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Special Issue for the Nile TESOL Skills Conference Proceedings 2011

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From the Editor

It is with great pleasure that my colleagues and I present our first edition of the Special Issue of the AUC TESOL Journal for 2011. It has been in the works for eight months and has been delayed by the busy schedules of the team who have been diligently working on it in addition to their many duties. In addition, Egypt underwent a revolution with all the disruption which ensued, the interruption of Internet and telecommunication service, and the unavoidable cancellation of the Nile TESOL 2011 Conference. Despite the aforementioned, we are delighted with the overwhelming response and support of our colleagues in the field and with their gracious sharing of their ideas and expertise in the form of their submitted articles. We received more articles than we had anticipated which accounts for the size of this special edition. We hope you'll find this edition both interesting and inspiring.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the editorial board of this special edition, Rania Jabr and Jonah Moos, for all their tireless work and dedication. I would also like to thank Mary Hughes for graciously agreeing to act as a third reader for some of the articles. Thanks are also due to Tom Farkas who meticulously edited many of the articles.

Mariam Osman
Editor

The Relationship between Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Vocabulary Knowledge

Ali A. A. Aljdee

Abstract

56 final year students in the department of English language at The 7th of April University in Libya were asked to complete a vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) questionnaire to identify the range and frequency of VLS these learners use. Their responses were correlated with their results in two vocabulary tests used to measure the learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of reception and controlled production. The findings show that the Libyan EFL learners reported using a wide range of VLS even though the frequency of use is relatively low. Discovery strategies, such as using dictionaries and guessing meaning from context, were used more frequently than consolidation strategies, such as practising in groups, making word lists, or assessing vocabulary knowledge. The results of the vocabulary tests indicate that these learners' receptive and controlled productive vocabulary knowledge is very low. Moreover, there were highly positive correlations between the learners' vocabulary knowledge and some VLS, such as using a monolingual dictionary, guessing meaning from context, making lists of words, and using media. Learners' VLS and their vocabulary knowledge can influence each other. Thus, building a vocabulary store would help learners use a wide range of VLS that require a knowledge of vocabulary to be used efficiently; such strategies in turn will enhance incidental learning and contribute to developing learners' vocabulary knowledge.

1. Introduction

The research on good language learners can be traced back to the seventies, when it started with the studies of Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). After these initiatives a large amount of research into learner strategies was conducted by many researchers (e.g. Rubin, 1987; O'Malley, 1987; Wenden, 1987a, 1987b Oxford, 1989, 1990, 1993; Oxford and Cohen, 1992; O'Malley and Chamot 1990). These studies concluded that differences between successful and unsuccessful language learners could be caused by the quantity and/or quality of their learning strategies.

Particular attention has been paid to vocabulary learning by researchers, materials designers, and teachers who have tried to identify the strategies that learners use to acquire new words or to remember them. However, some learners may be unaware of the various vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) they might use in order to develop their vocabulary acquisition.

Some researchers (e.g., Schmitt, 1997; Stoffer, 1995; Nation, 2001) have attempted to classify VLS. The taxonomy for this study is mainly based on Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of VLS (see appendix 1), which was in turn based on Oxford's (1990) social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive categories. Schmitt's taxonomy lists 58 VLS, and is classified into two categories: (1) the discovery strategies that are "useful for the initial discovery of a word's meaning" and (2) the consolidation strategies that are "useful for remembering that word once it has been introduced" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 135). In addition, these strategies are further classified into five groups. The discovery category includes *determination and social* strategies. The consolidation category includes *social, memory, cognitive*, and *metacognitive* strategies.

The five categories of strategies were defined by Schmitt (1997) as follows: *determination strategies* are "used by an individual when faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise" (p. 205). *Social strategies* are used when one asks other people (e.g., classmates or teachers) to understand a word. *Memory strategies* entail linking the word to be learned with some previously learned knowledge. The definition of *cognitive strategies* was adopted from Oxford (1990) as "manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner" (p.43). Finally, *metacognitive strategies* involve "a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best ways to study" (Schmitt, 1997, p. 205).

The current study aims to identify the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by Libyan English language majors at university level. The focus is particularly on Libyan students to see whether the Libyan context is typical or different from other contexts, since there are no studies related to VLS conducted in the Libyan context. It also explores these students' vocabulary knowledge and proceeds to investigate the relationship between these learners' VLS and their vocabulary knowledge.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were all fourth year undergraduate students (56 students) majoring in English as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Arts/ the7th of April University, Zawia, Libya. (6 males and 50 females). Their age ranged from 20 to 45, with a mean age of 22.24 (SD = 3.39). Most of them were in their twenties (20-23 years), so they reflect the actual age of most university students.

2.1. Data Collection Instruments

2.2.1. Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ)

This questionnaire was chosen to measure the range and the frequency of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) EFL learners use. It consists of 44 items related to VLS (see appendix 2). The VLSQ items have been developed in studies (e.g., Schmitt, 1997) and proved to be effective in obtaining data about learners' VLS.

2.2.2. Vocabulary Tests

2.2.2.1. The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), which was designed by Nation (1983, 1990), is a multiple-choice vocabulary test. It has been widely used by researchers to measure EFL/ESL

learners' vocabulary size receptively at four word frequency levels: the 2000 word level, 3000 word level, 5000 word level, and 10,000 word level; it also measures the learners' academic vocabulary, also called the University Word List (henceforth UWL) (see appendix 3). The VLT has been validated and widely used in vocabulary research studies by researchers (Read, 1988; Schmitt and Meara, 1997; Laufer and Paribakht, 1998; Beglar and Hunt, 1999; Schmitt et al., 2001).

2.2.2.2. The Vocabulary Size Test of Controlled Productive Ability (CPA)

The CPA is used to test the ability to use a word when asked to do so by a teacher or researcher (performance-based). The overall structure of the CPA test is modelled on the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) that was originally created by Paul Nation (1983, 1990) and utilized the same four word frequency levels and University Word List (UWL) (see appendix 4). The CPA is "reliable, valid (in that the levels distinguished between different proficiency groups) and practical" (Laufer and Nation, 1999, p. 33).

2.2.3. Semi-structured Interviews

Fifteen participants were randomly selected out of 56 respondents according to their scores on the vocabulary knowledge tests and were divided into three groups of five. The high vocabulary knowledge group (HVK) represents the five students with the highest scores, the moderate vocabulary knowledge group (MVK) represents the five students with moderate scores, and the low vocabulary knowledge group (LVK) represents the five students with the lowest scores. The interviews were conducted with the aims of eliciting information about learners' perceptions of VLS use and, most importantly, probing in detail how these learners use VLS (see appendix 5).

3. Data Analysis Procedures

- Descriptive analysis of the vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire (VLSQ) items to identify the overall pattern of VLS used by the respondents;
- Descriptive analysis of the scores on the two vocabulary tests: VLT and CPA;
- Correlation analysis between vocabulary test scores to see how learners' vocabulary knowledge in terms of reception and controlled production relate to each other;
- Correlation analysis between VLS and vocabulary knowledge.

4. Results

4.1. Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) Analysis

The VLSQ items were analyzed by utilizing descriptive statistics. The VLSQ responses were scored using a score scale of 0 to 100; 100 was given for 'always', 80 for 'usually', 60 for 'often', 40 for 'occasionally', 20 for 'seldom', and 0 for 'never' (6 point scale). The score average for each of the five categories was calculated by dividing the total mean scores of the strategies by the number of strategies. The mean score for each strategy was calculated by dividing the subjects' total scores by the number of the subjects. Total scores were measured by adding together the scores for all the subjects' responses for each strategy. Table 4 below shows the score averages for each category and for the overall mean.

Table 4: Score averages of the five categories

Category	Score Average
Determination strategies	**56**
Social strategies	**33**
Memory strategies	**47**
Cognitive strategies	**47**
Metacognitive strategies	**40**
Grand mean	**45**

- **Determination Strategies**

The determination strategies were found to be quite frequently used by the respondents, with a score average of 56; the most frequent strategies (in descending order) were (1) guessing from context (81), (2) using bilingual dictionaries (English/Arabic) (76), and (3) using monolingual dictionaries (English/English) (63).

- **Social Strategies**

Compared to other categories, the category of social strategies was found to be the most infrequently used by the respondents, with a low score average of 33. One out of seven social strategies can be considered as frequently used; asking a classmate for meaning received a mean score of 60 from the respondents.

- **Memory Strategies**

The use of memory strategies was fairly frequent, with a score average of 47. Connecting to personal experience was the most frequently used strategy (62). The least frequently used memory strategies were (in ascending order) as follows: (1) using the keyword method (22), (2) using scales for gradable adjectives (27), and (3) associating a word with its coordinates (35) (see appendix 6C).

- **Cognitive Strategies**

The category of cognitive strategies was ranked in the middle position in terms of use by the respondents, with a score average of 47; the two strategies of (1) repeating the word over and over (68), and (2) writing the word many times (59) were ranked at the top in terms of use. Keeping a vocabulary notebook was one of the least frequently used strategies, with a low score of 34 (see 6D).

- **Metacognitive Strategies**

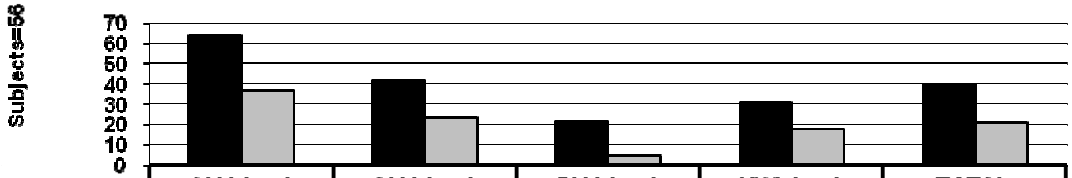
With score averages of 41, the metacognitive strategies were infrequently used by the respondents. The two strategies of skipping the new word (26) and assessing vocabulary knowledge (22) were the least frequently used, while the strategy of watching TV (67) was the most frequently used.

4.2. Descriptive Analysis of the Scores of Vocabulary Tests

The descriptive analysis comprises the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of each frequency level of the two vocabulary tests. Learners achieved higher scores in the VLT than the CPA. Also, the gap between the scores gets wider as we move from the lower frequency levels to the higher frequency levels. The VLT scores are out of 30

at each level and the total score is out of 120; the results show that there are many individual differences among learners in terms of the range of scores achieved (e.g., a range of seven to thirty on the 2000 VLT). Compared to receptive vocabulary knowledge, the Libyan students' controlled productive vocabulary knowledge is less. In all word frequency levels, including the total scores for the CPA, there are students who achieved a minimum score of 0, whereas the highest score does not exceed 15 out of 18. However, it should be borne in mind that, unlike the VLT scores, the scores for the CPA are out of a maximum score of 18 and the total score is out of 72. Figure 1 below shows the mean percentages on the VLT and the CPA.

Fig. 1: Comparing the mean percentages of the VLT and the CPA



	2000 level	3000 level	5000 level	UWL level	TOTAL
VLT	63.6	41.6	21.3	31.3	39.7
CPA	36.6	23.3	4.4	17.7	20.7

4.2.1. The Relationship between Vocabulary Test Scores

The first point to mention is that there is an internal positive correlation among the elements of the VLT and CPA. The results also show significant correlations across all word frequency levels of the VLT and CPA. These correlations ranged form moderate to high, for example, a very high correlation ($r=.79$, $p<.01$) between the *3000VLT* and the *3000CPA*.

4.3. The Relationship between VLS and Vocabulary Knowledge

Some statistically significant correlations were obtained between VLS and various elements of VLT and CPA; the most significant were distributed as follows:

- Determination strategies: *using monolingual dictionaries* and *guessing meaning from context* were positively correlated with the two measures, as was *identifying part of speech*.
- Memory strategies: *learning words of an idiom together* was positively correlated with the two measures.
- Cognitive strategies: *making own word lists* was positively correlated with the VLT and the CPA.
- Metacognitive strategies: *using computer programs* was positively correlated with the CPA, as was *reading English newspapers* with the VLT and the CPA.

