. Table 3 below shows the findings.

**Table 3: Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons**

<b>Group</b>		Direct Corrective Feedback	Marginal Corrective Feedback
Bonferroni	Adj. Mean	76.771	81.933
Marginal Corrective Feedback	81.933	<b>5.161</b>	
Peripheral Corrective Feedback	83.369	<b>6.597</b>	1.436

Accordingly, the differences among the average of the adjusted means of linguistic accuracy in timed and untimed writing were (1) in favor of the Peripheral corrective feedback group over the Direct feedback group and (2) in favor of the Marginal feedback group over the Direct corrective feedback group. What this basically means is that the Direct feedback group, quite unexpectedly, benefited the least from the teacher's corrections, a major finding of this research endeavor.

2. Within-subjects effect: Here two major findings are in order. First, there was a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the two adjusted means of grammatical accuracy manifested in increased grammatical accuracy for untimed writing regardless of feedback location. What this basically means is that the student writers tend to write better under non-time-restricted conditions. Second, there were no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the adjusted means of grammatical accuracy in writing resulting from the interaction of timed and untimed writing on the one hand with feedback location on the other.

*RQ2: Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of articles due to feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?*

The means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of the linguistic accuracy in the use of articles of timed and untimed writing and feedback location are presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of linguistic accuracy in the use of articles.**

Articles accuracy	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Adj. Mean	Std. Error
Untimed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	82.902	11.869	82.902	2.37
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	86.899	8.746	86.899	2.29
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	87.883	6.239	87.883	2.29
	Total	47	85.958	9.228	85.895	1.34
Timed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	64.807	6.520	64.807	3.74
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	66.276	21.892	66.276	3.62
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	75.699	9.742	75.699	3.62
	Total	47	69.015	14.970	68.927	2.11
Total	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	73.854	9.195	73.854	2.24
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	76.588	15.319	76.588	2.17
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	81.791	7.990	81.791	2.17

Table 4 shows differences among the means of linguistic accuracy in the use of articles in students' writing that have resulted from variations in timed and untimed writing on the one hand and variations in feedback location on the other. To verify whether these differences are significant, MANOVA of repeated measures (split-plot design) was used to measure the linguistic accuracy in the use of articles in students' writing according to feedback location and timed and untimed writing and the interaction between both variables as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: MANOVA of repeated measures test (split-plot design)**

Effects	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Tests of	Articles	6759.152	1	6759.152	<b>47.126</b>	0.000	51.72%
Within-Subjects	Articles * Group	299.501	2	149.751	1.044	0.361	4.53%
	Error(Articles)	6310.745	44	143.426			
Tests of	Group	1014.479	2	507.239	<b>3.381</b>	0.043	13.32%
Between-Subjects	Error	6600.488	44	150.011			

Table 5 indicates that there were two levels of effects:

1. Between-subjects effect: Figures indicate that there were statistically significant

differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among the average of the adjusted means of grammatical accuracy in the use of articles in timed and untimed writing. Again, since this variable has multi levels, Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons was used to uncover these significant differences as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons**

Group		Direct Corrective Feedback	Marginal Corrective Feedback
Bonferroni	Adj. Mean	73.854	76.588
Marginal Corrective Feedback	76.588	2.733	
Peripheral Corrective Feedback	81.791	<b>7.936</b>	5.203

What is worth noting here is that the differences among the average of the adjusted means of the grammatical accuracy in the use of articles in timed and untimed writing were again in favor of the Peripheral feedback group over the Direct feedback group.

2. Within-subjects effect: The results show that there was a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the two adjusted means of grammatical accuracy in the use of articles in students' writing attributed to timed and untimed writing. Concisely, there was an increase in the student writers' linguistic accuracy in the use of articles in untimed writing as opposed to that in timed writing irrespective of the variation in feedback location. Table 6 shows that there were no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among the adjusted means in the use of articles due to the interaction of timed and untimed writing with feedback location. In other words, feedback location had no effect on accuracy improvement in the use of articles.

