



The Asian EFL Journal

March 2020

Volume 24, Issue 2



Senior Editors:

Paul Robertson and John Adamson



Published by the English Language Education Publishing

Asian EFL Journal
A Division of TESOL Asia Group
Part of SITE Ltd Australia

<http://www.asian-efl-journal.com>

©Asian EFL Journal 2020

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of the Asian EFL Journal Press.

No unauthorized photocopying

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Asian EFL Journal.

editor@asian-efl-journal.com
Publisher: Dr. Paul Robertson
Chief Editor: Dr. John Adamson
Copy Editor: Dr. Joseph P. Vitta

ISSN 1738-1460

Table of Contents

Foreword by Copy Editor.....	1-2
Feature Articles	
1. George Skuse.....	3-30
<i>The Talk Skills Project: Improving Dialogic Interaction in the Korean Adult Foreign Language Classroom</i>	
2. Nguyen Van Loi.....	31-57
<i>Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Alternative Assessment in Teaching English at Secondary School</i>	
3. Ngan Nguyen and Francis Godwyll.....	58-82
<i>Why we are not where we want to be: Dilemmas of English language teachers and learners in Vietnam</i>	
4. Stan Pederson.....	83-98
<i>Target Language Use and Support for Comprehension by Japanese Primary Teachers in English Classes: A Quantitative Perspective</i>	
5. Chalida Janenoppakarn and Saneh Thongrin.....	99-135
<i>Enhancing Medical and Health Science Students' Writing Development Through a Modified Process-Genre Approach</i>	
6. Richard Janosy and Michael Thomas.....	136-161
<i>Self-Taught Language Learners in China and Their Learning Strategies: A Multiple, Instrumental Case Study of Approaches in Contextual Situations</i>	
Book Reviews	
7. Yangmen Liu.....	162-164
<i>Learner Corpora and Language Teaching</i>	
8. Derek Bell.....	165-167
<i>Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices (Third Edition)</i>	

Foreword by Issue's Copy Editor

Welcome to *Asian EFL Journal's* March 2020 issue! We are pleased to present six research articles and two book reviews that reflect our journal's mission to offer the Asian EFL community innovative inquiries and reports that have practical applications in the classroom. Reflecting the diverse nature of our readership, the foci of reports published in this issue range from elementary school classrooms in Japan to medical students' essay writing Thailand.

The first two articles in this issue highlight innovations within Asian EFL contexts. In the first, *The Talk Skills Project: Improving Dialogic Interaction in the Korean Adult Foreign Language Classroom*, George Skuse investigated how the implementation of an innovative and interactive intervention in an adult Korean EFL setting, underpinned by sociocultural theory, developed metacognitive awareness and oral communication strategies. Nguyen Van Loi in the second article, *Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Alternative Assessment in Teaching English at Secondary School*, investigated Vietnamese EFL teachers' beliefs on alternative assessment and found that while they saw its value, they had doubts about its feasibility. This generalizability of this finding is enhanced as the sample was constructed from four educational settings.

This issue's next two articles present practice-centric studies that uncover relevant themes for practitioners and researchers alike. In the issue's third article, *Why we are not where we want to be: Dilemmas of English language teachers and learners in Vietnam*, Ngan Nguyen and Francis Godwyll helped bring marginalized voices of Vietnamese EFL teachers and students to the fore in expressing their concerns about issues ranging from ambiguity in foreign language policies to teacher qualifications. The findings of this case study inquiry and their approach can transfer to other contexts. The issue's fourth article, *Target Language Use and Support for Comprehension by Japanese Primary Teachers in English Classes: A Quantitative Perspective*, Seth Pederson investigated solo versus team teaching in primary Japanese EFL settings. Under both conditions, Pederson found teachers up to the task of promoting classes with high target language usage and modelling.

The final two articles of this issue investigated ways to promote learning satisfaction and processes related to language acquisition. In the fifth article, *Enhancing Medical and Health Science Students' Writing Development Through a Modified Process-Genre Approach*, Chalida Janenoppakarn and Saneh Thongrin provided empirical data suggesting that a process-genre approach improved Thai medical students' attitudes towards essay writing in English. Richard Janosy and Michael Thomas in this issue's final article, *Self-Taught Language Learners in China and Their Learning Strategies: A Multiple, Instrumental Case Study of Approaches in Contextual Situations*, investigated self-taught learners and found that a love of the target language and its culture was what prompted these learners to engage with the target language. The article also highlighted the strong association between available resources and the activities in which self-directed learners engage.

This issue concludes with two book reviews. In the first, Yangmen Liu reviews *Learner Corpora and Language Teaching*, edited by Sandra Götz and Joybrato Mukherjee, and

highlights corpora research trends to can be of interested to the Asian EFL community. In the second, Derek Bell reviews *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices* (Third Edition), by H. Douglas Brown and Priyanvada Abeywickrama, to highlight important trends in language assessment.

Joseph P. Vitta, Rikkyo University

Head of Production of Asian EFL Journal March 2020 Issue

The Talk Skills Project: Improving Dialogic Interaction in the Korean Adult Foreign Language Classroom

George Skuse
Konkuk University, South Korea

Bio-profile:

Dr George Skuse is an Assistant Professor of Global and Integrated Studies at Konkuk University. He recently completed his PhD in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics at The University of Warwick. His research interests are classroom interaction, second language discussion and design-based research. Address: 120 Neungdong-ro, Gwangjin-gu, Seoul, 143-701, Korea.

Abstract

The Talk Skills project is a pedagogic intervention, implemented in the Korean adult L2 learning context, which aims to raise awareness of effective L2 talk and teach oral communicative strategies that help students to achieve it. The project is underpinned by theories on the relationship between interaction and second language acquisition, and sociocultural theory for language learning. Review of the literature showed that students have the best opportunities for language learning when classroom talk embodies characteristics such as students giving opinions, offering reasons, sharing information, respectfully challenging each other, attempting to reach agreement, negotiating meaning, noticing and building upon gaps in their language, and promoting language learning through scaffolding and emergent language. However, research into the Korean context showed that Korean L2 learners encounter problems with classroom group oral interaction that inhibit the production of this kind of talk and that may lead to unfulfilled potential for learning. This led to the hypothesis that adult Korean L2 learners could benefit from lessons that raise awareness of this kind of talk and learn strategies to help achieve it. The intervention was developed using a design-based research (DBR) methodology, using lesson transcript data, student interview feedback, and field notes to refine the intervention across two iterations. The Talk Skills project offers three contributions in a) the intervention itself as a workable classroom tool b) localised, humble contribution to theory, offering insight into how metacognitive awareness raising and oral communicative strategy training can be applied in the Korean context c) an example of DBR used in an L2 research context.

Keywords: L2 classroom discussion, pedagogic intervention, design-based research

Introduction to the *Talk Skills* project

The *Talk Skills* project was developed to improve small group oral interaction in the Korean adult foreign language classroom context. Discussion plays a large and important part in communicative language teaching and learning. This is because it allows students to a) sustain talk on a given topic, b) work together to co-construct knowledge, c) negotiate meaning, for example, by asking for help finding a word or clarifying a point and d) take turns giving opinions, agreeing or disagreeing with each other (Crawford & Zwiers, 2011). To achieve this aim, an intervention was developed for raising student awareness of the kind of talk that is educationally effective for foreign language learning, and training learners to achieve this talk in group oral interaction in the classroom context. The intervention was based on similar interventions that have proved successful in both L1 and L2 classrooms, such as the *Thinking Together* project in L1 primary and secondary schools (e.g. Dawes, 2012; Littleton & Mercer, 2007) and various L2 strategy training programs (e.g. Bejarano, Elite, Levine & Steiner, 1997; Lam, 2006; Naughton, 2006).

The study is guided by two claims, firstly that certain types of talk in L2 classrooms are of more educational value and more conducive to language learning than others and secondly, that adult Korean L2 learners in the classroom learning context could benefit from lessons that raise awareness and maximize the use of the kind of talk that is conducive to language learning in small group discussion. Much research in L1 classroom group discussion (e.g. Dawes, Mercer, Littleton, Row & Wegerif, 2004; Littleton & Mercer, 2007) has found that problem solving and joint reasoning tasks, in which learners are listening carefully to each other, giving reasons for what they are saying, respectfully challenging each other, and jointly working towards agreement, in other words, engaging in exploratory talk (Barnes, 1973), provide opportunity for learning. Similar findings have been made in L2 discussion research. Chappell (2014), uses the term inquiry dialogue to describe a type of L2 talk in which learners are being respectful of each other, working together to understand ideas, drawing on emergent language for the purpose of language learning, and scaffolding language (Ko, Schallart & Walters, 2003). Chappell claims that when learners are engaging in such talk, they are able to generate meaningful language, develop communicative competence and improve language learning strategies through communication. L2 research has similarly foregrounded the benefit of engaging in exploratory talk in L2 learning contexts (Boyd, 2012; Moate, 2010). Moreover, language learners have expressed a dissatisfaction when they are unable to frequently

participate in group discussion (Han, 2007). In the *Talk Skills* project, such educationally effective L2 classroom talk is termed exploratory talk for language learning.

Previous attempts have been made to improve L2 discussion, which have mainly focused on the teaching of oral interaction strategies and metacognitive awareness raising of oral interaction strategy use. This is supported by research that shows intensive strategy use is a characteristic of successful language learners (Mistar, Umamah & Zuhairi 2014). Such efforts focus on helping learners to “engage with each other and with the task in a way that would foster the creation and exploitation of learning opportunities” (Naughton, 2006, p.169). In strategy training programs, various language learning strategies are taught, such as follow up questions, requesting and giving clarification, repair, and requesting and giving help. It has been shown that teaching learners these strategies can improve the quality of their interaction (Bejarano et al., 1997). The *Talk Skills* project draws on previous attempts at metacognitive awareness raising in both L1 and L2 contexts and research into strategy training in the L2 context to develop a language classroom intervention. The aim of the intervention is to raise awareness in L2 learners of the concept of exploratory talk for language learning and helps them to develop strategies to use such talk effectively in their own classroom discussions.

Brief theoretical background to the *Talk Skills* project

The *Talk Skills* project is predicated on the notions that interaction in classroom activities benefits language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) and the sociocultural theory that language in the classroom should be used as a tool for collective thinking, as the success of language learning “may be explained by the quality of educational dialogue” (Mercer, 2004, p.139) that students engage in.

SLA and interaction

Long’s interaction hypothesis (1980, 1996) focuses on “how input could be made comprehensible” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p.43). This idea assumes that “environmental contributions to acquisition are mediated by selective attention and the learner’s developing L2 processing capacity, and that these resources are brought together most usefully, although not exclusively, through *negotiation for meaning*” (Long, 1996, p.414). In other words, comprehensible input alone is not enough, it is social interaction and negotiation for meaning that allows language to be produced as modified input, and this mechanism allows learners to develop their communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Long (1980) pointed out that

modification of interaction may involve various strategies, including comprehension checks, clarification requests, self-repetition and confirmation of message meaning among other conversational adjustments.

Sociocultural theory and L2 learning

The drive of sociocultural theory for second language acquisition (SCT-L2) is the study of the L2 learner's ability to "use the new language to *mediate* (i.e. regulate or control) their mental and communicative activity" (Lantolf, 2011, p.24). SCT-L2 places social interaction at the heart of learning and development. SCT-L2 and its focus on social interaction justifies attempts to develop learners' abilities to think together in groups. Littleton and Mercer (2007, p.4) note that "a sociocultural perspective raises the possibility that educational success and failure may be explained by the quality of educational dialogue, rather than simply by considering the capability of individual students or the skill of their teachers." Likewise, some oral strategy training programs used in L2 education are based on SCT (e.g. Naughton, 2006). SCT suggests that joint collaboration and problem solving greatly affects the learner's cognitive development.

SCT-L2 offers a holistic view of learning that takes into account the dialectical relationship between the mental and social processes, in which "the external world affects and transforms the individual's mental functioning, which, in turn, affects and transforms social, cultural, and institutional settings" (Johnson, 2004, p.171). This means that for the language learner, the external world is both the provider of input and the essential foundation of language development. The *Talk Skills* project is theoretically in line with SCT-L2 in that it aims to improve the learner's ability to think, act, and speak within the context of their classroom discussions.

Context: Issues with the communicative approach to language teaching in Korea

Research on CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) in the Korean context has identified several conceptual, classroom- based and societal constraints that are faced by Korean learners (Finch, 2013; Lim & Griffith, 2003; Park, 2012). First, Korean learners have typically been exposed to a hierarchical system of education, in which teachers are in a position at the top of the hierarchy, with absolute authority, and students are instructed to listen passively and obey the teacher (Park, 2012; Lim & Griffith, 2003). However, this hierarchical system is in contrast with CLT methodology, which shifts away from teacher-centered approach to a more equal, student-centered approach. Furthermore, students are often taught

English by Korean teachers who, when asked to conduct English lessons in English, are concerned about losing face in their classroom context, often resulting in difficulties and reluctance to teach using a communicative approach only in English (Li, 1998).

Korean students, used to a passive learning style, involving mainly listening to the teacher, often feel uncomfortable when asked to participate in communicative lessons, and may resist such methods (Li, 1998; Park, 2012; Windle, 2000). While Korean high school students are expected to graduate with a vocabulary of 3000 words they often enter tertiary education with little conversation practice and “the English they learn is textbook English bearing little relation to the English spoken by native speakers” (Cho, 2004, p.31).

Korea also has an educational culture of high stakes language testing which focuses on grammatical accuracy (Finch, 2013; Park, 2012). This results in Korean students having a “fear of making mistakes when speaking English” (Lim & Griffith, 2003). Students tend to be embarrassed at their mistakes and may be seen to silently rehearse speaking in order to verbalize grammatically accurate turns as much as possible. Korean students have also been noted to be reluctant to offer opinions during class discussions (Lim & Griffith, 2003). A further observation is that Korean students are “trained to think inclusively and express themselves indirectly in case they may offend others” (Cho, 2004, p.34). Such problems may lead to unfulfilled potential to create language learning opportunities in group discussion.

Nevertheless, Holliday, Hyde and Kullman warn against cultural stereotyping, as “stereotypes are often infected by *prejudice*, which in turn leads to *otherization*” (2004, p.23). For this reason, it is important to avoid reducing group members simply to a set of pre-defined characteristics. Lin and Luk (2007, p.54) further note that while it is important and necessary to detail what is central and typical about an aspect of culture, it is important to “avoid essentializing our interpretations of cultural models.” Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of the danger of stereotyping Korean learners simply as shy and afraid of making mistakes, for example, as some learners have developed very outgoing personalities and active participatory classroom behaviors.

Method: Design-based research, illustrated using the *Talk Skills* project

Design-based research has been developed as a method for implementing an intervention in a given educational context and studying both how to improve and refine the intervention, and the educational outcomes of the intervention. By studying engineered forms of learning in real world contexts, DBR explores the connections that link educational theory,

designed intervention and educational practice (Learning Theories, 2014) and aims to develop both theoretical and practical answers to educational problems (McKenney & Reeves, 2013). Design based research was chosen in the *Talk Skills* project as a means of a) designing and developing the intervention and b) illustrating how the designed intervention functions in its given learning context. Since its inception, design-based research has evolved mainly in the field of Information Systems in order to develop technology-based educational interventions, (e.g. Bakker & Van Eerde, 2015). However, DBR may equally be used for “designing and exploring the whole range of designed innovations: artifacts as well as less concrete aspects such as activity structures, institutions, scaffolds, and curricula.” (Design Based Research Collective, 2003, p.5-6). As with the *Talk Skills* project, DBR has been utilised by a single worker who “had had responsibility for design, research, and practice” (Joseph, 2004, p.236). Here DBR was used to develop curriculum for a summer program called the *Passion Project*, in which initial feedback from students generated knowledge of learner interest, which was then used to establish curriculum themes. Input from the perspective of teacher enabled important development of curriculum design, likewise, insights from the perspective of designer and researcher meant that decisions in the classroom were bolstered by a deeper knowledge of curriculum development theory.

McKenney and Reeves (2013) outline three core phases of design-based research, analysis and exploration, design and construction, and evaluation and reflection. While the three core phases are necessarily separate, they overlap in a consciously flexible and iterative process in which the phases influence each other as the project develops. There are two outcomes of DBR, the first and obvious outcome is the maturing intervention, the second is an improved theoretical understanding of the design choices that underpin the intervention. Throughout the *Talk Skills* project, these three phases provided a methodological framework and are used here to organise and illustrate the key issues faced when using design-based research.

Analysis and Exploration

The main purpose of the analysis and exploration phase is to establish a clear definition of the problem and the research context. One advantage of conducting DBR as a practitioner-researcher is that the problems to be explored are likely to be well understood, at least from a practical standpoint, as they are experienced first-hand, in the classroom. This was the case in the *Talk Skills* project as both practitioner and researcher, as the motivation for the project was

that my students at times did not maximise the opportunities for learning through classroom interaction.

This gave rise to a number of lines of inquiry, for example, it was necessary to better define the context of the project through researching the literature on Korean language learners. It was also crucial to develop a clear definition of effective classroom talk. Furthermore, research was needed into previous attempts at awareness raising both in L1 and L2 learning environments as well as researching previous attempts at oral communicative strategy training. As a further part of the analysis and exploration phase, a needs analysis was conducted to better understand the need for the *Talk Skills* project from a student perspective. This showed that students perceived themselves as having average to weak discussion skills, citing difficulties in elaborating using more detail, speaking logically, using exact expressions to make others understand, taking longer turns, learning new patterns for conversation and articulating themselves using full sentences among other weaknesses.

Synthesis of the needs analysis and literature review formalised the need to help students improve their L2 classroom group oral interaction. However, this also presented a potentially uncontrollable number of variables that are responsible both for the weaknesses in student discussion skills, such as motivation, affect or the relationship of cultural classroom norms on classroom interaction, as well as variables in the possibilities in overcoming these weaknesses. The advantage of DBR when focusing the research questions is the quality of addressing the issue through the iterative and responsively grounded ‘lens of design’ (Joseph, 2004, p.236). Because the fundamental focus of DBR is intervention design, all research centers around the development of the intervention, first through literature review and then, as the intervention is tested, further research arises from the outcomes of the intervention’s implementation. Therefore, questions that address wider areas of language learning theory are only targeted when such effort helps the evolving intervention. This also allows theoretical understanding to grow as the intervention matures, thereby, overcoming the dilemma of needing to be an expert without experience.

Design and Construction

Before construction of the *Talk Skills* project could begin, the first step was to develop a clear definition of what effective L2 discussion was, that, while recognising the complexities and different types of classroom interaction, could provide a framework of characteristics that would facilitate metacognitive awareness raising and strategy training activity choices. This

was developed by synthesizing concepts such as exploratory talk in L1 learning (Barnes, 2008), and concepts from L2 literature such as inquiry dialogue (Chappell, 2014) and guidance from communicative language teaching literature (Richards, 2006; Thornbury & Meddings, 2009), into my own concept of exploratory talk for language learning (ETLL). I defined this as a type of L2 classroom talk a) that is generated over an extended period, minutes rather than seconds, b) that is engaging, interactive, collaborative and meaningful, c) in which students are encouraged to give opinions, offer reasons share information and respectfully challenge each other in a process of cumulative knowledge building and understanding, d) in which students attempt reach agreement, e) that gives learners opportunity to negotiate meaning, notice and build upon gaps in their language and, therefore, f) that promotes language learning through scaffolding and emergent language. These characteristics of educationally effective L2 classroom talk, ETLL, provided a model for design and construction of the *Talk Skills* project. Once the characteristics of ETLL were established, the core design aim became creating a set of activities that would a) raise students' metacognitive awareness of the nature of effective talk and the need to engage in it in during classroom discussion and b) allow students to practice and develop specific oral communication strategies that would help them to achieve such effective talk. In order to turn these aims into a real-world intervention, during the design and construction phase, my main job was to act as 'bricoleur' or tinkerer (McKenney & Reeves, 2013), drawing on previous design models to guide initial design construction. A metacognitive awareness raising model implemented in L1 primary schools, the *Thinking Together* project (Dawes, Mercer & Wegerif, 2003) was used as a basic framework to guide the first phase of the intervention's development. The *Thinking Together* project was chosen partly because it has already been successfully adapted to suit adult English language students in the Spanish university context (Halbach, 2015) and indeed, this small scale pedagogic model was also drawn on when designing the metacognitive awareness raising phase.

To achieve the second design aim, research into oral communicative strategy training interventions was drawn on (Bejarano et al., 1997; Kehe & Kehe, 2013; Lam, 2005; 2006; Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006; Oxford, 1990; 2003;). However, reflecting on previous interventions showed that even though all models attempted to achieve the aim of improving oral communicative strategy use, there was much variance between them. Design choices, therefore, needed to be made on which strategies to use based on contextual needs and constraints, such as a) course length, a ten-week course of four one-hour classes per week, b) student level; the intermediate English conversation class was chosen for implementing the

intervention, as Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) have shown that this is the level at which students strategy use grows the fastest and the point at which students in their study reported the most strategy use, and c) how to integrate the intervention alongside other institutional curricula.

The course in which the *Talk Skills* intervention was implemented was ‘Intermediate English Conversation with Reading’, a 10-week course, in which students at the university, as well as working professionals, enrol independently each semester. To gauge likelihood of the intervention succeeding in this educational context, students in the first cycle were surveyed to find out their perceptions of discussion in L2 classrooms and their openness towards an intervention designed to improve their L2 discussion. Overall, students stated a perceived weakness in L2 discussion skills, with challenges including elaborating using more detail, speaking logically, and using exact expressions to help others understand. They also expressed an openness to learning methods of improving their group discussion, suggesting that implementing the *Talk Skills* intervention is feasible in the context of Korean adult L2 classroom learning.

The design of the intervention was, therefore, determined by three things: a) theoretical understanding of metacognitive awareness raising, oral communicative strategy training and the characteristics of effective classroom talk, b) the context in which the intervention would be implemented, and c) the needs of the learners.

Evaluation and reflection

Once a prototype version of the *Talk Skills* intervention was designed, it was evaluated across two cycles of implementation. During each cycle three main data collection methods were employed. Firstly, post-session and post-course interviews were recorded to gain student feedback of each session and of the course more generally. Post-session interviews were short informal talks with one or two of the students, who were asked to stay behind and discuss the class before moving on to their next classes. Here students were asked for highlights and criticism of each session (Bakker & Van Eerde, 2015). Post course interviews attempted to gain more in-depth reflection on the intervention from students that had completed the full course.

Secondly, field notes were logged systematically (Dornyei, 2007) in a practitioner’s journal at the end of each session, which covered thoughts about implementation of the lessons, feelings about how the activities were received by the students and potential changes that would

benefit the intervention. At this stage I also tried to make use of *satori*, a Japanese term which can be translated as a moment of realisation or awareness (McKenney & Reeves, 2013), with realisations noted in the journal at times during the project's development.

Thirdly, each session of the intervention was recorded using MP3 recording devices placed among all pairs or groups of students during each session of the intervention. Later, audio files were played back and one or two examples of activities, plenaries and other instructional elements of each session were chosen for transcription. Transcriptions of classroom interaction were analysed using applied conversation analysis (CA) methods (Kasper & Wagner, 2014; Waring & Wong, 2010). CA was chosen for its ability to illustrate the processes of L2 learning (Jenks, Seedhouse & Walsh, 2010). One advantage of CA is that it can help “refine insights into how the structure of conversation can be used by learners as a means of getting comprehended input and producing comprehended output” (Markee, 2000, p.44). As such, CA was used in this research to understand how students interpret the activities within the *Talk Skills* intervention by focusing on elements of the interaction. CA also helped to illustrate the extent to which the hypothetical, planned learning trajectory of each of the activities met their respective actual learning trajectories when the activities were carried out by the students. CA was chosen as it offers an emic, data driven perspective on the social, interactional nature of classroom talk (Seedhouse & Sert, 2011). In sum, from the perspective of participants' interactional practices, CA uses fine grained transcripts to identify evidence of learning and understanding as they occur in conversational behaviour within classroom activities. This analysis was used as evidence to support the refinement of the intervention across the two iterations.

While the three core phases are outlined separately here, in use, they overlap in a consciously flexible and iterative process in which the phases influence each other as the project develops.

Using a data analysis matrix to improve and refine intervention design.

Once the focus of the research, effective group talk awareness raising and skills training, was established, consideration was given to how the issue was approached in previous curricula. Problems that students may face with group work was investigated and consideration was given as to what should be learned. This culminated in tentative L2 learning goals that underpinned the initial intervention design and following redesigns. My duty as researcher at this stage was to formulate “hypotheses about students' potential learning and about how the

teacher would support students' learning processes" (Bakker & Van Eerde, 2015, p.20). This was done by consulting students and teachers and other experts within my given context as well as drawing on my own insight as a language teacher.

Throughout the process of implementing and analysing the intervention, Dierdrop, Bakker, Eijkelhof and Van Maanen's (2011) data analysis matrix became a particularly important analytic tool for assessing individual activities within the intervention.

Hypothetical Learning Trajectory	Actual Learning Trajectory
1. Task number	1. Transcript excerpt / field notes / student interviews
2. Formulation of task	2. Clarification
3. Conjecture of how students would respond	3. Qualitative impression of how well the conjecture and actual learning matched (– 0 +)

Figure 1. Data analysis matrix for comparing HLT and actual learning trajectory (ALT)

A HLT consists of the task and conjecture of how students would respond to the task. The role of HLT when implementing the pedagogic intervention is to guide the teacher and researcher towards "what to focus on during data collection and would include assumptions about students' potential learning and about how the teacher would support students' learning processes" (Bakker & Van Eerde, 2015, p.22). As the intervention is implemented, the HLTs may be referred to and adjusted depending on the outcomes of the tasks, for example, if learners do not complete a task as predicted, or a particular task is too difficult. This process is seen as an advantage in DBR – that the intervention is open to adjustment and improvement, and as such should be carefully documented within the research, and ideally based on theory.

Once the HLT of a task was established and data collected, each HLT was then compared to its actual learning trajectory (ALT). The ALT was realised through triangulation of transcripts, field notes and student interviews. Retrospective analysis showed the extent to which students in the class successfully accomplished the task. Once task specific analysis was completed, the comparison was then used either to keep the task unchanged for the next iteration, refine the task, or drop the task. The examples in the following section illustrate how the data analysis matrix was used in the *Talk Skills* project.

However, a second, more longitudinal approach was taken at the end of an iteration. This meant considering, for example, the order of strategy training lessons, their placement within the context of the ten-week course and how each individual session was structured. McKenney and Reeves' (2013) four strategies for structured reflection on educational design was used to achieve this aim.

Examples of design-based research in practice within the *Talk Skills* project

The *Talk Skills* intervention was developed over two iterations, for use in a Korean university adult intermediate English conversation class. Iteration 1 was implemented in the Spring 2015 semester. Iteration 2 was implemented in the Fall 2015 semester. The intervention was guided by two research questions a) What are the design features of an intervention that aims to help learners use exploratory talk for language learning? b) How does this intervention facilitate adult L2 learners' use of exploratory talk for language learning in their discussions?

In response to these questions, the *Talk Skills* intervention was designed in two phases. Phase 1 comprises of two sessions offered to students at the beginning of the course that were aimed at raising awareness of the need to talk and listen in English conversation class and which culminated in the making of ground rules for talk. Phase 2 of the intervention covers the following eight strategy training sessions:

- Asking Follow-Up Questions
- Asking for Clarification
- Checking for Comprehension
- Asking for Help
- Asking for More Details
- Challenging
- Disagreeing
- Giving Opinions

This section offers two examples of how the data analysis matrix was used to support the inclusion of two activities, the first from the 'Asking for Clarification' session and second from the 'Asking for More Details' session.

Example 1 Taken from the Asking for Clarification strategy training session: Iteration 1

This example shows how one task in the ‘asking for clarification’ session is run through the data analysis matrix, outlined in figure 1. First in the hypothetical learning trajectory (HLT), the task is formulated and conjecture of how students would respond is outlined. Then the success of the activity is judged by matching the HLT with the actual learning trajectory (ALT) after data analysis.

Hypothetical Learning Trajectory

- ***Task 1: Fill in statements and use statements to practice asking for clarification***

In this activity, students were given a list of statements and asked to fill in missing information with their own ideas. After this stage of the activity was completed, students were then instructed to work with another student and respond to their partner’s statements by asking for clarification using the target language provided in the material. Once clarification was given, students were also encouraged to keep their conversations going by recycling the previously practiced strategy of follow up questions.

- ***Conjecture of how well students would respond***

Asking for clarification is an element of Long’s (1996) interaction hypothesis, and a method for language learning through negotiating meaning in discussion. Providing good preparation was achieved, it was anticipated that the students would have little difficulty in using the statements, adapted from Kehe and Kehe (2013), to practice clarification checks and if possible, recycling rejoinders and follow up questions.

Actual Learning Trajectory In the actual learning trajectory (ALT), data including transcript excerpt, field notes and student interviews are analysed and clarified, and a qualitative impression is given of how well the HLT and ALT matched.

- ***Transcript excerpt, clarification***

Students engaged in dialogue that a) included clarification checks, rejoinders and follow-up questions and b) provided a context for long and relatively complex turns in which students explored differing opinions on a topic and respectfully challenged each other – characteristics of exploratory talk for language learning. This is highlighted in Excerpt 1, between N, H and teacher.

Excerpt 1

20. N: oh and uh. i think computers are gradually going

21. unexpensive.

22. H: oh, you said gradually going unexpensive?

23. N: yes. yes. the, the uh future of electronic machines i

24. think.

25. H: oh really? why do you think it? think that.

26. N: um (.) many corporation um (.) study about how to. how to

27. make it unexpensive. or technically. so, as time goes by

28. many machines are cheaper than the ()

29. H: i, i saw some article. in article said that there will be

30. (.) machine is more upgrade than now or upgrade

31. design. but it is it has expensive. so very good. very

32. upgrading. upgrading. so it's expensive but even

33. companies can () even people can buy it. can buy

34. it very easily. so they. the corporation (.) iyeong?

35. N: corporation.

36. H: corporation will make another, another thing, model. so

37. people can buy that.

38. N: i say i said uh. uh. computers are gradually going

39. unexpensive.

40. T: oh getting less expensive. getting cheaper, getting

41. cheaper, getting less expensive, getting less expensive.

42. N: but she said. ↑i don't agree this. the electronic machines

43. are getting expensive because of uh because they are

44. consist many, many part. uh, for example. this smartphone

45. has camera, and phone, and usb. it getting expensive.

In line 20, N begins with a statement that computers will become cheaper in the future. In line 22, H uses her turn to check for clarification. In line 23, N gives his answer, reiterating his belief about computers getting cheaper in the future. In line 25, H produces a rejoinder and follow-up question and in line 26, N gives another answer, again reinforcing why he believes that computers will become cheaper in the future. These turns represent the students fulfilling the requirements of the task, however, what is interesting is the way in which H then challenges N's position, by arguing that machine technology will be upgraded in the future meaning, therefore, that they will become more, not less expensive. This leads to several more long, complex turns, also including the teacher who joins in the conversation (although remaining objective and acting in a guiding role, rather than picking one side of the argument), in which the three interactants debate whether or not technology will become more or less expensive.

- ***Qualitative impression of how well the HLT and ALT matched***

This activity achieved its aim of allowing students to both practice clarification checks and recycle rejoinders and follow up questions, as well as incidentally providing a locus for dialogue with characteristics of exploratory talk for language learning. Therefore, the HLT met the ALT in this activity. Furthermore, student interviews reinforced the success of the session as a whole, as when asked whether they found the session useful, P answered ‘*Yeah, very useful*’ and H answered ‘*Yeah useful and, it is, uh fun*’.

Example 1 Taken from the Asking for Clarification strategy training session: Iteration 2

Here the same unchanged ‘asking for clarification’ activity was run through the data analysis matrix in the second iteration.

Hypothetical Learning Trajectory

- ***Task 1: Fill in statements and use statements to practice asking for clarification***

Students fill in missing information in a list of statements, then work with a partner to practice asking for and giving clarification using the target language.

- ***Conjecture of how well students would respond***

It was anticipated that the success of the activity would depend on the students completing statements in an interesting way that would generate authentic opportunity to check for clarification within dialogue that emulated exploratory talk.

Actual Learning Trajectory Data including transcript excerpt, field notes and student interviews were analysed and clarified, and a qualitative impression given of how well the HLT and ALT matched.

- ***Transcript excerpt, clarification***

Excerpt 2 shows B offering a statement from his list, that some Korean internet forum websites such as Ilbe and OU are a problem in Korean society. Korean forum websites such as Ilbe and OU are a current issue in Korean society as they offer a context in which Korean citizens may propagate hate speech against women.

Excerpt 2

99. B: i think korean internet creative sites is a big
100. problem.

101. A: what did you say big problem?
 102. B: i think there are many korean sites, korean sites,
 103. such as ilbe or ou, like that, and i think there have
 104. No (.) there have no real name so they chat so much.
 105. bully. and they use so many slang and i think uh. that
 106. is very big problem.
 107. J: but is that the problem. what is the problem like
 108. using slang in chatting or like that?
 109. B: m:m.
 110. J: is it the problem that using slang with friends or
 111. slang with somebody or they are close to each other.
 112. i, i know that sites are the some people use (.) uh i
 113. understand only with only with the community. only the
 114. person who are in it they didn't come out of it much,
 115. so i think it's ok to use it.
 116. B: mm, i think using freely is good. but i think so much
 117. it means there are so attract, uh offended to each
 118. other, somebody. then. i think they are out of their
 119. mind. like that.

After B offers his statement in line 99, A asks B to clarify what he means by 'big problem'. This gives B the opportunity to elaborate on why he considers such forum websites a problem, i.e. they offer anonymity to the user and a context for the user to, in B's terms, bully and use slang. Interestingly, J then, in line 107, asks for further clarification to explain what B means by 'slang'. When B hesitates in line 109, J follows this up in his next turn by stating that using slang is not necessarily a problem in and of itself if users are talking to each other within their own community. B then further clarifies his opinion, that while using the site to speak freely may not be a problem, users are wrong to use the site to offend others. J's clarification check in line 107, and continued in line 110, was also a request for B to give a reason for his opinion that the forum websites are a big problem in Korean society. B then offers his reason in the following turn beginning with the phrase "I think", a linguistic feature of exploratory talk (Dawes, Mercer & Wegerif 1999).

- ***Qualitative impression of how well the HLT and ALT matched***

The activity offered space for students to ask for clarification while discussing complex issues such as internet anonymity and regulating website forums. Discussing such issues also generated authentic opportunity to explore the topic, practice the target 'asking for

clarification' language, offer opinions and be asked for and give reasons for the opinions, in other words engaging in exploratory talk for language learning.

In J's post session interview, he offered positive feedback the, stating "*I really like it because it was real conversation... So maybe I could use when I go to the USA*". This would suggest that J found that the activity was a chance to practice using authentic language. When asked to give more detail about why he liked it, he pointed out that "*It has a lot of example and I could choose... Yeah, it was more easier to practice examples and the more examples I have so I could only transport some words in this situation*". J found the clarification expressions offered in the material were useful as he could choose and practice different clarification expressions. This was also my view in my field notes: "*it was definitely good, and they could get in those expressions and the expressions helped to maintain the natural conversation*". The data suggests that the activity offers genuine, authentic practice of the target language, a positive characteristic of language learning materials (Burns, Joyce & Gollin, 1996), therefore, the HLT met the ALT for this activity.

Example 2 Taken from the Asking for More Details strategy training session: Iteration 1

This example shows how one task in the 'asking for more details' session is run through the data analysis matrix, outlined in figure 1. First in the hypothetical learning trajectory (HLT), the task is formulated and conjecture of how students would respond is outlined. Then the success of the activity is judged by matching the HLT with the actual learning trajectory (ALT) after data analysis.

Hypothetical Learning Trajectory

- ***Task 1: Interview a partner about their best friend. Use target language to ask for more details.***

In this task, students are asked to prepare a list of questions to interview a partner about their best friend. Students are instructed to ask for more details after each question, using the target language provided.

- ***Conjecture of how well students would respond***

Asking for more details is an important part of exploratory talk for language learning as it is a mechanism for building cumulative knowledge as learners work to understand ideas together (Chappell, 2014). In this activity, designed by myself, it was anticipated that students would have little difficulty preparing questions and conducting the interview. However, one

anticipated problem was that students would misinterpret the aim of the activity, to focus on the interview itself as the primary aim, rather than understanding the intended aim of practicing asking for more details.

Actual Learning Trajectory Data including transcript excerpt, field notes and student interviews were analysed and clarified, and a qualitative impression given of how well the HLT and ALT matched.