5. Discussion

5.1. Range and Frequency of Use of VLS

The most frequently used of all strategies by these EFL learners were the discovery strategies of guessing meaning from context, using bilingual dictionaries (English/Arabic) and monolingual dictionaries. These results are congruent with the results of Schmitt's (1997) and Gu and Johnson's (1996) studies. Yet, differences between student interviewees were

observed in terms of ways of use. While high vocabulary knowledge (HVK) students reported that they used bilingual dictionaries when they could not understand the meaning of a new word after using other strategies, such as guessing or consulting monolingual dictionaries, moderate vocabulary knowledge (MVK) and low vocabulary knowledge (LVK) students usually use English/Arabic dictionaries immediately after they come across a new word; they indicated that it is easier and faster compared to using a monolingual dictionary.

These differences could be attributed to HVK students having more vocabulary knowledge that helped them make use of other strategies, such as guessing meaning from context and consulting monolingual dictionaries, which require vocabulary knowledge to be used successfully; Laufer (1997) suggested that a knowledge of about 3000 words is a prerequisite for making a successful guess. The HVK group was more conscious of managing and planning their learning (metacognitive strategies), i.e., they would try various strategies in sequence on each unknown word, in line with Scholfield's (1999) suggestion that dictionary use should not be an alternative; rather "strategies can be used in sequence on the same lexical problem" (p. 18). In doing so, they would use more appropriate strategies for getting the meaning and learning the new word in the long run.

With regard to consolidation strategies, the two cognitive strategies of verbal and written repetition were the most frequently used. This frequent use could be attributed both to the ease of using them as rote strategies and to learners being used to those strategies since they were in pre-college, where the Libyan teachers typically make the class repeat words aloud as a way of teaching pronunciation and introducing new words, as some student interviewees reported. It also suggests that Libyan EFL learners may not have other alternatives to be used instead of or along with these rote strategies. Moreover, teachers, as student interviewees reported, pay no attention to strategy training which plays a crucial role in developing language learning (Nation, 2001; Macaro, 2006). Wenden (1987b) claims that "learner training remains a secondary concern in many second language classrooms" (p. 159).

5.2.Vocabulary Knowledge

The results showed a clear pattern of declining scores across frequency levels from highest to lowest in the VLT and CPA word frequency levels and from receptive knowledge (VLT scores) to controlled productive knowledge (CPA scores). This gap means that learners are unable to use their receptive knowledge of vocabulary in productive situations. Hence, it is essential for such learners to be more exposed to the language through language in use activities.

The findings also indicated that there were internal high positive correlations within the elements of the VLT and CPA. This to a great extent confirms that the learners who did well in a lower frequency level (e.g. 3000 word level) could normally be assumed to have done well in a higher frequency level. Significantly moderate to high positive correlations were observed across all word frequency levels of the VLT and CPA. These positive correlations could mean that learners with higher receptive vocabulary knowledge are also higher in productive knowledge.

5.3.Relationship between VLS and Vocabulary Knowledge

With regard to the discovery strategies, *using the monolingual dictionary* was positively correlated with the learners' vocabulary knowledge, as were *guessing meaning from context* and *identifying part of speech* with the vocabulary knowledge. These findings are congruent with Gu and Johnson's (1996) findings. This could be attributed to the fact that both strategies require a certain level of vocabulary knowledge to be used efficiently; Laufer (1997) stated that a learner should know about 95% of the words in a text in order to guess words successfully. This can explain the more frequent use of these strategies by the HVK learners than the MVK and LVK learners, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the learners with

higher vocabulary knowledge are normally more successful in terms of using monolingual dictionaries and guessing from context.

Since the relationship between learner variables and language learning, in this case the learners' VLS and their vocabulary knowledge, goes in both directions, i.e., both can influence each other (Cook 1986), building a vocabulary store would help learners use a wide range of VLS like guessing from context, using monolingual dictionaries, and using media that require a certain knowledge of vocabulary (about 3000 words) efficiently. Such strategies in turn will enhance incidental learning and contribute to developing learners' vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, teachers should focus their learners' attention on the VLS positively correlated with the learners' vocabulary knowledge, especially after ascertaining that most of the VLS correlated with their receptive vocabulary were correlated with their controlled productive vocabulary knowledge as well.

6. Conclusion and Implications

In general, learners reported using discovery strategies more frequently than consolidation strategies. One interpretation of this is that those learners seem to be more interested in discovering or understanding the meaning of new words than in learning them. This could be attributed to the fact that the Libyan English majors restrict themselves to the task they perform, so during a reading activity, they just discover the meanings to understand the reading passage and/or to answer the comprehension questions. These learners need to use some metacognitive strategies, like assessing their vocabulary, in order to help them become aware of their vocabulary knowledge and develop it.

The Libyan EFL learners' infrequent use of metacognitive strategies indicates that most of these learners do not have plans or directions for their learning, which are important for success. It also indicates that learners are not independent in their learning and lack the knowledge of what to learn about words. Most of them, especially MVK and LVK learners, rely only on class material. These findings are consistent with those of Moir and Nation (2002) who discovered that their subjects were not responsible for their learning and unaware of what learning vocabulary requires. Such students should be helped to become more independent in their learning through learner training.

A possible recommendation for these learners is to focus on strategies that help develop both their receptive and productive knowledge, since both are very low, with more focus being given to high frequency words. Learners with low vocabulary knowledge should maximize their vocabulary size as much as possible in direct vocabulary learning through word lists or vocabulary games. Teachers should also be more realistic and focus their learners' (especially first and second year students) attention on more intentional learning of vocabulary through providing more courses that mainly focus on vocabulary, like listening and speaking, or reading comprehension courses that were reported to be beneficial for learners in terms of vocabulary learning so that learners can build a good vocabulary repertoire.

Regarding the relationship between VLS and vocabulary knowledge, the Libyan EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge was positively and/or negatively correlated with both frequently (most often) and infrequently used VLS; this indicates that the range of VLS used by the Libyan EFL learners rather than the frequency of use determines the correlations among VLS and vocabulary knowledge. There is usually consistency in that the VLS correlated with the learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge are also correlated with their controlled productive vocabulary knowledge. Thus, EFL/ESL learners are required to focus on a range of VLS, (e.g. group learning in classrooms, talking to native speakers, making lists of words) that enhance their productive vocabulary knowledge as well as their receptive knowledge.

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Appendix 1: The Taxonomy of the Current Study

1. Determination Strategies

1. I identify the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to help me know its meaning.
2. I break the new word up into the main parts (un-safe-ly = unsafely).
3. I check for Arabic words that are similar in form and meaning to the new word.
4. I analyze any available pictures to help me understand new words.
5. I analyze any available gestures to help me understand new words.
6. I use a bilingual dictionary (English / Arabic).
7. I use a bilingual dictionary (Arabic / English).
8. I use a monolingual Dictionary (English / English).
9. I guess the meaning of the new word from the context in which it occurs.

2. Social Strategies

10. I ask a teacher for translation of the new word into Arabic.
11. I ask a teacher for a paraphrase of the new word.
12. I ask a teacher for a sentence including the new word.
13. If you use word lists, do you ask a teacher whether they are accurate?
14. I ask classmates for the meaning of the new word.
15. I discover new meanings through group work activity.
16. I study and practice meaning of the new words in a group of students**.**

3. Memory Strategies

17. I make a picture in my mind of the new word's meaning.
18. I study the spelling of the new word.
19. I study the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to remember it.
20. I connect the new word to a personal experience (e.g. connecting the word research with the final project).
21. I paraphrase the meaning of the word I am learning in another way.
22. I study the sound of the new word.
23. I associate the new word with its coordinates (apples with oranges, peaches and etc.).
24. I say the new word aloud when studying.
25. I connect the new word to its synonyms and antonyms.
26. I learn the words of an idiom together.
27. I make an image in my mind of the form of the new word.
28. I use 'scales' for gradable adjectives (e.g. huge, big, small).
29. I use the Keyword Method.
30. I use the new word in sentences.

4. Cognitive Strategies

31. I repeat the new word over and over.
32. I write the new word many times.
33. I make my own lists of new words.
34. I keep a vocabulary notebook for expanding rehearsal.
35. I take notes of the newly learned words in class.

5. Metacognitive Strategies

36. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by watching English TV channels (e.g. movies, songs, documentary).
37. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using computer programs (e.g. internet).

38. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English radio programs (songs, news).
39. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspapers and magazines.
40. I revise the newly learned words soon after the initial meeting.
41. I continue to study the word over time.
42. I revise the newly learned words using spaced repetition.
43. I skip the new word.
44. I try to assess my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests).

Appendix 2: Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire

Dear Student,

This questionnaire is designed to gather information about how Libyan majors of English at university level as students of a foreign language go about learning vocabulary. The researcher, who is a Libyan PhD student at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, wishes to use this information for a study investigating the role of vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners on their vocabulary acquisition. Please read each of the following statements. You are kindly requested to indicate how often you have used a certain strategy, irrespective of the skills (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and of the place of learning (i.e. university and home). If you do not use a strategy at all, please tick the word *never.* If you use a strategy, please tick one of the words, *seldom, occasionally, often, usually,* or *always,* according to frequency. These words mean: *never (0%); seldom* (rarely, *20%); occasionally* (40%); *often* (60%); *usually* (80%) and *always* (100%). If you use a bilingual dictionary 80% of the time when learning vocabulary, for example, please tick the word *usually* in the following way:

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
				×	

Please tick the response (*never*, *seldom*, *occasionally*, *often*, *usually* or *always*) that tells <u>what you actually do NOT what you should do or want to do</u>. There are no right or wrong responses to these statements.

<u>Part One</u>

Please answer these questions first, before you continue on to the following questionnaire.

1. Name (optional): _____
2. Sex: male / female (circle one)
3. Age: _____ years old
4. Mother tongue _____
5. How long have you been studying English? _____ years
6. If you have studied English or lived in an English speaking country, please indicate how long it was.
   Years: _____ and months: _____ .

7. If and only if you have studied a foreign language other than English, please indicate which language and for how long.
   language: _____ length of study: _____ years and _____month.

Part Two

1. I identify the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to help me know its meaning.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

2. I ask a teacher for translation of the new word into Arabic.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

3. I make a picture in my mind of the new word's meaning.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

4. I repeat the new word over and over.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

5. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by watching English TV channels (e.g. movies, songs, documentary).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

6. I break the new word up into the main parts (un-safe-ly = unsafely).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

7. I study the spelling of the new word.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

8. I study the part of speech of the new word (verb, noun, adjective) to remember it.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

9. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using computer programs (e.g. internet).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

10. I ask a teacher for a paraphrase of the new word.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

11. I connect the new word to a personal experience (e.g. connecting the word research with the final project).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

12. I write the new word many times.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

13. I check for Arabic words that are similar in form and meaning to the new word.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

14. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English radio programs (songs, news).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

15. I ask a teacher for a sentence including the new word.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

16. I paraphrase the meaning of the word I am learning in another way.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

17. I study the sound of the new word.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

18. I associate the new word with its coordinates (e.g. apples with oranges, peaches, etc.).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

19. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspapers and magazines.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

20. I make my own lists of new words.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

21. If you use word lists, do you ask a teacher whether they are accurate?

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

22. I analyze any available pictures to help me understand new words.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

23. I analyze any available gestures to help me understand new words.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

24. I revise the newly learned words soon after the initial meeting.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

25. I continue to study the word over time.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

26. I keep a vocabulary notebook for expanding rehearsal.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

27. I ask classmates for the meaning of the new word.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

28. I say the new word aloud when studying.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

29. I revise the newly learned words using spaced repetition.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

30. I connect the new word to its synonyms and antonyms.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

31. I learn the words of an idiom together.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

32. I discover new meanings through group work activity.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

33. I make an image in my mind of the form of the new word.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

34. I skip the new word.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

35. I take notes of the newly learned words in class.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

36. I use a bilingual dictionary (English / Arabic).

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

37. I use a bilingual dictionary (Arabic / English).

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

38. I study and practice meaning of the new words in a group of students.

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

39. I try to assess my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests).

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

40. I use 'scales' for gradable adjectives (e.g. huge, big, medium, small)**.**

never 0%	seldom 20%	occasionally 40%	often 60%	usually 80%	always 100%

41. I use the Keyword Method. Using this strategy involves finding an L1 word sounding like the L2 word, then creating an image combining the two concepts.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

42. I use a monolingual Dictionary (English / English).

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

43. I guess the meaning of the new word from the context in which it occurs.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

44. I use the new word in sentences.

never	seldom	occasionally	often	usually	always
0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

Part Three

Please add any additional strategies you have used that are not written above, if any.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Appendix 3: The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

This is a vocabulary test. You must choose the right word to go with each meaning. Write the number of that word next to its meaning. Here is an example.