*RQ3: Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement due to feedback locations (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?*

The means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of the linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement for timed and untimed writing and feedback location are presented in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement.**

<b>Essay Writing Accuracy of subject-verb Agreement</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Adj. Mean</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>
Untimed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	88.510	8.521	88.510	1.81
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	90.118	6.057	90.118	1.75
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	90.884	6.293	90.884	1.75
	<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>89.866</b>	<b>6.925</b>	<b>89.837</b>	<b>1.02</b>
Timed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	62.677	7.821	62.677	3.65
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	63.062	17.290	63.062	3.53
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	69.970	15.145	69.970	3.53
	<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>65.291</b>	<b>14.229</b>	<b>65.236</b>	<b>2.06</b>
Total	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	75.593	8.171	75.593	2.16
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	76.590	11.674	76.590	2.09
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	80.427	10.719	80.427	2.09

Table 7 illustrates that there were differences among the means of linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement resulted from variations in timed and untimed writing on the one hand and variations in the levels of feedback location variable on the other. To verify whether these differences are significant, MANOVA of repeated measures (split-plot design) was used to measure linguistic accuracy in the use of subject-verb agreement students' writing according to feedback location and timed and untimed writing variable and the interaction between both as displayed in Table 8.



**Table 8: MANOVA of repeated measures test (split-plot design) results**

Effects	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Tests of	Agreement	14209.526	1	14209.526	<b>130.454</b>	0.000	74.78%
Within-Subjects	Agreement * Group	168.341	2	84.170	0.773	0.468	3.39%
	Error(Agreement)	4792.632	44	108.923			
Tests of	Group	409.139	2	204.569	1.464	0.242	6.24%
Between-Subjects	Error	6149.490	44	139.761			

From Table 8, we can notice that there were two levels of effects: Between subjects and within subjects.

1. Between-subjects effects: no statistically significant differences (at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ) were found in the use of subject-verb agreement in the student writers' timed and untimed writing ascribed to feedback location.
2. Within-subject effects: First, there was a statistically significant difference (at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the use of subject-verb agreement in students' writing due to the timed and untimed writing manifested in an increased linguistic accuracy for untimed writing irrespective of the location of feedback provided. Second, no statistically significant differences (at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among) attributed to the interaction of the timed and untimed writing with feedback location were attested.

*RQ 4: Are there any significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the means of timed and untimed writing linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions due to feedback location (Direct, Marginal, and peripheral) and the interaction between both?*

The means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions for both variables are shown in Table 9 below.

**Table 9: Means, standard deviations, adjusted means, and standard errors of linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions.**

Essay Writing Accuracy of Prepositions	Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Adj. Mean	Std. Error
Untimed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	91.871	5.680	91.871	1.15
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	93.913	3.334	93.913	1.12
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	93.107	4.170	93.107	1.12
	Total	47	92.987	4.453	92.964	0.65
Timed	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	67.472	5.566	67.472	2.25
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	81.326	8.861	81.326	2.18
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	80.241	10.715	80.241	2.18
	Total	47	76.535	10.584	76.346	1.27
Total	Direct Corrective Feedback	15	79.671	5.623	79.671	1.31
	Marginal Corrective Feedback	16	87.620	6.097	87.620	1.27
	Peripheral Corrective Feedback	16	86.674	7.443	86.674	1.27

Accordingly, there were differences among the means of the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions that resulted from variations in timed and untimed writing on the one hand and variations in feedback location on the other. To verify whether these differences are significant, MANOVA was used to measure (1) the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions in students' writing timed and untimed writing with reference to feedback location, and (2) the interaction between both variables as displayed in Table 10 below.

**Table 10: MANOVA of repeated measures test (split-plot design) results**

Effects	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Tests of	Prepositions	6483.339	1	6483.339	<b>147.268</b>	0.000	77.00%
Within-Subjects	Prepositions * Group	695.979	2	347.990	<b>7.905</b>	0.001	26.43%
	Error(Prepositions)	1937.057	44	44.024			
Tests of	Group	1155.775	2	577.888	<b>11.172</b>	0.000	33.68%
Between-Subjects	Error	2275.919	44	51.725			

Table 10 reveals that there were two levels of effect: Between subjects and within subjects.

1. Between-subjects effect: There were statistically significant differences (at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the use of prepositions in the student writers' timed and untimed writing attributed to feedback

location. Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons was used to uncover these differences. Table 11 displays the findings.