- ***Transcript excerpt, clarification***

In the beginning of the P's interview, with simple questions such as '*What is the name of your best friend?*' P did not use follow up questions, nor were they needed. It should be made clear in the instructions that these kinds of simple questions do not require follow up questions. However, in the later phase of P's interview, shown in Excerpt 3, P does regularly use the target language to ask for more details:

Excerpt 3

35. P: uh when did you meet your best friend first?
36. J: uh we (.) in middle school?
37. P: middle school?
38. J: middle school.
39. P: old friend. and uh (.) can you say a bit more about that?
40. uh what grade?
41. J: ah first grade in middle school.
42. P: wow. and mm (.) what do you do with your best friend?
43. J: what do you do? uh=
44. P: =talking a lot?
45. J: uh, um (0.5) many drink, many drink.
46. P: many drink? hhaha.
47. J: because she hhhaha.
48. P: many drink.
49. J: mm, many drink.
50. P: drinking mate?
51. J: huh?
52. P: drinking mate?
53. J: yes. haha.
54. P: wow. interesting. can you give me more details about what
55. kind of drink?
56. J: uh just like (.) soju. ((korean alcohol))

Excerpt 3 highlights two instances of P asking questions and asking for more details. In line 35, P asks ‘*When did you meet your best friend first?*’ In line 39, he follows up by asking for more details, saying ‘*And uh, can you say a bit more about that? Uh what grade?*’ Then, in line 42, P asks ‘*what do you do with your best friend?*’ Interestingly, this results in several turns checking for clarification and helping each other to understand meaning, thereby, recycling strategies from previous sessions. In line 54, P again asks for more details, by saying ‘*Can you give me more details about what kind of drink?*’ This results in several light-hearted turns about Korean alcohol, soju. In the final plenary stage of the activity, T gave each student one minute to describe their partner’s best friend to their class members. At this time, P was able to successfully summarize to the class the information he found out about his partner’s friend.

- ***Qualitative impression of how well the HLT and ALT matched***

When P was asked about finding out about his partner’s best friend, he stated “*It’s good, it’s interesting issue*” and agreed that he had much opportunity to use the target phrases. Therefore, as illustrated in both the transcript and post interview data, the HLT in this activity met the ALT. Nevertheless, two changes should be made: a) it should be made clear in the instructional phase that students should only ask for more details when it *feels natural* to do so as asking for more details when a question has been fully answered can result in confusion for the interviewee. Furthermore, b) it was clear that asking for more details appeared quite naturally within the dialogue, therefore, the instruction within the material for the interviewee to ‘only give the information asked for and no more’ is redundant and should be taken out in future iterations.

Example 2 Taken from the Asking for More Details strategy training session: Iteration 2

Here a slightly revised version of the same ‘asking for more details’ task was run through the data analysis matrix in the second iteration.

Hypothetical Learning Trajectory

- ***Task 1: Find out about your partner’s best friend and practice asking for more details***

Students prepare a list of questions to interview a partner about their best friend. Students are instructed to ask for more details where possible during the interview, using the target language provided.

- ***Conjecture of how well students would respond***

The activity was generally successful in the first iteration; however, the instructions were revised after reflection, asking students to ask for more details not after every question, but instead only when opportunity was presented in their interviews. In the first iteration, some students were asking for more details after questions, such as “What is your best friend’s name?”. In such instances, asking for more details was deemed somewhat unnatural and unnecessary. It was anticipated, therefore, that the revision would result in more organic dialogue during the interviews.

Actual Learning Trajectory Data including transcript excerpt, field notes and student interviews are analysed and clarified, and a qualitative impression is given of how well the HLT and ALT matched.

- *Transcript excerpt, clarification*

After students had completed the question preparation phase of the activity, Excerpt 4 shows D interviewing M about his best friend.

Excerpt 4

04. M: my best friend is high school friend.
05. D: yeah.
06. M: now he studied korean s. a. t? sunung exam.
07. D: ah.
08. M: once again?
09. D: ah yeah, yeah. ah yes, the exam is coming.
10. M: yeah. the exam is coming.
11. D: uh your friend must be very nervous.
12. M: yeah might be because you know the uh if, if someone
13. take the test twice then he have a more, more, something
14. burden.
15. D: uh can you say a bit more that? uh. what do you mean a
16. bit more burden?
17. M: because if he failed=
18. D: =yeah.
19. M: one more time. then he have to take one more test. then
20. it means that something kind of too late. compared to
21. other.
22. D: ah you mean he has advantage?
23. M: no, no disadvantage. because nervous than high school

24. student.

25. D: ah okay...

The excerpt begins with M giving some background information about how his best friend from high school is currently studying for an extra year to re-take the college entrance exam (a practice named *chaesu*), having received unsatisfactory results in his first attempt. This is a common practice among Korean high school students, as elite Korean universities offer brand capital (Abelmann, Kim & Park, 2009), that make the effort of an extra year's study worth the potential reward of upgrading to an elite university.

The interview moves on in line 12 to M explaining that his friend may be feeling nervous and that he is bearing the burden of having to prepare and re-take his college entrance exams. This prompts D in the following turn to respond by saying “*Uh can you say a bit more that? Uh what do you mean a bit more burden?*” Here, D is asking for more details using a target language phrase and at the same time recycling the previous strategy of asking for clarification. This act of asking for more details enables M to expand on his previous point, by defining his friend's burden as the potential of failing his upcoming exams again, which would leave his friend in a predicament of having to take the exams a third time thereby being left far behind his year group. Abelmann et al. (2009) describe the phenomenon of *chaesu* in terms of neo-liberal subjectivity, resulting in the burden of self-development that affects Korean students. In other words, today's students in Korea desire lives filled with dynamism and vitality, but are very much aware of the national decrease in job security and social welfare. They are also aware that achieving dynamic and vital lives is difficult, making choices such as extra years studying to retake college entrance exams a necessary burden. In sum, despite the somewhat familiar interview topic of asking about a best friend, D's act of asking for more details in the interview enriched the dialogue, enabling detailed elaboration on a complex social phenomenon.

- ***Qualitative impression of how well the HLT and ALT matched***

The activity served as an opportunity for students to practice asking for more details and further, to recycle other strategies, such as asking for clarification, shown in Excerpt 4. Practicing asking for more details resulted in enriched and interesting dialogue about complex topics that were relevant to students, suggesting that the main aims of the activity outlined in the HLT were matched in the ALT.

When asked about the activity, student M stated “*Actually before this class, I already use that sentence, so I just I think I just learn other way to ask*”. Here M was making the

point that while the practice of asking for more details is familiar to him, the activity offered new language for doing so. Further validation of this point came in my field notes, in which I stated that “...one of the advantages of the activity was giving them a range of expressions that they could use, as M just pointed out. People tend to use these ideas anyway, but this chance to sort of expand upon these strategies might be quite useful for the students.” Here, I noted that offering students a range of target language gave them a richer variety of ways to test out the strategy of asking for more details within the session’s activities.

Discussion: DBR contributing to *humble* theory

In DBR, theory drives design as it emerges within the project (Joseph, 2004). However, due to the nature of a DBR project, emergent theory is necessarily humble, in other words “tied to specific learning environments and learning goals” (Bakker & Van Eerde 2015, p.13), making it difficult to generalize. To illustrate this, Bakker and Van Eerde offer the following analogy: “it is very rare that a theoretical contribution to aerodynamics will be made in the design of an airplane; yet innovations in airplane design occur regularly” (2015, p.13). In the same way, the illustrations above display the nature of the *Talk Skills* project to show how the literature on the use of locally relevant knowledge in EFL classrooms (Canagarajah, 2005) is relevant in the Korean adult L2 learning context. In this regard, Luk (2005, p.248) asserts that “people communicate (irrespective of whether it is their first or second language) mainly for the purpose of asserting their *local* identity, interests, and values.” The data showed that the opportunity to use their locally relevant knowledge positively benefitted students also in terms of a) being able to utilise the target language within the activities and b) engage in exploratory talk for language learning.

Taking Canagarajah’s definition of local knowledge as “context-bound, community-specific, and non-systematic because it is generated ground-up through social practice in everyday life” (2005, p.4), one example of transcribed data for the activity showed that because student H completed the statement with his own idea, when using the statement to practice asking for clarification, he accessed knowledge on a local topical issue: hate speech against women in Korean internet chat forums. In the resulting dialogue, talk flowed easily as all students were interested in this topical issue, as raised by one of the students himself. The dialogue also offered space for students to practice the target asking for clarification language as well as recycle previously practiced target language.

In data in the Asking for More Details strategy training session, in which students interviewed their partner about their best friend to practice asking for more details, students entered into an interesting discussion on *chaesu*, the Korean practice of spending a year retaking college entrance exams in order to enter elite universities with high brand capital (Ablemann et al., 2009). The findings showed that by avoiding Western-centric topics and inviting students to access their local knowledge students could engage in ETLL, allowing the target strategy of asking for more details to emerge naturally in the talk, while also engaging in other oral communication strategies that aid ETLL (e.g. Dawes et al., 1999). Findings here also support Thornbury and Meddings' (2009) assertions that classroom language learning is effective when activities are language productive and allow students to focus on the language as it emerges naturally. Lack of space prevents a broader elaboration on other humble, context specific theoretical contributions, however, such contributions were developed in three thematic areas: important instructional techniques used in the *Talk Skills* intervention, student engagement with the activities and teacher's interactional roles within the intervention.

Conclusion

The two examples above, offer an impression of how the data analysis matrix can be used within a larger DBR project to develop a pedagogic intervention. As Bakker and Van Eerde (2015) note, DBR can take a variety of forms and can be used to develop a variety of theoretically or empirically focused educational projects.

Through two cycles of DBR in the *Talk Skills* project has become a workable model of maximizing exploratory talk for language learning in adult L2 classes, particularly in the Korean adult learning context, through awareness raising of ETLL, and oral communicative strategy training to help students achieve this type of talk in the classroom. DBR is an underutilized method of research in the L2 learning community, meaning the *Talk Skills* project is offered here as an example to prospective practitioner/researchers of a) an oral communicative strategy training and awareness raising intervention in its own right, and b) as an alternative model of qualitative research that can be used to effectively design and refine pedagogic interventions in the complex L2 classroom setting (Brown, 1992).

For practitioners who decide to embark on design-based research projects there lies a potentially rewarding dual benefit. On the one hand, DBR enhances research and design skills, on the other, it enables a deeper understanding of oneself as a practitioner and the

context in which teaching and learning takes place (Joseph, 2004). Through the *Talk Skills* project, it was possible for this practitioner/researcher to move from knowing intuitively that students benefitted from high quality classroom discussion, with a desire to help students get the most out of classroom talk experiences, to gaining a better theoretical and practical understanding of what it means for students to enter into exploratory talk for language learning, that is both educationally stimulating and effective in terms of offering language learning opportunities. Finally, the iterative research-design-teaching interface that takes place in the here and now of the classroom goes some way towards closing the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical use for teaching and learning.

References

- Abelmann, N., Kim, H., & Park, S. J. (2009). College rank and neo-liberal subjectivity in South Korea: The burden of self-development. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 229-247.
- Bakker, A., & Van Eerde, H. A. A. (2015). An introduction to design-based research with an example from statistics education. In A. Bikner-Ahsbahr, C. Knipping, & N. Presmeg (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research: Methodology and methods in mathematics education*. New York: Springer.
- Barnes, D. (1973). *Language in the Classroom*. Bletchley: Open University Press.
- Barnes, D. (2008). Exploratory Talk for Learning. In N. Mercer & S. Hodgkinson (Eds.) *Exploring Talk in School: Inspired by the Work of Douglas Barnes* (Kindle Location 219). SAGE Publications. Kindle Edition.
- Bejarano, Y., Elite, O., Levine, T., & Steiner, J. (1997). The skilled use of interaction strategies: Creating a framework for improved small-group interaction in the language classroom. *System*, 25(2), 203-214.
- Boyd, M. P. (2012). How teacher talk can guide student exploratory talk: Communication, conjecture, and connections in a 4th and 5th grade ELL classroom. *Teachers' roles in second language learning: Classroom applications of sociocultural theory*, 3-18.
- Brown, A. L. (1992). Design experiments: Theoretical and methodological challenges in creating complex interventions in classroom settings. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 2(2), 141-178.
- Burns, A., Joyce, H., & Gollin, S. (1996). *"I See what You Mean": Using Spoken Discourse*

- in the Classroom: A Handbook for Teachers*. National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Routledge: London.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2007). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in second language teaching. In E. Alcon Soler & M. P. Safont Jorda (Eds.) *Intercultural language use and language learning*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 41-58.
- Chappell, P. (2014). Engaging learners: Conversation- or dialogic driven pedagogy? *ELT Journal*, 68(1), 1-11.
- Cho, B. E. (2004). Issues concerning Korean learners of English: English education in Korea and some common difficulties of Korean students. *The East Asian Learner*, 1(2), 31-36.
- Crawford, M., & Zwiers, J. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Maine: Steenhouse Publishers.
- Dawes, L., Mercer, N., & Wegerif, R. (1999). From social interaction to individual reasoning: An empirical investigation of a possible socio-cultural model of cognitive development. *Learning and Instruction*, 9, 493-516.
- Dawes, L., Mercer, N., & Wegerif, R. (2003). *Thinking together: A programme of activities for developing speaking, listening and thinking skills for children aged 8-11*. Birmingham: Imaginative Minds Ltd.
- Dawes, L., Littleton, K., Mercer, N., Rowe, D., & Wegerif, R. (2004). Widening access to educational opportunities through teaching children how to reason together. *Westminster Studies in Education*, 27(2), 143-156.
- Dawes, L. (2012). *Talking points: Discussion activities in the primary classroom*. Routledge: Oxon.
- Design-Based Research Collective, The. (2003). Design-based research: An emerging paradigm for educational inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 32(1), 5-8.
- Dierdrop, A., Bakker, A., Eijkelhof, H. M. C., & Van Maanen, J. A. (2011). Authentic practices as contexts for learning to draw inferences beyond correlated data. *Mathematical Thinking and Learning*, 13, 132-151.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Finch, A. E. (2013). *ELT in Korea: Opportunities for change*. Daegu: Kyungpook National

- University Press.
- Halbach, A. (2015). 'Thinking together' and its effect on students' language performance. *ELT Journal*, 69(3), 286-296.
- Han, E. (2007). Academic discussion tasks: A study of EFL students' perspectives. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1), 8-21.
- Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2004). *Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students*. London: Routledge.
- Hong-Nam, K., & Leavell, A. G. (2006). Language learning strategy use of ESL students in an intensive English learning context. *System*, 34(3), 399-415.
- Jenks, C., Seedhouse, P., & Walsh, S. (Eds.). (2010). *Conceptualising 'learning' in applied linguistics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Johnson, M. (2004). *A philosophy of second language acquisition*. New York: Vail Ballou Press.
- Joseph, D. (2004). The practice of design-based research: Uncovering the interplay between design, research, and the real-world context. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(4), 235-242.
- Kasper, G., & Wagner, J. (2014). Conversation analysis in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 34, 171-212.
- Kehe, D., & Kehe, P. D. (2013). *Discussion Strategies*. Vermont: Pro Lingua.
- Ko, J., Schallart, L. D., & Walters, K. (2003). Rethinking Scaffolding: Examining Negotiation of Meaning in an ESL Storytelling. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(2), 303-324.
- Lam, Y.K. (2005). Is strategic competence teachable? *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 2, 87-12.
- Lam, Y. K. (2006) Gauging the effects of ESL oral communication strategy teaching: A multi-method approach. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 3(2), 142-157.
- Lantolf, J. P. (2011). The sociocultural approach to second language acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.) *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition*. pp. 24-47. Abington: Routledge.
- Learning Theories. (2005). Learning Theories and Models summaries. *Learning Theories*. Retrieved September 21, 2015 from <https://www.learning-theories.com/>
- Li, D. (1998). "It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine": Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4), 667-703.

- Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lim, Y. H. & Griffith, W. I. (2003). Successful classroom discussion with adult Korean ESL/EFL learners. *The Internet TESL Journal*, IX, 5. Retrieved March 3, 2014 from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Lim-AdultKoreanshtml>
- Lin, A. M. Y., & Luk, J. C. M. (2007). *Classroom Interactions as Cross-Cultural Encounters*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Littleton, K., & Mercer, N. (2007). *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking*. London: Routledge.
- Long, M. H. (1980). Inside the "black box": Methodological issues in classroom research on language learning. *Language learning*, 30(1), 1-42.
- Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.) *Handbook of second language acquisition*. pp. 414-468. New York: Academic.
- Luk, J. (2005). Voicing the "self" through an "other" language: Exploring communicative language teaching for global communication. In A. S. Canagarajah (Ed.). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Routledge: London. pp. 247-268.
- Markee, N. (2000). *Conversation analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McKenney, S., & Reeves, T. C. (2013). *Conducting educational design research*. London: Routledge.
- Mercer, N. (2004). Sociocultural discourse analysis: Analysing classroom talk as a social mode of thinking. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(2), 137-168.
- Mistar, J., Umamah, A., & Zuhairi, A. (2014). Strategies of learning speaking skill by senior high school EFL learners in Indonesia. *Asian EFL Journal*, 80, 65-74.
- Moate, J. (2010). The Integrated Nature of CLIL: A Sociocultural Perspective. *International CLIL Research Journal*, 1(3), 38-45.
- Nakatani, Y. (2005). The effects of awareness-raising training on oral communication strategy use. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 76-91.
- Naughton, D. (2006). Cooperative strategy training and oral interaction: enhancing small group communication in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 90(2), 169-184.
- Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

- Oxford, R. L. (2003). *Language learning styles and strategies*. Mouton de Gruyter: Boston.
- Park, S. M. (2012). Communicative English language teaching in Korea. *Humanizing Language Teaching* 14, 6. Retrieved March 15, 2014 from <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/dec12/sart03.htm>
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Seedhouse, P., & Sert, O. (2011). Introduction: Conversation Analysis in Applied Linguistics. *Online Submission*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Thornbury, S., & Meddings, L. (2009). *Teaching Unplugged (Delta Teacher Development Series)*. Delta Publishing. Kindle Edition.
- Windle, S. (2000). From Confusing to Confucian: Towards an understanding. *The Korea TESOL Journal*, 4(6), 1-8.
- Waring, H. Z., & Wong, J. (2010). *Conversation analysis and second language pedagogy: A guide for ESL/EFL teachers*. New York: Routledge.

Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Alternative Assessment in Teaching English at Secondary School

Nguyen Van Loi
Can Tho University, Vietnam

Bio-profile:

Nguyen Van Loi completed his Ph.D. in Education at Waikato University, New Zealand. He has extensive years of training school teachers of English in Vietnam. His research interests involve teacher education and teacher cognition in second language teaching and learning. Email: loinguyen@ctu.edu.vn, Address: Campus II, 3/2 street, Ninh Kieu district, Can Tho city, Viet Nam

Abstract

As part of the National Foreign Languages Project on renovating foreign language instruction, a new English assessment policy that incorporates alternative assessment into teaching English has been introduced to the school system of Vietnam. The current paper discusses the uptake of this innovation by investigating the perspectives and practices of public secondary school EFL teachers. A self-report questionnaire which includes both closed and open-ended questions to elicit quantitative data and qualitative comments was administered to a sample of 164 lower and upper secondary school teachers in four Mekong Delta's provinces of Vietnam. The results showed that although the teachers were well aware and appreciative of the values of alternative assessment, they held a less positive perception towards the feasibility of those alternative assessment tasks that are so demanding and time-consuming. They also expressed a weak belief in the importance of these methods to students' development of proficiency. In practice, they reported rarely using these forms in their classrooms due to students' proficiency, time and workload pressures, which possibly suggests an interaction of contextual factors with a lack of confidence in implementing them. The results offer useful implications for educators and administrators in terms of EFL teachers' professional development, training and change support.

Keywords: teacher beliefs, alternative assessment, formative, secondary school, innovation, EFL

Introduction

Besides curricular and methodological innovations, assessment practices are indispensable for improving the quality of foreign language teaching and learning. Alternative assessment (AS) has values which need to be incorporated into the classroom, and skills and knowledge of AS is regarded as an essential element of language assessment literacy for language teachers (Giraldo, 2017). For long, however, the mainstream school system in Vietnam has largely relied on high-stakes testing to gauge the effects of teaching on learning (Canh, 2020). Accordingly, a variety of tests, namely regular quizzes, mid-term tests, end-of-term tests, and graduation tests have been adopted as the main measures of language competence and performance. While traditional formal tests remain a key practice in assessing learners' achievements and school accountability, through the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) 2020, a new policy has introduced AS methods into schools.

The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET), through the NFLP 2020, introduced other measures of assessment than tests into their classrooms. According to Dispatch 5333, school teachers are to use one of the alternative techniques to assess students, namely portfolios, projects, and journals, in replacement of one 45-minute test, in order to enhance the learning process (MOET, 2014). However, what the school teachers currently believe and do about assessment remains a gap to be filled. The present study was thus conducted with an aim to shed light on how alternative assessment methods could be accommodated into existing practices in an EFL context. Drawing upon previous research on teachers' conceptions of language assessment (Almaamari, 2014; Brown, 2011; Muñoz, Palacio, & Escobar, 2012; Van Loi, 2014; Widiastuti, 2018) and the data obtained from a semi-opened questionnaire administered to a sample of Vietnamese EFL secondary teachers, this paper discusses the values and uses attached to AS from the perspective of Vietnamese EFL school teachers. Specifically, teachers' beliefs are examined with a focus on assessment nature, purposes, effectiveness, and forms, the desirability for and the feasibility of AS, and teachers' practices are revealed by self-reported scales on AS use frequency and factors influencing their choices.

Literature review

Nature of alternative assessment

Assessment theory in language education has developed from formal product-oriented assessment which particularly emphasizes the use of tests to less formal process-oriented

assessment which involves a variety of ways of collecting information about students' performance or progress in the day-to-day classroom (Harris & McCann, 1994; Fox, 2017). Apart from traditional testing, there exist many alternative methods of collecting evidence about students' progress, defined as AS, in the form of classroom tasks and activities, namely posters, presentations, discussions, observations of students' behaviours, projects, journals, and portfolios (Brown, 2001; Harris & McCann, 1994; Shermis & Vesta, 2011).

Alternative assessment is predicated on a constructivist view of knowledge which stresses the active role of the learner and learning process. This suggests assessment is an on-going dynamic process which empowers learners in their learning and informs teachers of their teaching effectiveness for performance improvement (Brown, 2001; Janisch, Liu, & Akrofi, 2007) which are referred to as formative purposes. In fact, AS is synonymous to formative assessment, classroom assessment or assessment for learning (Leung 2005, cited in Saito & Inoi, 2017). In contrast, formal tests usually imply teacher judgments on learning achievements, and are intended for summative purposes such as classifying learners and informing administrators and society of the educational quality (Brown, 2001). Nevertheless, Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij, and Harris (2017) note that the borderline between summative and formative assessment in formal respects is blurred, as tests could be employed to provide feedback information to students and teachers. Formal testing largely has instrumental purposes such as judging and classifying learners' levels of learning or ability or deciding if a student passes or fails. In contrast, alternative forms of assessment mainly aim to motivate students, and provide useful feedback to push teaching and learning. Thus, it has the potentiality to improve learning achievement. According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), classroom assessment tasks are implicit such that they involve dual purposes of collecting information about students' learning and facilitating their learning. They further point out that classroom assessment has a dynamic and cyclical nature, which means the teacher constantly conducts assessment, making decisions, adapting instructions, and assessing students again and so on.

Classroom assessment is conventionally undertaken by the teacher, but assessment should be understood as an on-going process in which both the learner and teacher are engaged in making judgments about the learner's progress in language learning (Hancock, 1994). Thus, non-conventional methods such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and other options offer possible measures to elicit feedback that informs learners of their learning and teachers of their teaching. One crucial benefit of incorporating alternative methods into the

language classroom is that they provide a wider range of evidence than formal tests on which to judge and boost the language competence of students as well as teach them learning skills (Hancock, 1994). The problem, however, is that AS increases teachers' workload and demands on their time (Nasri et al., 2010). Gronlund (2006) stressed that AS requires more time to design and score, and is more complex than traditional types.

Given the nature of AS, the meanings EFL teachers attributed to it, which may be shaped by their existing beliefs about the nature of language teaching and learning, testing and assessment, and practical experiences, are central to their implementation of assessment innovations (Looney et al., 2017). As cited by Brown (2011), drawing on the term *conception* which "encompasses beliefs, concepts, meanings, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences and the like" (Thomson, 1992, p.130), teachers' conceptualisations of assessment can be inconsistent with policy expectations and even with their classroom practices.

Teacher beliefs and practices about language assessment

In recent decades, researchers have paid close heed to the relationship between teacher cognition including teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge and learning, and their classroom practices on the ground that an understanding of its nature benefits teacher education and professional development (Borg, 2006; Freeman, 2002). This focus is especially required in the context "where [English] is taught by non-native teachers and where syllabuses are to various degrees prescribed" (Borg, 2003, p.98). Johnson (2006) particularly stresses that research on teacher beliefs has made significant contributions in terms of informing L2 teacher educators that there exists "an epistemological gap between how L2 teacher educators have traditionally prepared L2 teachers to do their work and how L2 teachers actually learn to teach and carry out their work" (p.239). A closer examination of the role of teachers' beliefs about educational innovations uncovers informative lessons to teacher development (Cuban, 1993).

Research on teacher beliefs and practices has been established in language education (Barcelos, 2003; Berliner, 2005; Borg, 2006). The term *belief* seems to be a complex construct (Pajares, 1992) without semantic consensus (Borg, 2001), but according to Borg some specific features can identify a belief. In this paper, a belief is understood as "a proposition which is consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and therefore is imbued with emotive commitment, [serving] as a guide to thought or behaviour" (Borg, 2001, p.186). To Brown (2004), teachers' conceptions

or beliefs can be revealed by their agreement or disagreement with propositions about assessment.

It is generally concluded that teachers' beliefs interact with their practices such that the former can shape the latter or is not congruent with the latter due to practical constraints (Borg, 2006). Teacher assessment of students' behaviours, for example, is shaped by their beliefs regarding the nature of teaching, learning and assessment (Borko, Mayfield, Marion, Flexer, & Cumbo, as cited in Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar, 2012). Therefore, pedagogical innovations can be fruitfully implemented if teacher beliefs which are unconsciously shaped by their training, working experience and context, and substantially hindering their innovation take-up, are justified and addressed.

Research about teacher assessment beliefs and practices in general education has indicated that teachers hold positive beliefs about formative assessment, but in practice they may display reluctance to employ assessment for improvement of learning and teaching and face tensions in making assessment decisions. Brown (2004) indicated that the New Zealand primary school teachers concurred with the view that assessment is a channel to improve pedagogical practices and student learning outcomes, and to increase teacher and school accountability, while they disagreed that assessment is for student accountability and is irrelevant for teachers and students. Using a phenomenographic study to examine the experience and thinking of 26 New Zealand school teachers, Harris and Brown (2009) concluded that the teachers felt a tension between what assessment they deemed useful for student learning and the need for school accountability to society and other stakeholders. Brown (2011) further points out later that while teachers expressed their consensus with formative assessment values, they refused using it in practice; those teachers who were resistant to changing assessment practices often have a low sense of professional development and success.

In language education, despite ample research on language teacher cognition over the last four decades (see Borg, 2006), inadequate attention has been devoted to teacher beliefs and practices regarding language assessment, especially alternative assessment methods. A few studies have revealed a relatively positive relationship between teachers' assessment-for-learning beliefs and practices in monitoring and scaffolding learning (Gan, Liu & Yang, 2017; Hasan & Zubairi, 2016) and no teacher perceptual difference in terms of their academic qualifications, teaching experiences and learners' proficiency level (Nasr et al., 2018). Others

have unpacked a complex interaction between teachers' assessment beliefs and practices, reflecting a similar observation in general education.

Rogers, Cheng, and Hu (2007) compared the assessment beliefs of EFL instructors across three university-level contexts, namely Canada, Hong Kong, and Beijing. The study found that the instructors' beliefs were linked to their assessment methods and intentions. The instructors believed that assessment is important both for formative and summative purposes. In practice, they all reported using a variety of assessment methods for their formative purposes such as providing feedback to improve learning or collecting information on teaching effectiveness. However, the mismatch also emerged probably because of cultural and social context. Teachers in Beijing claimed that AS is more effective than formal tests for evaluating students, but in practice, they used objective tests more than the Canadian and Hong Kong instructors. The researchers attribute this discrepancy to the need to prepare students for college exams and large class sizes. The study further revealed that the teachers found AS (performance assessment in the study) time-consuming and labour intensive, which negatively influenced their use of AS; their insufficient understanding of how to implement the AS results to improve teaching and learning also contributed to their reluctance. As cited in Saito & Inoi (2017), Cheng et al. (2011) found Chinese high school teachers used journals and portfolios less regularly (around 30%) than self and peer assessment (approximately 50%), while Cheng et al. (2004) found teachers in Hong Kong used all these forms less frequently. Saito and Inoi (2017) further confirmed that these methods were less regularly employed by Japanese high school teachers. Likewise, Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) examined the beliefs of 62 teachers in an adult English program of a private institute of languages, regarding using formative assessment in oral and writing evaluation. They showed that their beliefs and practices were contradictory due to their lack of assessment literacy. Despite their robust belief in the formative values of assessment, the instructors reported a concern for the inadequate ability to apply assessment results in improving their teaching and learning. This explained why they preferred summative testing, an observation consistent with what Rogers, Cheng, and Hu reported. Widiastuti (2018) similarly found that the Indonesian EFL teachers needed a more thorough knowledge of formative assessment especially how to use feedback obtained to improve teaching, and how to design tests for improvement purposes. Almaamari's (2016) study at the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University, with a mixed-methods approach and the participation of 127 EFL teachers, similarly revealed that the teachers mostly shared similar positive beliefs about assessment

for teaching and learning improvement, which were highly congruent with their practices. However, they raised concerns about the validity and reliability of this assessment type in practice. Several factors were found to have shaped their beliefs namely the institutional policy, pre-service training, teaching experience and schooling experience, collegial influence, in-service professional training and personal learning from research. Research in Egypt (e.g., Gebril & Brown, 2014; Gebril, 2017) indicated that in-service teachers endorse assessment for formative purposes more than pre-service teachers. They emphasized that the high-stakes, test-driven system needs to be deemphasized to enhance a positive attitude towards formative assessment. In other contexts, Burner (2016) found contradictory perceptions between Norwegian teachers and students regarding formative assessment purposes, suggesting a mutual understanding should be established.

In Vietnam, Thuy and Nga (2018) found that Vietnamese EFL high school teachers from one province preferred formative assessment methods namely interviews, question-answers, presentations, conversations, role-plays, and peer assessment in assessing speaking. In contrast, portfolios and self-assessment were not appreciated because of the teachers' limited knowledge of how to implement these measures in assessing students' speaking, limited time, and overloaded work. This finding is congruent with what Giang (2017) found, but in Giang's study, both self-assessment and peer assessment were less employed in writing classes because of time and work pressure, large class sizes, and objectivity in marking. Vu (2017) revealed that high school teachers in a big city lacked time and felt a heavy workload to design reliable classroom assessment tools. They were tightly controlled by the assessment system set by administrators. This study relied on individual interviews and has a limited sample. Thuy and Nga's study (2018) only focuses on speaking assessment and involves teachers in one province, while Giang (2017) drew on a small sample of 38 participants from another province. In a pilot study, Van Loi (2014) involved 117 EFL secondary school teachers from the Mekong Delta in responding to a semi-structured questionnaire, revealing positive perceptions of assessment for learning, but a less positive attitude towards using AS, especially peer-assessment and self-assessment, because the teachers doubted students' language ability. Projects, journals, and portfolios were regarded as the least desirable and feasible in their working contexts because of students' low proficiency, large class sizes, and limited curricular time. This study has two limitations: inadequate data on participants' responses to factors influencing the use of AS, and no data on teachers' practices of AS. The

current research, therefore, focused on similar issues, overcoming these shortcomings by revising the questionnaire.

All the previous studies have pointed to the various results regarding teachers' language assessment beliefs and practices. One common observation, however, is that teachers in general appreciate assessment for learning, but studies outside Vietnam show this belief interacts, or is not consistent with their real practices due to their lack of confidence in conducting AS and using its results, beliefs in the reliability and validity of AS, and contextual constraints namely limited time, and class sizes. These studies have also centred on the contexts and participants which differ from the one investigated in the current study. Related studies in Vietnam have revealed similar results, but also highlighted students' proficiency and teacher lack of trust in this. These studies, however, have small sample sizes and focus on a certain local context. Therefore, further research is still essential to provide insight into the culture of AS implementation.

The study

Design

This study aimed to unpack the shared beliefs and practices of teachers in using alternative assessment. To do this, a self-report survey was designed and administered to a large sample of teachers in the Mekong Delta region. The study mainly used a semi-structured questionnaire, which is a popular introspective method of capturing teachers' thinking, beliefs or cognition (Borg, 2006). As mentioned, the questionnaire was a revised version of a previous pilot study (Van Loi, 2014). Two five-point scales were added, namely one to elicit factors which influenced teacher practices, and another that aimed to investigate teachers' use of common AS activities. Two open-ended questions were designed to elicit follow-up comments or explanations about the teachers' choice of assessment and explanations of factors that influence their AS use.

Instruments and data collection procedure

The questionnaire content was grounded in the literature about assessment especially alternative formative assessment. The Likert-scale questionnaire is composed of three parts. Part 1 collects demographic information. Part 2 elicits teachers' agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale with 18 belief statements about formative purposes and values of assessment (items 1-9); peer assessment (items 10-15) and self-assessment (items 16-18).

Part 3 consists of various scales focusing on the perceived importance of various AS activities to impacting students' English ability (item 19, five-point scale); the perceived desirability for using AS (item 20, four-point scale), the perceived feasibility of different AS activities in practice (item 21, four-point scales); the factors that hindered teachers from using AS activities (item 22); the perceived levels of usefulness of AS forms to promoting students' learning (item 23, five-point scale), teachers' self-reported use of AS activities in practice (item 24, five-point scale), and teachers' confidence in assessment practice (item 25, three-point scale). Two open-ended questions were added to elicit further explanations about the factors which constrained their alternative assessment practices. These questions include "Can you explain further the factors you chose from the list which hindered your use of alternative assessment?" and "Can you explain why you rarely or never used the assessment activities you chose from the list?" All the questions were written in Vietnamese to reduce misunderstanding. The Cronbach's Alpha of the assessment beliefs scales (items 1-18) run on the SPSS software produced a coefficient of .73, an acceptable level for the internal reliability.

The participants were invited to respond to the questionnaire during a professional development course. First, the researcher informed them of the research purpose and explained that their participation was voluntary, their personal information would be confidential, and that for future publication, anonymity would be applied. Then the questionnaire was delivered to the teachers who agreed to take part. They had 15 to 20 minutes to answer all the questions. Most of them returned the questionnaire after completing, but some of them suggested returning the questionnaire on the following day.

Context and Participants

The participants were 164 English language teachers, involving 130 females and 34 males. This proportion reflects gender imbalance in ELT in Vietnam. Of the total, 101 (61.6%) teachers worked in lower secondary schools (grades 6-9), and 63 (38.4%) were upper secondary school teachers (teaching grades 10-12); they were from various schools in four representative provinces of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. A hundred and twenty participating teachers came from rural schools and 44 from urban ones. These teachers were invited to participate in the survey while they attended a professional development course organized by the researcher's institution during their summer time. Their teaching experiences ranged between one and over twenty years. The majority (75%) had a four-year

Bachelor's degree, 24.4% had a three-year college diploma. One teacher (0.6%) had a Master's degree. With respect to assessment skills and knowledge, 62.8% reported having received training during their undergraduate or professional development programs, while 37.2% had never received any training before.

The teachers follow the textbooks designed by the MOET. On average, they teach a 27 standard 45-minute hours per week a semester. On average, students receive 3 standard hours of lessons per week. Student learning assessment follows a fixed plan of specific schools and were set by their provincial Department of Education and Training. According to Dispatch 5333 (MOET, 2014), in-class assessment per semester includes regular 15-minute tests (at least 2), periodical 45-minute tests (at least 2), which are conducted by the teacher, following the specifications of their schools. One application assessment must be conducted as a substitute for one 45-minute test. Suggested measures are portfolios, journals, projects, written essays, or debates. One end-of-semester test was administered by the provincial Education and Training departments. The MOET designs and administers the national graduation tests through provincial departments.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were run to reveal patterns in the teachers' assessment beliefs and use. Means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated. The data was tabulated, and teachers' open comments on incorporating AS into their existing classrooms were analysed to add evidence to the quantitative results. Independent sample t-tests were employed to explore the differences in beliefs and practices according to demographic variables such as school locations and school levels they worked with.

Results

Perceived formative values and purposes of assessment

Table 1 below reveals that the Vietnamese secondary school teachers of English overall had a positive disposition towards the formative values and purposes of assessment.

Table 1

Vietnamese EFL secondary teachers' beliefs about alternative assessment

Questions	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD.
1. Teachers should use assessment to promote students' competence as set by the teaching goals.	1.00	5.00	4.0	.70
2. Assessment should be used to give feedback to teachers about their teaching effectiveness.	1.00	5.00	3.91	.80
3. Assessing students' learning can be done in many other ways than testing.	2.00	5.00	4.2	.75
4. Assessment is effective only when it aims at developing students' competences.	1.00	5.00	3.71	.85
5. Assessment activities should encourage students to be active and creative in learning.	1.00	5.00	4.19	.65
6. Assessment activities should help students understand their strengths and weaknesses to improve themselves.	1.00	5.00	4.04	.70
7. Teachers should use assessment activities to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning.	2.00	5.00	4.06	.56
8. Teachers should help students understand their own learning process by using assessment alternatives.	3.00	5.00	4.12	.38
9. Assessment can be used to improve teaching.	1.00	5.00	4.0	.33

*(1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)

The mean scores ranged between 3.71 and 4.2. The latter score (item 3) indicated an overall accurate perception of assessment, which is not merely contingent on tests. As shown in the table, the teachers tended to agree that assessment should be used to promote learning by developing students' competences (*item 1, M=4.0; item 4, M=3.71*), and to encourage them to be active and responsible for their learning (*item 5, M=4.19; item 7, M=4.06*). They similarly revealed quite a strong belief in the use of assessment for improvement of teaching (*item 2, M=3.91; item 9, M=4.0*) and learning (*item 6, M=4.04; item 8, M=4.12*).