6. business
7. clock _____ part of a house
8. horse _____ animal with four legs
9. pencil _____ something used for writing
10. shoe
11. wall

You answer it in the following way

1. business
2. clock __6____ part of a house
3. horse __3____ animal with four legs
4. pencil __4____ something used for writing
5. shoe
6. wall

Some words are in the test to make it more difficult. You do not have to find a meaning for these words. In the example above, these words are *business, clock,* and *shoe*. If you have no idea about the meaning of a word, do not guess. But if you think you might know the meaning, then you should try to find the answer.

The 2000-word level

1. birth
2. dust _____ game
3. operation _____ winning
4. row _____ being born
5. sport
6. victory

1. choice
2. crop _____ heat
3. flesh _____ meat
4. salary _____ money paid regularly for doing a job
5. secret
6. temperature

1. cap
2. education _____ teaching and learning
3. journey _____ numbers to measure with
4. parent _____ going to a far place
5. scale
6. trick

1. attack
2. charm _____ gold and silver
3. lack _____ pleasing quality
4. pen _____ not having something
5. shadow
6. treasure

1. cream
2. factory _____ part of milk
3. nail _____ a lot of money
4. pupil _____ person who is studying
5. sacrifice
6. wealth

1. adopt
2. climb _____ go up
3. examine _____ look at closely
4. pour _____ be on every side
5. satisfy
6. surround

1. bake
2. connect _____ join together
3. inquire _____ walk without purpose
4. limit _____ keep within a certain size
5. recognize
6. wander

1. burst
2. concern _____ break open
3. deliver _____ make better
4. fold _____ take something to someone
5. improve
6. urge

1. original
2. private _____ first
3. royal _____ not public
4. slow _____ all added together
5. sorry
6. total

1. brave
2. electric _____ commonly done
3. firm _____ wanting food
4. hungry _____ having no fear
5. local
6. usual

The 3000-word level

1. belt
2. climate _____ idea
3. executive _____ inner surface of your hand
4. notion _____ strip of leather worn around the wrist
5. palm
6. victim

1. acid
2. bishop _____ cold feeling
3. chill _____ farm animal
4. ox _____ organization or framework
5. ridge
6. structure

1. bench
2. charity _____ long seat
3. jar _____ help to the poor
4. mate _____ part of a country
5. mirror
6. province

1. boot
2. device _____ army officer
3. lieutenant _____ a kind of stone
4. marble _____ tube through which blood flows
5. phrase
6. vein

1. apartment
2. candle _____ a place to live
3. draft _____ chance of something happening
4. horror _____ first rough form of something written
5. prospect
6. timber

1. betray
2. dispose _____ frighten
3. embrace _____ say publicly
4. injure _____ hurt seriously
5. proclaim
6. scare

1. encounter
2. illustrate _____ meet
3. inspire _____ beg or help
4. plead _____close completely
5. seal
6. shift

1. assist
2. bother _____ help
3. condemn _____ cut neatly
4. erect _____ spin around quickly
5. trim
6. whirl

1. annual
2. concealed _____ wild
3. definite _____ clear and certain
4. mental _____ happening once a year
5. previous
6. savage

1. dim
2. junior _____ strange
3. magnificent _____ wonderful
4. maternal _____ not clearly lit
5. odd
6. weary

The 5000-word level

1. balloon
2. federation _____ bucket
3. novelty _____ unusual interesting thing
4. pail _____ rubber bag that is filled with air
5. veteran
6. ward

1. alcohol
2. apron _____ stage of development
3. hip _____ state of untidiness or dirtiness
4. lure _____ cloth worn in front to protect your clothes
5. mess
6. phase

1. apparatus
2. compliment _____ expression of admiration
3. ledge _____ set of instruments or machinery
4. mortgage _____ money raised from a bank
5. scrap
6. tile

1. bulb
2. document _____ female horse
3. legion _____ a large group of soldiers or people
4. mare _____ a paper that provides information
5. pulse
6. tub

1. concrete
2. era _____ circular shape
3. fibre _____ top of a mountain
4. loop _____ a long period of time
5. plank
6. summit

1. blend
2. devise _____ mix together
3. hug _____ plan or invent
4. lease _____ hold tightly in your arms
5. plague
6. reject

1. abolish
2. drip _____ bring to an end by law
3. insert _____ guess about the future
4. predict _____ calm or comfort someone
5. soothe
6. thrive

1. bleed
2. collapse _____ come before
3. precede _____ fall down suddenly
4. reject _____ move with quick steps and jumps
5. skip
6. tease

1. causal
2. desolate _____ sweet-smelling
3. fragrant _____ only one of its kind
4. radical _____ good for your health
5. unique
6. wholesome

1. gloomy
2. gross _____ empty
3. infinite _____ dark or sad
4. limp _____ without end
5. slim
6. vacant

Academic Vocabulary

1. benefit
2. labour _____ work
3. percent _____ part of 100
4. principle _____ general idea used to guide one's actions
5. source
6. survey

1. element
2. fund _____ money for special purpose
3. layer _____ skilled way of doing something
4. philosophy _____ study of the meaning of life
5. proportion
6. technique

1. consent
2. enforcement _____ total
3. investigation _____ agreement or permission
4. parameter _____ trying to find information about something
5. sum
6. trend

1. decade
2. fee _____ 10 years
3. file _____ subject of a discussion
4. incidence _____ money paid for service
5. perspective
6. topic

1. colleague
2. erosion _____ action against the law
3. format _____ wearing away gradually
4. inclination _____ shape or size of something
5. panel
6. violation

1. achieve
2. conceive _____ change
3. grant _____ connect together
4. link _____ finish successfully
5. modify
6. offset

1. convert
2. design _____ keep out
3. exclude _____ stay alive
4. facilitate _____ change from one thing into another
5. indicate
6. survive

1. anticipate
2. compile _____ control something skilfully
3. convince _____ expect something will happen
4. denote _____ produce books and newspapers
5. manipulate
6. publish

1. equivalent
2. financial _____ most important
3. forthcoming _____ concerning sight
4. primary _____ concerning money
5. random
6. visual

1. alternative
2. ambiguous _____ last or most important
3. empirical _____ something different that can be chosen
4. ethnic _____ concerning people from a certain nation
5. mutual
6. ultimate

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Appendix 4: The Vocabulary Size Test of Controlled Productive Ability (CPA)

This is a levels test of productive vocabulary. Complete the underlined words.
The example has been done for you.
He was riding a *bicycle*.

The 2000-word level

1. I'm glad we had this opp_____ to talk.
2. There are a doz_____ eggs in the basket.
3. Every working person must pay income t_____.
4. The pirates buried the trea _____ on a desert island.
5. Her beauty and cha_____ had a powerful effect on men.
6. La_____ of rain led to shortage of water in the city.
7. He takes cr_____ and sugar in his coffee.
8. The rich man died and left all his we_____ to his son.
9. Pup_____ must hand in their papers by the end of the week.
10. This sweater is too tight. It needs to be stret_____.
11. Ann intro_____ her boyfriend to her mother.
12. Teenagers often adm_____ and worship pop singers.
13. If you blow up that balloon any more it will bur_____.
14. In order to be accepted into the university, he had to impr_____ his grades.
15. The telegram was deli_____ two hours after it had been sent.
16. The differences were so sl_____ that they went unnoticed.
17. The dress you're wearing is lov_____.
18. He wasn't very popu_____ when he was a teenager, but he has many friends now.

The3000-word level

1. He has a successful car_____ as a lawyer.
2. The thieves threw ac_____ in his face and made him blind.
3. To improve the country's economy, the government decided on economic ref_____.
4. She wore a beautiful green go_____ to the ball.
5. The government tried to protect the country's industry by reducing the imp_____ of cheap goods.
6. The children's games were funny at first, but finally got on the parents' ner_____.
7. The lawyer gave some wise coun_____ to his client.
8. Many people in England mow the la_____ of their houses on Sunday morning.
9. The farmer sells the eggs that his he_____ lays.
10. Sudden noises at night sca_____ alot.
11. France was proc_____ a republic in the 18th century.
12. Many people are inj_____ in road accidents every year.
13. Suddenly he was thru_____ into the dark room.
14. He perc_____ a light at the end of the tunnel.
15. Children are not independent. They are att_____ to their parents.
16. She showed off her sle_____ figure in a long narrow dress.
17. She has been changing partners often because she cannot have a st_____ relationship with one person.
18. You must wear a bathing suit on a public beach. You are not allowed to be na_____.

The 5000-word level

1. Soldiers usually swear an oa_____ of loyalty to their country.
2. The voter placed the ball_____ in the box.
3. They keep their valuables in a vau_____ at the bank.
4. A bird perched at the window led_____.
5. The kitten is playing with a ball of ya_____ .
6. The thieves have forced an ent_____ into the building.
7. The small hill was really a burial mou_____.
8. We decided to celebrate New Year's E_____ together.
9. The soldier was asked to choose between infantry and cav_____.
10. This is a complex problem which is difficult to compr_____.
11. An angry crowd sho_____ the prisoner as he was leaving the court.
12. Don't pay attention to this rude remark just ign_____ it.
13. The management held a secret meeting. The issues discussed were not disc_____ to the workers.
14. We could hear the sergeant bel_____ commands to the troops.
15. The boss got angry with the secretary and it took a lot of tact to soo_____ him.
16. We do not have adeq_____ information to make a decision.
17. She is not a child, but a mat_____ woman. She can make her own decisions.
18. The prisoner was put in soli_____ confinement.

The University Word List level

1. here has been a recent tr_____ among prosperous families towards a smaller number hildren.
2. The ar_____ of his office is 25 square meters.
3. Phil_____ examines the meaning of life.
4. According to the communist doc_____, workers should rule the world.
5. Spending many years together deepened their inti_____.
6. He usually read the sport sec_____ of the newspaper first.
7. Because of the doctors' strike the cli_____ is closed today.
8. There are several misprints on each page of this te_____.
9. The suspect had both opportunity and mot_____ to commit the murder.
10. They insp_____ all products before sending them out to stores.
11. A considerable amount of evidence was accum_____ during the investigation.
12. The victim's shirt was satu_____ with blood.
13. He is irresponsible. You cannot re_____ on him for help.
14. It's impossible to eva_____ these results without knowing about the research methods that were used.
15. He finally att_____ a position of power in the company.
16. The story tells us about a crime and subs_____ punishment.
17. In a hom_____ class all students are of a similar proficiency.
18. The urge to survive is inh_____ in all creatures.

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

The interview questions were divided into two parts: part one seeks information about interviewees' general feelings about vocabulary as an aspect of learning a language; part two deals with the items of the vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire (VLSQ).