**Table 11: Results of Bonferroni's test for post hoc comparisons**

<b>Group</b>		Direct Corrective Feedback	Peripheral Corrective Feedback
Bonferroni	Adj. Mean	79.671	86.674
Peripheral Corrective Feedback	86.674	<b>7.003</b>	
Marginal Corrective Feedback	87.620	<b>7.948</b>	0.945

What is worth noting here is that the differences in the linguistic accuracy were (1) in favor of the Marginal feedback group over the Direct feedback group and (2) in favor of the Peripheral feedback group over the Direct feedback group. In other words, the Marginal group outperformed the Peripheral group which, in turn, outperformed the Direct group.

2. Within-subjects effect: The results show that there was a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the two adjusted means of grammatical accuracy in the use of prepositions in students' timed and untimed writing and in favor of an increase in the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions in untimed writing versus that in timed writing. Table (11) also reveals that there were statistically significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among the adjusted means of linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions in students' writing due to the interaction of timed and untimed writing with the feedback location variable as illustrated in Figure 1. In other words, the location of feedback had a differential effect on the linguistic accuracy of prepositions.

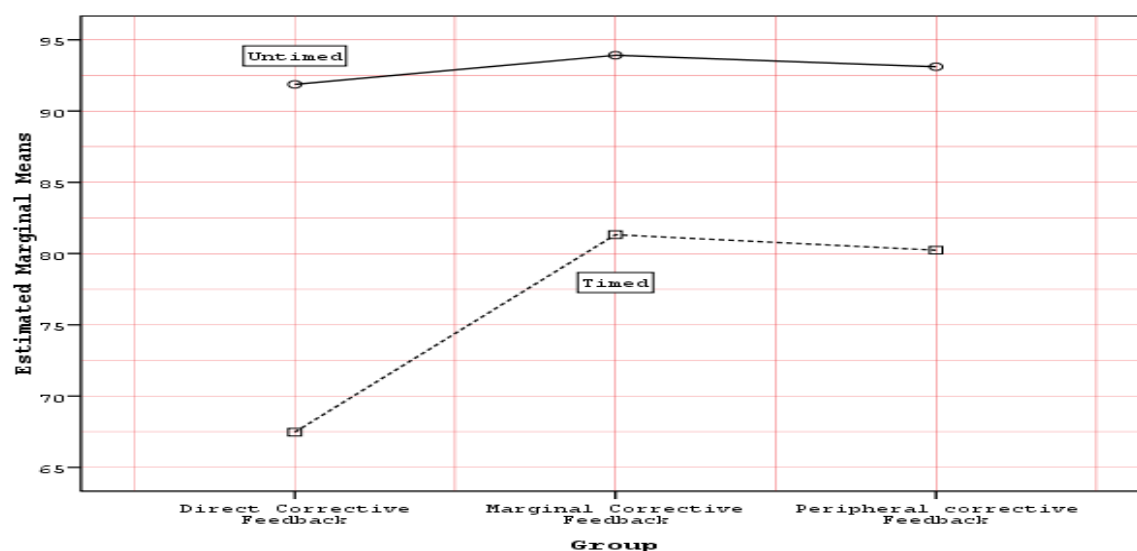


Figure 1. Graph line of the interaction of the repeated measures variable with feedback locations variable.

We can generally observe from figure 1 above that as we move from timed to untimed writing the adjusted means of the linguistic accuracy in the use of prepositions are likely to increase, indicating that students gained more accuracy in using prepositions when composing under non-time restrictions. However, one interesting observation that needs some justification is why, unlike that for articles and subject-verb agreement, the Marginal feedback gained the most for prepositions, another major finding of this research endeavor.

## Discussion

How should writing teachers draw the attention of their student writers to the editing stage of composing to the sentence-level errors they have made? Where should this feedback be provided on the students' composition? To the writing teachers, three methods of feedback provision are always available: (1) direct prompting: providing corrections directly above the error, (2) marginal prompting: providing corrections on the left and right-hand margins of the sheet of paper, and (3) peripheral prompting: providing corrections as end-notes at the bottom of the page. The main goal of the research reported in this article was to see how the location of feedback contributes to its salience and, therefore, improving the student writer's linguistic accuracy in the target structure(s). Another goal of the study was to see how their performance is affected by time restrictions (i.e. in both timed and untimed essay writing). In this discussion section, we try show how our current research ties up with previous investigations on three lines of research on writing instruction.