Peer and self-assessment

Table 2

Vietnamese EFL school teachers' beliefs about peer and self-assessment

Questions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD.
10. Only English teachers have enough ability to assess students' English learning outcomes	1.00	5.00	3.01	1.0
11. Assessment done by school students is not reliable.	1.00	5.00	2.83	1.0
12. School students can evaluate their peers in learning English.	1.00	5.00	3.25	.97
13. School students have ability to evaluate each other in English learning activities.	1.00	5.00	3.04	.96
14. In teaching and learning English at school, the teachers should involve students in assessing their peers.	1.00	5.00	3.57	.82
15. School teachers of English should have activities to involve their students in evaluating each other.	1.00	5.00	3.38	.88
16. School teachers of English should give their students opportunities to evaluate their own learning.	1.00	5.00	3.90	.69
17. It is necessary to organize activities for school students to evaluate their own English learning progress.	2.00	5.00	3.82	.78
18. School students can assess their own English learning progress.	1.00	5.00	2.90	.99

**(1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)*

More specifically, Table 2 below indicates the teachers' beliefs about self and peer assessment. It was revealed that the school teachers overall showed an uncertain attitude towards whether assessment should be implemented by the teacher only (*item 10, M = 3.01*) although the high standard deviation showed a wide range of opinions on this statement. They tended to disagree with or be undecided about the view that assessment conducted by students

is unreliable (*item 11*, $M = 2.83$). Their views were also relatively disparate with regards to students' ability to conduct assessment. The attitudes can be uncovered by the low mean scores of item 12 ($M = 3.25$), item 13 ($M = 3.04$), and item 18 ($M = 2.9$).

However, granting students opportunities for peer assessment was viewed as less positive than that for self-assessment. For peer assessment, items 14 ($M = 3.57$) and 15 ($M = 3.38$) revealed a relatively neutral attitude. Despite their undetermined belief in students' ability to assess themselves (*item 18*, $M = 2.9$), they deemed it necessary to grant students the opportunities for self-assessment practice (*item 16*, $M = 3.9$; *item 17*, $M = 3.82$).

In short, the teachers tended to hold a positive attitude towards the formative values of assessment, but they were neutral or uncertain about implementing self-assessment and peer assessment possibly because of their inadequate trust in students' ability to do the assessment task.

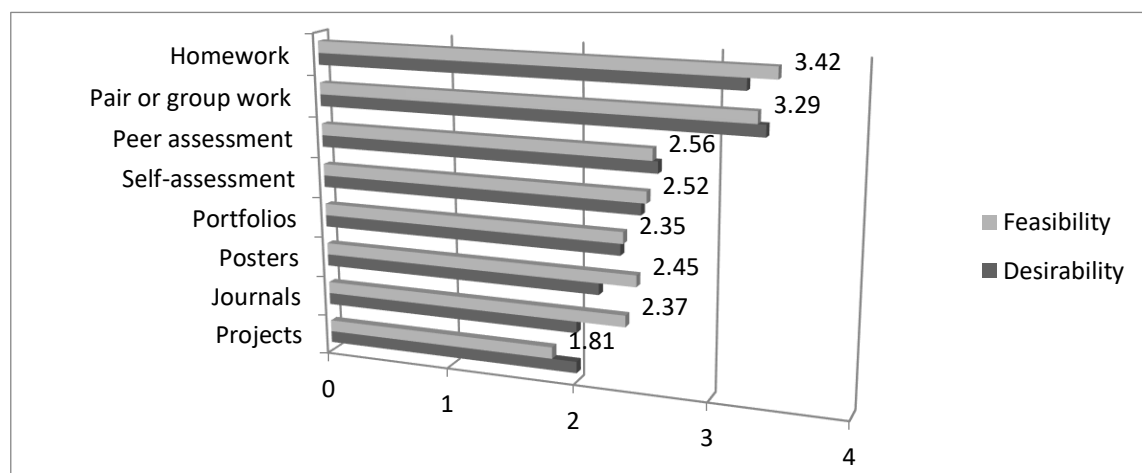


Figure 1. Vietnamese secondary EFL teachers' desirability versus feasibility of alternative assessment

*(1=not desirable/feasible; 2=slightly desirable/feasible, 3=quite desirable/feasible, 4=very desirable/feasible)

Figure 1 further displays the extent to which the teachers desired to implement AS techniques as opposed to the perceived feasibility of using them in the classroom. Overall, they found it less feasible and desirable to use AS methods such as projects, journals, posters, portfolios, and peer and self-assessment ($M=1.81-2.56$) than in-class activities in pairs or groups, and homework exercises ($M=2.96-3.42$). Project-based assessment was seen to be the least wanted and doable, followed by journals and portfolios. Particularly, among the three

least desirable and feasible forms, project work was deemed to have the least practicality in their contexts of teaching ($M=1.81$).

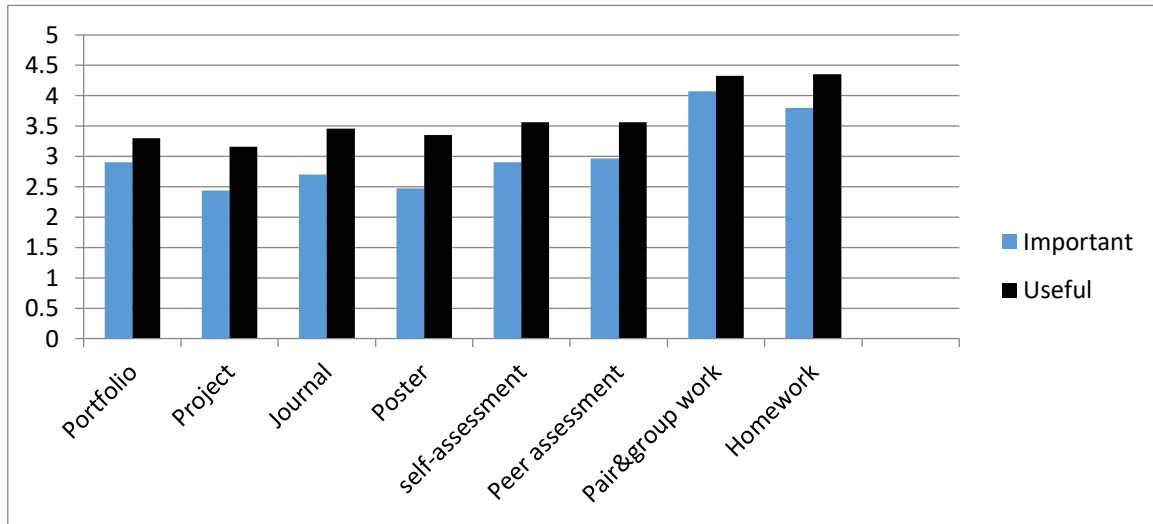


Figure 2. Perceived importance versus usefulness of alternative assessment activities to students' English proficiency development

*(1=not important/useful at all, 5= very important/useful)

The above results were consistent with their beliefs about the importance and usefulness of using AS for facilitating students' English improvement as revealed in the data from Figure 2. In question 19, the teachers were asked to rate how important they believe each assessment activity is to students' language development. Question 23 required them to judge how useful each assessment activity is to help push students' English ability.

It was further revealed from Figure 2 that with respect to the question whether AS is deemed crucial in enhancing students' English competence or not, the teachers placed more emphasis on pair and group work practices, and homework exercises ($M=3.8$, and $M=4.07$ respectively) than on portfolios, journals, projects, and peer and self-assessment in assessing students' English progress ($M < 3.0$). Similarly, the teachers perceived pair or group work activities and homework exercises as more useful tools for boosting students' English skills, with nearly equal means of 4.35. The mean scores for project work, portfolios, journals, posters as well as peer and self-assessment varied between 3.16 and 3.56, indicating a neutral view.

Further exploration of the differences in teachers' beliefs according to demographic features showed that only two variables were significant in indicating their contrasting

perceptions. These included the area where the teachers were working, and the level of school students they were teaching as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Difference in beliefs about alternative assessment by working locations

						T-test for equality of means
	Working areas	N	Mean	SD.	SEM	Sig.
MeanFA	Countryside	120	3.99	.34	.0309	.02
(items 1-9)	City	44	4.12	.29	.0442	
MeanPA	Countryside	120	3.13	.61	.0559	.70
(items 10-15)	City	44	3.09	.61	.0925	
MeanSA	Countryside	120	3.70	.58	.0531	.99
(items 16-18)	City	44	3.70	.66	.1000	

**MeanFA (mean of formative purposes of assessment); MeanPA (mean of peer assessment); MeanSA (mean of self-assessment)*

Table 3 presents the mean differences in the teachers' assessment beliefs according to their working area. The results suggest a significant difference regarding the formative nature of assessment. The teachers in the countryside were less positive towards using assessment of formative purposes than those teaching in the city despite their similarity in perceiving peer and self-assessment ($p < .05$).

Table 4

Teachers' belief difference by school levels

						T-test for equality of means
	Levels of school	N	Mean	SD.	SEM	Sig.
MeanFA	Lower secondary	101	3.97	.32	.0324	.008*
(items 1-9)	Upper secondary	63	4.11	.32	.0408	
MeanPA	Lower secondary	101	3.16	.64	.0635	.294
(items 10-15)	Upper secondary	63	3.05	.56	.0710	

MeanSA	Lower secondary	101	3.60	.64	.0637	.006*
(items 16-18)	Upper secondary	63	3.86	.50	.0629	

Table 4 similarly presents the mean differences in the teachers' perceptions about formative alternative assessment (MeanFA), peer assessment (MeanPA) and self-assessment (MeanSA) according to the levels of students they are working with. It was shown that lower secondary school teachers were generally less positive towards formative assessment and self-assessment than the upper secondary school group ($p < .05$). Regarding peer assessment, their perceptions were not different ($p > .05$).

Teachers' reported practice in alternative assessment

Table 5

Reported use of alternative assessment activities by percentage

Activities Assessment	for	Never	Once several years	in years	Every two years	Every year	Every semester
Portfolios		66.5%	4.9%		0.6%	17%	11%
Projects		85.4%	3.6%		-	9.8%	1.2%
Journals		78.7%	4.9%		0.6%	8.5%	7.3%
Posters		68.9%	5.5%		2.4%	18.3%	4.9%
Self-assessment		64%	5.5%		1.9%	9.1%	19.5%
Peer assessment		44.5%	3%		0.6%	16.5%	35.4%
Pair/group work activities		3.7%	0.6%		-	12.8%	82.9%
Homework		7.3%	1.2%		0.6%	10.4%	80.5%

Table 5 describes the frequency of teachers' reported use of alternative activities for assessment in their teaching. In general, the teachers reported more often employing in-class activities such as pair and group work (12.8% chose 'every year', and 82.9% 'every semester' respectively), and homework exercises (10.4% and 80.5% respectively) for assessing student learning. On the other hand, a large proportion (72.7% on average) reported never or once in several years using portfolios, projects, posters, journals, and self-assessment, which also means a low percentage of the teachers often implemented these

activities. The responses to the use of peer assessment were nearly equally split, nearly 48% on the ‘never’ scale (never, once in several years), and slightly over 50% on the ‘often’ scale. Pair/group work and homework accounted for over 90% of the teachers’ choice.

The teachers’ self-report on their implementation of AS may be related to their confidence in employing AS activities. As revealed in Table 6, for the question ‘How confident are you in implementing the following activities for assessment?’, the mean scores for their confidence in using portfolios, projects, journals, posters, self-assessment, and peer assessment were relatively low, ranging in ascending order from 1.67 to 2.21. This mean range means that they lacked confidence in undertaking these alternative methods. Familiar and traditional activities such as pair/group work and home assignments achieved the highest mean scores (closer to the maximum), indicating a high level of teacher confidence.

Table 6

Vietnamese EFL school teachers’ confidence in using alternative assessment

	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Portfolios	1.00	3.00	1.67	.675
Projects	1.00	3.00	1.72	.654
Journals	1.00	3.00	1.97	.723
Posters	1.00	3.00	2.04	.722
Self-assessment	1.00	3.00	2.19	.682
Peer-assessment	1.00	5.00	2.21	.722
Pair/group work practices	1.00	4.00	2.73	.550
Homework	1.00	4.00	2.79	.521

**(1=Training needed, 2=little confidence and further training needed, 3= confidence)*

The results above are consonant with their reported practices as presented previously. A Spearman’s test confirmed the correlation between their assessment practice and relevant confidence level (portfolio, $\rho=.237$, $p=.002$; project, $\rho=.178$, $p=.023$; journal, $\rho=.375$, $p=.000$; poster, $\rho=.337$, $p=.000$; self-assessment, $\rho=.154$, $p=.049$; peer assessment, $\rho=.273$, $p=.000$).

Factors influencing the feasibility of alternative assessment implementation

In terms of why the teachers perceived many proposed alternative methods as less feasible to undertake in the classroom, the following figure represents the factors as perceived by the Vietnamese EFL secondary teachers to have an impact on their assessment practice.

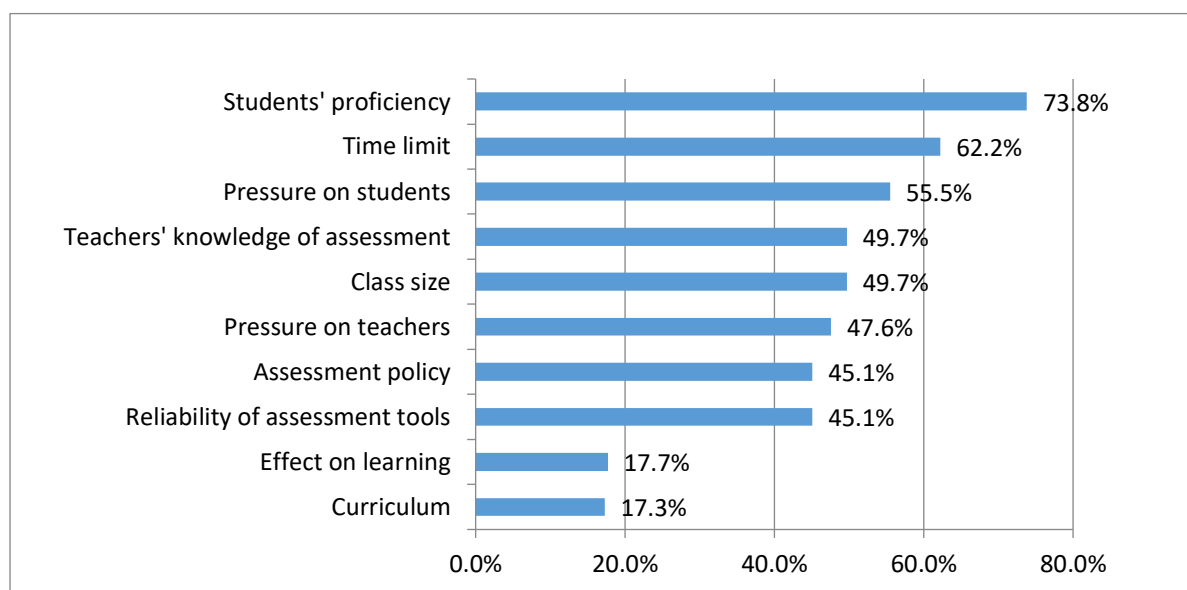


Figure 3. Reported factors influencing teachers' decisions about alternative assessment

The chart above reveals the influential factors in descending rank. Noticeably, students' English proficiency and time limit were the two most crucial factors mediating the teachers' decisions on whether to employ AS described previously (73.8% and 62.2% of the teachers respectively). Ranked third was the pressure on students when conducting AS for learning (55.5%). Teachers' knowledge of AS design, their work pressure, class size, assessment policy, and the reliability of AS were perceived to be relatively powerful factors, with a range of 45% and 49.7% teachers' responses. Importantly, just over 45% teachers selected assessment policy as the factor that influences their choice of AS. In contrast, the curriculum policy and the effect of AS on learning outcomes had the least impact on their decisions to implement AS, accounting for 17.7% and 17.3 % respectively.

Teachers' additional comments garnered from open-ended questions lend support to the teachers' beliefs and practices described above. The teachers attributed students' limited English ability to their reluctance to use projects, journals, and peer assessment in their practices. One female teacher with 15-year experience wrote, "Students in the countryside are still weak in English proficiency to make peer assessments or comments, especially for English, they are not capable enough to identify errors." "In doing projects, due to lack of ability, students can copy documents from the internet," commented another female 11-working-year

teacher. Students' activeness was to blame as well: "In the countryside, it is hard for the students to do projects, and they are not used to working independently and writing journals," a male teacher who had 12 years of experience reported.

Time limit constrains the teachers' implementation because they thought that it would take too much time to incorporate AS into class activities and to evaluate students' work: "There is time constraint. Teachers have to stick to the time allocation of the syllabus," or "teachers do not have enough time and conditions to read all the journals, so journal writing is not feasible." (A 10-years-of-experience male teacher)

Assessing learners' learning progress also puts more pressure on the workload of both students and teachers. This is especially true in the context where most classes are large, over 30 students. One female seven-years-of-experience teacher stated, "Assessing students through project doing is not feasible since it puts more pressure on them. Besides English, they have to study many other subjects," and "teachers have to teach several classes and each class is over 30 students."

Teachers' lack of training similarly was to blame for their reluctance to use some AS tools. One teacher reported, "We are not trained to use projects in teaching and assessing students' learning." (A female teacher with 8 years of teaching experience)

Discussion and implications

In general, despite their positive attitudes toward using alternative formative assessment for improving teaching and students' learning, the Vietnamese EFL secondary teachers were not highly willing to implement alternative forms of assessment they considered to be time-consuming and pressure-causing. Believing that such activities as projects, journals, and portfolios are less likely to be successfully employed in the EFL classroom of Vietnam, they rarely used them in practice. Their beliefs and practice were explained by the difficulties they mentioned, namely students' proficiency levels to undertake an active role in learning activities, teachers' assessment knowledge, and the contextual factors such as time limit, large class sizes, and a heavy workload which puts pressure on both students and teachers. In particular, the lower secondary teachers displayed a less robust belief in peer and self-assessment than the upper secondary teachers. Teachers in the countryside also held a less optimistic view than teachers in the city in this regard.

The findings above in general are in line with insights into teachers' beliefs, which mediate their practices, and the interaction of beliefs, practices and working contexts (Borg,

2006; Canh, 2007). They are especially congruent with teachers' conceptions of classroom assessment in EFL and ESL teaching as reviewed earlier (Almaamari, 2014; Brown, 2011; Muñoz, Palacio, & Escobar, 2012; Van Loi, 2014; Widiastuti, 2018).

Teachers' difference in perceiving the values attached to assessment for formative purposes, including AS, may be attributable to teacher educational qualifications and working conditions. The lower secondary teachers exhibited less confidence in using AS, reporting more challenges than the upper secondary teachers because they received insufficient professional preparation. In Vietnam, most lower secondary school teachers graduate from three-year colleges, whereas the upper secondary school teachers must hold a minimum four-year degree. This professional difference could render more difficulties for the lower secondary teachers, given the complex and demanding nature of AS (Gronlund, 2006). The fact that 37.2% participants had not received any assessment training can further account for their perceptual difference. In terms of working conditions, teachers in the countryside typically have less favourable conditions to access professional development opportunities, which may also explain why they expressed a lower level of confidence. In this respect, assessment literacy was found to mediate teachers' beliefs and implementation of formative assessment (Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar, 2012; Widiastuti, 2018). Vogt and Tsagari (2014) have stressed that teachers demand different training priorities in assessment literacy which should suit their local contexts.

The finding that projects, journals, portfolios, self-assessment and peer assessment were less frequently employed is in line with previous studies in Asian contexts (Cheng *et al.*, 2011; Rogers, Cheng & Hu, 2007; Saito & Inoi, 2017). This result has links to contextual factors namely student proficiency levels, large class sizes, restricted time, and a high workload, confirming previous research (Giang, 2017; Rogers, Cheng & Hu, 2007; Thuy & Nga, 2018; Van Loi, 2014; Vu, 2017). Most importantly, students' level of proficiency was cited as the major concern that might discourage teachers from undertaking AS activities. In fact, having experienced large classes of students who have limited English proficiency (EF, 2018; VietNamNet Bridge, 2016) in restricted curricular time and in the exam-oriented context, the teachers have been disposed towards filtering out any measure which is unfamiliar, time-consuming and demanding to themselves and students. These factors elucidate why they were reluctant to grant students chances to participate in process-oriented learning activities such as projects, journals and other similar ones.

Noticeably, the assessment policy was perceived to be less influential to the teachers' decisions on whether to use AS than their assessment knowledge. Saneia (2012) has particularly stressed that using AS to push students' learning is appealing to teachers, but its feasibility needs consideration. Alternative methods complex in nature, time-consuming, and demanding to both teachers and students, namely projects, journals, portfolios, and self and peer assessment were less likely welcomed probably because they were perceived to be not applicable in the teachers' context. Such a finding echoes the importance of practical or applicable assessment tools in the classroom (Brown, 2001; Harris & McCann, 1994).

Another perceptible observation is that the current assessment policy unintentionally seems to encourage teachers to use AS forms in replacement of a test for the purpose of student evaluation. This employment reflects the habitual practice that assessment results are not employed for learning and teaching improvement, but only for informing students and teacher and school accountability (Vu, 2017). This result reflects the observation that teachers' assessment purposes and intentions influence the way they use formative assessment, and that teachers rely on FA results for grading students (Saito and Inoi, 2017). This practice probably causes teachers to lose sight of the formative values of assessment, which could illuminate the beliefs and practice of Vietnamese EFL teachers in the present study. It was possible that these teachers misunderstood the purpose of assessment for learning, and their lamentation about the heavy workload of AS is possibly because they thought grading students' products (e.g. portfolios or journals) creates more work for them.

Despite the limitations of self-report data and an imbalanced gender sample, the present study offers some useful implications. First, the study suggests that changes in assessment practice should take into consideration and address the school teachers' current mind-sets regarding their students' English ability, class sizes, their time budget, and preparation of related knowledge and skills, which are potential barriers to implementing new assessment measures in the classroom. For AS to be fruitfully integrated into the EFL classroom, teachers should be made clearly aware of not merely the benefits of AS, but also ways to conduct it efficiently with respect to their students' characteristics and working contexts. Professional development courses and teacher training programs should prioritize practical measures or applications relevant to the local needs. One way is to synergize summative and formative assessment such that tests can be relevantly employed as assessment for learning (Wei, 2017). As argued by Xiao (2017), teachers working in exam-oriented contexts can be supported to design tests as an appropriate measure to push student

learning and collect information for teaching improvement. Second, Giraldo (2017) emphasizes language teachers need, among other skills in assessment literacy, the ability to reflect on their own beliefs, context, and needs for assessment, and to evaluate the assessment policy and existing tensions that affect their assessment practice. Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) also suggest that more guidance for and reflections on formative assessment practice be provided for the teachers.

Finally, in policy, more emphasis is to be placed on AS than currently is used as a replacement of one 45-minute test (MOET, 2014). This inadequate attention was already pointed out by Vu (2017) as an explanation for high school teachers' dominant use of tests. In other contexts, deemphasizing the use of tests is also suggested as a measure to change teachers' beliefs and practices (Gebril & Brown, 2014). In fact, the new assessment policy was introduced top-down to departments and schools without any consideration of the current situation. Although training workshops were organized to support the teachers to implement AS activities, the teachers may have been left without administrative support. School teachers strictly follow a schedule and specifications for formal assessment stipulated by administrative departments based on Dispatch 5333, and class-based assessment is left without due attention and support (Vu, 2017). Therefore, specific plans and procedures for integrating AS should also be designed and negotiated by staff, schools and related administration units. In that way, teachers will be better supported to complete their assessment tasks not only to account for student learning outcomes, but also to employ results to inform their teaching. The current study suggests that time, workload, and student proficiency mediated teachers' assessment decisions. Attention should be paid to appropriate time allocation for skill-developing, process-oriented activities in the curriculum such as projects, self-assessment and portfolios, which in turn could facilitate teachers' implementation of AS for formative purposes. Future research could further explore how administrators can support teachers in employing assessment for learning (see Moss, Brookhart & Long, 2013), and take account of students' voice regarding AS.

Conclusion

Alternative assessment as conceived by the Vietnamese EFL school teachers in this study shows evidence that while endorsing its benefits, the teachers reported the lack of confidence in using it, given the challenges they face in implementing. It is implied that AS procedures for formative purposes should be trained carefully, and emphasis be placed on

practical tools or measures that suit their working contexts. Drawing upon the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices, and shared insights into teachers' beliefs regarding language assessment, this study adds further evidence to conclude that any pedagogical innovation is likely to face the impact of existing beliefs and contextual constraints, including what teachers perceive regarding the feasibility and willingness for change. Changes in education-related aspects such as language assessment as researched in this study requires mediation with the socio-cultural context. Future teacher training and development are encouraged to address the practicality of assessment tools or techniques and the tensions between the need for school accountability and student learning. Further research which combines various methods such as observations, interviews, students' data, and involves a representative sample is essential to generalize and corroborate the current findings.

Acknowledgment

The author acknowledges thanks to the reviewers for their insightful comments which greatly improved the paper. Thanks are also extended to those school teachers who volunteered to participate in the survey.

References

- Almaamari, R.N. (2016). [The impact of teachers' beliefs on their formative assessment practices]. Thesis abstract retrieved from <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/121690>
- Bachman, L., & Palmer, A. (2010). *Language assessment in practice: Developing language assessments and justifying their use in the real world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barcelos, A.M.F. (2003). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (Vol. 2, pp. 7-33). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Berliner, D.C. (2005). The place of process-product research in developing the agenda for research on teacher thinking. In P.M. Denicolo & M. Kompf (Eds.), *Teacher thinking and professional action* (pp. 3-15). London, UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd
- Borg, M. (2001). Teachers' beliefs. *ELT Journal*, 55(2), 186-192.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109.

- Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education* (1st ed.). London: Continuum.
- Brown, D.H. (2001). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. White plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Brown, G.T.L. (2004) Teachers' conceptions of assessment: implications for policy and professional development. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 11(3), 301-318. DOI: 10.1080/0969594042000304609
- Brown, G.T.L. (2011). Teachers' conceptions of assessment: Comparing primary and secondary teachers in New Zealand. *Assessment Matters*, 3, 45-70. Retrieved from <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/assessment-matters/articles/teachers-conceptions-assessment-comparing-primary-and-seconda>
- Burner, T. (2016). Formative assessment of writing English as a foreign language. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(6), 626-648. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1066430>
- Canh, L.V. (2007). Teachers' beliefs about curricular innovation in vietnam: A preliminary study. In Y.H. Choi, B. Spolsky & R. Barnard (Eds.), *ELT curriculum innovation and implementation* (pp. 191-215). Korea: Asia TEFL.
- Canh, L.V. (2020). English language teaching in Vietnam: Realities, aspirations, and challenges. In L.V. Canh, N.T.M. Hoa, L.T.T. Minh, & R. Barnard (Eds.), *Building teacher capacity for Vietnam: Research, policy and practice* (pp.7-22). London and New York: Routledge.
- Cuban, L. (1993). *How teachers taught, constancy and change in american classrooms: 1890-1990* (2nd ed.). New York: Teacher College Press.
- Education First (EF) (2018). EF English proficiency index. Retrieved from <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/reports/epi-s/>
- Fox, J. (2017). Using portfolios for assessment/alternative assessment. In E. Shohamy, I. G. Or , & S. May (Eds), *Language testing and assessment. Encyclopedia of language and education* (3rd ed.) (pp. 135-147). Springer, Cham
- Gan, Z., Liu, F., & Yang, C.C.R. (2017). Assessment for learning in the Chinese context: Prospective EFL teachers' perceptions and their relations to learning approach. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(6), 1126-1134. doi:10.17507/jltr.0806.13
- Gebril, A. (2017). Language teachers' conceptions of assessment: An Egyptian perspective. *Teacher Development*, 21(1), 81-100. doi: 10.1080/13664530.2016.1218364

- Gebril, A., & Brown, G. T. (2014). The effect of high-stakes examination systems on teacher beliefs: Egyptian teachers' conceptions of assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 21(1), 16-33. doi:10.1080/0969594X.2013.831030
- Giang, D.N. (2017, May). Teachers' perceptions and descriptions of classroom-based assessment practices in Vietnam. Paper presented at *Vietnam Language Assessment Symposium: Classroom-based Assessment and the Assessment of Learning*, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. PowerPoint Slides retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.vn/en/exam/assessment-advocacy/vietnam-language-assessment-symposium-2017/presentations>
- Giraldo, F. (2018). Language assessment literacy: Implications for language teachers. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 20(1), 179-195. Retrieved from <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/62089>
- Gronlund, N.E. (2006). *Assessment of student achievement*, 8th ed., Boston: Pearson.
- Hancock, C.R. (1994). Alternative assessment and second language study: What and why? *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED376695.pdf>
- Harris, L.R., & Brown, G.T.L. (2009). The complexity of teachers' conceptions of assessment: Tensions between the needs of schools and students. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 16(3), 365-381. doi: 10.1080/09695940903319745
- Harris, M., & McCann, P. (1994). *Assessment: Handbooks for the English classroom* (1st ed.). Oxford: MacMillan Publishers.
- Hasan, W.M.W., & Zubairi, A.M. (2016). Assessment competency among primary English language teachers in Malaysia. *Proceedings of MAC-ETL 2016*, 66-73.
- Janisch, C., Liu, X., & Akrofi, A. (2007). Implementing alternative assessment: Opportunities and obstacles. *The Educational Forum*, 71(3), 221-230.
- Johnson, K.E. (2006). The socio-cultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *Tesol Quarterly*, 40(1), 235-252.
- Looney, A., Cumming, J., van Der Kleij, F., & Harris, K. (2017). Reconceptualising the role of teachers as assessors: Teacher assessment identity. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 0-26. doi: 10.1080/0969594X.2016.1268090
- Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (September, 2014). Dispatch 5333/BGDĐT-GDTrH on implementing competences-based assessment in teaching secondary English from academic years 2014-2015]. Hanoi, Vietnam. Retrieved from

<https://thuvienphapluat.vn/cong-van/Giao-duc/Cong-van-5333-BGDDT-GDTrH-phat-trien-nang-luc-mon-tieng-Anh-2014-2015-288353.aspx>

- Moss, C.M., Brookhart, S.M., & Long, B.A. (2013). Administrators' roles in helping teachers use formative assessment information. *Applied Measure in Education*, 26(3), 205-218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08957347.2013.793186>
- Muñoz, A.P., Palacio, M., & Escobar, L. (2012). Teachers' beliefs about assessment in an EFL context in Colombia. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, 14(1), 143-158.
- Nasri, N., Roslan, S.N., Sekuan, M.I., Bakar, K.A., & Puteh, S.N. (2010). Teachers' perception on alternative assessment. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7(C), 37-42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.006>
- Nasr, M., Bagheri, M.S., Sadighi, F., & Rassaei, E. (2018). Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of assessment for learning regarding monitoring and scaffolding practices as a function of their demographics. *Cogent Education*, 5(1), 1-29. DOI: [10.1080/2331186X.2018.1558916](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1558916)
- Pajares, M.F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-322.
- Rogers, W.T., Cheng, L., & Hu, H. (2007). ESL/EFL instructors' beliefs about assessment and evaluation. *Canadian and International Education*, 36(1), 39-61.
- Saneia, A. (2012). Dynamic assessment: A call for change in assessment. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 59(4), 4-19. Retrieved from <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/volume-59/>
- Saito, H., & Inoi, S. (2017). Junior and senior high school EFL teachers' use of formative assessment: A mixed-methods study. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 14(3), 213-233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2017.1351975>
- Shermis, M.D., & Vesta, F.J.D. (2011). *Classroom assessment in action*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Thuy, H.H.H., & Nga, T.T.T. (2018). An investigation into EFL teachers' perceptions of in-class English speaking assessment. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 34(2), 125-139.
- Van Loi, N. (2014). A report on secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs regarding alternative assessment. In B. Kham & P.T.H. Nhung (Eds.), *Conference Proceedings on English Language Testing and Assessment for School-Age Learners*. July, 23-24, Hue University College of Foreign Languages: Vietnam.

- VietNamNet Bridge (21 June, 2016). Poor English skills challenge Vietnamese students.
Retrieved from <https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/education/159027/poor-english-skills-challenge-vietnamese-students.html>
- Vogt, K., & Tsagari, D. (2014). Assessment literacy of foreign language teachers: Findings of a European study. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11(4), 374-402.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2014.960046>
- Vu, T.P.A. (2017, May). Classroom-based assessment in Vietnam: An investigation into teachers' beliefs and practices. Paper presented at *Vietnam Language Assessment Symposium: Classroom-based Assessment and the Assessment of Learning*, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. PowerPoint Slides retrieved from
<https://www.britishcouncil.vn/en/exam/assessment-advocacy/vietnam-language-assessment-symposium-2017/presentations>
- Wei, W. (2017). A critical review of washback studies: Hypothesis and evidence. In R. Al-Mahrooqi, C. Coombe, F. Al-Maamari, & V. Thakur (Eds.), *Revisiting EFL assessment: Critical perspective* (pp. 49-67). Cham: Springer.
- Widiastuti, I.A.M.S. (2018). EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of formative assessment to promote active learning. *Asian EFL Journal*, 20(5), 96-112. Retrieved from
<https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/monthly-journals/2018-teaching-articles/volume-20-issue-5-2018/>
- Xiao, Y. (2017). Formative assessment in a test-dominated context: How test practice can become more productive. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 14(4), 295-311.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2017.1347789>

Why we are not where we want to be: Dilemmas of English language teachers and learners in Vietnam

Ngan Nguyen & Francis Godwyll

Nha Trang University, Vietnam & University of West Florida, USA

Bio-profiles:

Ngan Nguyen, Ph.D. is a faculty member at the Faculty of Foreign Languages – Nha Trang University, Vietnam. She received her Ph.D. degree in Cultural Studies in Education from Ohio University, USA. Her dissertation focused on English as a Foreign Language education in Vietnam. Her master's degree in TESOL is also conferred by Ohio University. She is an alumna of the Fulbright Student Scholarship program, and winner of other scholarships such as A. Margaret Boyd Overseas Scholarship and the P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship. Ngan is interested in second and foreign language education issues, especially EFL. She has studied Vietnamese learners' pronunciation of English, language learning strategies, teacher-student power relations in language classroom, and some other contemporary issues in the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam. Email: ngannt@ntu.edu.vn, Address: Nha Trang University, 02 Nguyen Dinh Chieu St. - Nha Trang – Vietnam

Francis Godwyll, Ph.D. is Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Research and Administration and Director of the Doctoral Program in the College of Education and Professional Studies, University of West Florida – USA. He has authored or co-authored several books and chapters of other books. Publications carrying his research include *Journal of Education and Humanities: Theory and Practice*, *Academic Leadership*, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, and *International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*. Godwyll's research has covered a wide range of subjects: managing classroom behavior, diagnostically supported teaching strategies to reduce school failure, social justice in education, games for learning in school and home, aspects of Japanese schools, educating the marginalized, teachers' rights and responsibilities, the “juggling act” for mothers and academics, holistic education, diversity and many other subjects. Address: University of West Florida, 11000 University Pkwy, Pensacola, FL 32514 – USA

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to understand issues that hinder the success of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. The methodology adopted was a qualitative case study using document analyses, observations, and interviews of 22 participants from a university in the central area of Vietnam. Findings of the study reveal among others the following: ambiguity in foreign language policies; unresolved dilemmas in curricula, quality and textbook usage, teaching and learning resources, instructional approaches, as well as problems relating to teachers' qualifications. These add to the understanding of EFL

education in Vietnam and brought to the fore the marginalized voices of English teachers and students. Results of the study can be employed to make decisions on programming, material selection, pedagogical choices among others for enhancing English programs to better respond to learners' needs. The practicality of this research is not limited to the context of a specific institution in Vietnam, but is hoped to reach further to regional or international institutions which are facing similar problems.

Keywords: EFL teaching and learning in Vietnam, language policy, teachers' and students' voices

Introduction

English Language has undergone many ups and downs ever since it was introduced in Vietnam, losing importance after the Americans withdrew from the Vietnam War, then replacing Russian Language as the Soviet Union collapsed and became more prominent when government implemented the open door policies – or so called Doi Moi (Nguyen, 2012). The expansion of English in the country goes along with the global trend towards English and the people's changing attitude toward the language itself (Denham, 1992). It became the most learned/taught foreign language in this country (Do, 1999) during the decade after Bill Clinton lifted the Trade Embargo and now it still is. Vietnamese turn to English because of what they experience in daily life, trends of socioeconomic development, occupational opportunities, and desires to obtain knowledge elsewhere beyond their country borders.

Awakened from decades dormant in its socialism dream as the Soviet Union collapsed, Vietnam suddenly realized the disadvantages of having a workforce that does not speak English or speaks English with a lisp. Lee Kwan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, indicated in a visit to Vietnam in 2007 that success depends on the ability to comprehend the language used in the latest textbooks, and that language is English. Vietnam is confronted with seeking international integration in an English dominant environment with a workforce that does not speak English or speaks English with a lisp. In the words of the former U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Vietnam has to cope with raising English proficiency level of the workforce (Marine (2007). More than ever, the country needs people who can communicate independently and confidently in English to serve its economic development and modernization. As people continue rushing to classes to sharpen their English competence, painful criticisms continue to arise as English teaching and learning in Vietnam has not been able to provide learners with adequate level of proficiency to speak and performed satisfactorily in international tests. Table

1 displays results of Vietnamese test takers in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in the last 10 years.