Part One

1. Do you think you are a good learner?
2. Do you find vocabulary useful?
3. Do you have any problems related to vocabulary in all skills?
4. What difficulties do you face in learning vocabulary?
5. How important is vocabulary in communication for you?
6. Do you pay enough attention to vocabulary acquisition outside class or rely mainly on the subject material?
7. What aspects of word knowledge do you focus on, i.e. which are the most important aspects for you?
8. What do you think of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), helpful, not helpful, should be taught, easy to use etc…?
9. Have you received any training of how to use these strategies inside or outside class?

Part Two

Having their copies of the VLSQ during the interview, interviewees were asked two main questions:

1. If you use any of the following VLS, explain: when (time, and sequence of strategies), and how do you use each strategy in different skills?

2. If you do not use any of the VLS, explain: why do not you use certain strategies (e.g. keyword method) although they are recommended as useful learning strategies?

The following were the main strategies students were asked about:

- **Discovery Strategies**

1. DET. I identify the part of speech of the new word to help me know its meaning.
2. SOC. I ask a teacher for translation of the new word into Arabic.
7. DET. I break the new word up into the main parts to learn it (un-safe-ly = unsafely).
10. SOC. I ask a teacher for a paraphrase of the new word.
13. DET. I check for Arabic words that are similar in form and meaning to the new word.
15. SOC. I ask a teacher for a sentence including the new word.
27. SOC. I ask classmates for the meaning of the new word.
32. SOC. I discover new meanings through group work activity.
36. DET. I use a bilingual dictionary (English / Arabic).
37. DET. I use a bilingual dictionary (Arabic / English).
42. DET. I use a monolingual Dictionary (English / English).
43. DET. I guess from textual context in reading.

- **Consolidating Strategies**

4. COG. I repeat the new word over and over.
5. MET. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by watching English TV channels.

1. MET. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by using computer programs.
11. MEM. I connect the new word to a personal experience.
12. COG. I write the new word many times.
13. MET. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by listening to English radio programs
19. MET. I try to develop my vocabulary knowledge by reading English newspapers and magazines.
20. COG. I make my own lists of new words.
1. MET. I revise the newly learned words soon after the initial meeting.
26. COG. I keep a vocabulary notebook.
29. MET. I revise the newly learned words using spaced repetition.
31. MEM. I learn the words of an idiom together.
35. COG. I take notes of the newly learned words in class.
38. SOC. I study and practice meaning of the new words in a group of students.
39. MET. I try to assess my vocabulary knowledge (e.g. with word tests).
40. MEM. I use the Keyword Method.
41. MEM. I use the new word in sentences.

They were also allowed to express their opinions about any strategy either covered or not covered in the questionnaire as well as any inquiry about the study in general.

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Blended Learning

Basma Issa Tlelan Al-Saleem

Abstract

This study aims at highlighting the Blended Learning (BL) approach. It focuses on the definition of BL and its rationale, ingredients, dimensions, and challenges. It concludes that BL can be described as a learning approach in which more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and the cost of program delivery. However, it is not the mixing and matching of different learning delivery modes that is of significance, but rather the focus on the learning outcomes.

Introduction

As societies become increasingly dependent on technology, information and computer literacy become more important (Ross and Gage, 2004). Schools are beginning to increase the number of computers in classrooms (Umbach, 1998); however, many teachers are not using the technology to teach (Ross and Gage, 2004).

The Internet is a valuable resource for educators (Lemon, 1997). Teachers can take advantage of the increase in Internet access by using the Internet to collaborate with other professionals, access information for lessons, and allow students to learn from several sources of information, among many other activities (Wilson and Marsh, 1995). However, technology integration will not be achieved in today's schools without appropriate teacher development and teaching instructions (Glenn and Carrier, 1986).

The literature indicates that introducing technology into schools is not an easy process. Glenn and Carrier (1986) attribute the lack of computer use by teachers to a lack of quality training in learning methodologies which gives the chance for the teachers to use the electronic material along with the conventional one.

BL has come to be understood as a combination of conventional classroom instruction and e-learning (Benson, 2001). BL processes thus combine online learning and traditional learning approaches in various degrees.

What is Blended Learning?

The term 'blended learning' has gained considerable importance in recent years since it links teaching with technology. There are several definitions of this term, Whitelock and Jelfs (2003) started a journal special issue on this topic with three definitions: first, the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches, second, the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment, and third, the combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of learning technology use. Of these, the first is perhaps the most common interpretation.

In addition, there are two views from training experts concerning the definition of BL. Masie (2002) defines BL as "the use of two or more distinct methods …blending classroom instruction with online instruction access to a coach, simulations, on-the-job training, informal sessions." (p.32)

Shank (2003) believes that "BL seemed to mean … some e-learning and some classroom learning. No one wants to spend that much on e-learning and people want to preserve what they have, so they have made up this nice name for not changing much …" (p.8)

It is obvious from the previous two definitions that BL allows teachers and learners to use both e-learning as well as conventional methods throughout the class time, thus varying the resources and the methods of learning and teaching.

Dimensions of the Blend

The original use of the phrase "Blended Learning" is often associated with simply linking traditional classroom teaching to e-learning activities. However, the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning strategy "dimensions." Singh and Reed (2001) indicate that a BL program might combine one or more of the following dimensions, although many of these have overlapping attributes:

A - Blending offline and online Learning: at the simplest level, a BL experience combines offline and online forms of learning, where the online learning usually means "over the Internet or Intranet," and offline learning happens in a more traditional classroom setting. It is assumed that even the offline learning offerings are managed through an online learning system. An example of this type of blending would include a learning program that provides study materials and research resources over the Web while providing instructor-led classroom training sessions as the main medium of instruction.

B - Blending Self-Paced and Live, Collaborative Learning: self-paced learning implies solitary, on-demand learning at a pace that is managed or controlled by the learner. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, implies a more dynamic communication among many learners that brings about knowledge sharing. The blending of self-paced and collaborative learning may include a review of important literature on a regulatory change or a new product followed by a moderated, live, online, peer-to-peer discussion of the material's application to the learner.

C - Blending Structured and Unstructured Learning: not all forms of learning imply a pre-mediated, structured, or formal learning program with organized content in a specific sequence, like chapters in a textbook. In fact, most learning in the workplace occurs in an unstructured form, such as meetings, hallway conversations, and e-mail. A blended program design may attempt to capture active conversations and documents from unstructured learning events into knowledge repositories available on-demand, supporting the way knowledge-workers collaborate and work.

D- Blending Custom Content with Off-the-Shelf Content: is by definition generic, unaware of an organization's unique context and requirements. However, generic content is much less expensive to buy and frequently has higher production values than custom content that the teacher builds him/herself. Generic, self-paced content can be customized with a blend of live experiences (classroom or online) or through content customization.

Ingredients of the Blend

BL is not new. However, in the past, the ingredients for BL were limited to physical classroom formats (lectures, labs, etc.), books, or handouts. Today, organizations have myriad learning approaches to choose from. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) (2001) proposes the following ingredients in its State of the Industry Report:

1-Synchronous physical formats:

- Instructor-led Classrooms and Lectures
- Hands-on Labs and Workshops
- Field Trips

2- Synchronous online formats (live e-learning):

- E- Meetings
- Virtual Classrooms
- Web Seminars and Broadcasts
- Coaching
- Instant Messaging

3- Self-paced, asynchronous formats:

- Documents and Web Pages
- Web/Computer-Based Training Modules
- Assessments/Tests and Surveys
- Simulations
- Job Aids and Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)
- Recorded live events
- Online Learning Communities and Discussion Forums

Why blend?

There are many reasons why an instructor, trainer, or learner may pick BL over other learning options. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identify six reasons why one may choose to design or use a BL system: (1) pedagogical richness, (2) access to knowledge, (3) social interaction, (4) personal agency, (5) cost effectiveness, and (6) ease of revision.

In the BL literature, the most common reason provided is that it combines "the best of both worlds" Graham (2005, p.211). While there is some truth to this, it is rarely acknowledged that a BL environment can also mix the least effective elements of both worlds if it is not designed well. Beyond this general statement, Graham (2005) finds that overwhelmingly, people choose BL for three reasons: (1) improved pedagogy, (2) increased access/flexibility, and (3) increased cost effectiveness.

Improved Pedagogy: As indicated above, one of the most commonly cited reasons for blending is more effective pedagogical practices. It is no secret that most current teaching and learning practice in both higher education and corporate training settings is still focused on missive rather than interactive strategies. In higher education, 83% of instructors use the lecture as the predominant teaching strategy (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Similarly, distance education often suffers from making large amounts of information available for students to absorb independently (Waddoups and Howell, 2002). Some have seen BL approaches increase the level of active learning strategies, peer-to-peer learning strategies, and learner centered strategies used (Collis, 2003; Hartman, Dziuban, and Moskal, 1999; Morgan, 2002; Smelser, 2002).

Increased Access/Flexibility: Access to learning is one of the key factors influencing the growth of distributed learning environments (Bonk and Graham 2003). Graham (2001) emphasizes programs that will not be possible if students are not able to have a majority of their learning experiences at a distance from instructors and/or other students. Learner flexibility and convenience are also of growing importance as more mature learners with outside commitments (such as work and family) seek additional education. Many learners want the convenience offered by a distributed environment, and, at the same time, do not want to sacrifice the social interaction and human touch they are used to in a face-to-face

classroom. Ross and Gage (2004), for example, have seen an expansion of reduced seat time courses that allow for increased flexibility but retain some traditional face-to-face contact. University of Central Florida's courses (Dziuban, Hartmann, Juge, Moskal, and Sorg, Truman, 2004) are also good examples of this. As a third example, the University of Phoenix model allows for face-to-face socializing in orientations as well as presentation experiences at the beginning and end of a course with online learning experiences in between.

Increased Cost Effectiveness: Cost effectiveness is a third major goal for BL systems in both higher education and corporate institutions. BL systems provide an opportunity for reaching a large, globally dispersed audience in a short period of time with consistent, semi-personal content delivery. Bersin (2003) has done an exemplary job of documenting corporate cases that have effectively used BL to provide a large return on investment (ROI). In higher education, there is also an interest in finding solutions that are cost effective. The University of Central Florida, for example, has predicted cost savings due to cost reductions in physical infrastructure and improved scheduling efficiencies, which have yet to materialize when using BL (Dziuban et al., 2004).

Benefits of Blended Learning

Obviously, the concept of BL is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event but rather that learning is a *continuous process*. Singh and Reed (2001) list a number of benefits of using BL:

- **Improved learning effectiveness**: Recent studies at the University of Tennessee and Stanford give us evidence that a BL strategy actually improves learning outcomes by providing a better match between how a learner wants to learn and the learning program that is offered.

- **Extended outreach:** A single delivery mode inevitably limits the reach of a learning program or critical knowledge transfer in some form or fashion. For example, a physical classroom-training program limits access to only those who can participate at a fixed time and location, whereas a virtual classroom event is inclusive of a remote audience, and when followed up with recorded knowledge, objects can extend the reach to those who cannot attend at a specific time.

- **Optimized development cost and time:** Combining different delivery modes has the potential to balance out and optimize the learning program development and deployment cost and time. A hundred percent online, self-paced, media-rich, web-based training content may be too expensive to produce (requiring multiple resources and skills), but combining virtual collaborative learning forums and coaching sessions with simpler self-paced materials, such as documents, case studies, recorded live e-learning events, text assignments, and PowerPoint presentations (requiring quicker turn-around time and less skill to produce), may be just as effective or more effective.

- **Optimized business results:** Organizations report exceptional results from their initial BL initiatives. Learning objectives were achieved in 50 % less class time than traditional strategies (Graham,2001). Travel costs and time were also reduced by up to 85%. Thus, an acceleration of mission-critical knowledge to channels and customers could have a profound impact on the organization's bottom line.