First, as for the effect of the location of feedback on the performance of the student

writers, one main finding of the research reported above was that, quite unexpectedly, the more salient the feedback (in terms of its location), the less the improvement for both timed and untimed essay writing. What this basically means is that the further away from the error the feedback is provided, the more the gains. This has become evident when, grossly speaking, the Peripheral group outperformed the Marginal group which, in turn, outperformed the Direct group.

What is interesting about this research finding is that it corroborates the bulk of previous research findings on salience of feedback, particularly the effectiveness of direct feedback vis-à-vis indirect feedback. Many previous studies (e.g. Ferris, 1995, 2003; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982) have found that L2 learners benefit more from indirect feedback. Their theoretical argument was that as the ultimate goal of feedback provision is to help the student writers locate and correct errors and edit their writing on their own, error correction should be approached as a problem-solving activity (e.g. Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ferris, 2002, 2006). Bitchener and Knoch (2008), for example, argue the indirect approach to feedback provision is more effective as it “requires pupils to engage in guided learning and problem solving and, as a result, promotes the type of reflection that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition” (p. 415).

Given the findings of this research, we can argue that the Direct feedback group, which received teacher’s corrections immediately above the error, benefited the least on all the target structures. This amounts to saying that salience of feedback is probably a counter force to benefiting from error corrections on the part of the learners. This is probably true because, according to (Ferris, 1995; Lalande, 1982), when learners are given more direct feedback, they probably invest less language processing when they self-edit their writing products.

We would like to argue here that it is an attention-awareness trade-off (for details, see Svalberg, 2007). To illustrate, direct feedback fosters the learner’s attention to the errors s/he has made, but indirect feedback pushes his awareness of it. Although direct feedback reduces the amount of confusion that the student writer may experience when given indirect feedback (attention), it does not foster long-term learning (i.e. awareness). The more you draw the attention of the learner to the error, the less mental processing he puts into it, and therefore, the less he will benefit from it on the long run. According to Chandler (2003), direct feedback enables learners to instantly internalize the correct form, but it may not help the learner put the additional cognitive effort associated with indirect feedback. Error corrections should, the argument goes, be a means to help raise the learners’ awareness of some linguistic features in the target structure, not just drawing his attention to it. In more technical terms, we should

provide error correction that helps the learner restructure his developing interlanguage grammar (see Gass, 1997). By providing direct feedback immediately above the error that the learner has made, you help draw his attention to it, but you do not cause him to put the necessary cognitive effort into making use of it; the least of which is to let the learner put enough mental processing effort into comparing his output (which is erroneous) with the feedback he has received from the writing teacher. In a nutshell, we want error correction provision not only to promote noticing of the errors that the learner makes but, more importantly, to push his awareness of his developing interlanguage.

The other interesting finding of our research relates to factoring out the target structures we have experimented with. What has become evident to us was that the effect of the location of feedback was not constant for all those target structures. At the level of details we are considering here, the findings show that (1) the Peripheral feedback group gained better accuracy than the other two groups in the use of articles, (2) the Marginal group outperformed the Direct group in the use of articles, (3) the Marginal group made better accuracy improvement in untimed than in timed writing (as opposed to the other two groups) in the use of prepositions, (4) the Peripheral group outperformed the Direct group in the use of prepositions, and (5) none of the three groups had accuracy improvement in the use of subject-verb agreement.

Although Ferris (1999, 2002) has for long drawn a distinguishing line between ‘treatable’ and ‘untreatable’ Errors, we still lack a theoretically-motivated taxonomy of all errors on this ground. Corder (1967), argued for a dichotomy between errors and mistakes. Truscott (1996, 2001, 2007) argues for a distinction between grammatical errors and errors that fall outside the grammatical domain, a state of affairs that made him argue that corrective feedback can only be beneficial for errors that “are relatively simple and can be treated as discrete items rather than integral parts of a complex system” (Truscott, 2007, p. 258). Ellis (2009) suggests that “the gravity of an error is to a very considerable extent a matter of personal opinion” (p. 6). One interesting finding of this research corroborates Truscott’s distinction. It has turned out to us that, unlike articles and subject-verb agreement, prepositions require different feedback provision techniques. One interesting finding of Bitchener, Young and Cameron’s (2005) was that the type of feedback was not equally effective for specific structures. They found that whereas those who received direct error correction and oral meta-linguistic explanation outperformed, those who did not for the past simple tense and the definite article, they failed to do so for prepositions. Their explanation was like this:

whereas the past tense and the definite article structures are rule-based, prepositional forms are more idiosyncratic.