Table 1

Average TOEFL Scores of Vietnamese Test Takers for the TOEFL Internet Based Tests

Year/Type of Test	Average scores of Vietnamese test takers	Highest average scores of other countries	Lowest average scores of other countries
2007	70	103	56
2010	73	100	57
2013	78	100	56
2015	80	100	61
2017	82	100	59

Source: ETS (Educational Testing Services, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2018)

Research on English teaching and learning in Vietnam has mainly focused on how to teach or learn better a certain linguistic function. Some researchers have investigated learning styles, learning environment, learning motivation, learners' identity among others (Denham, 1992; Duong, 2007; Lewis & McCook, 2002; Pham, 2007; Phan, 2004; Phan & Phan, 2006; Sullivan, 1996, Tran, 2007). Not many have looked at the issues of foreign language policies, questioned the ever-changing curriculum and textbooks, or reports from the English teachers' and students' perspectives.

This paper, hence, seeks to understand from the perspectives of English teachers and students about prevailing issues concerning teaching and learning of the English language in Vietnam, what they experience and construe about the system, the curriculum, program design, as well as how they view each other's roles in the education process. Knowledge from the insiders will hopefully help improve English teaching and learning in the country.

The paper borrowed lenses from the English teachers and students at Nha Trang University, a higher education institution in the central of Vietnam.

Overview of English Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

A U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam comments that Vietnamese people always "place an extremely high priority on education" since they see it as fundamental for development and

success. “English is, after all, the lingua franca of commerce and this represents a particular challenge to Vietnamese businesses,” (Marine, 2007). Indeed, one of the challenges that Vietnam has to cope with is raising English proficiency level of the workforce since this has been a major impediment to reach further in the international economic playground.

Vietnam stipulated in its 2005 Education Law that schools should consider to teach languages used commonly in international communication to students (currently mostly English, starting from third grade). Skills and knowledge were denoted as two areas of objectives in the foreign language curriculum. By the time they came out of elementary school, pupils were expected to be able to communicate in English at the novice level (four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In terms of knowledge, they were expected to know the basic linguistic properties of the language (verbs, nouns, pronouns, simple sentences, etc.) and introductory information about the cultures and people of some English speaking countries (MOET, 2003). MOET tries to maintain a balance between instrumental objectives and intellectual objectives since goals were set to develop both skills and cultural knowledge of the language. This stance can also be found in curricula for a higher level of English learning. For example, the goals of the English major at vocational training schools are for students to develop functional knowledge of the language (i.e., to master the four skills so that English will become a tool for them to approach modern technology, study and do research in their specialized fields) and to gain knowledge about the English culture, and be aware of cultural differences so that they can develop friendship and business relations with people from other cultures (MOET, 2003).

It could be said fair emphasis has been placed on the education of English in school. However, after many years of learning English in schools, students are not able to conduct a simple conversation. Doan-truc (2006) remarks that English competence of Vietnamese students is lowest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). According to a report by The U.S. Commercial Service in Ho Chi Minh City in 2007, Vietnamese students of English score at an average of 360 on the paper-based version of the TOEFL (the maximum score in this version is 667, and most universities in the U.S. require a TOEFL score of 550 or higher for foreign students).

Poor performance of English language learners in Vietnam is related to the deficiencies in teaching and learning conditions such as lack of qualified teaching staff, learning equipment, sufficient funding, up-to-date teaching materials, and modern teaching facilities. Even though much effort has been invested in increasing teacher’s quality (through the 2020 national project

on foreign language education), many English teachers in Vietnam express that they themselves are not satisfied with their own language proficiency, that they have the required qualifications to teach by laws but it is not enough to meet the demand of students (Nguyen & Mai, 2015). Aside from this, the absence of strong government policies as well as improper instructional approaches might also be reasons of this little improvement in English learning (Doan-truc, 2006; Le, 2007; Luu-trang, 2009; Thanh-luong, 2006).

Lamb (2000) implies that if Vietnam does not get rid of the old textbooks used in the language curriculum developed with Russian advisors in the mid-1980s, English teaching in Vietnam will not be improved. Lamb (2000) explains that, “They [the textbooks writers] trumpet Sputnik and the World Festival of Youth in Moscow, and are full of such *misspeak* as *I am having a temperature* and *My car runs away* – explaining in part why many of the 35,000 teachers of English in Vietnam can’t really speak much English themselves” (italic originally in quotes). Hoang (2018) pointed out “the contents of English teaching present one of the most challenging issues in Vietnamese higher education”. That the government does not prescribe specifically what to teach allows room for creativity, but also causes “chaos” at the same time, especially when higher education accreditation in Vietnam is quite behind and has not been considered a priority for many universities. Only 114 out of 564 institutions (or 20%) continuously updated their self-evaluation reports in the period between 2005 and 2011, an implication that a major tool for quality assurance has not been used effectively. Also, actual external accreditation for universities in Vietnam did not take place until MOET established accrediting agencies around 2015 (Nguyen et al, 2017). A flaw in content guidelines might lead to problems when teachers, especially the less experience, have to decide what to teach, which materials to use on their own.

“Dumb English Bachelors” and “Deaf English Bachelors” have become rumored idioms about university graduates who cannot employ the language they have learned in college at the work place. English teachers are believed to have exerted tremendous efforts to accommodate teaching methods to students’ needs as well as devoted a high level of commitment and dedication in the attempt to improve the learners’ English competence (Doan & Utsumi, 2008). However, commitment and dedication seemed to need more ingredients to become a remedy.

The call for change has paved the way for the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Many English classrooms have adopted the principles of the CLT approach and thus began to implement a more skill-based curriculum. Unfortunately, the application of

the CLT approach in teaching English in Vietnam is not always successful (Lewis & McCook, 2002). As teachers are carried away applying rigidly the CLT method and forgot about their students' learning traditions, students can become frustrated and resistant to learning. The learning culture of Vietnam is centered on social harmony (Lucious, 2009; Phan & Phan, 2006; Tomlinson, & Bao -dat, 2004) and is strongly influenced by Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism (Lucious, 2009; Pham, 1995; Sullivan, 1996). A meager understanding of this culture may result in a counter effect in teaching. Also, the CLT came stamped and sealed in textbooks written by native English speakers (Denham, 1992). The unquestioned adoption of these textbooks and dogmatic compliance to prescribed instructions were likely more detrimental than beneficial.

Pham (2007) also agrees that native Vietnamese English teachers encounter various contextual problems as they implement the CLT method. In the struggle with the ultimate goal of teaching their students to be able to use the language with the principles of the CLT approach, teachers find themselves being pulled by standardized tests, large class sizes, traditional beliefs about teaching and learning, about teacher-student relations and so on. Pham (2007) asserted that teachers who apply the CLT approach need to exert extra efforts to generate contextually appropriate activities, otherwise such teaching will not succeed.

Tomlinson and Bao-dat (2004) notice that many language learners come to the language classroom not only to improve language proficiency, but also to socialize, to establish relationship with peers and learn useful interpersonal skills. However, these intentions are normally overlooked by teachers since they are too busy with teaching the language skills. Tran (2007) also echoes that many learners came to learn a language with genuine interest, passion and inspiration, not just with social motivations alone. Thus, a more culturally sensitive pedagogy for language classroom was advocated (Tomlinson & Bao-dat, 2004) since teaching without understanding students' backgrounds, needs, styles, or expectations will make learning tiresome, uninspiring and thus ineffective.

Methodology

Employing a qualitative case study design, this paper digs in the perspectives towards English and the experiences with English teaching and learning of English teachers and students at Nha Trang University in the central region of Vietnam. 22 participants were purposefully selected (key participants) among the administrators, the Faculty of Foreign Languages and students from different English programs (4-8-10 in numbers respectively, see

Table 2). The participants were coded as T (for teacher informants), SO (for significant others, including administrators and visiting teachers with a somewhat of an outsider's lenses), S (for student informants), and GS (for student informants in focus-group interviews). Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews, direct observations of participants (in classroom setting) and document analysis. In using key participants, the researcher was aware of the fact that their perspectives were selective, limited and biased (Patton, 2002). Therefore, constant crosschecking of findings was insisted to validate data consistency throughout the analysis process.

Table 2

Informants and data collection

Participants/means of data collection	Teachers	Students	Significant Others
Semi-structured interviews	8	10	4
Observations (in-class)	4	5	
Focus-group interviews		5	

Built on the premise of critical theory, this study will critically question how the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in Vietnam had responded to the needs of the English learners in Vietnam, and what the English curriculum has implied as far as educational goals and objectives, pedagogical approaches, teaching and learning materials among others were concerned. According to Gutek (2004), critical theory is:

a complex set of working assumptions about society, education, and schooling that question and analyze educational aims, institutions, curriculum, instruction, and relationships in order to raise consciousness and bring about transformative change in society and education. (p. 309)

Critical theory, as defined above, is concerned about social change. Thus, a good amount of educational research has employed critical theory in its quest for the better. Issues of power relations, struggle, hegemony, domination, ideology and resistance have been widely investigated (Tollefson, 2006). Implications drawn from the theory have been employed to re-examine education aims, methods of instructions, educational content, evaluation approaches among others to seek more critical understanding of educational system and suggest remedy

for change (Gutek, 2004). The study, thus is hoped to add to the paucity of empirical research in the area of English teaching and learning and brought to the fore the marginalized voices of English teachers and students in foreign language policy formulation and English curriculum development.

Findings and discussions

The unsolved dilemma: students

Nha Trang University receives every year between 10,000 to 15,000 applications and recruits 3000 to 3,500 among them. Most of the students are from Khanh Hoa province. The next provinces with large numbers of candidates are Phu Yen (bordering Khanh Hoa to the north), Dak Lak (bordering Khanh Hoa to the mountainous west), Binh Dinh, Nghe An and Quang Ngai (central coastal provinces). These are provinces dominated with agricultural or fishery communities, and many are economically deprived.

In Vietnam, learning English in public school depends on the school location and availability of teaching staff. In most urban schools, English is offered as one of the foreign languages at the third grade. Normally, students will continue with the language they start with until high school level. When they finish high school, they will need to take a graduation examination in the foreign language which they have studied. Six foreign languages that were listed in the last high school graduation exams are: English, Russian, French, Chinese, German and Japanese. However, no school can offer all of these languages. The majority of schools offer only one foreign language due to a shortage of staff or a low financial budget to sustain a variety of staff. Students do not choose which language to study. It is the school that decides which language is taught for which class. For example, there may be three classes to study English, three to study French, etc. For schools that only offer one foreign language, all students in the schools will have to study that language.

Unlike those in urban areas, rural schools usually are unable to offer foreign language courses until much later, sometimes not until the tenth grade. This difference is due to availability of both financial and human resources which are often short in the backcountries. Hence, many students in the rural areas will not start learning a foreign language until high school. Options are also more limited. Most schools can only offer one foreign language; English now is the most popular, while Russian and other languages are quite rare. Especially, in remote or mountainous areas, many schools do not have foreign language teachers. Thus,

the students attending these schools do not study any foreign languages until they go to college, if they ever do.

In sum, at the high school graduation point, there are students who have studied a foreign language for 10 years, 7 years, 3 years, or not at all. As a matter of fact, students in college have a diverse background in terms of foreign language competence. Every typical college classroom has some who have learned English, some have learned French for seven years, some have learned Chinese for three years, and some have never learned a foreign language in their life. They are all grouped together in a single English course at the university. Most universities are unable to offer a considerable variety of foreign languages for students to choose from. This basically means that unless it is a university of foreign languages, students only have a few options from which to choose.

This background of foreign language education at secondary schools has posed quite a challenge for teachers who continue the job at the tertiary levels, especially for those who work with students of lower qualifications. Table 3 below will give hints to understand what English teachers at Nha Trang University have experienced.

Table 3

Standard Scores for Admission to Universities' English Major Programs

University	2017	2018
Hanoi University of Pedagogy	23.25	22.6
Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy	26	22.55
Hanoi University of Foreign Languages	35.25*	31.85*
Can Tho University	23.5	21.25
Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities	26.25	23.20
Nha Trang University	21.5	17.5

Note: The total scores = Math exam + Literature Exam + English exam (max. 10 points each)

() English exam score is multiplied by 2*

As can be seen, some universities attract students who score better in the entrance exams, and more likely possess stronger academic records. Nha Trang University is not at the top group, and thus not the first choice for better students. A teacher commented:

Students at NTU are very weak in English... Their pronunciation is very poor. Most of them are from rural or remote areas ... As you know, students from the countryside, from the mountains and the highlands come to our university. They come with no English. Their English is “zero”. Most of them are “zero” English! Even if they’ve studied English for seven years or three years, they don’t know anything since they only learned to pass the graduation exams. When they arrive at the university, they are lost in our four-skill teaching approach, you know... listening, speaking, reading and writing. (T8, August 2010)

The teacher emphasized that students who chose Nha Trang University were mostly from rural or economically disadvantaged areas. Given poorer conditions, schools in the countryside or mountainous regions could hardly provide the students with good learning conditions, as well as better qualified teachers. Hence, not just teachers but people in general underestimated academic abilities, especially the English competence of students from these areas. The teacher insisted that this was not a stereotype, but it was an observed fact from her experience. Better students were already recruited by better universities. A colleague of the person also reinforced:

People all know that English teaching in rural secondary schools is inadequate in every manner, from availability to quality of the teachers. Teachers are not well-trained. There are teachers who have never heard a native speaker speaking English. They have never met a native English speaker. That’s a drawback. I could tell from five years of experience with teaching the English major here that students are very passive. They don’t have learning strategies. They don’t know new learning approaches. I found out that in secondary schools, they still teach with the traditional methods. Therefore, students don’t have communicative competence in English. They know a lot, though. They’re good at grammar. But they can’t speak! And especially listening! They can’t. Freshmen and sophomores struggle a lot with listening. (T7, July 2010)

The teacher believed that the fact that students entering the university with poor oral and learning skills is due to poor teaching instructions they received from secondary schools. Plenty of blames has been thrown at secondary schools for not doing a good job of teaching English to students. Pedagogical approaches among others have received the most criticism

(Hoang, Nguyen, & Hoang, 2006). Hence, the teachers at college level have in hands students with excellent grammar and mediocre oral skills. They certainly find it hard to teach the curriculum which is designed with ideal equations.

The students also echoed their teachers in this regard. They were not happy being placed in classes where they have to struggle quite hard to march with mates who have learned English for ten years, some who have learned English for seven years, some for three years and some have never learned English or any foreign language:

In my class, many people haven't learned English before. Some of them know other languages like French or Russian. So it's very difficult to learn together. (S10, August 2010)

In my class, some know everything, some don't know anything." (S7, August 2010)

In my class, there are many students from the north, and they haven't learned English before. They have never learned a foreign language, or they learned other languages such as French or Russian. So most people who are good at English are from Nha Trang or the central provinces. Some people are very good, actually, as good as the teachers. Some people don't know anything. In class, weaker students rarely talk. I like to do group work with good students, or those who are at the same level with me. But our teachers said we should help weaker students. So usually we can't pick our group. It's frustrating. (S8, August 2010)

As the students mentioned, there was a mixture in terms of English competence in their classes. This made it difficult when they did pair or group work. The students said that their teachers always encouraged them to form study groups so that they could support each other. Given a culture that values collectivism, mutual help is highly embraced. Vietnamese has a saying about the importance of learning from peers: *Học thầy không tày học bạn* (meaning: you learn more from friends than teachers). Peer learning is also valued in other cultures as well (Boud, 2001). Within such learning groups, people expect to share knowledge, experiences and ideas, or to get feedback, advice and even encouragement, or to learn how to socialize, etc. The central idea is every member benefits from the participation. It is a reciprocal process (Falchikov, 2001), so participants are required to contribute actively or the cooperation

will not be effective. Thus, given this situation, the desired effects of peer learning could discourage quite a few students, especially those at the top levels. A student could not hide her frustration:

Only some are strong. Honestly, many students are weak, even weaker than secondary level students... Many students were recruited because their math and literature exams' scores were high, not their English exam's scores. *We* found it difficult to group-work with these friends. Teachers blamed *us* for not helping them. But how? (GS4, July 2010)

Using “We” and “us”, GS4 seemed to indicate that there were peers who shared her feeling of disappointment in learning with weaker counterparts who had not been able to contribute much to the group's assignments due to weaker language competence. Obviously, mismatch of competence levels had caused difficulty for the students to work together as a team. Misunderstanding, different experiences, different expectations, different performances, etc. made the group fall apart. Resistance could result due to constant failures of group cooperation. The students stated that they did not want to be teamed up with peers who were not on the same level with them. If the teachers forced them to work together, they would just pretend they worked together, and ended up submitting the individual work of the best member of the group as the team's work.

Beside issues of student mixed backgrounds, miss-matched levels of proficiencies, teachers also find themselves stuck in the dilemma that their students do not have self-learning skills (T2, T5, T8, & T3 among others). Self-learning in this case is understood as the ability to read textbooks, do research, write papers and study lessons in advance, etc. independently and automatically. The teachers worried since MOET has cut down face-to-face meeting hours in the standard curriculum. This meant that students would need to do more work outside of class. However, given that students are still learning in the traditional way, i.e. relying on teachers' lectures, and that most teachers are still teaching with the traditional approach, the new curriculum will be a disastrous experience for both. As the teachers commented:

As I've just said, the old program gave us more in-class time so teachers could supervise students more closely. We could find out if students do their homework or not. Now as the time is cut down, students have to study on their own more. But I worried a lot about students' self-learning skills because they don't have good self-discipline. As a result,

I think learning quality will go down since students will not automatically sit down to learn on their own. (T5, July 2010)

Students are not independent in their studies. They still think that knowledge or skills should be transferred to them via the teacher. So if they have a good teacher, they will learn a lot. Ideally, I think students should play an active role in learning. However, in the Vietnam education system, teachers have to work a lot. Teachers play the major role in learning. Freshmen are very unfamiliar with the learner-centered approach. Students don't believe that they can learn more on their own. They are so dependent on teachers. They don't think they can look for things themselves. (T3, July 2010)

On the other hand, some teachers did not believe students should be given more time to study on their own. They reasoned that foreign language learning needed more contact hours since students need opportunities to practice the language under the supervision of teachers. I myself think that if students don't self-study, they won't make much progress. However, I think in language learning, students need face-to-face meetings so that they can practice skills, especially speaking and listening. (T2, July 2010)

What a paradox when teachers want their students to be independent learners while they find it hard to detach from the traditional authoritative role in their teaching, hence the dilemma. From the interviews, class observations and examination of the provided syllabi, we found out that teachers had done very little to help students develop self-learning skills. Assignments that required rote memorization (learning new vocabulary, answering reading comprehension questions for reading texts before class, doing grammar exercises before class, etc.) were typical. we did not see from the observed classes any assignments that asked students to generate something so that they would have to do research, to read beyond, to inquire information from someone or from other resources. Similar findings observed as we checked the program's syllabi. The only take-home, considerably time-consuming was the internship report (a summary of the work they performed during a 4-week internship, together with evidence of translation skills through a translation of a 3000-word document).

We might want to consider also the fact that tests and exams were designed as sit-in models with mainly multiple-choice questions. Teachers did not want to assign take-home tests and exams since they worried about plagiarism. Moreover, the pressure to score high in tests

and exams forced students to narrow their studies down to memorizing teachers' lectures and the assigned texts. Thus the researcher was not too surprised during the focus group interview when the students told her they had been to the library only once or twice, and one student shyly admitted that she had never been to the library. It seems the learning with their teachers had not given them causes to reach beyond the classroom walls.

The unsolved dilemma: teachers

"Teachers don't have time to grade our assignments." (GS4, July 2010), a comment struck during an interview and we decided to do further investigation in this matter. We received further reiterations that students often did not receive satisfactory teacher feedbacks for their assignments. The student participants showed an anxious attitude as they talked about their teachers' responsiveness to their needs:

Many times we asked for test or exam rubrics and we were answered that "it depends." Teachers were not enthusiastic in helping us. We sent emails but they didn't reply. We sometimes had to call them on the phone. (GS1, July 2010)

Most of the time unavailable, unreachable, out of coverage area, or simple no-one-answer-the-phone ... (GS5, July 2010)

The teachers didn't give us any formats or guides... We wondered how they graded our (*internship*) reports since everybody was doing it in different ways. (GS2, July 2010)

Hong-hanh (2010) remarks that university teachers in Vietnam have a heavy teaching load, and teaching is the main activities they do (only 28.4% of teachers carry out some kinds of research activities). Teaching is the main income for teachers, thus most teachers try to teach as many hours as possible to increase earnings. The situation is very similar at Nha Trang University. English teachers are no exception. They often teach evening classes at foreign language centers or offer tutoring in private homes to make ends meet.

We consulted the working load for the interviewed English teacher participants. Table 4 displays the hours the teachers are supposed to devote to teaching and research activities per year. Besides, teachers also have to supervise exams. The hours displayed in the table are the face-to-face teaching hours.

Table 4

Work Load of the Teachers

Teachers	Teaching hours/year*	Research hours/year*	Total
T8	530	180	710
T3	410	180	590
T4	430	180	610
T6	430	180	610
T7	430	180	610
T2	410	120	530
T5	410	180	590
T1	410	120	530

Note: () Hours calculated based on degree, position, title, etc.; Exam supervision hours were not added to the above work hours*

Source: Nha Trang University's Regulations for 2010 Institutional Budget and Statistics of Teaching Hours of Fall 2009-2010.

Given the hectic teaching loads, the concept of *office hours* does not exist among the informants. Not a single teacher interviewed mentioned they had ever set aside time to assist students outside the classroom. Students also did not know what *office hours* meant. The only way to reach their teachers outside class was to call or email. It was very uncommon for them to get an appointment with teachers outside class. A student said:

Maybe our teachers were busy, or they didn't want to reply, or because of some other reasons I don't know. However, if teachers were more open to us, our learning would be easier. (GS3, July, 2010)

The problem with time did not just stop at outside classroom consultation. It was further revealed that time constraints could influence the planning of learning activities or making pedagogical choices of teachers. The answers below were to the question if the teacher would assign students to do research papers:

If we assign such papers, we have to correct them. We don't want to do that. We can only correct most common mistakes. Given that I am teaching 50 students. If I have to

correct 50 assignments like that, how could I? 50 is a lot. Therefore, I don't think long papers are practical. (T8, August 2010)

We don't want to assign long papers because of many reasons.... We don't have time to grade these papers.... students won't want to do those papers. Most probably, they will copy from the internet and submit to us. (T2, July 2010)

If I give them a difficult assignment, they will all fail. (T8, August 2010)

Given the overloaded schedule, the teachers had to choose a more efficient solution to help them manage their teaching. However, what they think as "more efficient" could cause a problem, if not damages, to the learning outcomes. Modifications of teaching approaches, changing methods of measurements while staying tuned to the objectives of the curriculum are not something any teachers could do, especially inexperienced ones. Hence comes another dilemma for the case of this research.

The unsolved dilemma: textbooks and curriculum

The word "chắp vá" (*patchy*) was used by the students to indicate the discrepancy of the materials provided to them. The lack of textbooks was one of the major concerns of teachers and students. Most available textbooks were out of date and of poor quality. Imported copies were very expensive, and no student could afford them. Students could only pay for domestically reprinted or photocopied materials. Insufficient sources impeded teachers from developing systematic materials for the course they taught. As commented by the students:

Many teachers do not have sufficient textbooks to teach us with. For example, in writing, they mainly download lessons from the Internet. We can also do the same thing. The learning materials they give us are separate sheets and not a book, and that makes it difficult to review the materials later on. (GS4, July 2010)

Also, there is a shortage of learning materials, very few materials. Many teachers give us assignments without clear instruction or sample papers. We do not know how to do it... in general, learning materials are very scarce. (GS3, July 2010)

We do not know where the teachers got the materials. This makes it very difficult to earn good grades from the teacher since we do not know how to study for the exams. (GS5, July 2010)

Table 5 displays the main textbooks listed for the writing courses in the curriculum for the English Language Major in 2017.

Table 5

Textbooks for Writing Courses (English for Translation and Interpretation Major)

Course	Title	Author (Publisher)	Year of Publication
Writing 1	Process and Pattern: Controlled Composition for ESL Students	Charles Cobb (Wadsworth)	1996
Writing 3	Academic Writing from Paragraph to Essay	Cambridge University Press (CUP)	2008
Writing 5	Cambridge Certificate in Advanced Level 1, 2, 3, 4	Cambridge University Press (CUP)	2008
			1987

Source: Nha Trang University, syllabi for the English Major

As could be seen, outdated textbooks and not necessarily the best selection were being used as learning materials. The interviewed students also confirmed that they found the required textbooks outdated and no longer used in programs at other places. They were told by booksellers that those books were no longer on sale since people no longer used them. Teachers had to find more up-to-date materials on the Internet, compiling pieces here and there to make up their teaching materials. As a result, their lessons were patchy, unsystematic and lacked consistency.

A well-selected textbook plays an important role in the success of the course. However, availability, limited financial budgets and other reasons have failed teachers in this task. Students expressed how they were inspired when they got a good textbook to learn from:

Like the textbook for the American Culture Course ... we studied with an American teacher. That was a Longman publication. We all made copies of that book. It was a good one. If we like a book, we can remember a lot of what we learn. Other textbooks are ... generally, it depends on the teacher's choice. (GS4, July 2010)

Nguyen (2011) reports that universities and colleges in Vietnam are all faced with the shortage and poor quality of textbooks. Most materials being used are out-of-date with inconsistent content. Teachers usually rely on translated texts. A very small number of teachers could develop course books. Limited resources cause a lot of difficulty for both teachers and students to find appropriate materials.

We don't write course materials. We don't design or develop them. We compile the materials. Compile, not compose. We take a bit from here and there. Some from Hue University, some from Da Nang University, some from the Internet ... Thus, our materials are not systematic. I think we don't have time, we also don't have the ability to write a course book ... I am now using the material developed by an Australian volunteer who worked here several years ago for the American Culture course. I think it is a good material. However, I found it hard to cover the whole material in 30 hours. It was originally designed for a 45-hour course. (T1, June, 2010)

It's very difficult to find reference materials. Moreover, what is said in the reference texts is sometimes different from what the teachers tell us. So we get stuck. We don't know who is right or what to follow. (GS5, July 2010)

We find that the materials downloaded from the internet are not connected. There are many things we can find and learn on our own. We want teachers to give us things we don't have. Moreover, teachers only give us copies of part of the documents, not the whole documents. (GS4, July 2010)

As far as the curriculum is concerned, the informants of this study were not happy with the structure of the curriculum. The students indicated that many practical courses that they needed and wanted to study were either not offered or not included in the curriculum. Courses on computer skills, for example, are only three credit hours and not even focusing on practical

applications they would need. According to the structure of the current curriculum for the English Major at the university, with respect to the general education area, 30% of the subjects is devoted to political education, another 30% is for teaching a second foreign language (such as French, Chinese or Russian), and the rest is for all other general education subjects. This explains the following echoes in the focus group interview:

Since our major is English, there should be a focus on courses in English or English culture related. For example, in philosophy, we should have focused on Western culture, but we were only taught fundamental principles of Marxist-Leninism. For computer science courses, we were required to take courses of operational programming like MS-DOS, PASCAL which had no practical applications. Meanwhile, many of us didn't know how to type our internship reports for graduation. And many other courses like that. These courses accounted for 70 to 80% of the program and there was very little space left for English major related courses during the first years. (GS4, July 2010)

The students' criticism fell in the area of general education. They desired better composition of courses as well as more practical courses. A third of the credit hours spent on political oriented education was a heavy load, according to their opinion. However, this is a fixed requirement and no change could be made in this area. We also found that the curriculum provided very limited options for elective courses. For example, there were only three options for elective courses for the entire curriculum for students in the English Major program. Hence, students basically had to take whatever the university offered them to accumulate enough credits for the graduation requirement, regardless of relevance or practicality. A teacher informant shared:

I think students learn by doing, by participating in real work contexts. But that's the theory. In reality, our current curriculum fails to offer students what they need. Our students have to sit in class too much, for too many hours. I want to change this, but I haven't been able to do anything. (T7, July 2010)

As the major agents in the education process, yet it looks like both teachers and students understand there are issues with the curriculum, yet unable to cause changes. As T7 and some

other teachers said, they should strictly follow the standard curriculum of MOET. T5 emphasized the importance of conformity, saying that since it [MOET's standard curriculum] was the "standard," it was good to follow, and they must follow it since they were part of the system. The teachers emphasized that there was no reason to question the MOET's standard curriculum. It was a fixed entity and should not be touched:

We are in Vietnam, so we should conform to the Vietnamese system ... And the programs developed by MOET are firm, and cannot be changed. That means we are not allowed to leave out some elements or cut down certain parts. Students should follow the programs so they will acquire the necessary knowledge ... They should have a strong knowledge foundation, so they do not fall out of the right track. (T5, July 2010)

There was a bow to authority in this regard. These teachers we believed were not the only ones who thought they could ever make changes on things that were determined by upper levels of authority. Conceived, born, raised and matured within the system, it was hard for one to realize and question the norm. The teachers here believed that the education must follow that model, and that was the only good model for the students. However, in the long run, change is inevitable if the teachers want to train students who respond better to the socioeconomic development trends. They will need to stand up so their voices could be heard.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study responds to the need for a more critical understanding of English teaching and learning as a foreign language in Vietnam. It has attempted to unveil issues related to the curriculum, textbooks, experiences and perspectives of English teachers and students of the reality of English teaching and learning in Vietnam, particularly at the higher education level.

The investigation has revealed various dilemmas facing the agents in the system. Controversies, constraints, and unmet expectations make teachers and students perplexed in their quest for knowledge. If these problems remain unaddressed, the teachers and students will continue to struggle in their teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Spaces should be created for teachers and students to voice in developing the curriculum, course materials, assessment methods, pedagogical approaches and so on. In terms of foreign language policy making and curriculum designing, involving teachers and students in these processes will help move away from centralization, avoiding possible imposition of ideas from an elite

group of educators or authoritarians. This research has pointed out that there is a tendency of viewing the standard curriculum developed by MOET as fixed and unchangeable, which has somehow put a strain on creative thinking and limited options for the university to strive for uniqueness. Teachers and students should be given more opportunities to participate in constructing the content and forms of their education. In other words, instead of leaving decision making in the hands of a few top commanders, there should be opportunities for teachers and students to decide what and how they want to teach and learn. Abstention is equal to disempowerment, that is the teachers and students are disempowered in their own education pursuit by not having a voice in the decision making process.

Even though the findings of this study elicited on the case at Nha Trang University, it is believed other higher education institutions in Vietnam could certainly draw from the study's results to make decisions on programming, material selection, pedagogical choices among others for enhancing their English programs to better respond to the needs of their students. At the same time, the practicality of this research hopefully will not be limited to the context of a specific institution in Vietnam, but will reach further to regional or international institutions which are facing similar problems. Since this research brings on stage the voices of English teachers and students in Vietnamese universities, international ESL/EFL professionals may also find resonance somewhere along the line. More than ever, the teaching of English as an international language in the context of globalization is scrutinized from various perspectives. It is never redundant to listen to different voices, especially those that have not been heard. Future research, hence, could consider the following suggestions:

- Since this study involved twenty-two participants, further research can pursue a larger sample which may yield results that can be generalized to a larger group of English teachers and students at higher institutions in Vietnam.
- Since this study focused on the case of Nha Trang University, it would be worthwhile to conduct a comparative research of the experiences and perspectives of English teachers and students from different higher education institutions.
- Future studies can also be designed to investigate the experiences and viewpoints of policy makers, upper administrators, labor employers or significant others in the society relating to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

-

References

- Boud, D. (2001). Introduction: Making the move to peer learning. In D. Boud, R. Cohen & J. Sampson (Eds.), *Peer learning in higher education: Learning from and with-each-other* (pp. 1-17). London: Kogan Page.
- Denham, P. (1992). English in Vietnam. *World Englishes*, 11(1), 61-69.
- Do, T. (1999). Foreign language education policy in Vietnam: The emergence of English and its impact on higher education. *The Fourth International Conference on Language and Development Proceedings*. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- Doan, H. & Utsumi, L. (2008). *Trends in teaching and learning English in Vietnam: Implications for the future*. Retrieved from <http://daotaoquoc.edu.vn/eng/coe/conference2009/9.Anh.pdf>
- Doan-truc. (2006, November 18). Da so giang vien tieng Anh moi chi o trinh do cu nhan (Most English teachers only have bachelor degrees). *Vietnamnet*. Retrieved from <http://vietnamnet.vn/giaoduc/tintuc/2006/11/635009/>
- Duong, O. (2007). Meeting students' needs in two EAP programmes in Vietnam and New Zealand: A comparative study. *RELC*, 38(3), 324-349.
- ETS. (2008). TOEFL test and score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests. Retrieved from http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/71943_web.pdf
- ETS. (2011). TOEFL test and score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests. Retrieved from <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/TOEFL-SUM-2010.pdf>
- ETS. (2014). TOEFL test and score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests. Retrieved from http://www.toefl.com.tw/iBT/pdf/2013_TOEFL%20Test%20and%20Score%20Data%20Summary%E2%80%8B.pdf
- ETS. (2016). TOEFL test and score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests. Retrieved from http://www.toefl.com.tw/iBT/pdf/2015_TOEFL%20Test%20and%20Score%20Data%20Summary%E2%80%8B.pdf
- ETS. (2018). TOEFL test and score data summary for TOEFL internet-based tests. Retrieved from https://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf/94227_unlweb.pdf
- Falchikov, N. (2001). *Learning together: Peer tutoring in higher education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Gutek, G. (2004). *Philosophical and ideological voices in education*. Boston, MA: Pearson

Education.

- Hoang, V. (2018). *The current situation and issues of the teaching of English in Vietnam*. Retrieved from <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/326718789>
- Hoang, V., Nguyen, C., & Hoang, H. (2006). *Doi moi Phuong phap day tieng Anh o trung hoc pho thong Viet Nam (Changing English teaching approaches in Vietnam high schools)*. Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc.
- Hong-hanh. (December 21, 2010). Giang vien dai hoc “ngai” nghien cuu khoa hoc (University teachers are not eager with doing research). *Dan Tri*. Retrieved from <http://dantri.com.vn/c25/GS25-445568/giang-vien-ngai-tham-gia-nghien-cuukhoa-hoc.htm>
- Lamd, D. (2000, March 19). U.S. gains foothold in Vietnam as country embraces English. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/mar/19/news/mn-10457>
- Le, H.. (2007, August 17). Giao duc trong toan cau hoa: Tieng Anh – phuong tien chinh de vao “cuoc dua” (Education in the time of globalization: English is the means to join “the race”). *Sai Gon Giai Phong*. Retrieved from <http://www.sggp.org.vn/gducdhoc/2007/8/116055/>
- Lewis, M., & McCook, F. (2002). Cultures of teaching: Voices from Vietnam. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 146-153.
- Lucius, C. (2009). *Vietnam’s political process: How education shapes political decision making*. New York: Routledge.
- Luu-trang. (2009, January 19). Tieng Anh: Tiep can cang som, hieu qua cang cao (English: The early to start, the better the competence). Retrieved from <http://beta.baomoi.com/Home/HocBong/www.tuoitre.com.vn/Tieng-Anh-Tiepcan-cang-som-hieu-qua-cang-cao/2375358.epi>
- Marine, M. (2007, August 6). Challenges of higher education in Vietnam: Possible roles for the United States. Speech delivered at the opening ceremony of *Executive MBA Program of University of Hawaii's Shidler College of Business* in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
- MOET. (2003). Decision No. 50/2003/QĐ-BGD&ĐT on implementing the English Language and Information Technology Programs at elementary education level. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- Nguyen, C., Ta, H., & Nguyen, H. (2017). Achievement and lessons learned from Vietnam’s

- higher education quality assurance system after a decade of establishment.
- International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(2), DOI: 10.5430/ijhe.v6n2p153.
- Nguyen, N. (2012). How English has displaced Russian and other foreign languages in Vietnam since “Doi Moi”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 23(2), 259-266.
- Nguyen, N. (January 6, 2011). Giao trinh Viet: Thieu va yeu (Textbooks in Vietnam: Scarce and poor). *Dan Tri*. Retrieved from <http://dantri.com.vn/c25/GS25-449212/sinh-vien-viet-khat-giao-trinh-chuanquoc-te.htm>
- Nguyen, T., & Mai, N. (2015). Responses to a language policy: EFL teachers’ voices. *The European Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (eISSN: 2301-2218), DOI: 10.15405/ejsbs.164.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pham, H. (2007). Communicative language teaching: Unity within diversity. *ELT Journal*, 61(3), 193-201.
- Pham, H. (1995). The education system of Vietnam. In D. Sloper, & C. Le (Eds.), *Higher education in Vietnam: Change and response* (pp. 41-61). New York: St. Martin’s Press.
- Phan, H., & Phan, Q. (2006). Vietnamese educational morality and the discursive construction of English language teacher identity. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 1(2), 136-151.
- Phan, H. (2004). University classrooms in Vietnam: Contesting the stereotypes. *ELT Journal*, 58(1), 50-57.
- Sullivan, P. (1996). *English language teaching in Vietnam: An appropriation of Communicative Methodologies*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of California at Berkeley). Ann Arbor, MI: UMI.
- Thanh-luong. (2006, November 18). Khong tu tin neu chi hoc tieng Anh tai dai hoc. (Not confident if only studying English in college). *Vnexpress*. Retrieved from <http://www.vnexpress.net/GL/Xa-hoi/Giao-duc/2006/11/3B9F07F7/>.
- Tollefson, J. (2006). Critical theory in language policy. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy theory and method* (pp. 42-59). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Tomlinson, B., & Bao-dat. (2004). The contribution of Vietnamese learners of English to ELT methodology. *Language Teaching Research*, 8(2), 199-222.