Issues or Challenges When Using BL

Graham et al. (2001) briefly outline six major issues that are relevant to designing BL systems. The issues are: (1) the role of live interaction, (2) the role of learner choice and self-regulation, (3) models for support and training, (4) dealing with the digital divide, (5) cultural adaptation, and (6) finding a balance between innovation and production.

- The role of live interaction: Under what conditions is human interaction important to the learning process and to learner satisfaction with the process? Hanson (1997) observes a preference among many learners for the live or face-to-face components of a blended experience. When CM and face-to-face elements are combined, learners often place a greater value or emphasis on the face-to-face aspects of the experience. Cole (2000) makes the claim that the face-to-face components are really unnecessary and are primarily used for socialization reasons. Similarly, the University of Phoenix (Martyn, 2003) takes the position that the live, completely online, and blended options to their courses are "equivalent" experiences to be selected based on learner preference. When and why should we consider human interaction, such as collaboration and learning communities? How does live interaction versus low fidelity, asynchronous interaction affect the learning experience?

- The role of learner choice/self regulation: How do learners make choices about the kinds of blends that they participate in? Many learners primarily select BL based on convenience and access. But that begs questions about the type and amount of guidance that should be provided to learners in making their choices about how different blends may impact their learning experience. Online learning components often require a large amount of self-discipline on the part of the learners (Collis, 2003). Huang and Zhou (2004) mention the challenge that many of their Chinese students have in regulating their own learning without the close guidance of an instructor. How can BL environments be designed to support increasing learner maturity and capabilities for self-regulation?

- Models for support and training: There are many issues related to support and training in blended environments including: (1) increased demand on instructor time (Hartman et al.,1999; Lee, 2004), (2) providing learners with the technological skills to succeed in both face-to-face and CM environments (Levine and Wake, 2000; Morgan, 2002), and (3) changing organizational culture to accept blended approaches (Hartman et al.,1999). There is also a need to provide professional development for instructors who will be teaching online and face-to-face (Lee, 2002). It is important to identify successful models of support for a blended approach to learning from the technological infrastructure perspective as well as from the organizational (human) perspective.

- Dealing with the digital divide: The divide between the information and communication technologies available to individuals and societies at different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum can be great (Massy, 2004). This researcher raises the issue that e-learning is often perceived as being an approach that favors the advantaged. Yet, e-learning is a strategy that may be considered for educating all segments of society because of its low cost and ability to be distributed widely. Nevertheless, the jury is still out on whether BL models can be developed that are affordable and still address the needs of different populations with different socioeconomic conditions around the world.

- Cultural adaptation: What role can blended approaches play in adapting materials to local audiences? One strength of e-learning is the ability to rapidly distribute uniform learning materials. Yet, there is often a need for customizing the materials to the local audience to

make them culturally relevant. Lohr (2003) and Martyn (2003) both address the need to find a balance between global and local interests. Lohr suggests that a face-to-face instructor plays an important role in helping to make globally distributed materials culturally relevant and meaningful.

- Finding a Balance between innovation and production. In design, there is a constant tension between innovation and production. On the one hand, there is a need to look forward to the possibilities that new technological innovations provide, and, on the other hand, there is a need to be able to produce cost effective solutions. However, due to the constantly changing nature of technology, finding an appropriate balance between innovation and production will be a constant challenge for those designing BL (Graham et al.,2001).

Looking at the future, Martyn (2003) emphasizes the importance of continuing to identify successful models of BL at the institutional, program, course, and activity levels that can be adapted to different contexts. This will involve understanding and capitalizing on the unique affordances available in both face-to-face and computer-mediated or distributed learning environments.

Conclusion

To conclude, BL can be described as a learning approach in which more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of program delivery. However, it is not the mixing and matching of different learning delivery modes that is of significance, but rather the focus on the learning outcomes. Therefore, Singh and Reed (2001) refine this definition as follows: "BL focused on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the 'right' learning technologies to match the 'right' personal learning style to transfer the 'right' skills to the 'right' person at the 'right' time." (p.22)

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Online Resources for Teaching Reading and Writing: An Ocean at Your Fingertips

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Abstract

The World Wide Web (WWW) is a dynamic environment that offers something for every audience, including teachers and educators. A plethora of sites has sprung up across the last decades that cater to teachers of all subjects, but simply knowing where to start can be daunting. Nonetheless, the benefits of the WWW largely outweigh the challenges for many reasons, the most important of which is preparing students who will lead their lives in a world dominated by technology. This short summary article will consider some of the advantages and disadvantages to teachers and students of using online resources, encourage an approach that minimizes intimidation while maximizing organizational strategies, and suggest starting points for identifying online resources pertinent to reading and writing instruction. It concludes with a list of suggested instructional websites to expand teachers' current repertoire.

The World Wide Web (WWW) is a dynamic environment that offers something for every taste. It allows users to access information; interact with one another across continents and oceans; pass leisure time pursuing personal interests; perform necessary job functions, or share with friends and family as well as with professional or interest networks. In short, there is something of benefit to everyone on the net, and this is true for teachers and educators as well. A vast array of sites has sprung up across the last couple of decades that caters to teachers of all subjects, but the seemingly infinite number of available sites can be overwhelming, and the task of finding exactly what one needs can be tedious; simply knowing where to start as you begin your journey into the world of online teaching resources can be daunting. These factors alone often serve as enough deterrent, without even considering the already countless hours that teachers spend with their students and preparing for classes. Nonetheless, the benefits of the WWW largely outweigh the challenges for many reasons, the most important of which is preparing students to become knowledgeable users of the technology they will need to achieve maximum success. This short summary article will consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of using online resources, encourage an approach that minimizes intimidation and maximizes organizational strategies, and suggest some starting points for locating online resources pertinent to reading and writing instruction. The summary concludes with a list of reading and writing instructional websites to provide newcomers to the world of online resources and instruction a place to begin searching for sources and for already net-savvy instructors to expand their repertoires with alternative ideas and sites. The list is by no means exhaustive, as sites are innumerable and the WWW is a dynamic, constantly evolving environment; however, it provides a starting point and may provoke new ideas.

There are many advantages to consider for both teachers and students when using online resources. The WWW provides a truly global meeting place where teachers can share ideas and resources with ease, and through which they can bring the wider world into their classrooms. Teachers can arrange online exchanges for their students in written or spoken formats, for example, and they can use the same resources to communicate with colleagues. For those working in homogeneous areas or areas with relatively secluded populations, the WWW provides an opportunity to expand the context of the classroom and expose students to new people, cultures, countries, and ideas through global media. The Web also provides an opportunity to recycle and reinforce lessons from the classroom in the form of tasks or practice activities with an appropriate level of control, or to differentiate instruction when

needed. In addition, using the Web can encourage student autonomy, and is particularly appealing to Generation Y learners who have grown up with technology and not only enjoy using it, but expect it to be part of their instruction. For teachers, online resources can even remove some of the burden of providing feedback, using automatic marking features. And finally, they increase flexibility for both students and teachers, as one can work anywhere at any time provided there is an internet connection available (PP104TESOL2010, 2010). Reading and writing instructional sites, in particular, offer many of these benefits, which we will now consider as individual parts of instruction, but first a note of caution. As you read about and visit these sites, please keep in mind that there is a great deal of overlap in reading and writing skills and instruction; in other words, very few sites are strictly devoted to reading or writing, but many could be employed as either. For organizational purposes, they have been categorized and described separately, but most do not fit only into one category or the other, so keep your imagination open for either type of use as you peruse the offerings.

The WWW offers many options for supporting reading instruction, perhaps the most pertinent of which is authentic content. Individuals and organizations of all types all around the world use the Web as a medium of communication. Students can access all kinds of sites and publications written by speakers of English for real worldly purposes. Teachers can create tasks for the classroom or independent assignments involving authentic content on the Web, or student-centered instruction based on content themes. The possibilities are almost endless. In addition, the WWW has not only replaced those ten-pound dictionaries of our childhoods with more manageable online content, but has made them seem antiquated at best. Online dictionaries do it all, offering audio files for pronunciation, video/audio definitions for aural learners, flash cards, reports of popular word use trends, and the list could go on. In short, the WWW has brought dictionaries to life, in a much more engaging medium than the print versions of the past. These dictionaries in turn may feed nicely into other reading and/or vocabulary instruction, such as using electronic word walls, which are also described below as writing tools. Other facets of reading instruction that we may have learned years ago with paper and writing utensils, such as highlighting, jotting notes in margins, or using sticky notes, have also found their way into online instructional offerings. Several sites offer opportunities to highlight text on the screen, make notes, and save or print versions of your work. In addition, they offer a backup in case the printout is misplaced or damaged, or you simply want to work online without using more paper than is necessary. Finally, the Web offers sites with specific tools for teaching reading at any level, from phonics to comprehension to strategies, such as skimming and scanning, which can of course be used in conjunction with the dazzling variety of authentic content offerings. Instructors can choose sites with or without audio or print files for classroom use, or build their own comprehension worksheets as they see fit for their classroom contexts.

Because reading is mainly a receptive skill, and therefore inherently more difficult to assess, we might expect more productive skill offerings for writing, and the WWW does not fail to deliver! Broadly speaking, the web offers two types of writing resources: those on the "micro" level of word usage and grammar, and those on the "macro" level for complete paragraph, essay, or other entire text composition. To start with the "micro" level, using online corpora, students can not only learn new words and expand their vocabularies, but also in what context to use those words. They can create their own personal electronic word walls (known as word or tag clouds on the net) with new and/or content-themed vocabulary, or do the same with classmates. A large number of sites are dedicated to grammar, explaining everything from verb tenses to pronoun referents to punctuation, and many of the same offer on-the-spot interactive activities to assess learning or provide practice. Some of these even offer audio or video explanations for students who aren't particularly attuned to the visual processing of reading. Few sites, however, offer both superb instruction and superb practice, so you may have to direct students to more than one site if they need comprehensive reviews

of rules and practice applying them. Varied site offerings mean that you can choose activities at an appropriate level of control, whether you expect students to be producing entire grammatically correct sentences, or simply want to illustrate the differences between, for example, asking questions with "to be" or "to do." At the "macro" level, an equally large number of sites offer opportunities for journaling, collaborative writing projects, or process writing projects. Teachers only have to choose their site and use their imagination, transferring pencils and papers to word processors and keyboards. Students and teachers can collaborate without being in the same room, easily monitor process and progress, work on their own schedules, and minimize the amount of paper consumed and carried around in bags and backpacks!

With all the great opportunities that the WWW presents, it also offers some challenges to effective use. Content in many sites may not be ideal for your course, and some sites may simply be blocked in your location, but given the sheer quantity of websites in existence, you are likely to find something that is available and fits your context –even if what you get from the website is nothing more than an idea to work with. Nevertheless, some courses/institutions may have particular target varieties of English that do not match the most easily accessible sites, and related to that, not all interactive sites allow for different varieties of English (e.g., with grammar or vocabulary exercises). It may be difficult to track student progress on some sites, or a tried and true site may disappear or change into a totally different entity from one course to the next, or even from one week to the next! Creating numerous usernames and passwords can be tedious for teacher and students alike, not to mention the difficulty of keeping up with them. Some sites may even contain mistakes, meaning teachers must be diligent in selecting which websites to use and they must monitor the sites they choose carefully (PP104TESOL2010). These possibilities are real dangers of using the WWW in the classroom, and enough to turn many teachers off completely. However, there is a way to circumvent these problems before they happen: customization.