Being more idiosyncratic, prepositions in our current study differed from other types of errors (particularly articles and subject-verb agreement) in at least two ways. First, there was an interaction between both variables manifested in improvement in the accuracy in untimed writing vis-à-vis timed writing. Second, students benefited more from teachers' corrections when they are located on the margins of the page. We, therefore, strongly believe that studies such as this one should help in preparing a theoretically-motivated taxonomy of errors that could help writing teachers decide on two nontrivial concerns: (1) which errors to correct, and (2) how to provide corrections on each type of error.

Third, the influence of the time constraint on the writing performance of students in FL contexts has been debated for long. On the one hand, Caudery (1990) found “no significant differences in writers’ ability to work within strict time limits and their ability to work at a more leisurely pace” (p. 129). On the other hand, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer (1963), Zamel (1983), Raimes (1983), and Cooper (1984) found a counter piece of evidence. Coffman (1971), for example, argues that “What an examinee can produce in a limited time differs from what he can produce in a longer time, and the differences vary from examinee to examinee” (p. 276). The findings of this research have supported the general impression that writers perform better when given more time. This is probably so because the writer is afforded enough time to plan his ideas. Writing impromptu is usually done under artificial circumstances, and so, requires different skills (e.g. essay-writing teaching vis-à-vis essay-writing testing). Leki (1992) has made the argument that L2 learners are exposed to the target language through both formal and informal input. As a classroom activity, teacher feedback cannot cut off other feedback options that the student writer can benefit from when composing, correcting, and/or editing. Peer input (see Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Garcia-Mayo & Pica, 2000; Nelson & Carson 1995, 1998, 2006), teacher’s supportive talk (see Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), classroom group work exercises (see Ellis, 2003), and face-to-face peer revision discussions (see Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992, 1994, 1996; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998) are not exclusive of one another but complementary to each other (see Tsui & Ng, 2000), an echo of Master’s (1995) finding: corrective feedback was effective when combined with classroom discussions.

## Conclusion

When experimenting with corrective feedback provision techniques, researchers exercise utmost caution to keep the independent and intervening variables constant, so that the effect of error feedback is not attributed to these parameters. However, their findings still show conflicting evidence not only for the efficacy of error correction (whether feedback is/isn't effective), but also for the type of feedback. According to (Guenette, 2007), one reason why the evidence is still conflicting is that these investigations into the effects of corrective feedback on the learners' performance fail to operationalize their terms systematically. One such term is salience of feedback, of which the location of feedback is one internal parameter. In the study reported above, we tried to show that writing teachers have available to them three options as actual classroom practices: *direct prompting*, *marginal promoting* and *peripheral promoting*.

Bitchener and Knoch (2009) argue that previous studies on corrective feedback provision were flawed in terms of their "design, execution, and analysis" (p. 204). As for the location of feedback, and therefore its salience to the student writers, we have tried in the research reported above to suggest a corrective feedback provision model on how future studies should be designed in various FL contexts, so that comparisons can be safely made. In our context, this model has brought up two interesting findings.

First, it has turned out to us that salience of feedback is a counter force to benefiting from error corrections on the part of the learners. What this basically means is that the more salient the feedback in terms of its location, the less the learners were able to benefit from it. Learners who received direct feedback benefited the least from the error corrections the writing teacher has provided on their writing products for the three target structures we experimented with. This is probably true because, according to (Ferris, 1995; Lalande, 1982), when learners are given more direct feedback, they probably invest less language processing when they self-edit their writing products.

Another interesting finding that we believe still needs further research relates to how focused (vis-à-vis unfocused) feedback should be operationalized. We have found some pieces of evidence against providing focused feedback selectively, i.e. providing corrective feedback on only a few functional uses of some target structure. Another area of research that we believe still awaits further research is the distinction we have suggested between error correction and error feedback. We have tried to show that whereas indirect feedback is a form of error feedback, direct feedback should be viewed as a form of error correction. Finally, we suggest that as the ultimate goal of feedback provision is to help the student writers locate



and correct errors and edit their writing on their own, error correction should be approached as a problem-solving activity (e.g. Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ferris, 2002, 2006). While there are many inroads into this area, future research in different FL contexts should systematically examine the relationship(s) between the target structure(s) and the feedback provision technique that would work best for each error category.