Tran, L. (2007). Learners' motivation and identity in the Vietnamese EFL writing classroom.
English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 6(1), 151-163.

Target Language Use and Support for Comprehension by Japanese Primary Teachers in English Classes: A Quantitative Perspective

Stan Pederson

Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University, Japan

Bio-profile:

Stan Pederson is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Kumamoto University. He specializes in second language education for young learners. His research interests include classroom interaction, teacher education, assessment and team teaching. Address: 2-40-1 Kurokami, Chuo-Ku Kumamoto City, 860 8555, Japan

Abstract

Given the low proficiency and the challenges facing Japanese primary teachers to teach through experience and to provide a high-interaction environment for students, the present study transcribed, coded, and analyzed data from video-recorded lessons from ten teachers; six team teaching and four solo teaching, to investigate i) how much target language is used in class in solo and in team teaching, ii) the extent of use of dual or multiple means to deliver messages, and iii) how such behaviors compare in the target language versus L1. The findings showed that teachers used a high volume of target language in both solo and team teaching. Comprehension was supported in more than half of all messages by adding gestures or other supplemental means of communication and such behaviors applied consistently across L1 and L2. The results show primary teachers are up to the task of implementing an experience-centered and high-interaction curriculum as mandated in the official course of study.

Keywords: EFL, young learners, target language, teacher talk, gestures

Introduction

From 2018, Japanese elementary schools began a two-year transition to the new curriculum in which the present Foreign Language Activities classes move down to grades three and four; and grades five and six take on the newly created English as a subject. While there have been no large changes in focus, the new subject status of English in elementary school brings with it detailed assessment requirements and an increased demand for consistency and accountability. Supervisors at every level will be keen to assess how

faithfully teachers are conforming to the recommended goals and teaching methods, which have been unevenly implemented in the past (Mills, 2014).

The course of study for elementary school Foreign Language Activities emphasizes that students become familiar with the sounds, words and expressions of the foreign language as part of building a foundation for communication (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [Hereafter MEXT] 2017). Notably, speaking and listening within the broader category of communication are to be imparted through experience and interaction. However, few teachers have experienced this style of language learning in their own school days meaning they cannot call up an old script and teach as they were taught. This poses some difficulty since experience as a learner is an important source of teacher beliefs and behavior as they reflect on language learning experiences that they regarded as useful or satisfying and reject parts they disliked (Numrich, 1996). The new primary school context and the new methods mean that teachers must cobble together disparate episodes of experience from English and other subjects, consider policy directives and recommendations regarding methods, and integrate these with their own beliefs about elementary school teaching overall, to create a teaching approach for this new area of instruction. These challenges are compounded by a generally low level of English proficiency and a related lack of confidence (Butler, 2004; Fennelly & Luxton, 2011). In fact, few have specialist knowledge of the area with just 4.1% of primary teachers holding English teaching licenses (MEXT, 2016b). However, the aims and methods of instruction necessitate a lot of English use by teachers.

The present study seeks to gain some precise information about how teachers have responded to the challenges stated above. Broadly speaking, this paper concerns itself with “classroom English,” a term widely used in Japan. I refer to this as non-target English (hereafter NTE) and define it as: English used by a teacher outside of that specifically targeted for instruction in the lesson. This definition includes all messages in which the teacher has choices about words, expressions and whatever supplementary means are used to convey meaning. This includes things like free variations on target expressions, personalizing content, off-topic chat and all aspects of classroom management such as giving instructions and conducting transitions.

This definition casts a broad yet practically useful net. From the perspective of stated program goals, the definition captures all the messages through which the teacher may offer students the experience of engaging in language as communication, while excluding those of

a more mechanical nature, those prescribed by the current teaching content. The definition necessarily encompasses all those messages which involve teachers as English language users giving us a corpus of teacher talk pertaining directly to language proficiency. Finally, this definition makes it easier to standardize the measurement of how much English a teacher uses in class, making comparisons possible across studies.

There is a dearth of such quantitative information pertaining to elementary EFL education in general (Nilsson 2013). Furthermore, there is a need to establish a local, Japanese baseline given the unusual focus of establishing a “foundation for communication” as opposed to the more traditional emphasis on language acquisition.

Specifically, this paper investigates how teachers have responded to the need to use NTE in terms of i) how much NTE is used in a class, when teaching alone, or with an assistant language teacher (ALT) ii) the extent of use of dual or multiple means to deliver messages, and iii) how stable such mixed media usage is when comparing L1 to L2.

The study has implications beyond the Japanese situation as EFL has been entering elementary school systems around the world and adjusting to the broader whole child focus of elementary school education and the necessity of being taught by non-specialist or teachers of limited English language proficiency.

Literature review

This section begins with a consideration of the distinctive aims set for teaching English at elementary schools in Japan. These aims have a profound influence on the role of teachers and on the methods adopted. The section concludes with a consideration of research on the amount and nature of communication in the elementary English classroom.

Educational Aims and Methods

In Japanese schools, an overarching set of aims and assessment standards applies to all subjects. The three-fold standards are categorized as follows: i) knowledge and skills ii) thinking, judgment and expression and iii) attitudes and abilities regarding learning, and the unreported category of humanity, which encompasses the quality of relationships (empathy, thoughtfulness) with other people and to the broader society. The new three-fold standards are a reorganization of the standards in effect during the period of this study, which were four-fold, including 1) interest, motivation and attitude (towards learning) 2) thinking, judgment and expression 3) skills, and 4) knowledge and understanding (MEXT, 2016a). In

short, teachers focus on educating the whole student, a perspective familiar to primary school educators and to ESL educators who have been teaching from within the school system, but which is relatively new to our field of EFL instruction, which has, until recently, been conducted largely outside of schools. Specific to the Japanese EFL situation, the goals center on developing a foundation for communication: a positive attitude toward foreign languages and cultures, and a familiarity with the sounds and fundamental words and expressions of a foreign language. In line with the standards above, learning is to take place experientially (MEXT, 2017a)—that is, the child learns about language through interaction itself rather than through explicit instruction.

From 2018, Foreign Language Activities, having moved down to grades three and four, consist of largely self-contained lessons centered on speaking and listening, while English classes for grades five and six feature closely-connected lessons building slowly and systematically on each other (Pederson, 2018). In grades five and six, reading and writing are introduced although this does not extend beyond basic letter-sound correspondences in reading and copying words and expressions in writing. However, learning through experience, through communication, and fostering a positive and active attitude toward communication and learning remains at the core of both programs.

Teaching through experience and communication requires that gestures and context be used to the full and that such interchange takes place in an environment and with people the pupil knows well. Students are not so much exchanging meaning as they are interacting, that is jointly constructing meaning as they go, based on contextual clues of shared experience, physical environment and nonverbal signals (Walsh 2011). Teachers must be engaged in the present interaction and rooted in their deep local knowledge, something that matches the tightly-knit situation of Japanese elementary schools, where the teacher is in charge of all subjects (with some exceptions) and is with the children for the full day and for the full school year.

From an SLA perspective, the aims and methods in the elementary school foreign language program are compatible with an acquisition approach based on comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrel, 1995). Among factors aiding comprehension and, therefore, acquisition, they suggest: speaking more slowly and clearly, using high frequency words and simplified grammar in shorter sentences, and using material of personal interest. Writing from a broader classroom discourse viewpoint, Walsh (2011) explains that such behaviors are widespread in real classrooms. This is confirmed in the Japanese elementary school context

by Pederson (2011) which found that a homeroom teacher (HRT) used supplemental means of communication, primarily gestures, close to half the time with both L1 (44%) and L2 (47%).

Context and gestures are used in various ways as part of the natural communication of children. Goldin-Meadow (2004) gives the example of a child saying “chair” and pointing to a chair, a situation in which information overlaps. She then contrasts this with a child pointing at a chair and saying “daddy,” which may be construed as meaning daddy’s chair, a message with no overlap, in which neither words nor gesture conveys the message but which together specifies content. Note in the second example that an active listener with shared local knowledge is required to co-construct meaning.

In addition to comprehensible input, the high-interaction environment aimed at in the course of study combined with the limited knowledge of beginning students leads to many opportunities for *negotiation for meaning*, where interlocutors endeavor to overcome a communication breakdown (Ellis, 2003) and where the repair is meaning-focused, not grammar-focused (cf. *negotiation of meaning*). Communication breakdowns likewise pave the way for many opportunities for developing strategic competence as per Canale and Swain (1980) presumably a key component of the sought-after foundation for communication.

Target Language Use

Studies dealing directly with the amount of target language (TL) use in the elementary classroom are hard to come by. Nilsson (2013) used an observation protocol to investigate TL use. Four teachers were observed teaching grades two and three on two or three occasions each. She found that the teachers averaged 75% of target language use: with two teachers at 65%, one at 70% and one at 98%. The teacher who used the most TL was particularly enthusiastic about English classes saying that it is the high point of the week for both herself and her students. The large gap in TL use compared with the other three teachers was said to reflect an important difference in attitude and beliefs.

In a single-lesson study of a Japanese elementary classroom, Pederson (2011) recorded the HRT using English 53% of the time in a team-teaching situation. In addition he found the use of multiple means to communicate to be extensive, approaching half of all messages, and with little difference between L1 and L2.

Kang (2008) conducted a case study in Korea on the nature of L1/L2 language use in elementary school under an official Teaching English through English (TETE) policy. He

reported that the teacher ended up using L1 in situations where her English was not understood, particularly when complex instructions or discipline were involved. The study shows the teacher making choices balancing: official policy, her own teaching beliefs and the perceived needs of the students in front of her. Unfortunately, there is no precise account of how much TL versus L1 was actually used and there is no mention of how much gestures or other supplementary means of communication were utilized.

In another Korean study, but focusing on secondary students, Kim & Petraki (2009) observed that classes for beginning students that allowed the assistance of their native Korean fared better in terms of overall use of English (10-40 percent more), and in the amount of detail in responses, than did classes trying to use English only. In questionnaires, both beginning students and their teachers found L1 particularly useful in management and discipline, clarifying meanings and for explaining grammar rules. Contrast this with Nation (2003) who insisted that L2 use should be maximized and that one of the best ways to do this was to use it for classroom management.

Mills (2014) investigated the purposes for L1 use for one lesson in each of three Japanese elementary schools. Each lesson was team-taught. The specific amount of L1/L2 use was not central to the study but the researcher did conclude that there was a great deal of variation in how much L1 was used by each of the team teachers. She attributed the differences to variations in teacher beliefs and to differences in school policy. These policies included, for example, one school which delegated the planning and leadership of the classes to the ALT. In a study of six Japanese elementary schools, Aline and Hosoda (2006) identified four main roles played by HRTs: bystander, translator, co-learner and co-teacher. Presumably, the differing roles would correspond to differing amounts of L1 versus L2 usage but this study also provided no quantitative data in this regard.

Methodology

This section starts by specifying research questions, continues with a consideration of the background of participating teachers and schools, and concludes with details of data collection and management.

Research Questions

The present study concerns itself with the overall amount of non-target English (NTE), defined as English used by a teacher outside of that specifically targeted for instruction in the lesson:

1. How much NTE do classroom teachers use in class? When teaching solo? When team teaching with an ALT?

The next question relates to how much teachers use supplementary means to aid linguistic communication. The term complementary channels of communication (hereafter CCC) includes those instances where English and Japanese (linguistic media) are used together in the same message as well as those messages in which gestures, pictures etc. are used together with linguistic media. Thus:

2. To what extent do teachers use complementary channels of communication to get messages across when using NTE?

And finally, this study attempts to make clear to what extent CCC is a regular part of the teachers' pre-existing teaching behavior or whether this is a special strategy necessitated by teaching in a second language. Thus:

3. How stable is such complementary channel use when comparing NTE to L1?

The Teachers and their Schools

Lessons from three different public-school settings were analyzed, including a large urban school, a university-affiliated school and a mid-sized school in an isolated rural area in Western Japan. Lessons from six team teaching situations and four solo teaching situations were video recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. A total of 14 lessons were analyzed in all.

One team-taught lesson from each of four male teachers was recorded at a university-affiliated elementary school, and two lessons were recorded and transcribed for one female, a regular elementary school teacher with an English teaching license. The female teacher takes the lead in running the English program at the school and is skilled enough in English to speak fluently about her lesson plans and her philosophy of teaching. These lessons were taught with an experienced, mid-career, male ALT who is competent in Japanese. He rotates among several schools and is, therefore, not very familiar with individual students. Teachers,

parents, and students can be characterized as more achievement-oriented than at other public schools.

Four team-taught lessons led by a female teacher were recorded at a rural public school involved in a special program to explore and advance English education at elementary school. While she has an English teaching license, she was trained and qualified as an elementary school teacher and has no experience teaching at junior high school. She is in charge of developing the syllabus and teaching English classes in the upper grades. The regular classroom teacher is present and may participate to one extent or another. In the lessons being considered, however, the involvement of the classroom teacher is minimal and is not included in the analysis. Lessons were team-taught with an experienced female ALT who is competent in Japanese. She lives in this small community and is very familiar with all the teachers and students in the school. Data from teachers with multiple lessons were averaged to make it suitable for teacher-to-teacher comparisons. Finally, one lesson was transcribed for each of four regular elementary teachers teaching alone in a large urban public school. Three teachers were male, one female.

Data Collection and Management

English Activities classes in grades five and six were video recorded. A research assistant transcribed communications involving the teacher(s), including both English, Japanese and gestures or whatever else was judged to be part of a message. The assistant was a native speaker of Japanese with advanced ability in English having completed a full undergraduate degree at an American university. She was trained by the researcher to apply transcription conventions and to assign data codes. This was followed by supervised practice transcribing and coding messages. As the assistant became proficient, training took place ad hoc as responses to questions and through review of transcripts and coding on the completion of each lesson. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Student-to-student communication was not transcribed unless it was the focus of class attention.

A discourse analysis approach using pre-determined categories assigned codes for source and target, move, sub move, and medium. Although discourse analysis has been criticized for weaknesses related to classification such as reduction, simplification and multi-functionality (Walsh, 2011), the main coding concern of this study, medium, was free from such confusions. It was adapted to the aims of this research and coded in one or more of the categories below:

- LET Language English Target
 LENT Language English Non-Target (NTE in this paper)
 LJ Language Japanese
 PARA Such as gestures, deixis

LET are those expressions specifically targeted in materials for the lesson presently being studied or specifically reviewed for the purpose of use in the present lesson. These messages were not the subject of this research and excluded from the analysis. Repetition and pattern practice were, for example, not represented. All other English messages are NTE. A solicit to “Repeat after me” would be included as NTE while the actual repetition sequence would be excluded as LET. PARA is a catchall for both paralinguistic elements (e.g., volume, tone of voice) and all manner of gestures and non-linguistic elements.

Results

Table 1 shows how much NTE classroom teachers used in team-taught lessons. ATT-DTT are the four non-specialist teachers at the university-affiliated school and ETT is the teacher with an English license at the same school. FTT is the teacher at the rural school with an English teaching license.

Messages in the PARA category, messages such as gestures with no accompanying language, account for 6% or less of all messages. NTE messages range from 27 to 175 with an average of 104 messages per teacher per class. The percentage equivalents range from 13% to 53%, averaging 36% of all teacher communications.

Table 1

Non-target English Use in Team Teaching

Teacher	PARA%	LJ%	NTE%	NTE (N)	T+ALT (N)
ATT	1	75	24	89	244
BTT	2	66	33	89	308
CTT	6	46	47	169	412
DTT	3	83	13	27	215
ETT*	5	50	45	76	150
FTT**	6	42	53	175	522
Average			36	104	309

*Data is averaged over two recorded lessons.

**Data is averaged over four recorded lessons.

Table 2 shows data for solo teachers. Average NTE use stands at 49% with the average number of messages at 193, considerably higher than the 104 messages in team teaching, yet considerably less than the combined average of 309 for a teacher plus an ALT.

Table 2

Non-target English Use When Teaching Alone

	PARA %	LJ%	NTE%	NTE (n)
HA	9	55	37	183
IA	27	39	35	138
JA	5	27	68	186
KA	7	43	50	266
Average			49	193

Table 3 shows how often team teachers aid comprehension of messages by using CCC for NTE and LJ. The figure for language used alone plus that for CCC combines to 100% for each language.

Table 3

Percentage of Complementary Channels of Communication Use by Language in Team-taught Lessons

Teacher	English (NTE)		Japanese (LJ)	
	<u>Only</u>	<u>With CCC</u>	<u>Only</u>	<u>With CCC</u>
ATT	44	56	49	51
BTT	44	56	51	49
CTT	39	61	48	52
DTT	61	39	57	43
ETT	47	53	37	63

FTT	47	53	35	65
Average	47	53	46	54

CCC with NTE covers a range of 22% from a low of 39% for teacher DTT to a high of 61% for teacher CTT. CCC with LJ has a similar span of 25% from 43% for teacher DTT to 65% for teacher FTT. The overall similarities between L1 and L2 are summarized in the averages for each, virtually identical at 53% for English and 54% for Japanese.

In the case of classroom teachers teaching alone (Table 4), there is similarly little difference between CCC with English and Japanese. There is a range of 20% for English and 18% for Japanese. The average for English is higher by 5% at 59% compared to 54% for Japanese and the standard deviations are nearly identical at 9.6% for English to 9.4% for Japanese.

Table 4

Percentage of Complementary Channels of Communication by Language for Teachers Teaching Alone

Teacher	English (NTE)		Japanese (LJ)	
	<u>Only</u>	<u>With CCC</u>	<u>Only</u>	<u>With CCC</u>
GA	46	54	38	62
HA	52	48	53	47
IA	35	65	56	44
JA	32	68	38	62
Average	41	59	46	54

Perhaps most notable is that CCC with Japanese is, nonetheless, high in all cases ranging from a low of 44% to a high of 62%.

Discussion

The course of study, with its emphasis on speaking and listening, and its requirement that students learn primarily through experience with the ultimate goal of building a foundation for communication (MEXT, 2017a) means that teachers need to engage in much NTE interaction. However, meeting such policy goals presents obvious challenges for the Japanese primary teacher. It may be, for example, that low English proficiency and fear of

making mistakes might lead teachers to curtailing their use of English. Likewise, in team teaching, for reasons of stress and embarrassment, teachers may tend to move off center stage, taking on an English-restricted role, or assign the ALT the (officially-disapproved) role of leader with their own job being to help the students--as one teacher stated in Mills (2014). Accordingly, the study investigated how much NTE was used when primary teachers taught alone and when they team taught with an ALT.

With an average of 193 NTE messages in a 45-minute class in solo teaching it is clear teachers are making great efforts to communicate using English. In the team-teaching context, teachers remained in charge and were active in NTE use with an average of 104 messages per class. While teachers managed to use English about half the time (49%) in solo lessons, they still maintained a high level of NTE use in team-taught lessons at over a third (36%) of all messages. While the level of NTE use does not come close to the average 75% TL use of Nilsson's (2013) Swedish elementary school study, one must also consider the greater immediate relevance and the extent of exposure to English in the European context. In addition, the Japanese teacher is working to meet the broad goals in force for every elementary school class in Japan, which may include, for example, facilitating the child's thinking process, a task better undertaken in the first language.

Although the number of NTE messages from the Japanese teacher goes down from 193 teaching alone to 104 in team teaching, the combined team messages increase to 309, a 62% increase over teaching alone. Teachers may be designing lessons to maximize use of the ALT resource, yet they do not retreat from use of English themselves.

The schools in this study were probably keener to implement policy faithfully than were some others. The rural school was specifically designated to research English education, the university-affiliated school is devoted to in-house research and is conscious of its role as a model for other schools, and the large urban school was led by a principal heading up a school board committee on elementary school English education. While there have been variations in how the policy for elementary school English Activities classes have been implemented (Mills, 2014) in the past, and while I can attest that such variations persist, the looming status of English as a subject for grades five and six is sure to increase adherence to guidelines, making the results of the present study more relevant to the future, perhaps, than to the present.

Even if NTE is used extensively in class, it does not become interaction and experience of communication unless comprehension is achieved. The present study does not

investigate the comprehension question directly, instead it gauges the extent to which teachers offer support for student comprehension through the use of complementary channels of communication (CCC). An additional question follows up on the findings of Pederson's (2011) single-teacher study which found the Japanese primary teacher using CCC (called mixed media in that study) in nearly equal amounts for both L1 (44%) and L2 (47%).

The present study shows Japanese solo teachers using CCC to communicate 59% of the time when using English. This differs little from Japanese team teachers who use CCC 53% of the time. Clearly teachers are taking care to make their messages understood whether teaching alone or in a team.

More remarkable is the stability of CCC support across languages. Solo teachers used CCC with English 59% of the time with NTE and with Japanese 54% of the time while team teachers used it in nearly the same amount, at 53% for NTE and 54% for Japanese. This leads one to suppose that the use of CCC messaging is a general communication strategy of primary teachers across languages, confirming the findings of Pederson (2011). This suggests the transfer of existing communication strategies rather than development of a new approach specifically for foreign language instruction.

This has implications for teacher training in that in-service teachers are already using CCC skills extensively. In this case, raising consciousness regarding existing behaviors and some creative application exercises aimed at expanding their repertoire should be sufficient. Pre-service teachers, in contrast, would be better served by an explicit approach of instruction and practice, followed by implementation in a practicum setting.

Previous studies have attributed variations in L1/L2 use to differences in policy (Mills 2014) and differences in teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Kang, 2008; Nilsson, 2013; Hobbes, Matsuo & Payne, 2010). While the present study did not investigate teachers attitudes and beliefs, the consistency of results across types of school, a university-affiliated school, a school in an isolated rural community and a large urban school; and in solo teaching versus team-teaching situations may point back to commonalities in attitudes and beliefs based in the shared experience of teaching Japanese children in public schools. In addition, transferring teachers every three years or so means each teacher will experience a variety of settings which overlaps with overlaps with the experience of other teachers. Commonalities in classroom practice are also likely based in an increasing consistency in policy as it moves from being more local and flexible to more prescriptive national standards and as English moves to subject status.

Perhaps the most striking implication of the study, and one the author did not set out to explore, is that Japanese primary teachers may have sufficient proficiency to conduct Foreign Language Activities classes and the new English as a subject classes exactly as intended in the course of study. According to the present study, they are communicating in English actively and at volume; they are using CCC to achieve comprehension--a fine model to the students of using communication strategies when words alone will not suffice or when communication breaks down. Moreover, they continue communicating actively in the presence of a foreigner (ALT), demonstrating a lack of reticence and shyness—a fine example to the students of overcoming the shame barrier, a cultural impediment to Japanese as users of a foreign language. This is not to say that greater English proficiency should not be pursued, only that Japanese primary teachers are up to the task they have been set, that of assisting students in developing a foundation for communication, one created by learning through experience, and requiring interaction based in rapport, immediacy and grounding in context.

The study has implications beyond the Japanese situation, particularly for other Asian nations, as they move away from transmission models of teaching and embrace approaches based on social interaction (constructivism) and focusing on the development of the whole child. Teaching proficiency, in these terms, goes well beyond second language proficiency; and even language proficiency must be viewed more broadly as proficiency in communication, in *all* its aspects.

This study has provided a simple definition of non-target English (NTE), one which should make comparisons across studies easier. It admits all messages involving English (excluding those of a mechanical nature and those that do not go beyond that specifically targeted for instruction) and admitting all the normal scaffolding behaviors used by skilled teachers.

Acknowledgement

This study was made possible with the support of a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Grant-in-aid for Scientific Research. Grant number (C) 16K02967

References

- Aline, D. & Hosoda, Y. (2006). Team teaching participation patterns of homeroom teachers in English activities classes in Japanese public elementary schools. *JALT Journal*, 28(1), 5-21.
- Butler, Y. (2004). What level of English proficiency do elementary school teachers need to attain to teach EFL? Case studies from Korea, Taiwan and Japan. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(2), 245-278.
- Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fennelly, M. & Luxton, R. (2011). Are they ready? On the verge of compulsory English, elementary school teachers lack confidence. *The Language Teacher*, 35(2), 19-24.
- Hobbs, V., Matsuo, A., & Payne, M. (2010). Codeswitching in Japanese language classrooms: An exploratory investigation of native vs. non-native speaker teacher practice. *Linguistics and Education*, 21, 44-59.
- Kang, D. (2008). The classroom language use of a Korean elementary school EFL teacher: Another look at TETE. *System* 36(2), 214-226.
- Kim, Y., & Petraki, E. (2009). Students's and teacher's use of and attitudes to L1 in the EFL classroom. *Asian EFL Journal*, 2(4), 58-77.
- Krashen, S., & Terrel, T. (1995). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Hempstead, Hertfordshire, UK: Prentice Hall.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2017a). *Shogako gakushushido yo ryo (Heisei 29 nen hokushi) kaisetsu: Gaikokugo katsudo, Gaikokugo hen [Elementary school study curriculum guidelines (Heisei year 29 bulletin) commentary: Foreign language activities, Foreign language section]*. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/micro_detail/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2018/05/07/1387017_11_1.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2017b). *Shogakko gaikokugo katsudo, Gakokugo kenshu gaidobuku [Elementary school foreign language activities, Foreign language training guidebook]*. Retrieved from

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/07/07/1387503_1.pdf

- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2016a). *Gakushu hyoka ni kan suru shiryo heisei (28 nen 1 gatsu 18 nichi) sousoku, hyokabetsu bukai, shiryo 6-2* [Documents regarding the assessment of learning (Year of Heisei 28, January 18) General rules: Assessment subcommittee, document 6-2]. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/061/siryo/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/02/01/1366444_6_2.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, (2016b). *Shougako ni okeru gakokugo kyoki no jisen ni muketa torikumi (Karikyuramu kyoza, shido taisei no kyoka)*. [Efforts to enhance foreign language education at elementary school (Curriculum, materials, strengthening the teaching system)] Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/074/siryo/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/03/03/1367634_5.pdf
- Mills, A. (2014). Purposes and implications of L1 use in Japanese elementary school English classes. Departmental Bulletin, University of Tokyo Graduate School: Department of Language and Information Sciences, 12,127-143. Retrieved from <http://repository-old.dl.itc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2261/55892/1/lis1208.pdf>
- Nation (2003). The role of the first language in foreign language learning. *Asian EFL Journal*, 5(2) 1-8.
- Nilsson, M. (2013). *Target language in the primary classroom: Teachers beliefs and practices*. Unpublished Master's thesis (Stockholm University). Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:651103/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Numrich, C. (1996). On becoming a language teacher: Insights from diary studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 131-153.
- Pederson, S. (2018). What to expect from the new English curriculum in elementary school. *Eigo kyoiku: Kumamoto Chugakko Eigo Kyoiku Kenkyukai [English Education: Kumamoto Junior High School English Education Association]*, 48, 13-18.
- Pederson, S. (2011). Reaching young learners of English: Richly contexted communication in a Japanese elementary school classroom. *Memoirs of the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University*, 60, 47-54.
- Walsh, S. (2011). *Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action*. London: Routledge.

Enhancing Medical and Health Science Students' Writing Development through A Modified Process-Genre Approach

Chalida Janenoppakarn & Saneh Thongrin

Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand & Thammasat University, Thailand

Bio-profiles:

Chalida Janenoppakarn is a lecturer at Language and Academic Services Centre, International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. She holds her PhD in English Language Studies. She has presented her research at various international conferences. Her research interests include writing strategies and motivation to write. **Email:** chalidajane@yahoo.com (**corresponding author**), Address: Srinakharinwirot University
114 Sukhumvit 23, Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Saneh Thongrin, a faculty member of the Department of English and Linguistics, Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand, holds her PhD in Rhetoric and Linguistics. She has published research articles on Thai Asian collectivist concepts and pedagogical implications, ESL/EFL writing instructions, language and culture, and writing for scholarly publication. **Email:** sthongrin@gmail.com, Address: Thammasat University 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Abstract

Approaches to writing instruction have been widely explored regardless of learning environments. However, not all approaches to writing pedagogy have proven effective, particularly with students in disciplines that are more involved in hard data or objectivity, such as it is with medical sciences. This study aims to investigate EFL medical and health science students' writing development through the modified process-genre approach. This approach was a combination of process and genre approaches adapted from Hyland's (2003) model. A quasi-experimental study was conducted on 37 EFL medical and health science students with mixed abilities in a Thai University at the outskirts of Bangkok. They were administered with pre-test and pre-questionnaire before they were taught through the modified process-genre approach. After the instruction, post-test, post-questionnaire and interviews were conducted to examine the students' development in both writing and attitudes towards learning to write essays. The results of this study showed the effectiveness of the modified process-genre approach on the medical and health science students; their essay scores improved, and they reported more positive attitudes towards writing. Student's attitude changes include overall interest and confidence, the awareness of students' roles and

teacher's roles, and the students' attitude towards self-development and life-long learning. The findings suggest that the modified process-genre approach can successfully be implemented in Thai EFL writing instruction and that the process-genre approach is an effective integration of writing as a process and genres that view readers as the main target.

Keywords: modified process-genre approach; students' writing; students' attitudes

Introduction

Writing is often perceived as one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners (Bennui, 2008; Glass, 2008; Tangpermpoon, 2008; Thongrin, 2000, 2012). This is because L2 learners need to have a certain amount of linguistic knowledge to convey their ideas to their readers. Some researchers such as Defazio, Josette, Tennant and Hook (2010) have noted that the majority of students do not have writing skills that are essential to communicate effectively in a written language, which can help them to become successful upon their graduation. They have also pointed out that there is a crucial need for students at all levels to be good written communicators and to understand the importance of good writing skills (Defazio, Josette, Tennant & Hook, 2010). Students who wish to study in international universities will be assessed mainly by their writing skills, and that measurement is increasingly being used in the health sciences field. In fact, after graduation, the graduates also need to have English skills, particularly in writing, to catch up with the globalized world (Hamzaoui-Elachachi, 2006). Student weaknesses in writing, which could have been addressed by effective practices in higher education, may be detrimental to their careers where global workplace standards approach native-level competency.

As far as we, as teachers of English, are concerned, Thai students have been found to exhibit a number of problems in relation to various aspects of writings (e.g., Kulavanich and Surasiangsang, 2002; Thongrin, 2012; Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang, 2007). In the work of Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang (2007), there is evidence that the students' problems in writing could be caused by teachers. Teachers have exacerbated inherent weaknesses in student writing by failing to address important aspects such as coherence, critical thinking and so on. Although most Thai students start learning English at the elementary level and study English throughout their school years, advanced students at a high proficiency level of English still have problems with academic writing at the level of text organization and cohesion. As these researchers stated, college students who are assigned to write essays

receive comments oriented to grammar, organization and content, but not on text cohesion and coherence (Todd, Khongput & Darasawang, 2007).

Apart from the students' problems, the teachers or instructors themselves also face problems in teaching writing skills and methods of classroom engagement. Many scholars such as Kulavanich and Surasiangsang (2002) have noted that the instructors from the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels are not keen on teaching writing, when compared to reading, listening and speaking skills. Similar to the findings from the first three levels of schooling, those at the university level are stated to be keen on teaching reading, grammar and speaking, but not writing. Some instructors find it difficult to make their students interested in their writing lessons (Kulavanich & Surasiangsang, 2002).

As stated in the aforementioned research, the problems in teaching and learning writing in Thailand still exist. Thongrin's (2012) in-depth study emphasizes that these problems can be compared to those in the contexts of Korea and the United States of America. In Korea, the instructors focus more on grammar than on arousing readers' interest in three parts of writing, consisting of introduction, body and conclusion. This leads to students' inability to convey their ideas and feeling through their writing. By contrast, in American colleges, the instructors focus on writing with audience awareness, thus leading the writers to use such strategies in arousing readers' interest from the introduction until the essay's conclusion (Thongrin, 2012).

Thai students have been found to face a number of writing problems, such as grammar, vocabulary/word choice, organization, cohesion, coherence, punctuation, structure and inability to portray meanings to readers (Kulavanich and Surasiangsang, 2002; Thongrin, 2012, 2018a; Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang, 2007). Even though Thai students have learned the English language starting from the elementary level, they still have problems in the aforementioned writing areas. Also, due to the use of a product-based approach to the teaching of writing in the past, most Thai students are deemed to lack creativity in writing. The teachers or instructors in Thailand should develop their writing instruction, focusing more on boosting students' creativity and developing their students' logical and critical thinking so that the students can develop their writing in the future.

Aside from the problems mentioned earlier, as Thailand has become a member of the ASEAN Economy Community (AEC) Agreement, to make EFL learners in Thailand become quality members in terms of language abilities, there is an urgent need for Thai teachers to improve their students' proficiency in English, particularly in writing, which is the most

difficult skill of EFL learners when compared to other academic skills (Kulawanich & Surasiangsung, 2002; Thongrin, 2016), in which certain approaches to writing instruction, including product approach, process approach, and genre approach, have been investigated. However, the effectiveness of these approaches has been limited to the writing instruction provided to general groups of ESL/EFL learners at high school or college levels who, probably, studied English or writing for general purposes required in curriculum. The approach to writing instruction designed to equip certain groups of non-ESL/EFL students who need to use English or writing skills for their particular purposes, like those with medical functions, has rarely been explored. The instruction offered to these students is necessary for the advancements of not only individual countries but also those aligned in the AEC regions. Unfortunately, students of science disciplines generally have differing levels of English proficiencies due to the specific nature of each discipline within science, such as medical science-support areas, which aims at general skills of operational tasks, rather than conceptualized knowledge and skills. The writing instruction that aims to coach the undergraduates in science with different English proficiencies and subject backgrounds, like students in medical science and health science, should provide another facet of the writing instruction that can be applied to a hard discipline like medical and health sciences.

In this study, we consequently investigated writing instruction using Hyland's (2003) process-genre model. However, effective instruction should be compatible with students' historical backgrounds and their study contexts (Rosen & Abt-Perkins, 2000). We thus modified Hyland's (2003) model, adding prior knowledge activation as a starting stage, integrating rhetorical situations to enhance students' knowledge in the text-modeling stage, and putting together some aspects of collaborative learning with peers and the teachers during the final two text-construction stages (as shown in Figure 1 in the next two sections).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of the modified process-genre approach implemented with the medical science and health science undergraduates, focusing on their writing development and attitudes towards this approach, as shown in the two research questions here:

RQ 1: Did the participants significantly improve their writing abilities in terms of their written products after being taught through the process-genre approach?

RQ 2: What were the participants' attitudes towards learning to write essays through this approach?

Literature Review

As this study embodies its theoretical perspectives in relation to both writing that encourages learners to develop their writing skills through writing processes and writing that allows learners to investigate systematic thoughts organized in their written products, some important aspects associated with writing approaches suitable for EFL students are discussed here. The review starts with the process approach, moves on to the genre-based one, and concludes with the process-genre integration.

The Product, the Process and the Genre Approaches to Writing Instruction

Approaches to writing instruction play a decisive role in delivering successful instruction, in which explicit instruction for academic language skills are essential for learners' writing development (Eskey, 1983; Thongrin, 2018b), including the students in college (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998). As a dominant approach to writing instruction, the product approach emphasizes the end-goal of a final written piece. Teachers aim to assign students a piece of writing, collect it, and return it with error corrections for students to do revision (Pincas, 1982; Brown, 1994). However, this approach has received much criticism because the process used by students is ignored (Yan, 2005). More alarming, this approach focuses only on an imitation of a perfect product which requires a constant error correction, thus leading to students' lack of motivation and self-esteem in writing (Thongrin, 2009; Yan, 2005).

To supplement some missing parts given by the product approach, researchers and writing teachers turned to the process approach, which comprises four stages that are practiced from (a) prewriting, involving such activities as planning and gathering information, (b) drafting or composing, (c) revising, and (d) editing (Cambell, 1998; Caudery, 1995, 1997). Reflected by such stages, this approach is viewed as a writer-centered method that helps develop the writers' effective ways of writing as exploring (Walsh, 2004). The process approach, in many instances, promotes students' motivation in writing because they become involved in new and stimulating learning experiences (Caudery, 1995). For example, peer feedback is an activity of this approach which lets students show each other their writing tasks and receive comments on them (Caudery, 1995). As such, this approach offered a vital impact on writing in terms of transforming product models and raising students' awareness of the complexities of writing (Rahman, 2011).

However, the process approach has some limitations in terms of social perspectives (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003). That said, the main criticism is that it does not adequately address the issue of the audience or reader, especially when the form of the expected text is content-specific and conventional (Badger & White, 2000). Also, the imagined reality of the writer does not reflect the real context existing in the real setting, thus leading to an ignorance of the contextual meaning of a written text. Additionally, the teaching of the correct usage of forms and grammar items is neither explicit nor context-related, which may then lead to the increase of grammar errors and the use of irrelevant forms in the final written product (Badger & White, 2000).

Therefore, the genre approach, an expansion of product approach (Badger & White, 2000), came into play in writing instruction. According to Cope & Kalantzis (1993) and Hammond et al. (1992), this approach comprises three stages: (a) modeling the target genre for students; (b) jointly constructing a text by the teacher and students; and (c) independently constructing a text by each student (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Hammond et al., 1992). These three stages can help prepare the students to know the target genre, then get the students engaged in writing activities, and let them practice producing their own texts. In this approach, writing is often regarded as the students' reproduction of text based on the genre assigned by the teacher. This leads students or learners to be exposed to various examples of the same genre in order to develop their writing proficiency to write a particular genre (Badger & White, 2000).