Just as many sites offer teachers opportunities to create and store their own materials of any type online as those that offer pre-made materials. If you do not want to spend hours checking the contents of sites to find just what you want or you are frustrated after an hour of fruitless searching, you can write your own materials and save them online. They will even be there when you change institutions, cities, or countries, and you will not incur shipping costs for big boxes of files and paper. You can print them out from their online storage container for classroom use, use them as interactive activities to be done online, link them to course sites, allow the site do the marking for you, save the activities from semester to semester, or use your imagination to do something else! The possibilities are endless when you make your own custom activities or assessment tools. For those who may have unreliable internet connectivity, it is also possible to download many resources or materials to your own local machine, ensuring access whether the WWW is up and working or not.

The WWW can be overwhelming and intimidating as you begin to navigate its countless resources. To make the task a little less daunting, organize yourself with an easily created wiki or bookmarking service where you can keep notes about what sites you like, dislike, find most effective or least effective, want to revisit, and so on. It will require an initial investment of time, but in the long run will actually save you time as you learn what resources are most effective for your teaching situation. Each semester, you might try out three to five new resources, discard the ones you found unhelpful or had some other issue with, keep the ones that worked well, and try out a few new ones. Over time, you will grow a nice new bag of online tricks. You might even decide to create class wikis that can be valuable resources to students even after your class is finished and your institution-hosted page expires. Not only will students thank you, you will thank yourself for not having to set up the same page with the same information semester after semester.

In sum, the WWW is truly an ocean of resources at our fingertips, but it is up to us to decide how best to use them. The following is a short list of reading/writing sites that may give you a starting place for your search. Most of the sites are free or low cost. For more details about each site, visit: https://sites.google.com/site/niletesol2011/ and go to the "Online Resources" link. There are also some sample lesson plans if you need more ideas to get started. Happy searching!

Reading Resources: Authentic Content

www.tv411.org,

www.readwritethink.org,

http://school.discoveryeducation.com,

www.pbs.org,

www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish,

www.breakingnewsenglish.com

Reading Resources: Dictionaries

www.pdictionary.com,

www.languageguide.org,

www.wordcentral.com,

www.wordsmyth.net,

www.wordreference.com,

http://wordweb.info/free,

www.merriam-webster.com,

www.learnersdictionary.com,

www.ldoceonline.com,

www.wordia.com,

www.visualthesaurus.com,

www.visuwords.com

Reading Resources: Tools

www.starfall.com,

www.sanchezclass.com,

http://abcteach.com/,

www.teach-nology.com,

http://bubbl.us,

www.gliffy.com,

www.awesomehighlighter.com,

http://webklipper.com,

www.diigo.com,

www.tagxedo.com,

www.wordle.net

Writing Resources: Grammar and Vocabulary

www.eslgold.com,

http://a4esl.org,

www.englishgrammarsecrets.com,

http://perso.wanadoo.es/autoenglish,

www.chompchomp.com,

http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/classware/infoCenter.do?isbn=0073259381,

www.academicvocabularyexercises.com,

www.americancorpus.org,

http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/

Writing Resources: Coherence/Cohesion

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/,

http://isu.indstate.edu/writing/esl/esl.html

Writing Resources: Collaboration and Process

www.opendiary.com,

www.livejournal.com,

www.blogger.com,

http://writeboard.com,

http://clear.msu.edu/clear/index.php,

www.crayon.net

Customization

www.easytestmaker.com,

http://clear.msu.edu/clear/index.php,

www.wordlearner.com,

www.education.vic.gov.au/languagesonline,

www.flashcardmachine.com,

http://quizlet.com,

www.classmarker.com,

www.mystudiyo.com,

www.quia.com,

http://hotpot.uvic.ca,

http://moodle.org

Organization

https://sites.google.com/site/sites,

www.wetpaintcentral.com,

www.springnote.com,

http://pbworks.com,

www.nicenet.org,

www.wikidot.com/learnmore:education

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Do Self-Directed English Projects Help Promote Learner Autonomy?

Diane Malcolm

Abstract

This article describes the use and evolution of self-directed projects as an adjunct to classroom learning in the context of a first year English program at a medical college in Bahrain. For the past decade, each semester, students in the program have been required to design, carry out and hand in a self-directed project focused on improving their language skills. I describe how these projects are introduced, selected, managed and assessed, along with project suggestions and input from students' reflective evaluation of their project work. Finally, I discuss the benefits and drawbacks to this initiative for teachers wishing to encourage students' autonomous language learning.

Introduction

One of the challenges for teachers in EFL settings is to expand their learners' experience of using English to settings outside the classroom. While most teachers would agree that out of class activities help to maximize language exposure, thus helping produce greater gains in English proficiency, convincing learners to invest the time and effort required to achieve this end is not always easy. In any class, each individual brings their prior experience, interests, socio-cultural beliefs, among many other factors, to the new learning environment. Thus, any initiative promoted by teachers to increase exposure to and development of their English abilities beyond the classroom should accommodate learners' individual wants and needs as well as convince them of the usefulness of expending the effort. These ideas provided the impetus for an added activity, self-directed English projects, which we have required of students in our first-year academic English program over the past decade.

Background

In an article in *English Language Teaching Forum* (Malcolm & Rindfleisch, 2003), I outlined the rationale for the projects and provided examples and suggestions. To summarize, the project idea came about as a way to deal with our classes of first year medical students of highly varying English proficiency. Within the existing course structure, some marks were allotted for remedial classes for students of the lowest proficiency, so we wanted to provide an English-enhancing activity for the more proficient students which would carry the same credit. This course component should offer individual choice and develop students' responsibility for their learning (one definition of learner autonomy, see Holec, 1981), yet not take up class time. The solution we found is based on Lee (1998), who had the following aims for her students' projects: to improve language ability, to become a more self-directed learner, and to take on greater responsibility for language learning.

In the remainder of this paper, I will describe how the projects are introduced to students, how their progress is tracked, how the projects are assessed and some adjustments to the original assignment in response to problems arising. Finally, I will discuss the benefits and drawbacks to these self-directed projects, from a teacher's perspective, and consider whether they truly help develop student autonomy in English language learning.

Starting the projects

The project begins with a handout given in class explaining the rationale for this activity, the desired outcome, some suggestions, deadlines and finally a contract to be signed by both students and instructor (see Appendix). Students are advised that there must be a product for whatever project they undertake; that is, there must be some documented evidence that they have carried out the contracted activity. A suggested time allotment for the project is also included, so that students realize the time to be expended is not unreasonable, and can easily be achieved in the course of a term. We suggested approximately an hour a week, over 12 weeks of the 16 week semester as a minimum amount of time to be devoted to out of class project work. The remainder of the handout gives some suggestions for projects, some of which are described below, but students are encouraged to make their own suggestions to be discussed with the instructor later.

An important purpose of this introductory phase is to make students aware that this is a compulsory activity (marks are awarded for the project completion). However, the marks do not depend on 'perfect' English, but are based on three main factors: reliability, i.e. completing the project within the allotted time frame; effort, i.e. evidence that the students have made a sincere attempt to work on an aspect of English that they identified as needing improvement; and originality, i.e. the students' work is not plagiarized, duplicated or done by another person.

I usually bring some examples of previous students' efforts to class or describe different projects done in the past to give students something concrete to examine beyond the project descriptions written in the handouts. Thereafter, students have around a week to think over their project ideas, and are encouraged to discuss these with the teacher. This is also an important step, as students may be confused, overly ambitious or reluctant to commit themselves without teacher encouragement. Contracts with descriptions of the project work are prepared by a certain deadline and signed by teachers and students. Even at this stage, students may re-negotiate the contract, if they run into difficulties, or realize they are unlikely to complete what they had originally planned. Any amendments to the contract must be agreed on, and signed for, by both teacher and student before the new plan gets underway. Once the contract is signed, it is kept, along with all materials the student produces or works on during the semester, in a plastic file folder, prepared and labeled by the student and accessible in the instructor's office.

Suggestions for projects

Many different project ideas have been put forward for students to consider over the years, and the following are only a few of the more current suggestions (see Malcolm & Rindfleisch, 2003, for others).

Writing projects

Students who wish to improve their writing skills may write a journal, comprising around 400 words every two weeks to be handed in to the instructor for comments, suggestions and corrections. The final product should be revised and handed in along with the commented drafts. Journal writing has ranged from reality journals, based on the students' lives and feelings, fantasy journals, in which students can take on other roles, writing as a historical figure or a fictitious character, for example, or, since our students are in a medical college, disease journals, in which the students imagine they have a particular disease, and write about their reactions to the initial diagnosis, symptoms, treatment, complications and so on. This kind of writing involves a certain amount of research, so

reading and researching skills are also involved. Students have also written their own stories, poems or summaries of articles, either print or from the Internet.

Speaking projects

Improving their speaking skills is another project many students choose. Currently, students are taking part in discussion groups, where they select the topic, arrange for a time to meet, discuss the topic and record the discussion. Each participant is expected to be the group leader in turn, write a one-page summary of the discussion and his or her reactions to it, while each participant also writes a short description of his or her contribution to the discussion and reaction to it. Individual or paired speaking projects have also been attempted, as well as interviews, which involved preparing questions and recording and transcribing one or more interviews over the semester. In all cases, a record of the discussion is required, unless the teacher is present in the group (not as a leader, but as an observer/participant).

Spelling and vocabulary projects

Our students also have problems with English spelling, as well as wishing to expand their vocabulary. A recent initiative has involved using the Academic Word List and the exercises that go with each sublist (available at http://www.academicvocabularyexercises.com). Students learn the spellings and meanings of the words in a sublist by working through the online exercises. At a specified date, they are given a test on the material. The spelling is tested through dictation, while the word meanings are tested through choosing the appropriate words to fit blanks in sentences (similar to the practice exercises).

Reading projects

For reading projects, students are expected to read a designated number of pages from a text they select. Many have chosen simplified readers from our self-access center, their own books, or sometimes articles from print or electronic sources. Once the text is chosen and approved, students are required to read a specified number of pages, summarize what they have read, and submit the summary in their file, along with a vocabulary notebook containing any new words they had to look up with their English meanings. Students may also be asked to summarize orally and discuss the story with the instructor.

Self-access projects and students' own ideas

Students also have access to the many grammar, reading, writing and vocabulary improvement books in our self-access center, and can be contracted to do a certain number of exercises, or pages from these books during the semester. Many have their own creative ideas, which have ranged from creating and producing vocabulary games, to writing plays or movie scripts, or writing and illustrating comics. Almost anything is acceptable as a project, as long as there is a product that shows the student has been working on improving his or her English.

Modifications to project guidelines to deal with problems

Most projects proceed without any major problems, and are completed as contracted. However, because of a few recurrent problems, we have made some modifications to our assessment.

Procrastination

First, many students seem to forget about the project once the initial negotiation is done and the contract signed. Despite regular reminders in class that they should be giving the instructor evidence of what they are doing, many neglect the project till the last minute, resulting in a sudden flurry of (often suspiciously perfect) papers documenting what was done. To keep students on track, we decided to have three interim deadlines, roughly corresponding to once a month, where students are expected to hand in a progress report (see the Activity Sheet in the appendix). Failing to meet these interim deadlines will result in a deduction for the "reliability" mark.

Group projects

We encourage students to do individual projects, but for those who insist on group work (such as discussions), we stipulate that we must have evidence from each individual member of that group as to what they have done, not one report for the whole group. Each individual in the group is then evaluated separately. While some students have been successful in assigning tasks within a group, so that each one bears and carries out a specific responsibility, in other cases group members have let one another down, resulting in frantic renegotiation of contracts, sometimes with very little time remaining till the final due date. This may also result in a deduction for lack of reliability or effort.

Plagiarizing

Of course, a problem that is familiar to all teachers who assign out of class work is plagiarizing or 'getting help', i.e. having another person do the project, without being acknowledged. Students have handed in work written by more proficient relatives, friends, or downloaded from the Internet, or recycled from high school English classes, and have expected to get credit for it. Thus, we added a provision to the final assessment, which states that no marks will be awarded in cases where plagiarized work is submitted (see the Project Assessment sheet in the appendix).