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## **Gender, Identity, and Teaching English in Japan**

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Diane Hawley Nagatomo's *Gender, Identity, and Teaching English in Japan* represents a contribution to the field of ELT in Japan both as a substantial assessment of the context in which English teaching takes place and as a foundation for potential future research into the variety of contexts where English teachers find themselves in Japan. First, there are the early chapters devoted to the early and modern history of English teaching and learning in Japan. Then, there are the later chapters that make up the original research portion of the book, which are limited in generalizability by the author's own admission but may generate future research. Depending on one's interests, some parts of the book may be of much greater use than others, but the appeal of the book is certainly not limited to researchers on gender and identity in ELT in Japan.

The three chapters devoted to stage-setting are detailed to an extent that is surprising in a book whose main topic is not English as a concept in itself, as in Seargeant (2009) but a qualitative examination of a fairly small demographic (non-Japanese women married or previously married to Japanese men) within Japanese ELT. Of particular salience for this book are the early establishment of English as a means of mastering foreign knowledge by translating it into Japanese, the hiring and subsequent firing of the *o-yatoi gaikokujin* (foreign experts brought to Japan to impart technical knowledge in the early years of Japan's industrialization), and the rise of the native speaker as language model/ideological *Other* that has seen expression in the JET Programme and the still-massive *eikaiwa* English



conversation school industry. A dichotomy that readers of Nagatomo's other work (2012; 2013) and others will be familiar with is that between *eigo* and *eikaiwa*, English as an academic subject and English as communication, which is hinted at in these two chapters and makes several appearances in the subjects' interview data as well. The chapters on the history of ELT and of gender issues in language learning in Japan will make useful reading for any scholar seeking to examine how English came to be taught the way it currently is in modern Japanese society.

The necessity of the thoroughness of the background chapters becomes apparent once the research subjects and methods are introduced in chapter 5. The women who took part in the study work in public education, private English academies (also called *eikaiwa*), universities, or frequently some combination of these, with a range of experience and official qualifications ranging from virtually none to advanced degrees, thereby representing a very wide swath of ELT in Japan. The narrative method employed requires tying the subjects' individual stories to larger patterns in Japanese society and ELT in Japan and worldwide. In particular, the two analytic lenses used, Gee's Identity Theory (2000) and Wenger's Communities of Practice (1998), require some understanding of what factors are relevant in Japanese workplaces and communities to then see how those factors affect teachers' identities. These lenses are not applied universally (Wenger's is only applied in Chapter 9, on full-time teachers), leaving much of the research findings in the form of narratives whose thematic commonalities are implied rather than explicitly and rigorously formulated. One aspect of Gee's theory that is perhaps more consequential than expected is the N-identity, associated with supposedly natural or intrinsic forms of identity. The identities that these teachers form are often very strongly influenced by their positioning within Japanese society as women (and therefore considered not to be primary breadwinners) and non-Japanese residents (and therefore considered a priori tertiary to the Japanese institutions for which they work).

One is left with a thorough understanding of the context in which English teachers in Japan work, as well as a collection of anecdotes from the professional lives of 10 female native-speaking English teachers. Temptations to extrapolate from the research data are discouraged by the author, who concludes that:

Had I interviewed ten different women, it is likely I would have heard ten different stories. Had I interviewed these same ten women on different days, it is also possible they would have told me ten different stories. (p. 203)

Although that may be true, one is left wishing for quantitative data to indicate just how prevalent some of the issues encountered by the research subjects are. How common, for

example, is the experience that efforts towards professional development by high school teachers are met with derision, as in the case of one research subject? The author is disinclined to imply or assume that this pattern is widespread, leaving the matter to other researchers.