When considering the core practices used in the three approaches to writing instruction, we can see that the genre based approach could be similar to the product approach in that it regards writing as predominantly linguistic. However, this approach is different from the product approach in that it places more weight on the social context in which it is produced (Badger & White, 2000). Along the same line, the genre approach is also different from the process approach in that its focus is placed on the reader's viewpoint, rather than the writer's (Badger & White, 2000). That is why the genre approach, when compared to its counterparts, is more effective for students or learners to improve their writing skills in English than the process approach (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Henry & Roseberry, 1998).

However, similar to other approaches, the genre based approach still has some limitations. For instance, teachers are in fact not helping the students by attempting explicit teaching of a particular genre (Caudery, 1998). This approach may get student to be too

dependent on the teacher's suitable materials as models, and may not require students to express their own ideas, thus making the students become counter-productive (Caudery, 1998). Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) also insist that the students may regard writing genres as mindless imitation in producing written texts. Consequently, in the work of Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), the students' creativity is stifled, thereby preventing them from responding more effectively in a changing social context or work place environment. These limitations could extend to the ESP teaching, in which the genre approach, when applied to ESP subjects, shows the tendency to be overly prescriptive, focusing on the rules of constructing a particular genre above others (Bhatia, 1993). Given such limitations, the process-genre approach is then designed to help alleviate the weaknesses of the other approaches.

The Process-Genre Approach

A combination of the process and genre based approaches, the process-genre provides a more dynamic combined approach that helps students to write with direction, and improves both content and creativity. The process-genre approach allows students to study the relationship between the form and purpose of a particular genre while using the recursive processes of prewriting, drafting, revision, and editing (Badger & White, 2000). This view is supported by Goa (2007) in that the process-genre approach acknowledges not only the students' creative thinking and the ways of how writers form their texts, but also specific discourse communities where a particular genre performs along with the knowledge of linguistic features. Taught by this integrative approach, EFL students or learners write more in the sense that they visualize target texts at the outset of their writing process and receive more room for their critical and creative ideas. These eclectic merits can be shown through several studies. Voon Foo (2007), Pujianto et al. (2014) and Reonal (2015), for example, used this approach in teaching expository essays to ESL/EFL students. Voon Foo (2007) conducted his study in a Malaysian secondary school so as to find out the effective ways of teaching expository writing in Malaysian context. It was found in his study that the EFL students who were taught through the process-genre approach could express their ideas in writing more effectively to the readers, and could develop more relevant ideas to support their writing tasks than those being taught through other approaches. Also, the process-genre approach could raise students' awareness of writing strategies and willingness to apply them to compose their texts (Voon Foo, 2007). This approach also worked well when implemented

with EFL students in Indonesia in the work of Pujianto et al. (2014) as the results showed that the process-genre approach could help develop the students' writing skills, reporting skills, metacognitive awareness of writing process, and ability to communicate within various genres. The research of Reonal (2015) conducted on the freshmen students in ESL classes in the Philippines also confirmed the effectiveness of the process-genre approach. This approach could improve the students' performances in writing expository texts and specifically their performance in the skills of organization, sentence fluency, and voice (Reonal, 2015).

The effective use of this approach is also confirmed when implemented with Thai undergraduates. The work of Saito (2010) applied this integrated process-genre approach by focusing on argumentative essays of Thai third-year English major students. The findings of this study revealed that the students made an improvement in their quality of writing from the first draft to the second draft. In addition, it was found that the students could produce well-organized and well-developed essays comprising four main components of argumentative writing including claim, data, opposition and refutation.

In addition, this approach has been found effective not only for students with general English backgrounds but also for those in specific disciplines. Babalola (2012) investigated the effects of the process-genre approach on the written English performance of computer science students in the Federal Polytechnic (or one of the tertiary institutions) in Nigeria. The results of his study showed that there was a significant effect of this approach on computer science students' written English performance in each of the four writing attributes including organization, content, expression and linguistic accuracy. The students' improvement of their writing skills could be attributed to the student-centered, flexible and practical nature of the process-genre approach (Babalola, 2012).

In our study context, we investigated the effectiveness of the process-genre approach, the modified model by Hyland (2003) applied in writing instruction offered to students in medical and health sciences. While learning to write with our modified process-genre approach, the students explored the relationship between form and purpose for a particular genre (e.g., narrative and cause-effect writing) normally used in their prospective work, while being taught to write through the recursive writing processes including prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. How they were exposed to writing based on the integrative approach is described in the following section.

Methodology

Participants

This study was set out to examine the effectiveness of the modified process-genre approach on EFL medical and health science students' writing development. This study used a quasi-experiment with the dual-group-pretest-posttest design implemented with the undergraduates of a Thai University at the outskirts of Bangkok. With this research focus, the participants would be recruited from those enrolled in a foundation English course entitled "English for International Communication II", aiming to improve two language skills including the integration of reading and writing skills, in which a bias-free sampling with the recruitment would be ideal. However, it would not be practical to conduct the recruitment with conventional, systematic sampling methods for research in social sciences (Thongrin, 2018b). Given some related factors, such as the nature of the course the students were taking or the number of students taking the course, the sampling-method constraint could take place in the experimental research conducted in an educational environment. However, we tried our best to achieve the sampling method that would allow the students taking the English for International Communication II to be included equally as our research participants. Given that all sections of the course, including two sections recruited for this study, were assigned to instructors through a system implemented in the host university, this practice could be considered our bias-free, systematic sampling method used in this study, in which 37 EFL students were recruited as the research participants and divided into 2 groups: 22 medical students (59.5%), regarded as higher proficiency students, and 15 health science students (40.5%), regarded as lower proficiency students. The duration of the study was 12 ninety-minute sessions in the second semester of the academic year 2016.

Research Approach and Data Collection Methods

This research was an experimental study which involved a triangulation mixed method design, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, where we resorted to four sources of data. First, we collected the data derived from pre- and post-tests to investigate whether the students taught through the process-genre approach could improve their writing abilities after the experiment. Second, we analyzed the data from the students' first and final drafts to triangulate the results from the pre-and post-tests. Third, we constructed the pre-and post-questionnaire contents related to students' attitudes towards learning to write essays to examine the students' opinions before and after the experiment.

Fourth, to triangulate the results derived from quantitative analysis, we also interviewed the students for their more detailed opinions about the use of this approach in relation to the effective use of the modified approach and related elements of writing instruction.

Research Procedures

Before being taught through the process-genre approach, the participants were asked to do the pre-test and pre-questionnaire that the researchers constructed for this study. Then, they were taught to write narrative and cause-effect essays through the modified process-genre approach based on 4 steps including prior knowledge activation, text modeling, joint construction, and independent construction as illustrated in Figure 1.

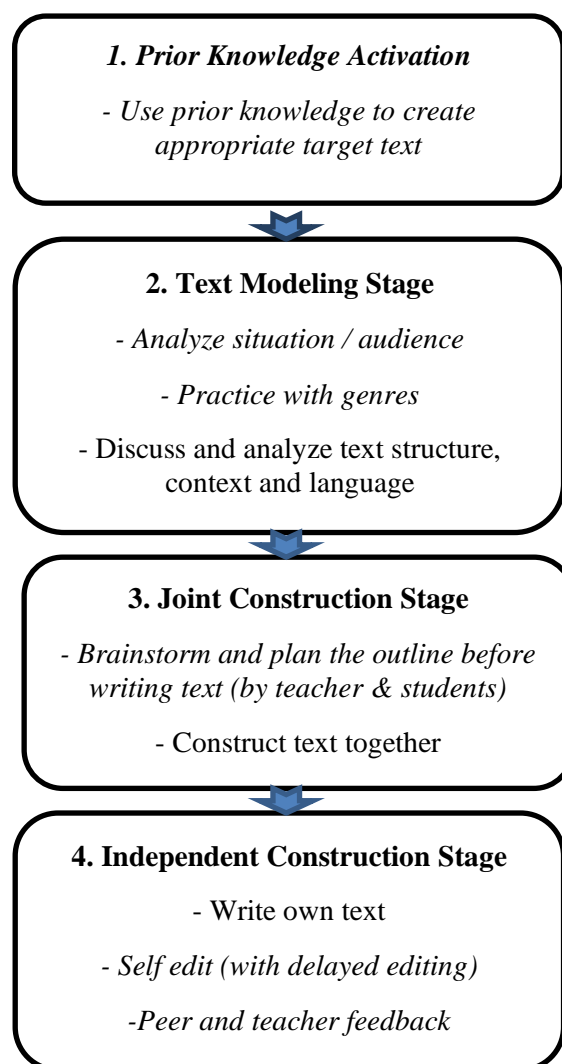


Figure 1 The Modified Model of Teaching and Learning Cycle

Source: Adapted from Hyland (2003, p. 21) (*Our adaptation is illustrated in italics.*)

The model in Figure 1 is adapted from Hyland's (2003) model, with an adaptation of the cycle of teaching and learning writing through the use of process and genre approaches. To prepare students to become familiar with the target genre, we added the stage of activating prior knowledge before the modeling stage. This way, students had opportunities to use their prior knowledge to create the target text appropriate for their cultural, situational or overall social context. They constructed these contexts using such activities as brainstorming, watching movies or videos, listening and talking to their friends, or reading materials, and so on. After activating prior knowledge, we integrated Yau's (1991) comments regarding the consideration of real situation and audience, as well as allowing students to practice writing within a particular genre during the modeling stage. Considering the real situation and audience before writing the essay will help students to raise their awareness of audience and situational contexts that are integral to clarity. In addition, offering language practice to a particular genre in this stage will facilitate the students' familiarity with language used in the genre before writing their own essays. Apart from adding Yau's (1991) comments in the modeling stage, we also followed the major steps of Hyland's (2003) model in teaching writing, with the clarification in more detail in both joint construction and independent construction stages. To elaborate, after having students become familiar with genres and the steps in writing process, in the joint construction stage, we put together the ideas from students and helped them adjust their plan for writing.

Additionally, in the independent construction stage, after students had finished their first draft, the teacher advised them to leave their own piece of writing for a while (e.g. one day), then self-edited and redrafted it. Following this, with the collaboration from the teacher and peers, students reviewed some comments and revised their own writing until they finished their final written product.

The instruction focused on two modes of essays, narrative and cause-effect for the ease of novice writers. We scaffolded by starting with narrative essays which could help develop their personal voice while writing about themselves. After becoming familiar with writing narrative essays, they could gain more knowledge and skills to write more difficult and systematic ones, like the cause-effect essays introduced in this study.

After the instruction, the post-test was administered to all the participants to measure their development in English writing abilities. The writing test was constructed by the researchers. It was used as the pre-test and post-test to measure students' writing abilities by score differential. The writing test was an essay writing test which required the students to

write a well-organized essay of about 300 words within 45 minutes. The questions in the test were: “What is an unforgettable event in your life? Have you learned anything from that event?” The students were then required to provide reasoning and support. As narrative writing is a common rhetorical mode for science professions (Moore, 2015), the pre-post tests used in this study would be oriented to a narrative topic, rather than a cause-effect counterpart, to accommodate the skills that would be essential for their actual practice. We graded the students’ essays using the standard rubrics as practiced by the language center of the host university. The rubrics consisted of 4 parts: overall task fulfillment, content, organization, and language (grammar and vocabulary).

Moreover, to see changes in the participants’ attitudes towards learning to write essays through this approach, they were asked to complete the post-questionnaire which contains three parts: the participants’ demographic data, fifteen questions with 5-point Likert scales related to students’ attitudes towards the use of process-genre approach, and three open-ended questions asking about the participants’ important ideas, benefits, and additional comments regarding essay writing through our modified approach. Qualitative interviews were also employed to triangulate the quantitative data from the tests and questionnaires. The interviews were conducted with 10 medical and 10 health science students who were randomly chosen. The interview questions consisted of six open-ended questions (see Appendix A). This was to investigate the participants’ opinions about how effective the approach was on their writing. Since interviews were interactive, the researchers could elicit additional data if initial answers were incomplete or not specific enough. In this research, the researchers used semi-structured interviews which were adapted from the examples in Creswell’s (2005) study.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the study were analyzed through a mixed-methods analysis. For quantitative data, the scores from the first and final drafts of the written topic, different from the pre- and post-tests, and those from the pre- and post-tests of the students were marked by two raters, using the multi-faceted Rasch measurement (Park, 2004). The two raters were the teachers of English who had at least 5-year experience in teaching writing. These two raters who were aware of the goals of this study could make students’ scores more reliable, and the researcher was excluded from this process to avoid any bias in marking essays. In terms of scoring rubrics, this study used the multi-faceted Rasch measurement

adapted from Park (2004) because of the combination of both holistic and analytic scoring. It was found that the Rasch measuring approach was powerful as it covered a variety of perspectives of assessment such as overall task fulfillment, topic/content, organization and language elements (Park, 2004). The inferential analysis, paired t-test, was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the scores from the first and final drafts, and between those from the pre-and post-tests (with a .05 level of significance). In addition to the scores of the students (from the first and final drafts, and those from the pre- and post-tests), the results of students' attitude levels towards learning to write essays before and after the experiment were investigated by using mean and standard deviation. Adapted from Best and Khan (2006), the criteria in interpreting the mean of students' attitudes toward levels of agreement about the benefits of learning to write essays contain five scales: 5.00-4.21, 4.20-3.41, 3.40-2.61, 2.60-1.81, and 1.80-1.00 indicating very high, high, moderate, low, and very low levels of agreement about the benefits of learning, respectively.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis helped strengthen the findings derived from the previous data sources. The data obtained from students' answers to the open-ended questions were qualitatively analyzed, using content analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1: Did the participants significantly improve their writing abilities in terms of their written products after being taught through the process-genre approach?

Students' writing development was assessed through two data sources: pretest-posttest results, and the scores from their written products assessed by two raters.

Pretest-Posttest Results

The data drawn from the students' pretest-posttest results revealed that the participants could improve their writing abilities throughout a course of data collection as described in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Students' Mean Scores from the Pretest and Posttest

Students' Faculty	Tests	Mean	S.D.	t-value (2 tailed)	p
-------------------	-------	------	------	-----------------------	---

Students' Faculty	Tests	Mean	S.D.	t-value (2 tailed)	p
Medicine	pretest	13.68	1.78	-10.460	.000*
	posttest	16.68	1.43		
Health Science	pretest	7.27	2.25	-9.556	.000*
	posttest	13.47	2.20		
Total	pretest	11.08	3.74	-10.629	.000*
	posttest	15.38	2.37		

*Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), N (Med) = 22, N (HS) = 15, N (Combined Group) = 37

Indicated in Table 1, the mean score of the posttest of the medical students (16.68) was significantly higher than that of the pretest (13.68). In the same fashion, the health science students gained the higher mean score of the posttest (13.47) than that of the pretest (7.27). Also, the results of the paired t -test run on the pre- and post-tests indicated a t -value of -10.460 for the medical students and that of -9.556 for the health science students, and showed a p -value of $< .001$. This means that each group of students could improve their proficiency in English writing.

We also examined the improvement of all the students, both the medical and health science students as a whole group, so we could see improvements of the two groups. The comparison of all students' mean score of the posttest (15.38) to that of the pretest (11.08) showed that all students developed their writing abilities after being taught through the process-genre approach. Similarly, there was statistically significant difference between the total students' mean score of pretest and that of the post-test ($t = -10.629$, $p = .000$). This indicates that all students whose abilities were collectively analyzed (both medical and health science students) could improve their writing abilities after the instruction.

The participants' writing improvement was very important to indicate the merit of the process-genre model we modified. Shown below are some of the samples, the essay introduction, the participants wrote in their pretest-posttest papers.

Med student 3

- Pretest

In one person's life, they might be something or *some evident* that makes a person scared of something. For instance, it was from big adventurous memory that had

happened. According to this, I also have the unforgettable event that makes me scared of dogs until now.

- Posttest

In my life, there are tears and joys. There are times that I feel so down and there are times that I get so happy. Apart from that, there are *many unforgettable events* in my life but there was one that changed my opinion and made me be a better person since then.

Med student 5

- Pretest

Talking about unforgettable events in my life, there are plenty. Some are good and some are bad. So let's talk about *the one* that really *change* my life: my first heart-break.

- Posttest

Someone says that "*Everything happens* for a reason." And I totally agree with that. When it happens, it always teaches us something. It can be grateful and also harmful. The event that affected my life and *my thought was when I took an exam* for admission in my high school. Here are the reasons why.

Health science student 5

- Pretest

In my life, I like cycling very much. Cycling from childhood to now, it's 20 years old. I think I'm good at cycling. *When I study in the university, I often cycled* because the building near my apartment. *One day I having fun.* I and my friends cycled to the parking lot. It's very steep and high. We cycled very fast so my bike hit the big rocks.

- Posttest

An unforgettable experience is an event that has an impact on my life. It can also be something that can change my life. My unforgettable event is that *I got bicycle accident when I studied at this university.*

Health science student 7

- Pretest

When I was young. The topic which is mentioned after school summer vacation is all about their long holiday trip. Somebody went to country. Somebody went to abroad. I was exciting everytime I heard about travelling abroad from my friends. All of their story inspire me that *before I died. I'll travel around the world and told my story to my child.*

- Posttest

I've passed many events in my life. *But the most memorable event which became my unforgettable event in my 20-year-lifetime was my first time solo abroad travelling.* And I'll tell you why this event affects my life, my thought and my perspective forever.

As we can see, how the participants wrote the essay introduction in the two test papers showed differences. The points in the pretest papers were not well developed and organized. The pretest papers showed a lack of focus or thesis statement in their writing. There were also a lot of grammatical mistakes such as fragments and incorrect tenses. However, after being taught through the process-genre approach, the posttest results showed that the students improved their writing in terms of a better introduction with thesis statements, as well as subject-verb agreement and tenses. More importantly, the topic shown in the posttest papers was more clearly developed than that in the pretest ones. Supported by the pretest-posttest scores, accompanied by the students' test samples, the participants could improve their essay writing skills through the process-genre model modified in the writing instruction.

In addition to the students' writing improvement, the analysis of the students' essays written during their learning process could be used in identifying the merit of the process-genre writing instruction.

Scores from Participants' Written Products

The previous sub-section showed how the students' writing could improve after being taught through the modified process-genre approach by assessing their pretest and posttest results. Apart from the pretest-posttest results, we also investigated scores from the students' written products collected from the first and final drafts of both narrative and cause-effect essays. The differences between the pretest-posttest papers, and the first and final drafts of students' written products were the purposes of each research instrument. The pretest-posttest papers aimed to assess the students' writing abilities within the time-limit and the students did not know the topic of the tests. The first and final drafts, however, aimed to see their development of learning process along the course of instruction, and they could use their time for writing their first drafts until their final drafts. The results of the students' written products showed that they could write their essays better as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Students' Mean Scores from the First and Final Drafts of Narrative and Cause-Effect Essays

Students' faculty	Students' work	Mean	S.D.	t-value (2 tailed)	p
<i>Narrative Essays</i>					

Students' faculty	Students' work	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i> -value (2 tailed)	<i>p</i>
Medicine	first draft	14.36	2.51	-14.042	0.000*
	final draft	15.55	2.40		
Health Science	first draft	13.00	2.34	-10.217	0.000*
	final draft	14.30	2.37		
Total	first draft	13.81	2.50	-17.214	0.000*
	final draft	15.04	2.44		
<i>Cause-effect</i>					
<i>Essays</i>					
Medicine	first draft	15.89	1.57	-10.011	0.000*
	final draft	17.05	1.34		
Health Science	first draft	14.83	1.42	-12.616	0.000*
	final draft	16.03	1.43		
Total	first draft	15.46	1.58	-15.069	0.000*
	final draft	16.64	1.45		

*Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), N (Med) = 22, N (HS) = 15, N (Combined Group) = 37

As indicated in Table 2, the mean scores of the final drafts of narrative essays of both medical and health science students (medical students = 15.55, health science students = 14.30) were higher than those of the first drafts (medical students = 14.36, health science students = 13.00). We found the same pattern in cause-effect essays where the mean scores of the final drafts of both groups (medical students = 17.05, health science students = 16.03) were higher than those of the first drafts (medical students = 15.89, health science students = 14.83).

The results of the paired t-test run on the first and final drafts of the two genres from the medical students (narrative essays with $t = -14.042$, and cause-effect essays with $t = -10.011$), and those from the health science students (narrative essays with $t = -10.217$, and cause-effect essays with $t = -12.616$) showed that scores given to the final drafts were significantly higher than those given to the first drafts ($p < .001$). Once again, we analyzed the students' writing abilities as the scores representing the whole group with mixed abilities. When compared the total students' mean scores of the first drafts for both genres (narrative = 13.81, cause-effect = 15.46) to those of the final drafts (narrative = 15.04, cause-effect = 16.64), we found that after being taught through the process-genre approach, all students developed their writing abilities with a similar increasing pattern.

Also, the results of the paired t-test run on the first and final drafts of total students (narrative essays with $t = -17.214$, and cause-effect essays with $t = -15.069$) showed that scores given to the final drafts were significantly higher than those given to the first drafts ($p < .001$). Together, these results indicated that all the students significantly improved their writing abilities after the instruction.

As has been discussed, the analysis of the scores obtained from the pretest-posttest papers and those derived from the participants' essays written during the course of data collection revealed that the participants had a noticeable development in their writing. There was strong evidence from the pretest-posttest results showing that all participants could develop their writing as was determined with an assessment measure that shows statistically significant differences after being taught through the process-genre approach. Another quantitative data from the students' written products from the first and final draft of students' work would confirm the effective use of this approach. The students' writing samples was another piece of evidence to triangulate the aforementioned two data sources because the results showed much improvement in students' writing abilities in terms of, for example, a better introduction with a thesis statement as well as subject-verb agreement and tenses. The results were consistent with previous researchers such as Voon Foo (2007) and Babalola (2012) that there was a significant impact of the use of this approach on students' writing performance because they could develop their essay substantially through the writing instruction with this approach. The participants in this study made an improvement in their quality of writing, similar to those in the work of Saito (2010). The effectiveness of this approach on students' writing in our study may be a result of employing the modified model

of Hyland (2003). This was because this modified model could promote the consideration of the real situation and audience which could help the students raise their awareness of thinking about setting the situation for their audience or reader to more clearly comprehend the content of the essays. Moreover, before starting the writing lessons, the teacher prepared the students by providing opportunities for them to learn more about the target text through various activities in the stage of prior knowledge activation. Furthermore, the students could become familiar with the language used in each genre because the students were given language practice in the modeling stage modified in Hyland's (2003) model. The students gathered their background knowledge in the text creation, analyzed the situation and audience of the written topic, brainstormed their ideas and planned for the selected ideas organized in the outlined essay, and finally revised their drafts. Among these activities, what was equally important was the practice of multiple drafting and self-editing. Along with teacher and peer feedback, they produced stronger texts effectively and independently.

In conclusion, the modified process-genre approach proved to significantly help the writing abilities of students in medical sciences.

RQ 2: What were the participants' attitudes towards learning to write essays through this approach?

To take a closer look at the students' writing improvement, we explored their attitudes behind their learning development relying on two data sources, including the questionnaire results and interviews. Here, the data were analyzed through two major analyses. The first analysis deals with the participants' attitudes toward three main entities of the instruction, in which the data reveal general information about the difference of the participants' attitudes before and after being taught to write essays through the modified model (Table 4). The second analysis illustrates the detailed description of the participants' attitudes towards learning to write essays through the process-genre approach, where individual groups (Tables 5 & 6), and the combined (Table 7) are discussed.

Participants' Attitudes towards Three Main Entities of the Instruction

In this analysis, the data obtained from the questionnaire eliciting students' attitudes towards learning to write essays revealed that all participants positively changed their attitudes after being taught through the process-genre approach, as illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Comparison of Overall Means of Medical and Health Science Students in the Aspects of Their Attitudes Towards Learning to Write Essays (Before & After Instruction)

Students' faculty	Categories of students' attitudes	Before instruction	Interpretation	After instruction	Interpretation
Medicine	Students' interests & confidence	3.44	High	4.28	Very High
	Students' and teacher's roles	3.70	High	4.35	Very High
	Students' development & benefits	3.62	High	4.28	Very High
	Overall (Grand Mean)	3.59*	High	4.30*	Very High
Health Science	Students' interests & confidence	2.48	Low	4.16	High
	Students' and teacher's roles	3.04	Moderate	4.27	Very High
	Students' development & benefits	2.69	Moderate	4.46	Very High
	Overall (Grand Mean)	2.74**	Moderate	4.30**	Very High
Total	Students' interests & confidence	3.04	Moderate	4.23	Very High
	Students' and teacher's roles	3.43	High	4.31	Very High
	Students' development & benefits	3.24	Moderate	4.35	Very High
	Overall (Grand Mean)	3.24***	Moderate	4.30***	Very High

Notes: * Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before the instruction (3.59) and after the instruction (4.30) of medical students with $t = -6.988$ $df = 21$, $p = .000$

**Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before the instruction (2.74) and after the instruction (4.30) of health science students with $t = -8.931$ $df = 14$, $p = .000$

*** Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before the instruction (3.24) and after the instruction (4.30) of all students with $t = -9.226$ $df = 36$, $p = .000$

The data in Table 4 indicate the results drawn from the questionnaire, where detailed description of each area is shown in Tables 5–7. Overlooked for a holistic picture, all the students revealed their positive attitudes towards learning to write essays through the process-genre approach, indicated by a significantly higher grand mean after the instruction (3.24 in the pre-questionnaire, and 4.30 in the post-questionnaire).

In the group with the medical students, their attitudes changed from a “High” level (with an overall mean of 3.59 before the instruction) to a “Very High” one (with an overall mean of 4.30 after the instruction) in three categories such as students’ interests and confidence, students’ and teacher’s roles, as well as ability in self-development and learning benefits. The same pattern was found in the health science ones. There was also a change in students’ attitudes towards learning to write essays through this approach. This was evidenced by the overall mean of 2.74 before the instruction, which could be interpreted as a “Moderate” level. However, the overall mean after the instruction changed to 4.30, showing a “Very High” level.

Interestingly, when comparing between these two groups of students, we found that the health science students seemed to indicate more positive change in their level of attitudes than that of the medical ones. As seen from the interpretation, the students’ attitudes of the former group changed two steps further, from a “Moderate” level (2.74 in the pre-questionnaire) to a “Very High” level (4.30 in the post-questionnaire), whereas those of the latter group moved only one step, from a “High” level (3.59 in the pre-questionnaire) to a “Very High” one (4.30 in the post-questionnaire). This indicated that the overall mean difference of health science students was significantly higher than that of the medical students.

Overall, the findings showed that the participants had more positive attitudes at the end of instruction. This means that they were satisfied with their writing improvement which could result in their favorable attitudes.

Detailed Description of the Participants’ Attitudes: Medical Students

This analysis deals with the detailed descriptions of each category of questionnaire content. The data indicating individual groups of medical and health science students (Tables 5 and 6) were followed by the data representing the holistic group (Table 7). The following table indicates the findings drawn from the medical students.

TABLE 5

Medical Students' Attitudes Towards Learning to Write Essays Through the Process-Genre Approach (Before and After Instruction)

Statements	Mean	Before Instruction		After Instruction		Interpretation
		S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	
Students' interests and confidence	3.44		High	4.28		Very High
1. I like learning essay writing.	3.36	1.049	Moderate	4.09	0.811	High
2. I like lessons of essay writing in class.	3.27	1.120	Moderate	4.14	0.774	High
3. I have thought essay writing is interesting.	3.46	0.963	High	4.41	0.686	Very High
4. I have thought writing various genres helps me to write essays purposively.	3.77	0.752	High	4.50	0.598	Very High
5. I am confident in writing essays.	3.32	1.041	Moderate	4.27	0.703	Very High
Students' and teacher's roles	3.70		High	4.35		Very High
6. I like teacher's guidance in essay writing.	3.73	0.767	High	4.41	0.503	Very High
7. I like working with friends when writing essays.	3.50	0.964	High	4.36	0.658	Very High
8. I like to correct essay writing by myself.	3.23	0.922	Moderate	4.27	0.985	Very High
9. I like peer feedback in essay writing.	3.73	1.032	High	4.18	0.958	High
10. I like teacher feedback in essay writing.	4.32	0.646	Very High	4.50	0.598	Very High
Students' abilities in self-development & life-long learning benefits	3.62		High	4.28		Very High
11. I have thought I can develop myself in writing essays.	3.64	1.002	High	4.36	0.581	Very High
12. I acknowledge benefits of essay writing using different genres.	3.68	0.780	High	4.27	0.767	Very High

Statements	Before Instruction			After Instruction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
13. I have thought writing a variety of genres helps to ease my writing.	3.64	0.72 7	High	4.27	0.63 1	Very High
14. Class activities in relation to writing various genres helped develop my writing.	3.59	0.66 6	High	4.14	0.77 4	High
15. I can apply writing knowledge learned from my class in the future.	3.55	0.80 0	High	4.36	0.65 8	Very High
Overall (Grand Mean)	3.59		High	4.30*		Very High

Notes: * Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before and after the instruction of medical students with $t = -6.988$ $df = 21$, $p = .000$

The data from Table 5 shows the medical students' more positive attitudes towards the use of this approach (3.59 before the instruction, and 4.30 after the instruction). When taking a closer look at 15 items representing the three categories, we found that after the instruction the students showed highly positive attitudes in 8 aspects : their interest in essay writing (item 3), purposive writing (item 4), teacher's guidance (item 6), working with friends (item 7), self-development in writing (item 11), benefits of various genres (item 12), writing ease with genres (item 13), and applying knowledge in the future (item 15), when compared to their own attitudes before the instruction. In addition, before the instruction they showed moderate levels of their attitudes in 4 aspects: preference in essay writing (item 1), preference in writing lessons (item 2), confidence in writing (item 5), and self-editing (item 8), all of which changed to the "High" and "Very High" levels after the instruction.

What was interesting was how the medical students expressed their favorable attitudes toward positive effects of peer feedback (item 9), and learning activities that help them develop their writing abilities (item 14), in which both areas were rated with a 'high' level before and after they were taught to write essays using the process-genre approach. Probably, the participants' highly satisfactory feeling at the outset could be explained by two major possibilities. First, the medical students might have experienced learning collaboratively with peers and participated in activities-based courses from other courses in relation to their discipline and general educational courses, in which the students perceived or experienced positive gains derived from such collaborative learning, task oriented courses. This could be

associated with another explanation in relation to the specific practices of the participants' discipline. Being medical students, the participants are normally trained for their professional expertise through the activities called problems-based learning, in which they work collaboratively with peers and the instructors solving problems related to the tasks (Taweessin et al., 2012; Treesirichod et al., 2018). With these experiences and familiarity, the participants might have viewed feedback and activities from the study as beneficially as they had practices within their own medical discipline. It's interesting to note that the two areas within writing were rated highly before the study even though they lacked considerable skills as was shown by the post test. Along the same line, the 'very high' rate at the outset took place with the teacher feedback. This could be explained through two reasons. One is the authority figure frequently found among Thai and other Asian students who tended to rely on teachers as the main knowledge agents (Chen, 2019; Nguyen, 2019; Thongrin, 2009). The phenomenon could also be associated closely with the students' common practices, in which novice physicians, including medical students, work shoulder to shoulder with their instructors serving coaches or mentors in any kind of professional consultations. And this could also apply to the instructors of non-medical courses like essay writing, where the teacher's feedback has been thought to help them with writing processes. There, they expressed a 'very high' favorable attitude toward the teacher's feedback before the instruction, and this attitude level still remained the same after the instruction. As advanced learners with high expectations of essay writing across all courses, they would prefer peer feedback, teacher feedback, and class activities that could help them develop their writing abilities and favorable attitudes regardless of time and space—before/after instruction and any course taken.

Detailed Description of the Participants' Attitudes: Health Science Students

This section shows the findings drawn from the health science students' attitudes, indicating more significantly positive changes, when compared to those of the medical students.

TABLE 6

Health Science Students' Attitudes Towards Learning to Write Essays Through the Process-Genre Approach (Before and After Instruction)

Statements	Mean	Before Instruction		Mean	After Instruction	
		S.D.	Interpretation		S.D.	Interpretation
Students' interests and confidence	2.48		Low	4.16		High
1. I like learning essay writing.	2.20	1.041	Low	3.93	0.884	High
2. I like lessons of essay writing in class.	2.13	0.990	Low	3.87	0.834	High
3. I have thought essay writing is interesting.	2.73	0.961	Moderate	4.33	0.724	Very High
4. I have thought writing various genres helps me to write essays purposively.	3.13	0.834	Moderate	4.80	0.507	Very High
5. I am confident in writing essays.	2.20	0.561	Low	4.07	0.799	High
Students' and teacher's roles	3.04		Moderate	4.27		Very High
6. I like teacher's guidance in essay writing.	3.47	0.834	High	4.53	0.743	Very High
7. I like working with friends when writing essays.	2.87	0.915	Moderate	4.33	0.816	Very High
8. I like to correct essay writing by myself.	2.20	0.862	Low	3.93	1.033	High
9. I like peer feedback in essay writing.	2.73	0.961	Moderate	3.93	1.033	High
10. I like teacher feedback in essay writing.	3.93	0.799	High	4.60	0.737	Very High
Students' abilities in self-development & life-long learning benefits	2.69		Moderate	4.46		Very High
11. I have thought I can develop myself in writing essays.	2.47	0.743	Low	4.27	0.594	Very High
12. I acknowledge benefits of essay writing using different genres.	2.67	0.816	Moderate	4.53	0.640	Very High
13. I have thought writing a variety of genres helps to ease my writing.	2.80	0.862	Moderate	4.47	0.743	Very High
14. Class activities in relation to writing various genres helped develop my writing.	2.80	0.775	Moderate	4.47	0.640	Very High

Statements	Mean	Before Instruction		Mean	After Instruction	
		S.D.	Interpretation		S.D.	Interpretation
15. I can apply writing knowledge learned from my class in the future.	2.73	0.884	Moderate	4.53	0.743	Very High
Overall (Grand Mean)	2.74*		Moderate	4.30*		Very High

Notes: *Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before and after the instruction of health science students with $t = -8.931$ $df = 14$, $p = .000$

The data in Table 6 show that the health science students expressed their highly favorable attitudes towards learning to write essays through the process-genre approach, compared to their own feelings before the instruction (2.74 before the instruction, and 4.30 after the instruction).

The detailed description of each area indicated that the health science students had low levels of attitudes in 5 aspects: preference in essay writing (item 1), preference in writing lessons (item 2), confidence in writing (item 5), self-editing (item 8), and self-development in writing (item 11). However, they had more positive changes in these 5 aspects after the instruction to “High” and “Very High” levels. Furthermore, they showed moderate levels of their attitudes before the instruction in 8 aspects: interest in essay writing (item 3), purposive writing (item 4), working with friends (item 7), peer feedback (item 9), benefits of various genres (item 12), writing ease with genres (item 13), writing class activities (item 14), and applying knowledge in the future (item 15), all of which changed to “High” and “Very High” levels after the instruction. Additionally, there were only two items that showed the health science students’ attitudes, changing from “High” levels before the instruction to “Very High” levels after the use of process-genre approach, including teacher’s guidance (item 6), and teacher feedback (item 10).

It is clear that the health science students’ attitudes became much more positive. When compared to those of the medical students (in Table 5), the health science students seemed to reveal higher changes in their attitudes than the medical ones, as the medical students only expressed quite highly favorable attitude toward the three areas they could feel familiar with in their discipline—the feedback derived from peers and the teacher, and some aspects of collaborative learning. Given this, the medical students expressed their good attitudes before and after the instruction, and this lent a small gap between the two periods of instruction—‘high’ and ‘very high’ levels of satisfaction. On the other hand, the health

science students who seemed to be familiar with lecture-based courses rather than discussion with peers and instruction rate these areas with a ‘moderate’ level of satisfaction before the instruction. When seeing that the feedback provided by peers and the teacher and learning activities helped the experience health science students improve their writing abilities, they, however, expressed their attitudes with a very high level, thus resulting in a huge disparity between the two periods of instruction. Although both groups showed their favorable attitude to the areas differently at the outset, they showed agreement in that the process-genre approach to writing instruction was very helpful for their learning.

To strengthen the finding, we also verified our interpretation, examining the finding analyzed collectively.

Two Combined Groups’ Attitudes

Table 7 illustrates the attitudes of the participants analyzed holistically. This action aims to triangulate the analysis of students’ attitudes. The same pattern in both types of analysis would strengthen the data analysis and thus reveal students’ attitudes more substantially.