When students take shortcuts, fail to take the assignment seriously, or evade their responsibility, teachers might question whether it is worth the effort to take on this initiative and expect students to negotiate, complete and benefit from an out of class project. I will take up these issues, as well as the matter of teacher investment in the projects, in the next section.

Self-directed projects and learner autonomy

There are both advantages and disadvantages to these projects as they relate to the qualities teachers hope to build in students as autonomous language learners. This section includes some extracts from a reflective paragraph students were required to write about their project experience this semester. Of the more than 100 students who responded, virtually all of them commented that the project had helped them improve their English skills.

Becoming a more self-directed learner

Those who put in the time and effort required and work honestly, develop better organizational skills and work habits, learn to delegate work, if doing a group project, and understand the benefit of planning and organizing their work in stages, rather than leaving it

to the last minute. As one student wrote: "*I learned to be more patient with members of my group, got a better view on how to choose group members, and learned to set more realistic, self-sustaining goals"*[1]

Improving English language skills

Next, the hoped for result of improved English ability as a result of doing the project may or may not be reached. Those who seriously invest effort, take advantage of the teacher's advice and suggestions, view the project as an opportunity rather than a waste of time, and as a way to express their individuality and creativity will improve as a result of their actions. One student stated: *"[The spelling project] was very useful, because most of words I used them in other subjects such as biology."* However, students who waste time, take the task as a burden and seek out the least demanding activity for which they expend the minimum effort are unlikely to see any real benefit to their language skills. Another student commented: *"Some bodies do the [SAC] project to finish the time only not to improve the skills."*

Taking on responsibility for learning

The projects provide many opportunities for students to be involved in decision making about what, where, when and how much to work on English improvement. Of course, at the same time students may avoid the responsibility, by copying work or taking on easy tasks that don't challenge their ability, or putting things off till the last minute. Nevertheless, even an unsuccessful start may lead to a successful conclusion and greater self-awareness of learning needs. One student reported: "*My project at first was about speaking…but then I changed it because there were a lake of time and we weren't making any progress, so I change it to writing skill especially after test 1 by which I felt my writing was very poor… Next semester I think I will complete on this project because I liked it and I know that I need to improve my writing skills more…"*

Teacher involvement

As can be seen from the descriptions, the teacher is an important factor in the success of these so-called "self-directed" projects, from setting up and negotiating the initial contract, to providing feedback and revising products, to reminding about deadlines and collecting, correcting and in some cases, testing student work. Some may question whether the resulting drain on the teacher's limited time is worth it. The decision in the end is up to the instructors, who must consider their own setting, students, energy levels and convictions.

If a teacher is seen as a facilitator, whose main function is to scaffold her students' learning efforts, then it seems to me that helping students to carry out their projects provides a perfect opportunity to fulfill this role. If, on the other hand, a teacher is not comfortable with handing over some control of their learning to the students, then the project assignment is unlikely to succeed. I believe there needs to be trust on both sides: the teacher must believe students are capable of taking on a task without constant supervision, while students must be convinced the project is a useful way to improve their learning. Both parties need to feel that the effort expended is beneficial, not just an easy way to get marks, or an abdication of the teacher's role as provider of knowledge.

[1] Comments are transcribed as written, including student errors.

Conclusion

I think it is important to keep in mind that autonomy cannot be forced on anyone. Not everyone is ready to become a self-directed learner, but the project initiative provides learners with the opportunity to set and achieve their own goals in learning and can result in greater confidence, self-reliance, and a feeling of self-worth and accomplishment. These are all qualities we as teachers wish to instill in our students, along with improved English language skills.

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Appendix: Examples of the Project Contract, Assessment and Activity Sheet

PROJECT CONTRACT

This is an agreement between _____ (name of student) and

_____ (name of teacher) in regard to the Self-Directed Learning Project for English 151.

I agree to complete the following project under the conditions described below.

I will complete the following part of the project on or before **a specified date**. The entire project must be completed on or before **a specified date**

I have chosen this project because I think it will help me to improve my skills in the following way:

I understand that my grade for this project will partially depend on my fulfilling this agreement.

AGREED Signed: _____ (Student) Date:_____

_____ (Teacher)

PROJECT ASSESSMENT			
Area to be Assessed	Marks awarded	Maximum	Comments
*1**. Originality.** Did not just copy something from the internet or other sources.		2	
2. **Effort.** Amount of work devoted to improving **English**.		4	
3. **Reliability.** Completing the contract as specified and agreed on with the instructor.		4	
Deductions [up to 4 marks]: Marks may be deducted for late contract signing (one mark); failing to keep project activity sheet up to date (one mark); not keeping work in file (one mark); not having work verified by instructor ***Anyone not doing his or her own work will receive NO MARKS.**			

Project Activity Sheet (kept in student's file)		
Date	**What I did**	**Teacher Comments**
November 20____		
December 20___		
January 20__		

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Low-Tech Communicative Approaches in Large Classrooms: Group Work that Works for Everyone!

Elizabeth Hepford

Abstract

There have been many case studies indicating that certain school systems outside of the United States and Great Britain face many problems teaching English as a Foreign Language, especially when trying to use Communicative Learning Theory (CLT). Rather than creating another study demonstrating how yet another country has the same problems, this paper will discuss previous studies, determine what problems they have in common and offer a variety of solutions based on those studies, other papers written by experienced teachers in the field, and the author's observations and experiences. The main problems that will be analyzed are large classrooms and cultural conflicts with CLT. One of the most popular solutions is group work, which will be the focus of this paper.

Low Tech Solutions for Large Classrooms: Group Work that Works for Everyone

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Foreign language teaching has undergone dramatic reforms over the years, but the most significant for language teachers today happened in the 1960s when Noam Chomsky reformed language learning completely. His theory of Universal Grammar and ideas that students must use the language to learn it led to the modern theories of Communicative Language Learning. In the 1970s, an increased effort to make language learning more communicative led to a plethora of new techniques with varying levels of success. Even after 50 years, Chomsky's theories are being developed into new methodologies, but there still remains debate about how to integrate communicative learning into the language classrooms (Richards, 2001).

Most of the current studies center on communicative learning and most of the techniques have been developed for an ESL classroom in either the USA or England. However, a review of the literature shows that these techniques present formidable challenges to the reality of many EFL classes (Hiep, 2005; Penner, 1995; Aliexo 2003). The challenges most often mentioned include: large classes, cultural conflicts, administrative restrictions, and a lack of practical training and resources. The challenge most often mentioned is large class size, which is the focus of this paper.

What is a "large class"? US studies define large classes as 25-30 students. In the UK, it's defined as 35 students. According to a UNESCO study in 2001, African countries have a ratio of 1:43, but in reality many have over 100 students (Senelake, 2010). When teachers are asked to define a large class, they explain that it is a large class "if I can't learn all of the students' names by the end of the semester," or "if eye contact with each student would take more time than the lecture" (Senekane, 2010, p.9). According to the Ministry of Education

and Training in Lesotho in 2010, "it is estimated that there are 43,000 learners who exit primary schools, but there are only 256 secondary schools in the country" (Senekane 2010, p. 2). They do not have the means to support such large numbers of students. Most of their problems are caused by new policies to increase attendance in school, but no funding to increase the infrastructure (Senekane, 2010).

Africa is not alone. In a study about India, Savitri comments that "fixed desks, six students in a desk and not less than 60 in a classroom are a common sight" (2009, p. 138). Wilhelm reports that there are 150 students in a class with no walls and a metal roof in Macao, China (2006); 100% of the teachers asked in a study about Turkey agreed that class size is a problem (Bal, 2006); and, teachers in Brazil reported to Alexio (2003) that overcrowded classes resulted in disciplinary issues and prevented them from implementing CLT activities. Teachers from all over the world complain that the noise from a large class and the work load created by so many students make it difficult to teach. They also say that their students get lost in the crowd, and it is impossible to give them feedback or administer discipline. Unfortunately, for most developing countries, reducing class size is "economically unviable," and therefore "the problem of large classes will prevail." (Byanugisha, 2008, p. 87)

Group work can make managing large groups easier by lessening the grading load, giving teachers time with individual students, and increasing the amount of communicative learning time. Additionally, many group work activities do not require expensive technology, resources or even electricity, all of which can be difficult to find in some parts of the world.

Before putting students into groups, one should understand what makes group work functional. Group work accomplishes two very important tasks in language learning. Firstly, it increases the amount of interaction and opportunities to speak, which increases the likelihood of communicative learning; secondly, students develop a greater sense of membership in their learning community, which decreases their affective filter and encourages them to talk more (Apple 2006, Senekane 2010,Bal 2006).

Groups can be cooperative, where they have a goal and freedom to decide how to accomplish it, or collaborative, where each student is given a task and all tasks must be accomplished to achieve the goal. Unless the group is highly motivated, a collaborative group is usually preferable, or one student will end up doing all the work, while the others will socialize. According to Apple, "group goals create motivation to learn, motivation to help others learn, and encouragement to learn, which leads to peer teaching, peer modeling, cognitive elaboration, and peer assessment, which in turn enhances learning" (2006, p. 278). In other words, the students will teach each other in order to accomplish the task. In a large classroom, the advantages of peer teaching are obvious.

In order to create collaborative groups, teachers need well planned activities with very clear instructions. Roles should be assigned based on the abilities and preferences of the students by either the group or the teacher. Some examples of roles include: leader, scribe/ reporter/ summarizer (oral or written), artist/visual aids creator, vocabulary monitor (writes down new and difficult words), actors, and a time monitor. The various roles also give students a chance to practice English by performing in one of the less commonly used multiple intelligences, such as kinesthetic/bodily. Different tasks will, of course, require additional roles. Teachers should make it clear that points will be lost if everyone doesn't participate (Rance-Rooney, Apple, Kozar).

The groups will vary depending on the task, and the teacher should consider how to form the groups. It's very tempting to conveniently let the students be with their friends or to form groups based on the least likely to cause trouble. However, some other considerations are: language proficiency (ensuring all work or help each other), personality (dominant and non-dominant), friendships (provide support), diversity of backgrounds (may help in

discussions), and gender (makes some topics more comfortable) (Rance-Rooney, 2010). Which type of group combination is the most productive will depend on the task.

Does it work? By its very nature, group work encourages communicative learning and according to a study at Nanjing University in China, "the experiment class [which was being taught using communicative methods] performed better in all the tests on the four skills except in the grammar section" (Penner 1995, p. 8). Therefore, teachers should keep in mind that additional grammar instruction may be necessary depending on the examinations students need to pass. They should also keep in mind that, as a very talented Macmillan teacher trainer once said to me, "the real goal of language instruction is to teach students to *use* a language. No one asks if you know a language; they ask if you can speak it."

Practical Ideas for Teachers

The next section of this paper will be dedicated to practical uses of group work in response to the many studies in my literature review that stated they didn't have any practical training in how to use Communicative Learning Theory.

The first factor to keep in mind is that students need to learn how to perform in groups, just like teachers need to learn how to do it. Apple (2006) suggests starting with paired activities and slowly working up to groups. The students won't know how to react the first time a teacher gives them the freedom to speak in class. Therefore, teachers should expect some disruptive behavior the first few times, which is why it is important to set some ground rules and be clear in exactly what is expected of the students. It's also a good idea to save collaborative tasks for the end of class so that it's not necessary to calm the students down again at the end of the task. Wilhelm (2006) begins and ends her lessons with songs which unite the group into one again and give her time to speak at the end of the song.