The wide range of personal narratives in this book, coupled with the broad and deep exploration of the context in which they occur, makes the limitations of the qualitative research method employed seem less significant. The book is written in plain enough language to be accessible to even freshly minted language teachers, and the placement of the historical background in a separate group of chapters than the body of the research makes it more easily citable than if background were presented interspersed with the research subjects' narratives. It is easy to recommend this book for researchers on almost any language teaching context in Japan, and one hopes that the questions it raises will be answered with more research.

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This review has not been previously published and is not in consideration for publication elsewhere.

## **Complexity in Classroom Foreign Language Learning Motivation: A Practitioner Perspective from Japan**

Richard J. Sampson. Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2016. v-227.

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### **Bioprofile**

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This book explores the motivation of a group of first year high school students at a national college of technology in Japan over one school year, while being instructed for English and homeroom by the author, Richard Sampson. Sampson interprets classroom data as a complex system, whereby an individual's approach is viewed within a given context but is never fully understood due to limitations in knowing all previous and current influences on an individual. Such a perspective creates a student-centered approach to data interpretation and positions the research within motivation constructs described by Dornyei (2009).

The book, intended to advance current motivation constructs, contains twelve chapters split into three parts. It would appeal to those interested in motivation research in the Japanese context, and to those concerned with the development and growth of a single class group over a year-long period.

The first part (chapters 2-5), titled "Growth: A Research Narrative" introduces the context of Japan, and details current motivation research in chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 4 and 5 then introduce the study's design and initial findings. It is important to note that this project was undertaken as action research so conditions for keeping up with data analysis were not

ideal and Sampson comments throughout the book about the difficulties of conducting this type of study while working. Despite these challenges, extensive data were collected including a researcher journal, learning journals from students, various worksheets, and questionnaires used throughout the year. Most questions and assignments detailed targeted possible-selves constructs and motivational influences. The research journal and learning journals in particular were used to create a narrative throughout the book to provide insight into the development of individuals throughout the school year as various projects and assignments were completed.

Part 2 (chapters 6-10), titled “Re-viewing” advances understanding the data through the lens of complex systems and how student motivation was oriented to and changed over the course of the year. A complex system is described as constantly evolving, and changing based on the experiences of the individuals that create the larger group. In order to understand a complex system, we must understand the individual voices within the system, which is why the research journal and learning journals prove valuable to this book. As the theory of complex system is described by Sampson he supplements the theory with examples from the data to further advance the arguments being made. Once the framework of interpretation is described, Sampson looks at various points of interest that occurred in the data. Of particular interest is the development of student’s orientation to English and creating an ideal self that involves being a speaker of English. The motivation of the students in this group is particularly clear in chapter 10 which relates to a final group movie project, which was the culmination of various projects and was given at the end of the school year. Students were able to give extensive effort and oriented to the assignment in different, but mostly positive ways. Sampson argues that the students were able to connect with the assignment because they received support and encouragement from their classmates, who helped to create a sense of accomplishment by the end of the project.

Part 3 (chapters 11-12), titled “Reciprocity” relates the data and analyses of the book to previous motivation research. In this part, Sampson makes a strong argument for further use of complex system interpretations in motivation research in order to gain insight into the experiences of the language learner. These final chapters also defend the research against potential criticism, arguing for the use of high school subjects, complex system interpretation, and the limitations created by conducting the project as action research. All of the points made are well based in research and provide an insightful self-reflection about the research, creating a very personal element to the book. While the research and learning journals provide the bulk of the data, more explanation and analysis of the questionnaires and other

assignments could have helped to provide even more evidence for the arguments made.

The student-centered approach taken by this book was refreshing and provided valuable insight into the development of motivation in a class over a school year, thus furthering understanding of motivation development longitudinally. The chapters are easy to follow and clearly explain the reasoning for the research, helping to acclimatize the reader to the context of the book. Sampson is also appropriately cautious of over-generalizing findings from data, and interpretations are made based on a very specific context, reflecting the complex system interpretation and extensive analysis. While sections from learning journals used for analysis were valuable, they also tended to be from a specific group of students within the class. Having more varied voices in the analysis could have aided in building an even greater understanding of the class. This book is for those interested in motivation and/or the Japanese language learning context. In addition, the personal nature of the research would be of interest to a more general audience who would like to further their knowledge in classroom development.

## **Reference**

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 Motivational Self System. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9-42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Statement: I verify that this book review has not been previously published or submitted for publication anywhere else and that the work is my own.