TABLE 7

Combined Groups’ Attitudes Towards Learning to Write Essays Through the Process Genre Approach (Before and After Instruction)

Statements	Before Instruction			After Instruction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Students’ interests and confidence	3.04		Moderate	4.23		Very High
1. I like learning essay writing.	2.89	1.173	Moderate	4.03	0.833	High
2. I like lessons of essay writing in class.	2.81	1.118	Moderate	4.03	0.799	High
3. I have thought essay writing is interesting.	3.16	1.014	Moderate	4.38	0.681	Very High
4. I have thought writing various genres helps me to write essays purposively.	3.51	0.837	High	4.54	0.558	Very High
5. I am confident in writing essays.	2.88	1.032	Moderate	4.19	0.739	High

Statements	Before Instruction			After Instruction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Students' and teacher's roles	3.43		High	4.31		Very High
6. I like teacher's guidance in essay writing.	3.62	0.794	High	4.46	0.605	Very High
7. I like working with friends when writing essays.	3.24	0.983	Moderate	4.38	0.716	Very High
8. I like to correct essay writing by myself.	2.81	1.023	Moderate	4.14	1.004	High
9. I like peer feedback in essay writing.	3.32	1.107	Moderate	4.08	0.983	High
10. I like teacher feedback in essay writing.	4.16	0.732	High	4.54	0.650	Very High
Students' abilities in self-development & life-long learning benefits	3.24		Moderate	4.35		Very High
11. I have thought I can develop myself in writing essays.	3.16	1.068	Moderate	4.32	0.580	Very High
12. I acknowledge benefits of essay writing using different genres.	3.27	0.932	Moderate	4.38	0.721	Very High
13. I have thought writing a variety of genres helps to ease my writing.	3.30	0.878	Moderate	4.36	0.676	Very High
14. Class activities in relation to writing various genres helped develop my writing.	3.27	0.804	Moderate	4.27	0.732	Very High
15. I can apply writing knowledge learned from my class in the future.	3.22	0.917	Moderate	4.43	0.689	Very High
Overall (Grand Mean)	3.24*	0.728	Moderate	4.30*	0.500	Very High

Notes: * Significantly different at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), between overall means before and after the instruction of all students with $t = -9.226$ $df = 36$, $p = .000$

Table 7 shows that the students, holistically analyzed, expressed very positive changes towards their learning to write essays through the process-genre approach (3.24 before the instruction, and 4.30 after the instruction)

We found the same pattern in all aspects, including students' interests and confidence, students' and teacher's roles, and their abilities in self-development and life-long learning benefits. Considering the analysis derived from the two groups separately analyzed and that from the combined groups investigated, we learned that the process-genre approach could enhance the participants' writing abilities and thus build positive self-perceptions about their development, confidence, and awareness of their roles. These self-perceptions will then help the students in both disciplines become aware of the significance of collaborative learning, which we modified and used as the process-genre approach to writing instruction, as the activity that can be applied in their real-world practices. We then explored deeper, using the data obtained from interviews. We found strong evidence to confirm the results from the questionnaire. A number of participants (19 out of 20 interviewees or 95%) expressed positive attitudes towards the use of process-genre approach, such as benefits of this approach, students' confidence in writing, interesting activities in class including peer feedback, brainstorming and planning. Below are some of their comments from interviews:

1. How do you feel about learning to write essays through the Process-Genre Approach?

I have fun and don't feel bored when learning through a variety of activities in this writing approach. Our teacher has provided a step-by-step approach which can help us gradually learn about how to write good essays (Translated interview -HS 5).

2. After learning how to write essays through this approach, do you feel more confident than before? Why?

I gain more confidence in writing because the teacher teaches me how to brainstorm ideas and plan my essay writing. I can get a lot of ideas from these activities. Some other activities in class are also useful, such as peer feedback. Although I have never got peer feedback from my friends before, I think it is a good idea to get comments from others, apart from those of the teacher. We can learn from each other (Translated interview -Med 10).

3. How do you feel about activities in the prior knowledge activation stage (e.g., using prior knowledge to create target text)?

Before writing, our teacher lets us try to think about our knowledge that we've learned before. All of students in class try to brainstorm our ideas in relation to the assigned topic. In doing so, it can help us prepare ourselves before starting to write essays (Translated interview – Med 1).

4. How do you feel about activities in the modeling stage (e.g., analyzing audience, practicing different genres or types of texts, analyzing texts)?

Different genres learned in class help me practice various types of essays and help develop my writing knowledge. The teacher provides such interesting lessons that make me fun and curious to learn more. I have learned a lot about how to write a good introduction which gets readers' attention, supporting details which are relevant to the thesis statement, and a conclusion that restates all ideas in the thesis statement (Translated interview– Med 4).

5. How do you feel about activities in the joint-construction stage (e.g., brainstorming, planning the outline)?

I like the way that the teacher gets all the students to brainstorm ideas about the topic assigned by my teacher. After brainstorming, she lets us do an outline before writing. I think it can help us not to go out of track, and keep on the things that we should focus on (Translated interview – HS 13).

6. How do you feel about various kinds of feedback/ editing activities (e.g., peer feedback, teacher feedback, self-editing) in the independent construction stage?

After having learned how to write essays through useful lessons, I felt I could write better than before. Moreover, I could learn my friends' styles of writing from a lot of activities in class. When giving feedback to my friends, I could learn not to make mistakes like them. When receiving peer feedback, I could also know what my friends thought about my own writing. Sharing ideas in class could help us gradually improve our writing (Translated interview –HS 12).

By using the modified model of teaching and learning cycle adapted from Hyland (2003), all the students improved their attitudes. To clarify, in the stage of prior knowledge activation, the students were equipped with prior knowledge, such as grammar and vocabulary, through a variety of activities, thereby getting them to be familiar with the target text and helping them to write essays purposefully. In the modeling stage, the students gained more experience in language practice and learned a variety of genres through interesting activities in class, so they could have more confidence in writing essays, and were curious to learn more to improve their writing, thus leading to their changes in attitudes about interests and confidence in essay writing. In the joint construction of the text, with planning and brainstorming activities, as well as the teacher's guidance, the students gradually acknowledged many ideas from friends and obtained guidance from their teacher before writing. This led to their development in creativity and critical thinking which could help to ease their writing. In the independent construction stage, the students had to write their own texts with delayed editing, thereby helping them to practice self-editing. In this stage, with teacher and peer collaboration such as teacher feedback and peer feedback, the students could see their own mistakes, and then revise their essay writing. This, finally, led to their development in writing, and raising students' awareness of various benefits of essay writing learned from their class.

To summarize, in Research Question 2, the findings from two data sources including the results from the questionnaire and interviews showed that the students, both from medical and health science, positively changed their attitudes towards learning to write essays after being taught through the process-genre approach. And it was surprising to find out that the health science students scored higher than the medical students.

All in all, the findings from the pre- and post- tests, the students' written products from the first and final drafts, and students' attitudes from the questionnaires all equally came to the conclusion that the process-genre approach had a significant effect on students' writing and attitudes toward writing. This approach can be useful for both groups of students. Also, there was evidence to prove that both of these two levels of students (both high and low ones) could improve their attitudes towards the use of this approach. The aforementioned findings were also supported by the data sources collected from qualitative interviews. Most of the participants expressed their ideas after being taught through the process-genre approach that they felt more confident in writing. They learned a lot from different types of genres and writing lessons in class, thus leading them to have a better understanding about how to write good essays.

Implications and Conclusion

The results of this study derived both from qualitative and quantitative analyses have shown the effectiveness of process-genre approach on students' writing abilities for both medical and health science students. Furthermore, the attitudes of those two proficiency students towards learning to write essays have positively changed after the use of this approach. The findings are consistent with the results of previous studies (Babalola, 2012; Pujianto et al., 2014; Reonal, 2015; Saito, 2010; Voon Foo, 2007). To clarify, in the aspect of writing ability, the students could express their ideas in writing more effectively to the readers, and could develop more relevant ideas to support their writing tasks, which was similar to Voon Foo's (2017) research. Also, this approach could help develop the students' writing skills specifically of genre knowledge, writing process, and the skills of organization, sentence fluency and language, which confirms the effectiveness of this approach in the work of Babalola (2012), Pujianto et al. (2014), Reonal (2015) and Saito (2010). Furthermore, the findings of the study regarding the improvement of students' attitudes are consistent with those of Voon Foo (2007). This was because after learning through this approach, the students recognized the benefits of each activity used in the process-genre approach, thus

leading to students' awareness of writing strategies and willingness to apply them to compose their essays. Apart from the findings from the previous research, when considering the levels of their attitudes in more detail, it was found that the lower proficiency students seemed to change their attitudes more than those of the higher proficiency ones.

The findings indicate that the way in which we modified Hyland's (2003) model, the process and genre-based approaches to writing instruction, is very effective for science-related students. In the first stage, **prior knowledge activation**, the students should be encouraged to put together their prior knowledge so the text can be written meaningfully. Then, in **the modeling stage**, we suggest that the teachers should lead the discussion emphasizing the awareness of settings and audiences so students understand how each genre of writing is associated with such contexts and audiences. This action, of course, makes genre-based writing more meaningful. In the third stage of the model, **joint construction stage**, students' collective thoughts for brainstorming and planning for the texts are crucial as these activities help the students generate texts according to specific genres more effectively. Finally, in the **independent construction stage**, students' views can be widened through various sources of feedback, including teachers, peers, and their own ability. With the one-to-one conference, students learn more how to improve their writing skills. What we have added in this approach certainly contributes to the students' writing development. It allows them to study the relationship between the form and purpose of a particular genre while using the processes of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Consequently, observing the patterns of writing that show particular meanings and purposes and exploring these steps during the processes of writing are the two entities essential for writing in a more advanced level like the essays that will finally introduce the students to more challenging tasks in their future real-world practices. Certain steps of the modified approach should help these medical and health science students, who will very soon play a very important role in relation to health-care services, to write with clear writing outcomes while at the same time they can explore their own writing as independent writers more and more. The modified model also helps or guides writing instruction of other EFL/ESL environments, in which learners need teachers to scaffold the writing processes so they could produce their written products more effectively. The modified model, regardless of learning settings, can foster not only the students' creative thinking, but also the ways of how writers write their texts, as well as the knowledge of linguistic features. Therefore, it is recommended as one of the most effective

methods of teaching writing since it is demonstrated that this approach results in student achievement.

All in all, the merit of this study indicates that the process-genre approach we modified for this investigation, if applied effectively, helps students to acquire writing skills satisfactorily. For more effective use of the approach we modified, we suggest that the teachers should prepare suitable teaching materials, practice valuable classroom management, and provide effective feedback (both for teacher/student conferencing and student/student feedback) as to make students learn to write with adequate resources and progress in writing.

References

- Babalola, H. A. L. (2012). Effects of process-genre based approach on the written English performance of computer science students in a Nigerian polytechnic. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(6), 1–7.
- Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). Product, process and genre: Approaches to writing in EAP. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 153–160.
- Bennui, P. (2008). A Study of L1 Interference in the Writing of Thai EFL Students. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 4, 72-102.
- Best, W.J. & Kahn, V.J. (2006). *Research in Education* (10th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bhatia, V.K. (1993). *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.
- Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interaction approach to language pedagogy*. Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Campbell, C. (1998). *Teaching second-language writing: Interacting with text*. Newbury: Heinle & Heinle.
- Caudery, T. (1995). *The process approach*. Paper presented at the British Council summer school on writing in the classroom, University of Surrey, England.
- Caudery, T. (1997). Process writing. In G. Fulcher (Ed). *Writing in the English language classroom*. Hertfordshire: Phoenix ELT/Prentice Hall Macmillan.
- Caudery, T. (1998). Increasing students' awareness of genre through text transformation exercises: An old classroom activity revisited. *TESL-EJ*, 3(3), A–2.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (1993). *The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conduction, and evaluating*

- quantitative and qualitative research. (2nd ed.).* USA: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Defazio, J., Jones, J., Tennant, F. & Hook, S.A. (2010). Academic literacy: The importance and impact of writing across the curriculum – a case study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10 (2), 34–47.
- Eskey, D. (1983). Meanwhile, back in the real world...: Accuracy and fluency in second language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 315-323.
- Gao, J. (2007). Teaching writing in Chinese Universities: Finding an electric approach. *Asian EFL Journal*, 20. Retrieved April 1, 2012 from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/june_05_yk&jk.php.
- Glass, T. E. (2008). *The nature of English writing done by graduates of a university in Thailand*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
- Hammond, J., Burns, A., Joyce, H., Brosnan, D., Gerot, L., Solomon, N., & Hood, S. (1992). *English for social purposes: A handbook for teachers of adult literacy*. National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
- Hamzaoui-Elachachi, H. (2006). Development of a writing curriculum for academic purposes at tertiary level: The case of Algerian EFL university students. *ESP World*, 9(1), 1–9.
- Henry, A., & Roseberry, R. L. (1998). An evaluation of a genre-based approach to the teaching of EAP/ESP writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(1), 147–156.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kay, H. & Dudley-Evans, T. (1998). Genre: What teachers think. *ELT Journal*, 52(4), 304–314.
- Kulavanich, P. & Surasiangsang, S. (2002). *A study of learning and teaching foreign languages in the central, eastern and western parts of Thailand*. Proceedings in the Seminar on Research Project of Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages in Thailand, on 15 February 2006 at Asia Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23, 157-172.
- Moore, Y. (2015). Patient Safety Narratives – Clinical Trials: Medical Writing and Patient

- Safety Narratives. *Drug Development and Delivery*, 15(4), 55-64. Retrieved January 10, 2016 from <https://drug-dev.com/patient-safety-narratives-clinical-trials-medical-writing-patient-safety-narratives/>.
- Park, T. (2004). An investigation of an ESL placement test of writing using many-facet Rasch measurement. *Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 1-21.
- Pincas, A. (1982). *Writing in English 1*. London: Macmillan.
- Pujianto, D., Emila, E., & M.I., S. (2014). A process-genre approach to teaching writing report text to senior high school students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 99-110.
- Rahman, M. (2011). Genre-based writing instruction: Implication in ESP classroom. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 33(11), 1–9.
- Reonal, A.M. (2015). Process-Genre Approach in teaching expository writing in secondary ESL classes. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*. 3(3), 187-191.
- Rosen, L. M., & Abt-Perkins, D. (2000). Preparing English Teachers to Teach Diverse Student Populations: Beliefs, Challenges, Proposals for Change. *English Education*, 32 (4), 251-266.
- Saito, S. (2010). *An analysis of argumentative essays of Thai third-year. English majors instructed by the integrated Process-Genre approach*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok.
- Tangpermpoon, T. (2008). Integrated approaches to improve students writing skills for English major students. *ABAC Journal*, 28 (2), 1–9.
- Taveesin, S., Wongchanchailert, M., Anuntaseree, S. & Suwanrath, C. (2012). A study on the development of educational skills of medical students utilizing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) at the Prince of Songkla University. *Proceedings, The 13th Thai Medical Education Conference* (Theme: Health Professional Education in the 21st century, pp. 1-10), Khon Kaen, 8-9 October 2012. Retrieved September 14, 2017 from <https://meded.psu.ac.th/newmeded/document/research/pdf55/25.pdf>.
- Thongrin, S. (2000). Growth in L2 writing: A case study of an ESL student writer. *TESOL Bulletin*, 13(2), 35–46.
- Thongrin, S. (2009). A modified model of peer response in EFL writing instruction: An

- alternative to ESL/EFL writing instruction. *Proceedings from CU/TU English Departments Seminar*, (pp. 201-251). Bangkok, 18 May 2009.
- Thongrin, S. (2012). Teaching writing skills. In A. Wiriyachitra (Eds.), *Looking back and moving forward of English learning* (pp. 139–177). Bangkok: Windows on the World Publisher, [in Thai].
- Thongrin, S. (2016). Instructional model modified for writing instruction for college students' writing improvement and identity constructed. *Proceedings, The Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University Annual International Conference 2016* (Theme: Modernity in Cosmopolitan Southeast Asia, pp. 75–106), Bangkok, 22-23 August 2016.
- Thongrin, S. (2018a). Integrating moral education into language education in ASIA: Guidelines for material writers. In P. W. Handoyo, Gutierrez Perfecto, Canh, Perfecto, & Buripakdi (Eds.), *Situating Moral and Cultural Values in the ELT Materials: The Southeast Asian Context* (pp. 153-173). SPRINGER English Language Education Series, Volume 9. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Thongrin, S. (2018b). Developing an Instructional Model to Teach Thai Research Assistants to Write English Scientific Research Articles. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 11(2), 21-65.
- Todd, R.W., Khongput, S. & Darasawang, P. (2007). Coherence, cohesion and comments on students' academic essays. *Assessing Writing*, 12 (1), 10–25.
- Treesirichod, A., Chansakulporn, S., Phivthong-ngam, L., Kusumaphanyo, C., & Sangpanich, A. (2018). The attitudes of medical students towards problem-based learning during the clinical years. *South-East Asian Journal of Medical Education*, 12 (1), 41-46.
- Voon Foo, C. T. (2007). *The Effects of the Process-Genre Approach to Writing Instruction on the Expository Essays of ESL Students in a Malaysian Secondary School*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. Retrieved March 23, 2015 from http://eprints.usm.my/9356/1/THE_EFFECTS_OF_THE_PROCESS-GENRE_APPROACH_TO_WRITING.pdf.
- Walsh, M. (2004). *Process Writing in High School EFL: What, How and Why*. ETJ Kansai ELT Expo 2004. Retrieved April 19, 2015 from <http://www.walshsensei.org/ProcessHandout.pdf>.
- Yan, G. (2005). A process genre model for teaching writing. *English Teaching Forum*, 43(3),

18–27.

Yau, M. (1991). The role of language factors in second language writing. In L. Malave & G. Duquette (Eds.). *Language, culture and cognition: A collection of studies in first and second language acquisition* (pp. 266–283). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Appendix A: Interview questions

1. How do you feel about learning to write essays through the Process-Genre Approach?
2. After learning how to write essays through this approach, do you feel more confident than before? Why?
3. How do you feel about activities in the prior knowledge activation stage (e.g., using prior knowledge to create target text)?
4. How do you feel about activities in the modeling stage (e.g., analyzing audience, practicing different genres or types of texts, analyzing texts)?
5. How do you feel about activities in the joint-construction stage (e.g., brainstorming, planning the outline)?
6. How do you feel about various kinds of feedback/ editing activities (e.g., peer feedback, teacher feedback, self-editing) in the independent construction stage?

Self-Taught Language Learners in China and Their Learning Strategies: A Multiple, Instrumental Case Study of Approaches in Contextual Situations

Richard Janosy & Michael Thomas

British Council & University of Central Lancashire

Bio-profiles:

Richard Janosy, MA TESOL, DELTA, is an English trainer and IELTS examiner based in China. He has been teaching EFL for the past 17 years and his main research interests are in autonomous language learning. Email: rjanosy2000@yahoo.ca, Address: British Council, 7/F Landmark Building Tower 1, 8 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Beijing 100004 China

Michael Thomas, PhD, is a professor in the field of computer-assisted language learning at the University of Central Lancashire in the UK. His most recent book was *Project-based Language Learning with Technology* (2017). Email: mthomas4@uclan.ac.uk, Address: School of Language and Global Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2H, UK

Abstract

One fundamental question in second language acquisition (SLA) studies is: why do some language learners reach higher levels of language proficiency while others in similar contexts do not? To that end, research examining language learning strategies (LLS) and the particular learner characteristics that aid motivation and progress have been a central topic of concern. Many studies have been done to compile the strategies that learners use to acquire the language from the good language learner studies (Rubin, 1975) to Oxford's (2003) taxonomy of LLS. These original studies revealed the uniqueness existing amongst learners leading to the study of learners' individual differences (IDs) (Dörnyei, 2009; Skehan, 1991). These studies included the presence of context-dependent available resources and choices of strategies according to learning styles. Through an online questionnaire coupled with individual interviews, the research in this paper applied a multiple case study approach to 12 participants in China who described their various methods, LLS and approaches to mastering the language relative to their context. The majority began learning out of interest and eventually became English teachers in their own country. The overriding element found in these participants was their love of learning the language and the associated culture – an intrinsic motivation driving their learning styles. Their context did not appear to be a barrier to their progress and it was evident that their self-directed learning activities changed

according to available resources. The participants also described how they made use of 21st century media tools to learn, communicate and practise the language, giving them mobility and available resources at any time and place. The findings from these self-taught language learners are applicable to teaching contexts in that they raise awareness of the significance of LLS within learning activities in the English language classroom.

Keywords: Computer-assisted language learning, CALL, individual differences, language learning strategies, self-directed learner

Introduction

There is, for many, the desire to learn a foreign language beyond the classroom. Classroom-based language learning may well suit some learners who merely wish to pass examinations but may be uncomfortable for many struggling students who have to keep pace with the class schedule and meet the deadlines. Moreover, language learning in classrooms can be severely limiting to those who endeavour to reach higher levels of achievement. In addition, learning English in a Foreign Language (EFL – English as a foreign language) environment brings its own challenges as learners may complain about the lack of resources or opportunities to interact and practise the target language. Nonetheless, there are learners who, despite these seeming restrictions, manage to reach varying degrees of proficiency in the target language thus demonstrating an ability to overcome such barriers within their contextual environment. While motivation and reinforcement are reasons that contribute to language proficiency, the question of why these learners achieve some success while their peers still struggle at basic levels, requires more research and is therefore the main aim of this study.

Twelve participants agreed to take part in the research and through quantitative and correlational analysis of a questionnaire along with qualitative case studies arising from interview data, this study examined the language learning strategies (LLS – Oxford, 1989) they used most frequently along with their individual differences (IDs) in learning styles. The participants were Chinese teachers of English based on the Chinese mainland in Beijing and Panjin (in the North East region), the majority of whom majored in English language studies. The focus of this study, however, was the extent to which they were self-directed learners who were able to go beyond the mandated school curriculum to learn English. Although many studies focusing on language learning strategies have been done in the past (Grossmann, 2011; Ring, 2015; Wu, 2008), very few, if any, have examined self-directed learners or LLS outside of academic environments. This study contributes to existing

knowledge by collecting information from the participants on their personal LLS usage and extrapolating their learning styles in correlation to their LLS choices, while also examining how they pursued their language learning goals independently.

Based on interviews and the analysis of the recordings made, the general descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) were used as a base to appraise the “Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language Use” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 29) during the interviews and success, in this study, is defined as those who reached CEFR level B2 and above. The following questions were posed:

- What individual differences (IDs - Dörnyei, 2009) characterise English as a foreign language (EFL) learners who have achieved CEFR B2 and above given their contextual situations where others given similar situations and opportunities have not?
- To what extent are these learners self-directed?
- What are the most common learning strategies used by these learners?
- To what extent do these learners make use of and exploit 21st century ICT and media tools?

Background

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has contributed to understanding how learners acquire an additional language since the 1960s (Ellis, 1993). Research in the field is multidisciplinary and encompasses disciplines such as psychology, sociology, linguistics, and education, and has led to the development of several significant theories of language and learning, as well as methodological approaches to help the investigation of language acquisition (Ellis, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

SLA research has mostly looked at the universal aspects of acquisition since its onset (Ellis, 1998; Skehan, 1991), however, it is now also recognised that second language learning is very much an individualistic journey and thus one significant set of indicators of achievement in learning a second language has been the study of individual differences (IDs) amongst learners (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Skehan (1991) and Dörnyei (2009), for example, view language aptitude, motivation, learner strategies, and learner styles as more relevant to SLA research, and they both position aptitude and motivation as the most constant predictors of achievement in the language learning process (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Other studies suggest that learning styles, learning strategies and affective variables are central to the process as they are ultimately independent and inseparable (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003).

Correlational studies

Dörnyei (2009) studied the interplay between language, agency and environment explaining that, in reality, various interlocutors will interact in different settings. He emphasized the unifying aspects of all individual differences and the omnipresence of context affecting each of them, a component previously thought to be independent of monolithically described learner characteristics. Taking into account more recent research on dynamic interchange, he underlines that the traditional notion of stable individual differences is outdated. The higher order IDs (e.g., cognitive, affective, and motivational) are seen interacting as wholes in what Snow calls “aptitude complexes” (as cited in Robinson, 2001, p. 372). Focusing on instructed learning, Robinson (2001) sees IDs as varying correlations of aptitude complexity and suggests combining our understanding of ability in order to favour certain learning conditions.

Schmidt (2010) discussed the importance of varying abilities while reiterating the noticing hypothesis with regard to IDs, motivation, aptitude, and language learning history. He recalls his well-known case study of Wes and re-evaluates his limited progress in grammatical accuracy despite the student’s significant motivation to communicate. Schmidt discounts a lack of motivation as being a factor since Wes was a very good communicator and had the personality to take risks in speaking and learning. He compared another well-known naturalistic language learner (Julie), reported by Ioup, Boustagui, El-Tigi and Moselle (as cited in Schmidt, 2010) who, having experienced similar exposure and interaction to Wes, attained near-native accuracy in her learning of Arabic. Schmidt cross-examined both reports and showed one of the main differences to be Julie’s use of language learning strategies (she kept a vocabulary notebook, paid attention to morphological variations and carefully kept track of corrections). This, Schmidt pointed out, was in sharp contrast to Wes’s more relaxed approach to communication. Indeed, an apparent difference between Wes and Julie was the latter’s use of language learning strategies to consciously move forward, both in terms of interaction and accuracy.

Language learning strategies (LLS)

Language learning strategy studies attracted considerable research during the latter quarter of the last century. Oxford defined learning strategies as the actions or behaviours that a learner undertakes to make his or her learning successful and personal (as cited in Ellis, 2008). Learning strategies are often correlated with learning styles (Ehrman et al., 2003;

Grossmann, 2011; Oxford, 2003) which in turn are affected by personality. Dörnyei (2009) included learning strategies in the interplay between motivation, language aptitude, and learning styles and defined their roles in terms of the proactiveness of a learner in his or her participation in the learning process.

Strategies aimed at learning a language have been classified as cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, and socio-affective with variations from O'Mally and Chamot (as cited in Ellis, 2008) and from Oxford (2003). There is a great deal of overlap between these classifications (Skehan, 1991) and it is the classification by Oxford that will be used in this paper as a comparison point for the findings of the study as it is one of the most comprehensive (see Brown, 2000, p. 132 for a summary).

Manfred's (2008) study in Hong Kong attempted to examine the contextual factors influencing learners' use of LLS and the patterns of strategy use through a qualitative approach. In the study, data were collected using semi-structured interviews with questions relating to the participants' use of LLS. They noted that the learners used few language learning strategies as they were not aware of them or they thought the concept was too difficult or cognitively demanding.

In another study by Sykes (2015), similar in some ways to the study outlined in this paper, a case study was conducted to analyse an adult learner's behaviour and compare it to attributes compiled from the various GLL studies. The Singaporean participant called Adam had generally been an enthusiastic and effective learner from primary school to university in which English had been the medium of instruction. Adam was a polyglot having learnt languages as needed throughout his career and was successful in part due to his own efforts and positive approach to learning languages but was in many ways unique in that he began by having his formal instruction in English environments from a young age which gave him an advantage over most EFL language learners in a non-L2 milieu. Despite these privileges, Sykes mentioned how Adam took full advantage of the resources available to him both in the instructional and non-instructional setting and can thus be described as a self-directed learner as he identified his own problems and worked out solutions to reach his goals.

The self-directed learner

In the mid-1970s, a series of studies labelled the good language learner (GLL – see Rubin, 1975) became popular and aimed to identify the characteristics that caused some language learners to succeed where others struggled. These included the study of cognitive

styles, attitudes, motivations, or past learning experiences with a focus on building a classification of strategies and activities used by the GLLs. Initiated by Rubin in 1975 and followed by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todesco in 1978 (as cited in Norton & Toohey, 2001), it led to acceptance of the idea that there were differences in learners, a finding that reflected the trends at that time towards viewing cognitive, affective, and motivational traits as factors shaping language learning success (Norton & Toohey, 2001). These studies, however, have been criticised for painting a too perfect picture of a ‘good learner’ and focusing too much on strategies at the expense of other factors such as attitude or context (Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004). Rather than identify the characteristics of a GLL as in Rubin’s study, it may be more realistic to talk of the autonomous learner or the self-directed learner, what Cotterall (2008) generally describes as the extent to which a learner can take charge of their learning both on a psychological and methodological level. A self-directed learner is one who can take his or her learning beyond the confines of the classroom and many studies have shown the gains these learners achieve compared to those who do not go beyond the classroom tasks (Alghamdi, 2016; Cotterall, 2008; Gan et al., 2004).

Discussing the importance of self-direction necessitates an understanding of context (Dörnyei, 2009) such that teachers are more fully aware of EFL learners’ choices with respect to strategies and the resources available to them. This study attempts to examine how EFL participants fared with the resources available and also to see how the advent of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and social networking in particular helped with this process. CALL may provide significant resources and tools for self-directed learners and can foster autonomy in different ways (Beatty, 2010). CALL refers to computers in its acronym but in the 21st century extends to include the use of mobile electronic and communication devices that make learning opportunities available at all times regardless of location (e.g., e-dictionaries, video clips, reading material, and communications via chat apps).

As the above discussion indicates, the research literature on self-directed learners and LLS has left some areas unexplored, the first of which is the influence of context on choice of LLS use. Many studies of LLS use have involved quantitative compilations of a commonly used questionnaire, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (Oxford, 1989), which is useful for the analysis of big data but, responding to closed questions, leaves little room for the participants themselves to speak in their own voice about how and why they implemented their strategic choices. A second gap, as mentioned before, is that except for the Schmidt study (2010), all other reviews were done in academic settings, an approach which

fails to examine self-directed learners in their informal situations. Finally, due to the early dates of the studies, CALL and other 21st century tools have not been involved in relation to LLS usage, although they are in common use today. One metacognitive strategy example would be easiness in finding practice opportunities using online communications tools when there are none in a particular physical environment. Other examples are the readily available electronic dictionaries and apps offering immediate resources via one's electronic device, some of which are mentioned below.

Methodology

Research approach and design

The study aimed to understand why some learners achieved success while others still struggled at the basic level. Was it the context, available resources, or specific learner IDs and their interaction that contributed to their achievement? Due to the multifarious elements that interact in the learning process, a multiple-case study was used as it enabled the cross-examination of each of the participants for differences and similarities in contextual situations, learner IDs, and strategy use thus strengthening the results of the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tellis, 1997). The survey data were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and interview data via a qualitative process in which themes were identified to observe patterns in the participants' learning styles and subsequently matched to keywords with the Oxford strategy taxonomy (Oxford, 2003). Finally, interviews served the purpose of building a narrative of each participant's learning progress relative to their contextual situation and available resources.

In previous research other ways of researching strategy usage have involved longitudinal studies using observations and think-aloud techniques to identify strategies used. One example is Zhou (2014) who used such methods in a qualitative research study involving a single participant to discover a child's strategy usage to guess word meaning. Another case study involved two English major university students for a comparison (Gu, 1994). These were done with interviews and the analysis of think-aloud sessions. Questionnaires, as well, can be used to obtain data as a study in the Middle East was done via a survey of 251 middle school Arabic and Turkish students (Köksal & Ulum, 2016). The questionnaire used was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and they included interviews with 46 of the participants.

Participants

The target participants in this study were Chinese English-language teachers in mainland China who were, to varying degrees, autodidacts. Each participant was in a different context and location and many did not know each other. 12 participants completed the online questionnaire and were interviewed at different locations. Their ages ranged from 30 to over 50 years old and their varied experiences in learning English as a second language brought interesting insights into learning possibilities with their particular IDs (see Table 1). The rationale for this sampling choice was based on the researchers' premise that English language teachers would be more aware of their language learning process and progress and may therefore bring more richness to the research although future research could focus on the learners themselves for their experience. Another reason was that teachers appreciated the purpose of the research and the benefits it may bring and thereby were more willing to participate.

Table 1

Participants' general profile

Name	Age range	Years learning English	1 st , 2 nd or 3 rd tiered city*	Formal English instruction in:				
				Primary school	Middle school	High school	University studies	Studies abroad
Alice	<45	23	3rd	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barbara	<45	21	3rd		✓		✓	
Brian	<45	30	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carl	<45	10+	3rd	✓	✓	then dropped out and continued self-taught		
Gina	<45	20	3rd	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jennifer	45+	22	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kate	<45	10+	3rd	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Liz	45+	45	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Margaret	45+	15	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mary	45+	10	1st		✓	✓	✓	
Roger	<45	35	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Name	Age range	Years learning English	1 st , 2 nd or 3 rd tiered city*	Formal English instruction in:				
				Primary school	Middle school	High school	University studies	Studies abroad
Tracy	<45	27	1st	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note: these are fictitious names created for the purpose of anonymity.

In China, 1st-tiered cities include metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai (Zhang, 2016). 3rd-tiered cities offer much fewer facilities and for our participants, fewer resources for language practice.

Procedures

The duration of the study was three months. From nineteen invitations, four students either did not respond or were not willing to participate, three participated in the pilot study and twelve were part of the final research. An official invitation was then disseminated to all of the willing participants describing the details of the project. Once ethical consent was received, participants were given the link to the online questionnaire. Following this, semi-structured interviews were then conducted and recorded to follow-up on the questionnaire. Eleven interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted via telephone. This phase lasted three weeks as it involved some travelling between locations to interview the participants. Finally, the questionnaire data were compiled for analysis with the qualitative interviews coded, and a summary report was produced for discussion.

Data collection and analysis

A 29-item questionnaire was designed, written in both English and Chinese and was made available online (SmartSurvey, n.d.) because some of the participants were not in the researchers' location. The different sections of the questionnaire collected data on historical background, strategy use, learning styles, and character. An interview complemented the survey to improve validity and the Chinese translation of the questionnaire helped to increase the accuracy of the respondents' input and avoid ambiguities in the questions.

Data were obtained both from the online questionnaire rendering quantitative data and from the interviews giving qualitative data to be coded and analysed. Key results from the quantitative data were presented in the form of bar charts to show comparisons between respondents' preferred choices. For the qualitative data, the interviews were first transcribed in

their entirety after which the transcriptions were analysed, coded (with the help of NVivo software), and compared to a pre-defined set of categories of learner IDs and the Oxford (2003) taxonomy of strategies.

Results and analysis

Quantitative results

This section explores the strategies used through the lens of the categories and classification system derived from Oxford (Brown, 2000; Oxford, 2003). Referring to Q14 in the questionnaire (see Figure 1), it is evident from the data that two memory strategies dominated as preferred strategies: trying to create new sentences from learned words (50%, scale 5) and memorisation of words (58.3%, scale 5). In addition, two listening strategies were stated in the preferred choices: detailed listening (50%, scale 4) and listening dictation (41.7%, scale 4). Finally, another significant preference was the activity of extensive reading (41.7%, scale 5).

Q14. Do you use any of the following language learning strategies? Please mark your usage on a scale of 1 to 5 from 'don't use' (1) to 'use quite a bit' (5).

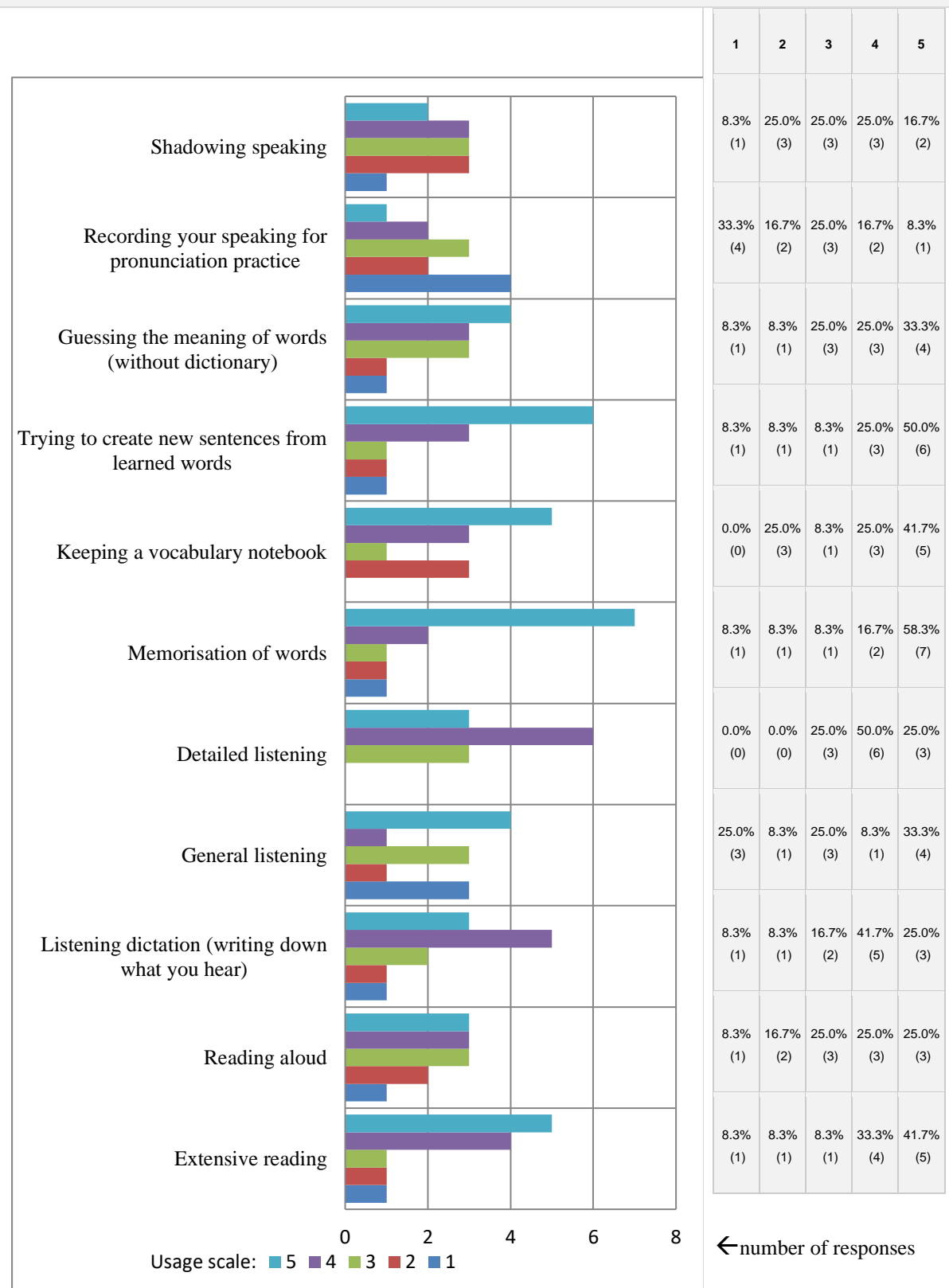


Figure 1: Survey response - Language learning strategies

Learning activities

Overall, the data from Q10 as shown in Figure 2 showed that a majority of participants clearly placed watching movies as a preferred learning activity (58.3%, scale ‘really like’). This was coupled with a desire to interact as much as possible where opportunities presented themselves (58.3%, scale ‘really like’). The interviews corroborated these numbers in the corresponding discussions.

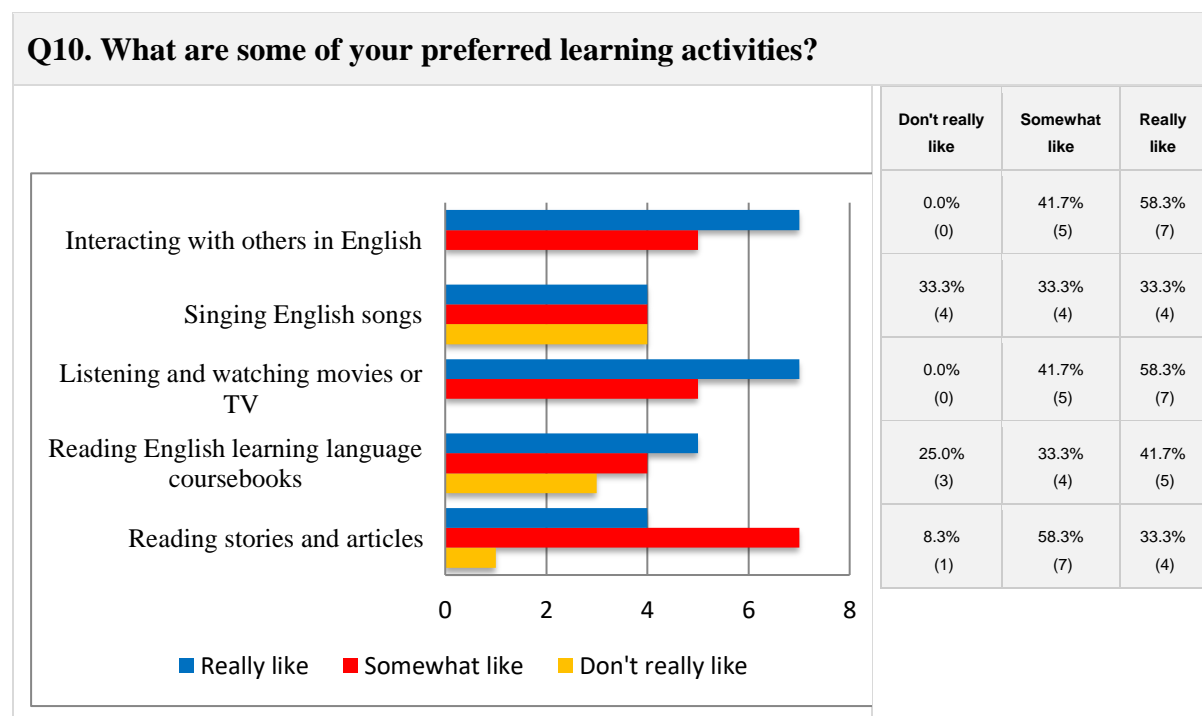


Figure 2: Survey response - Preferred learning methods

Additional strategy usage and preferred learning activities emerged from the interviews to which we now turn below.

Using CALL and media tools

When asked in the questionnaire (Q7) what resources students would use to learn English, the dominant choice was Internet use (91.67%). Watching movies and English TV (83%) also had a high preference and the interviews reaffirmed using the Internet to either download or watch them. Figure 3 illustrates these prevailing numbers.

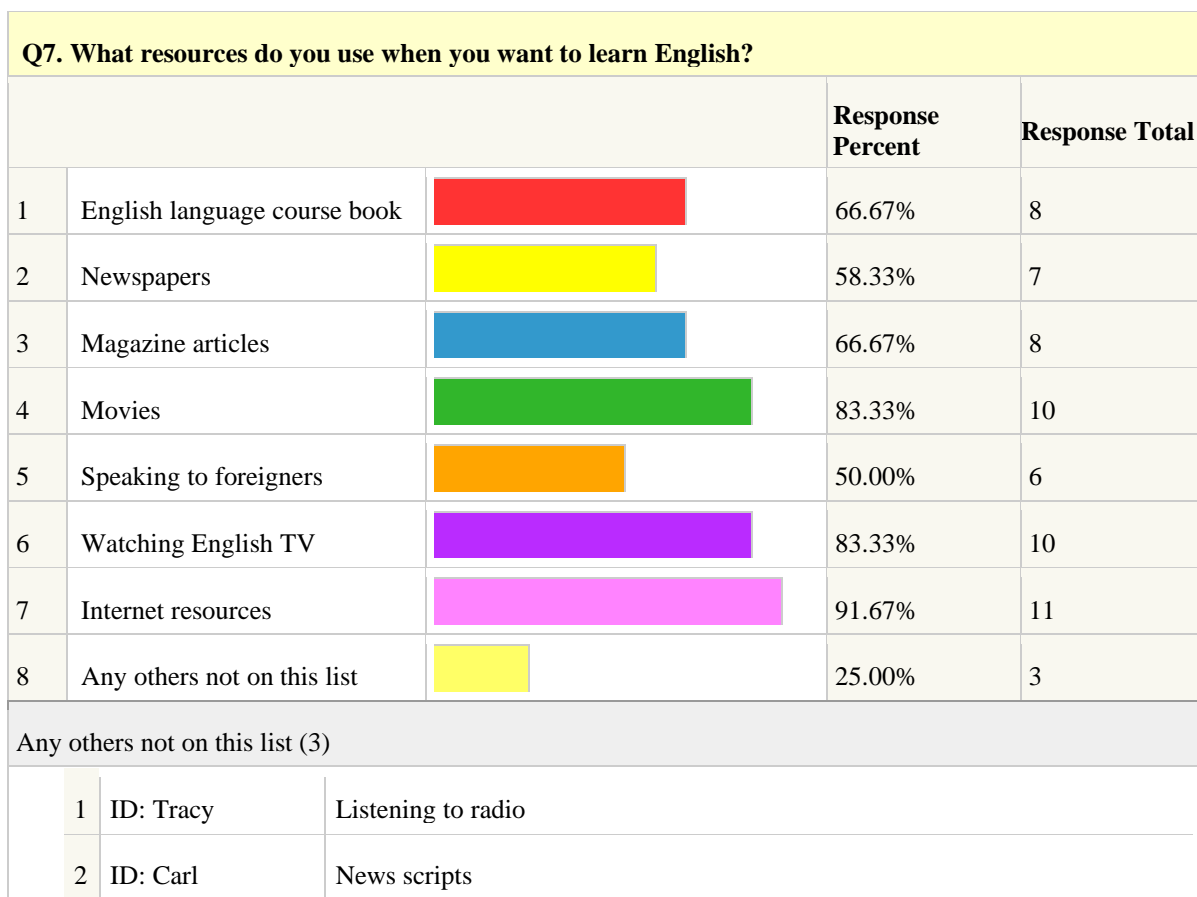


Figure 1: Survey response - Resources used to learn English

The predominant language-learning tool reported in the interviews was the use of smartphone apps where, besides being with them at all times, helped them practice various aspects of their language skills such as vocabulary memorisation or pronunciation and intonation practice.

Qualitative data from interviews

This section presents the interview discussions highlighting commonalities and differences amongst the participants as well as discovering unique approaches or strategies used for the multiple facets of language acquisition. The various topics have been organised around learner IDs mentioned above (e.g. motivation, learner strategies, learner styles, and affective variables).

Motivation

Several topics of interest emerged regarding this ID. The first and foremost learner ID contributing to these participants' successes was the intrinsic motivation; 10 out of 12

participants (83%) repeatedly described how their motivation was related to their love of the language or simply learning out of interest.

Alice: *I like English very much.*

Barbara: *at that time, I didn't, (0.4) eh think too much to be an English teacher or something. Just out of interest.*

Gina: (Did you have a goal...), (0.2) *eh, not a very definite one. I (0.4) I just loved English and now, I love it too.*

Kate: *I just love listening to English with no ((special)) goals.*

Motivation is often influenced by the presence of the teacher through their teaching methodologies or as a model to emulate. Here two participants talked about the teacher as an exemplar of success demonstrating the interplay of motivation with affective variables and one reflected how the teaching methods helped.

Barbara: *I didn't have a clear goal at first (0.6) my interest comes from my first English teacher. She was, (0.4) eh, Russian raised. (0.8) She seemed like a foreigner and she's beautiful. I'm interested in the teacher first and then I'm interested in English. I wanted to talk with her in English (.) and that's why I learned it.*

Margaret: *During the high school, (0.6) I was very interested in studying English at that time. And (0.4) one secret, ha ha, (0.8) it was because I liked my English teacher ha ha (0.4) he was very handsome [...] because I wanted to draw his attention, so I studied to get a higher score ha ha.*

Alice: *I think the education (.) in middle school and high school matters much because from (.) my middle school, I had a very good teacher and she taught the pronunciation and (.) I think the pronunciation is very important for me to memorise words and (0.4) in my university, the teacher has taught me a lot of learning methods for me to (.) improve my English level.*

Another surfacing ID, resulting from motivation, was the extent to which the students worked harder at learning English than the average students during their formal education. Five described how they put in more efforts than their peers in the following example statements:

Barbara: *I think I did more than some others. You know, in high school, there are courses, (0.2) not only English, so, (0.2) I think what I did more was on my way from home, to*

school or back, when I say something, (.) I will try and say it in English. I will try and think of some words, some things I learned and (0.6) when I am doing some other courses, I will try and translate into English and then answer it.

Kate: I did more than the other students because I'm not clever

Liz (who spent her time listening intensely to the radio and speaking to herself talks of entering university): Even when I did some housework, I spoke to myself and I just repeated what I heard and I could recite a long passage because I read many times. So, I think I, (0.8) so, that's why I could speak English when I entered university [...] I passed the test with high marks (0.4) in my speaking because I practiced myself.

Doing more than the average student shows an inclination towards self-directedness in learning the language.

Self-directedness

Interestingly, self-directedness implies planning and goal-setting, but as the interviews in this research showed, goal-setting was not predominant at the early stages of seven of the participants. Such examples are shown in the following excerpt from Alice, Liz, Barbara, Kate and Brian:

Alice: (Interviewer: did you think of becoming a teacher?) no ... just learning English

Liz: (Interviewer: did you have a goal of wanting to reach a higher level of English?) no, no, I don't think (0.6) I have actually a goal. I just (0.2) go like that. I just enjoyed it [...]

Barbara: I didn't have a clear goal at first (0.6) my interest comes from my first English teacher.

Brian: em (0.8), well, eh, (0.8) years ago, (0.2) I had only one aim (.) or target – to improve my English. (0.4) I mean, when I was young.

Kate: I never planned to be an English teacher.

With their motivation for learning being intrinsically driven, this section now turns to examine what language learning strategies prevailed in their learning styles and self-directedness.

Strategy usage

From the interviews, cognitive strategies dominated the dialogues illustrating the various activities used for practicing the language along with some meta-cognitive strategies

used in goal-setting and planning (see Brown, 2000, p. 132 for a summary of Oxford's taxonomy of strategies). In addition, there was also some discussion on memory strategies, compensation strategies, and social strategies which are described below.

Cognitive strategies

Within cognitive strategies were many examples of the subcategory of practicing. This included the use of repetition as a strategy as is evident in the following extract:

Carl: *I watch movies such as (.) Gone with the wind sometimes around 10 times. I want to know what they said, why they said that, and (0.2) what is the story around the speaking.*

Roger (talking about remembering words): *repeat again and again and (.) you will remember it. For example, persimmon, eh, (0.2) this is food. I don't know this word, persimmon. So, I look it up in the dictionary (.) but after half a year, I will forget it. And, I'll look it up again and find it (0.4) and forget it again, (0.6) I think this is the 10th or 11th time I remember this word persimmon.*

Alice (talks about watching movies only once): *eh, (0.2) when I watch two or three films there are some expressions that appear again and again and then I grasp them. I didn't watch it again [...]*

Alice, contrary to others, watched movies extensively rather than intensively trusting that common expressions return in most situations.

Combining practicing naturalistically with formally practicing with sounds, the majority of the participants exercised speaking aloud as that is often encouraged in schools. However, half of them also talked about a Chinese smartphone dubbing app (QuPeiYin) which provided opportunities to learn movie lines by recording themselves repeating it to compare the differences in pronunciation and/or tonality in expression – a form of shadow speaking (repeat a speech immediately after hearing it).

Roger: *read aloud. I like to read (0.4) aloud because (0.2) when I was young, this was a (0.4) very important way to practice (0.2) the English.*

Gina: *eh, (.) I have one application for-QuPeiYin..., it can make me correct my own(.) pronunciation and sometimes the most important is the intonation in a sentence. [...]
pronunciation is not usually important in your communication. I think the (.) intonation plays a (.) a more important role.*

Liz: *I just spoke to myself. I spoke to myself, mainly, I recited what I heard from the recording. Like I said, I could recite passages all the words, maybe, at that time. A long passage, I could recite ... I just spoke, I didn't have to think...*

Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategy use was evident in the Oxford categories focusing on listening, paying attention, seeking times to practice, and in self evaluations to some degree as was evident in this extract:

Alice: *when I was in university, I listened to VOA or BBC for half an hour every morning. I think that's very (.) beneficial to help you with your listening.*

Tracy also mentioned that she listened to English radio while driving to and from work:

Gina (discussion paying attention): *... not only pay attention to the clause but also (0.2) the expressions they use (0.2) in the series, in the movies,*

Barbara: (Interviewer: ok, so you pay attention to some things) *yes, I will think 'oh, this is how they say it' [...] when you learn English to some certain level, you will (0.2) unconsciously notice English in your daily life. For example, when I am cooking fast noodles, I will read the instructions in the English version and I will see some expressions such as 'shelf life', 'expiry'. I think it's a good way to learn from daily life. That makes it interesting. It's better than learning from the books.*

To compensate for the lack of practice opportunities to communicate with native English speakers all the participants discussed using various strategies. For example, speaking to themselves at times or, being English teachers, practice through actual teaching. Jennifer, for example, is no longer a teacher but a director of a school. She hires a native English speaker on contract to teach the learners and takes the opportunity to have a practice session by discussing teaching.

Self-evaluation of one's progress appeared to be a difficult task for the participants; however, some of the participants mentioned ways they were able to accomplish that although it was not something they could do regularly. Four participants (33%) discussed doing standard tests (TOEFL) occasionally to see what score they may have reached. Jennifer mentioned that she sometimes completed a placement test at a school with no intention of taking a course to see where she was placed. Four other participants also explained how they

self-evaluated themselves by choosing to do tasks, either listening or writing, and evaluating how well they performed.

Social strategies

Social strategies included cooperating with others and, on that topic, the interviews discussed the benefits and limitations of having a language learning partner. Overall, all participants agreed that it was beneficial as it pushed them to go further in their learning. Many had such partners when in college but do not have any now.

Another category of social strategies according to Oxford is developing cultural understanding. In that regard, one of the participants who watched movies to learn English (Roger) also did it to understand the culture:

Roger: *Because I was very interested in eh (0.4) Chinese culture and western culture. So, if you don't know language, how can you (0.6) learn western culture? [...] language is more than the culture. It is the culture, it is science, it is (0.6) everything.*

Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies were used by learners to make up for a gap in language ability or knowledge (Villamizar, 2014) and in these interviews, the following strategies emerged: guessing intelligently and switching to the mother tongue. Jennifer, for example, asserted that she was successful most of the time in guessing meaning from context and Roger sometimes watched movies with Chinese subtitles to assist the comprehension of some lexical details.

Memory strategies

Finally, with memory strategies, two participants talked about using keywords and one described how she used imagery:

Kate: (Interviewer: So, remembering vocabulary [reading the survey form] you remember by roots and affixes?) *yes, it's a good way. I think it's a better way to remember those words but (0.4) there is another way to remember how to use the words is to make more and more sentences using the new words. It helps me to remember how the word is used.*

Tracy: (Interviewer: What do you mean by imagination?) *Imagination, eh (0.8) because, if you want to remember this word, sometimes, I need to imagine (0.2) eh (0.4) it's like a*

picture in my mind. For example, I remember 'apple', in my brain, it's a picture of an apple. [...] Imagination is also (0.2) personal actually. For example, maybe this word is related to my personal experience. It can, from the imagination ... I can think of something and I can relate this word to things, I (.) can think of. Then, I can remember it, you know (0.2) more easily.

The interviewees also discussed how strategies had changed over time with a common response being that participants were less systematic in their learning or more relaxed about learning English than before. This would indicate that some strategies have been abandoned while some others have been adopted. For example, taking notes and reading aloud have been replaced with a more relaxed approach to learning (affective strategies) and memorisation has given way to understanding as Barbara suggested:

Barbara: at first, I tried to memorise words, (.) grammar rules, but now, (0.8) there is no focused purpose of learning English. Whatever I learn, I don't have a (.) purpose. Just out of interest, I want to learn about something, I will do it and so, I think the biggest change is my mind – my mind to learning English. I don't em, (0.4) see it as a tool or something. It's a habit.

Learning without Internet

As an additional question, the participants were asked how they handled learning English before they could use the Internet. Interestingly, the participants' responses to this question did not manifest a lack of resources:

Alice: from the books and from the radio; ya, when I was in university, I listened to VOA or BBC for half an hour every morning

Barbara: during college, (0.2) not everyone had a computer. Our school had a library and there was an Internet bar but it was inconvenient for you to check (.) something anytime. So, I had to refer to the book and talk with my classmates or ask my teachers for help. Most of the time in my self-study, I would refer to books, dictionaries and books. I'll go to the library a lot.

Jennifer: (Interviewer: and how did you deal with resources before the Internet?) just eh...learn from (.) books, (.) textbooks and (.) teachers, especially in high school and in (0.6) college. (Interviewer: so, even at that time, you feel you had resources?) ya, ya ... eh, in middle school, very limited (0.2), only textbooks and tapes.

Liz (note: Liz is the oldest participant of the 12): [now] *we have a lot of facilities – you have recordings, you can go online, you have tape recordings, all these kinds of (.) advanced technologies to assist you but back at that time, I didn't have them. So, what I could do is (.) just listen to the radio, maybe how many times, I don't know. As far as it was the program so I just listened to it and (Interviewer: was it a program to learn English or ...) to learn English and there was a teacher there and I just followed that program and we didn't have a textbook so I had to write down (.) the sentence, or if they broadcast a story, I wanted to write down every word so I could practice my listening ability and also writing.*

Discussion

What learner IDs characterised the participants?

As initially posed in the introduction of this study, the aims were to discover how successful self-directed learners approached the learning of English with innovative strategies and/or selected learning activities and how that differed from learners in a traditional classroom setting. The related question asked “What individual differences (IDs) characterise EFL learners who have achieved CEFR B2 and above given their contextual situations where others given similar situations and opportunities have not?” In order to address this question, this subsection refers to the category of learner IDs from Ellis (2008) from which motivation and personality would seem to be the main driving force behind the participants’ approach to their learning achievements. Because of their intrinsic motivation, participants’ learning seemed to be less structured than it might have been when they were studying their majors in university. They discussed using all available resources (radio, movies, smartphone apps, and speaking to oneself) to acquire the language whereas students in an English learning program such as the Hong Kong example mentioned before (Manfred, 2008) applied more metacognitive strategies of organisation and planning (more structured) and cognitive strategies of note-taking and summarising as one would expect to do when preparing to pass a course. However, the participants in this study reported using such strategies in their college days.

To what extent were these learners self-directed?

In the profiles above, and from the interviews, two of the participants (Carl and Liz) could be considered to be most self-directed and even self-taught (having learned the language almost entirely on their own with little formal instruction). Although the research

initially sought to identify self-taught learners for closer examination of strategy usage, what emerged were intrinsically motivated English major students who had worked harder than the average Chinese English language learner due to their interests and eventual career directions.

What were the most common learning strategies used by these learners and to what extent did these learners make use of and exploit 21st century ICT and media tools?

The results have shown wide usage of strategies covering all the categories of Oxford's Taxonomy – memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective, and social (Brown, 2000; Oxford, 2003). Strategy use was not always a conscious choice, however. Rather, it was through the activities the participants described that their usage emerged. Through their favoured medium of watching movies emerged the practice of repeating, and the use of compensation strategies. Internet and smartphone usage for language learning demonstrated cognitive strategies mainly related to practicing (pronunciation) and metacognitive strategies of centering the learning. Memory strategy usage emerged through imaging and creating mental linkages of words to patterns (roots and affixes).

As mentioned above, the participants took advantage of opportunities to involve English in their lives and through activities of listening, reading and speaking, used various strategies consciously and unconsciously to fulfill their general goals of learning the language. As their studies progressed, they used fewer strategies or approached the learning of the language more casually.

When watching movies (one of the main reported activities), 33% reported watching casually and still learning from it, two said they do a bit of both, and three affirmed continuing to watch movies with a purpose to learn. When discussing reading, the majority identified reading casually or extensively rather than intensely (one read intensely) and only two talked about writing in this respect.

The participants' learning styles and relaxed approaches at this time may have been because they had already reached a good enough level to be comfortable in the language but it may also illustrate their adoption of English in their lives as mentioned in the questionnaire where 75% asserted that English had become part of their lives. Seeing English as part of their lives would allow them to access all possible resources to enrich their skills and knowledge both culturally and linguistically.

Strategy usage embedded in learning activities was shown to be the best recipe. Recalling the comparison of learners Wes and Julie (Schmidt, 2010) would indicate that

language learning strategies are the elements that add purpose to language activity and that doing an activity (such as watching an English movie) without the purpose may produce average results in the long term.

Limitations

The study targeted one type of learner – Chinese English-language teachers. On reflection, this may have limited the variety of samples and contextual situations we could discover but likewise, this was an instrumental case study (Dörnyei, 2007), and was thereby more interested in the phenomenon than the sample. Another limitation was that this research initially sought to study self-taught learners as the study title suggests. However, the participants, although quite self-directed in their learning, were for the most part, English majors in their university studies making them less of a model for the struggling learners as originally desired.

Although the approach and methodology used allowed the participants to describe their styles and choices, it must be noted that these are specific experiences and that the results cannot be generalised, especially due to the small sample size involved on this occasion.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to understand the learning habits and use of language learning strategies of a group of self-directed learners in China. This was done, in part, to address the problem many EFL learners in China frequently identify as being the lack of opportunities and/or resources to learn English. That claim was countered in several ways by demonstrating the possibilities and the achievements of some participants through examination of the interview data relative to the research questions.

Through the interviews and results of the online questionnaire it was evident that individual differences (IDs) in learners enabled them to achieve higher goals than others and which learning activities and strategies they applied to scaffold their progress. It was notable that one key ID amongst all the participants was a keen interest both in learning the language and the target culture. This provided the solid base which allowed the participants to make use of every available resource and become a self-directed language learner forming their careers and life directions. Finally, the analysis of the participants' path of progress indicated that it was not as structured and perfectly planned at every step as some GLL studies (Gan et al.,

2004; Rubin, 2005) would like to suggest but more an experimental undertaking that changed as possibilities changed.

Implications for teaching

What can be learned from the experiences of these participants? One common answer would be to create teaching materials relevant to the learners' needs – one that would kindle their interests both linguistically and culturally. But another aspect could be to raise the awareness of strategy usage during activities in the classroom. More than completing tasks, the learners should know why they are doing a task in a certain way and that the aim is not simply to complete the task (not a race to the finish). For example, in an activity asking students to survey five other students (one by one) in a communicative task, they should be made aware that repetition and practice is an important learning strategy in the activity and to avoid grouping together in order to complete the survey faster.

Future research

Much, if not most, research on strategy usage has been done in institutional contexts most likely due to convenience. Regarding self-directed learners, further research in non-institutional contexts would add potentially unique approaches such as the ones found in this study complementing existing teaching methodologies and providing new concepts for material developers. Additionally, any one of the language learning strategies combined with activities uncovered in this research could be isolated in an intervention study for its efficacy in use versus non-use (e.g. students' regular use of flashcards in a spaced-repetition app on a smartphone or using movies in the classroom (and using the dubbing app) to measure the effectiveness of use in a classroom and the exposure to authentic language as opposed to coursebooks).

This research has shown that language learning strategies, far from being an old topic, are well-embedded in the language learning process and has revealed the myriad ways they are applied in personalised and context-sensitive situations. Acting as models, these examples could serve learners pedagogically by raising awareness of their benefits and flexible individualised application.

References

Alghamdi, F. M. A. (2016). Self-directed learning in preparatory-year university students:

- Comparing successful and less-successful English language learners. *English Language Teaching*, 9(7), 59.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation, 13(4), 544–559.
- Beatty, K. (2010). *Teaching and researching: Computer-assisted language learning* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.
- Brown, H.D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Cotterall, S. (2008). Autonomy and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from good language learners* (pp. 110–120). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). Individual Differences: Interplay of learner characteristics and learning environment. *Language Learning*, 59, 230–248.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2003). Individual differences in second language learning. *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, 589–630.
- Ehrman, M. E., Leaver, B. Lou, & Oxford, R. L. (2003). A brief overview of individual differences in second language learning. *System*, 31(3), 313–330.
- Ellis, R. (1993). Talking shop: Second language acquisition research: How does it help teachers? An interview with Rod Ellis. *ELT Journal*, 47(1), 3–11.
- Ellis, R. (1998). *Second language acquisition*. (H. G. Widdowson, Ed.) (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gan, Z., Humphreys, G., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2004). Understanding successful and unsuccessful EFL students in Chinese universities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), 229–244.
- Grossmann, D. (2011). *A study of cognitive styles and strategy use by successful and unsuccessful adult learners in Switzerland*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Gu, Y. (1994). Vocabulary learning strategies of good and poor Chinese EFL learners. In

- Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.*
Baltimore, USA.
- Köksal, P. D., & Ulum, Ö. G. (2016). Language learning strateiges of Turkish and Arabic students: A cross-cultural study. *Language Teaching*, 1(1), 122-143.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives on good language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(2), 307–322.
- Oxford, R. L. (1989). Strategy inventory for language learning (SILL). *English*, 1(1), 4-6.
- Oxford, R. L. (2003). Language learning styles and strategies: An overview. *Learning Styles & Strategies*, 1–25.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ring, N. M. (2015). *My friend TED: Implementing effective listening strategies into academic listening using TED talks*. Sheffield Hallam University.
- Robinson, P. (2001). Individual differences, cognitive abilities, aptitude complexes and learning conditions in second language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 17(4), 368–392.
- Rubin, J. (1975). What the Good language learner can teach us. *Tesol Quarterly*, 9(1), 41–51.
- Rubin, J. (2005). The expert language learner: A review of good language learner studies and learner strategies. *Expertise in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 37–63.
- Schmidt, R. (2010). Attention, awareness, and individual differences in language learning. In W. M. Chan, S. Chi, K. N. Cin, J. Istanto, M. Nagami, J. W. Sew, ... I. Walker (Eds.), *Perspectives on individual characteristics and foreign language education* (pp. 27–50). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Skehan, P. (1991). Individual differences in second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13(2), 275–298.
- Tellis, W. M. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(2), 1–14.
- Villamizar, D. R. (2014). Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency: Case study. *Opening Writing Doors*, 11(1), 35–79.
- Wu, M. M. (2008). Beliefs about language learning of Chinese ESL learners undertaking vocational education in Hong Kong. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 56(2), 1–16.
- Zhang, R. (2016, October). The designation of 1st, 2nd, 3rd tier cities in China. Retrieved from <https://econ274.academic.wlu.edu/2016/04/the-designation-of-1st-2nd-3rd-tier->

cities-in-china/

Zhou, X. (2014). *Learner's strategy use to guess word meanings during interactive read aloud: A case study*. University of Stirling. Retrieved from https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/learners_strategy_use_to_guess_word_meanings_during_interactive_read_aloud_v2_0.pdf

Learner Corpora and Language Teaching, by Sandra Götz and Joybrato Mukherjee (Ed.). John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2019. Pp. vi + 267.

Reviewed by Yanmeng Liu
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Bio-profile:

Yanmeng Liu is a PhD candidate of School of Languages and Cultures at University of Sydney, Australia. Her PhD study is under the guidance of Prof. Christine Meng Ji, an established scholar in corpus studies, contrastive linguistics and quantitative language methodologies. Yanmeng's research focuses on corpus-based language learning, corpus-based translation and interpreting studies.

Corpora with considerable language data and efficient corpus tools facilitate identification of linguistic patterns that might otherwise remain obscure, challenging and/or time-consuming for teachers and researchers to identify manually. The book under review, *Learner Corpora and Language Teaching*, is edited by Götz and Mukherjee (2019) and synthesises current research in learner corpus studies and their value in language teaching while making corpora more accessible to the field. The book presents research papers from the 12th Teaching and Language Corpora Conference in Giessen, 2016. Papers are compiled in four thematically defined sections: (I) New learner corpora and tools, (II) Written learner corpora and language teaching, (III) Spoken learner corpora and language teaching, and (IV) Learner corpora and language teacher education. This volume focuses on the value of spoken and written learner corpora in the teaching of languages.

Section I presents new learner corpora and corpus tool innovations, bridging a gap between learner corpus and its application in language pedagogy. The first part of this section presents a newly compiled spoken corpus, The Trinity Lancaster Corpus (TLC), to integrate learner corpora with learning materials design and classroom exercises. This effort presents a relationship between learners' overall performance and listenership strategy that signals of active listenership can be taught to elevate overall learner understanding and conversation principle awareness. The second paper in this section introduces an automated tool for rating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) essays. The tool is based on the corpus named Russian Error-Annotated Learner English Corpus (REALEC) in two genres (graphical materials and argumentative essays in English by students in Russia). The paper thoroughly explains how

the automated tool uses corpus tools, from error identification to error classification, and error correction to annotation display. This paper also uses REALEC to generate examination questions, and further analyses how useful this method is for examiners.

Section II examines applications of learner corpora to determine non-native speaker over- or underuse of linguistic patterns in English. Keywords for analysis of native and non-native English speakers are selected, such as ‘TAKE’ by Biel (p. 51), and countable nouns, prepositional phrases, verbs and general adverbs by Pérez-Paredes and Díez-Bedmar (p. 101). Also presented are additional keywords that use syntactic features, like linking adjuncts by D’Arienzo (p. 75) and direct quotes by Wiemeyer (p. 129), to calculate the log-likelihoods of similarity between learners’ English and native English. Biel determines that non-native speakers overuse simple verbs, as had been generally considered, due to their restricted vocabulary. Through similar comparison, Pérez-Paredes and Díez-Bedmar conclude that the noun phrase is of considerable importance in the identification of language acquisition achievements. Using syntactic features, D’Arienzo argues that EFL learners in Italy share a similar tendency in both over- and underusing linking adjuncts. Pedagogical interventions are proposed for Italian learners to acquire cohesive devices. Wiemeyer, in a study of intertextuality of L2 learners, suggests, despite familiarity of direct quotations and conventions, that teaching should enhance learner knowledge in length, syntactic integration, and the purpose of direct quotes.

Section III regards spoken learner corpora in which both linguistic features and paralinguistic cues are studied. Abe (p. 157) reports Japanese students learning English benefit from exposure to a natural language environment by investigating the third-person singular -s phenomenon. Additionally, Gráf (p. 175) and Puga (p. 191), using spoken corpora in studies based on speech rate and edge tone, respectively, explore possible and novel approaches for spoken corpus research and spoken language assessment. Finally, in Section IV, Calie (p. 245) investigates an added value of learner corpora—how they can be used to familiarize more teachers in the use of corpus linguistics.

The research compilation presents diverse approaches to applying learner corpora in language learning and teaching. In sum, the book presents two major contrasts between: a - advanced and lower learners and b - L2 learners and native language corpora. In doing so, a major research theme emerges and these contrasts further explore how language learning can be improved using features such as lexical markers by Gablasova, Brezina and McEnery in section I, Pérez-Paredes and Díez-Bedmar in section II, Abe and Rosen, in section III, and

syntactic structure by Biel, D'Arienzo and Wiemeyer in section II. Apart from linguistic features common to spoken and written corpora, paralinguistic features such as fluency, tone, and speech rate are crucial for language learning and use. Section III, in this vein, presents studies by both Gráf and Puga that expand learner corpus beyond traditional word analysis.

Authors in this compilation also introduce several innovative corpus tools and novel learner corpora, which enrich resources for the future development of learner corpus studies. Limitations are few. As both spoken and written learner corpus studies are discussed in a single volume, the content of sections I and III overlaps somewhat with regard to spoken learner corpora. Additionally, variables could be better controlled when making comparisons between corpora. For example, the time when corpus materials are produced is of great importance in language comparison, as languages are dynamic and change throughout different periods; comparisons between student assignments prepared today with a corpus compiled several decades ago are not that convincing. Corpora being compared should include broadly comparable data features.

As a whole, *Learner Corpora and Language Teaching* is an informative collection of recent literature on learner corpora and their application in language learning and teaching that represents a valuable resource for teachers, researchers and language learners alike.

Reference

Götz, S., & Mukherjee, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Learner Corpora and Language Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

***Language assessment: principles and classroom practices* (Third Edition), by H. Douglas Brown & Priyanvada Abeywickrama. Pearson Education, Hoboken New Jersey, 2019. pp. 1-331.**

**Reviewed by Derek Bell
Dankook University, General English Program, Yongin, Korea.**

Bio-profile:

Derek Bell is currently teaching in the General English Department at Dankook University in Yongin, Korea. He has taught many different ESL classes including leadership, public speaking, job interview, and the basic ESL classes of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The idea of language assessment in ELT is often ambiguous and leads us into a space of enquiry. *Is it necessary to evaluate students? Is it helpful or harmful? What are we assessing and why? Are we testing something that will be useful for the students in their future? What items do teachers put in their rubrics? Do students take tests only to forget what they learned after the test? Are students interested in learning or merely obtaining a good grade?* The reality is that grades for and in university often determine a student's future. Brown and Abeywickrama's third edition of *Language assessment: principles and classroom practices* (2019) is very helpful for any ELT professional who does assessment or who is learning about doing assessment.

The book, which has been in print as Brown's work since 2004 and as a collaboration since 2010, is structured within twelve chapters. Chapters one and two give the reader background issues in language assessment. Chapters three to eleven go into detail on assessing the different sub-skills and language aspects of ESL. Chapter twelve considers less quantitative forms of grading that do not involve letters or percentages.

The first chapter provides foundational knowledge and concepts in assessment and testing. The authors cite Mousavi's (2009) definition of assessment as "appraising or estimating the level or magnitude of some attribute of a person" (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019, p. 3). As a variety of assessment with some necessary overlap into teaching, they maintain, a 'test' is a method of measuring a person's "ability, knowledge, or performance" in a given domain. The chapter, further, outlines and exemplifies many types of assessments.

The second chapter is very informative. It examines practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. These are all important things for stakeholders in testing

processes to consider. However, this chapter was great for experienced teachers, but overly complex for novice teachers. It appears, perhaps, overly advanced for someone just learning for the first time of how to conduct language tests.

Chapter three targets teachers who are starting to design tests. It explains the different types of classroom language tests. Further, it gives a basic checklist, and presents examples of tests in different countries. It discusses designing a basic test in each skill and offers great ideas to new teachers on administering tests, especially pre-test preparation. Scoring, grading, and feedback are discussed briefly but very informatively. Among the questions addressed are: *What is the relative weight a teacher should place on each section? What does the school environment want in terms of scoring? What type of feedback is appropriate in each type of test?*

Chapters four and five investigate standards-based assessment. This, once again, is for an experienced tester, not a beginner. Chapter four examines English language standards in different countries, both English-speaking and non-English speaking contexts. Also, test-driven learning and teaching is introduced, in light of the fact that this type of learning requires extrinsic motivation: Students study for the test, which is very important for their future. Many readers will acknowledge that the college entrance examinations in Asia are a good example of this.

Chapters six, seven, eight, nine, and closely examine the assessment of the basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. These chapters were very informative as they detail the basics as well as exemplifying each type of test. These chapters describe and illustrate the micro skills and macro skills of each skill. Also, there is a valuable example of a basic speaking rubric on pages 184-185.

Chapter eleven details grading and covers student evaluations. This chapter pertains to university teachers because it investigates rubrics, which are very important in a university setting. It also discusses absolute versus relative grading. In an applied sense, relative grading, or a grading curve, is used in many universities.

Chapter twelve valuably spotlights 'beyond letter' grading. This involves self- and peer- assessment, which is under-utilized despite its learning value. Self-assessment concerns the many ways a student can apply the principles of self-assessment as a means of gaining autonomy and reflective insight. The authors stress an excellent question about the role of assessment in the learning process: *How can students, especially low level, improve if all they see is a letter or number grade?*

This book is a must-read for new teachers who have started a job where English language testing is required. This book is well-written and hugely instructive. The book also goes beyond the assessment using numbers or letters. There are manifold new ideas to understand, especially for a beginner teacher. These ideas or theories more closely target experienced teachers who have done a lot of testing. However, the book provides a solid background for understanding all key aspects of testing in English language evaluation.

References

- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2019). *Language assessment: principles and classroom practices* (3rd Ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Mousavi, A. (2009). *An encyclopedic dictionary of language testing*. Tehran, IR: Rahnama Press.