In large classrooms where it's difficult for students to move, Wilhelm (2006) suggests activities that don't require students to leave their seats. Students can work in groups of four, two in front and two behind them, or in a row. She conducts a communicative dictation activity with the two students in front and two in back formation. The students are given a topic and students take turns making sentences about the topic. Everyone writes down the sentences. After they finish, they trade papers and correct each other. Another one of her ideas is called "chaining". Students in a row of approximately four, practice a dialogue in the following manner: Student one reads the first line to student two. Student two repeats what student one said then reads the next line to student three and so on. Senekane (2010) mentioned an idea from Bonwell & Edison's study in 1991 called "turn to your neighbor discussions". Every 10 minutes throughout the lecture, the instructor asks a question and allows the students to discuss it for a few minutes before continuing. This provides weaker students a chance to ask for help and more advanced students a chance to absorb what is being said. As explained by Apple, "Those who teach, learn twice" (2006, p. 288).

Scattegories, a popular board game from the United States, is easily converted into an in-seat collaborative task. Students are divided into groups small enough that they can work together (2-4 students). The teacher gives the class a letter and the students write down as many words as they can, beginning with that letter. After a designated amount of time, they combine their lists and count the words. The group with the most words "wins". Another option is to have a member of the winning group write all their words on the board and only count the words that no one else thought of. This provides an opportunity to learn new vocabulary as well.

In classes where you can move around, Apple (2006) offers some ideas on group formations he calls "the traveling heads". Students are placed in groups of four and each assigned a number. After a designated amount of time, the teacher calls out a number and the student with that number moves to another group to share the information from the previous group and collect information from his/her new group. After another designated amount of

time, he/she returns to his/her first group and shares the information learnt. This can be used when each group has been given part of the task necessary to complete the final project or just to compare answers. For example, students can be given a list of 100 vocabulary words. Each group takes 25 words and a dictionary and looks them up. The "traveling head" will deliver his/her group's 25 words to a new group and collect 25 words to return to his/her original group.

Communicative Language Learning works best when authentic and relevant material is present and/or discussed (Alan, 2005; Senekane, 2010). I have found in my own classes that if I find out what the students are interested in and provide articles written about those topics, they are interested and want to participate. Facebook, the Internet, music, celebrities, sports, dating and teen problems are extremely popular with high school and college students. Younger students may enjoy talking about sports and even including some demonstrations using a real ball. Younger students also would probably like to talk about video games, their families and their friends. To make this an activity, the teacher should provide 1-3 thought-provoking questions to be discussed. One member of the group will report to the class what was discussed. The more controversial the questions are, the greater the participation!

When the classrooms are crowded, collaborative homework is another option for teachers to consider. Kozar (2010) suggests a survey activity where students must ask people outside of the classroom for answers, then combine the results of their individual efforts with their group. They can then report their findings back to the class. I've used this same activity for journalism and writing classes as evidence to support arguments in their papers.

Oral reports are collaborative if they are done in groups, and all of the students are required to speak. Even if a more advanced student does the research, the lower level student will have to at least be able to speak about the topic. If teachers don't allow their students to read their reports, the activity becomes more communicative because they are forming their own sentences. However, they may use notes and should be encouraged to use visual aids. Avoid presenting all the reports on one day because the other students will become bored quickly. To increase listening, teachers can try requiring a summary of the report given or a short quiz after each one. If class noise makes doing oral presentations impossible, the teacher might try meeting outside of the class to listen to the report.

For lower level students, collaborative drawings can be productive and fun (Kozar, 2010). Students are given one crayon and they must share to complete their picture. Everything in the picture should be labeled in English and students should be asked to show their picture and tell the class about it. Once again, don't do too many because the others will become restless.

Cultural Barriers

Research studies used for this paper conclude that even though teachers understand CLT theories, they return to their traditional classroom practices as soon as they return to their classrooms. According to Penner (1995) and Savitri (2009), in cultures where a teacher is supposed to hold all the knowledge, a student-centered class is threatening to both the teacher and the student. In addition, the pressure to be the all-knowing teacher discourages questions because if the teacher is unable to answer, it would be "disgraceful" (Penner, 1995). One teacher in Penner's (1995) study explained, "English may be foreign, but its teaching should be Chinese."

The solution, according to Hiep, is to modify it. The good news is that cultural barriers are not impossible to overcome. Group work, by its nature, is actually collective. All of the students are working towards the same goal, and they are helping each other. If implemented carefully and slowly, the students will learn to accept it and the teachers can learn to use it, but "when there is no mediation between the students' and the teacher's

different expectations, it results in confusion and frustration for the students." (Savitri, 2009, p. 8)

A mistake native speakers often make is calling on individual students to answer questions or do certain tasks, which can be very embarrassing in a collective culture. Hiep (2005) suggests having students answer together in a chorus. Once they have adjusted to being asked more questions rather than just listening to the teacher, they can be broken into smaller groups. Teachers may find that maintaining a teacher-centered classroom, but encouraging more participation in teacher-led conversations, is a useful transition to smaller groups. Students and teachers from a culture with great respect for authority will also benefit from specific instructions with clear expectations for the final product. If students are asked to create a list of words, tell them how many; if they are asked to illustrate something, tell them what colors to use and what size it should be. After some time and practice, tasks with more freedom can be utilized.

Teachers also can explain the different aspects of other cultures and "pretend" to be American or British for that class, thus giving students permission to break away from their cultural norms. Schools that have the benefit of a native speaker may find the transition easier because strange methods are better accepted by students when given by foreigners (Savitri, 2010). Their non-native speaking counterparts can then follow their example once the students are comfortable with the methods.

The key to crossing the cultural barriers to group work and CLT is to move slowly and lead the students there carefully. The benefits are worth the efforts. As Heip explains, "abandoning CLT in the English classroom in countries such as Vietnam or China seems not to be a viable measure, given that the ultimate goal of English teaching in these countries is to help learners acquire a good working command of English." (2005, p. 2).

Group work may not be the solution to all of the problems EFL teachers face, but it may be the solution to some of them. Hopefully, publishing new ideas will encourage teachers to keep trying CLT in their classrooms as their students will benefit from increased communicative competence. In my literature review, there were apparent problems that couldn't be addressed in this paper, such as a lack of resources, a need for practical training, and restrictive administrative policies. As long as these problems exist, the need for research and publication will persist.

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Blogging in Second Language Teacher Education: Connecting Theory with Practice

Francis Bangou

The research reveals that for many pre-service teachers it is not always easy to make the connection between the knowledge acquired at university and the reality of a classroom, and many teacher candidates often perceive theories as being irrelevant to their education (Bangou, 2006; Laursen, 2007). Thus, in recent years, the development of reflective tasks that better connect theory with practice has become a focus of teacher education programs (Laursen, 2007). Many studies have shown that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as blogs could promote pre-service teachers' reflective practices and help them better connect theory with practice (Soubrié, 2006).

In 2008, the use of a blog was integrated into an English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology course taught at a Canadian university; its purpose was to help pre-service teachers connect theory with practice through reflective practices. This blog activity was designed around Wallace's model of foreign language teachers' professional development (1991) and forms the basis of the present case study, which aims to analyze the reflective blogging practices of eleven pre-service teachers and to assess if this tool did indeed provide them with the opportunity to connect theory with practice. The research questions that guided this study were (1) how did the pre-service teachers connect theory with practice through reflective practices on the blog? and (2) how did the blog contribute to the pre-service teachers' reflective practices?

Theoretical framework

The reflective model

A major issue surrounding second language teacher education is the perceived disconnect between theory and practice (Wallace, 1991 Bangou, 2006; Bangou & Fleming, 2010). This study is based on Wallace's reflective model, as it was the only model available that was specifically connected to the field of second language teacher education, and it seemed to fit the overall philosophy of the teacher education program at the university where this study took place.

Wallace (1991) developed this model based on the understanding that professional, structured education includes the development of two types of knowledge: received knowledge and experiential knowledge. According to the model, received knowledge refers to acquaintance with "the vocabulary of the subject and the matching concepts, research findings, theories and skills which are widely accepted as being part of the necessary intellectual content of the profession" (Wallace, 1991, p. 14). Experiential knowledge refers to both the knowledge-in-action developed by pre-service teachers through practice (in real classrooms and at university) and the opportunity to reflect on that knowledge-in-action (Wallace, 1991).

Based on a constructivist perspective, this model emphasizes that learners do not "enter into professional training situations with blank minds and/or neutral attitudes" (Wallace, 1991, p. 50). Rather, pre-service teachers' prior experiences and beliefs affect the way that they interpret and integrate new information. Therefore, in this model, constant reflection on experiential and received knowledge *in practice* is the key to a better connection between theory and practice.

Review of the literature

Over the last three decades, the role of theory and practice in teacher education has been the subject of numerous studies (e.g., Schön, 1983; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Laursen, 2007) and debates on "whether theory precedes or follows practice, whether practice (re)constructs theory, or whether theory and practice exist in dialectic relationship" (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007, p. 957). Nowadays, it is widely believed that theory and practice should be integrated in teacher education, and reflection on practice "is often viewed as the way to achieve such integration" (Laursen, 2007, p. 3).

In parallel to these conceptual developments, there was a need for more empirically based research on ways to better connect theory and practice in teacher education (Barak & Yinon, 2007; Bangou & Omer, 2008). An example of such empirical research is Laursen's (2007) study on how pre-service teachers conceptualized theory and practice in teacher education. Based on interviews with 34 students, Laursen's study reveals that teacher candidates in this context wanted primarily to learn *how* to teach, not to reflect on teaching, showing that pre-service teachers feel it is important for theories to be useful. Other studies have similarly revealed that reflection in teacher education can at times be perceived as irrelevant by some teacher candidates, and that it is important to provide pre-service teachers with guidance through the reflective process (Bangou & Fleming, 2010). Moreover, the research reveals that it is crucial for teacher candidates to critically reflect on the ways that their prior beliefs affect their experiences both in the teacher education program and in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Methodology

Context

This study took place in a mid-sized Canadian teacher education program that has about 750 students enrolled annually to obtain their elementary or secondary teaching licensure. This eight-month teacher education program includes two practicums of five weeks each, and its mission includes training competent and reflective teaching professionals who can critically and concretely connect theory with practice (Bangou & Fleming, 2010).

This study was conducted over a two-year period and focused on an optional ESL teaching methods course. This course took place annually once a week for five weeks, with each session lasting for three and a half hours. As part of the requirements for the course, the pre-service teachers had to publish on a blog a minimum of four messages of at least 100 words each. Although the teacher candidates were strongly advised to publish at least one message a week, they had the option to publish their messages whenever they wanted throughout the semester. The teacher candidates were also required to comment on at least four of their colleagues' postings. Each comment had to be at least 50 words long. As the course professor, I did not contribute to the blog to avoid influencing the discussion (Bangou & Fleming, 2010).

Participants

For ethical reasons, in the first year of the study I could not invite the pre-service teachers to take part in the research until the end of the five-week course, when nine teacher candidates agreed to take part in the study (including three who participated in interviews). I invited the pre-service teachers to participate in the study at the beginning of the session in the second year, and 44 teacher candidates agreed to take part in the study (including eight who participated in interviews).

This article focuses on the eleven pre-service teachers (two males, nine females) who agreed to participate in the interviews over the two-year study period.

Data collection

Considering the contextual nature of the research questions, a case study approach seemed to be the most appropriate way to reach our objectives. According to Yin (2009), a case study allows a researcher to empirically analyze complex activities via diverse sources. Indeed, case studies are more interested in reasons and processes than results and effects (Anderson, 1993).

A total of 72 messages (46 entries and 26 comments) were retrieved from the blog, and the eleven participant bloggers were interviewed to talk about their experiences in the teacher education program. These interviews were meant to situate their reflective practices in a larger context, and to reveal the factors that might have influenced their reflections.

Data analysis

First, the messages were analyzed to highlight emerging themes and to underline the ways that pre-service teachers connected theory with practice. Next, the interview transcripts were analyzed to create a list of thematic codes based on the research questions. The content of the interviews was then analyzed to underscore the themes that recurred between the interviews and the blog postings. The most common opinions and behaviors could then be identified, and the most original and pertinent experiences highlighted.

Results and discussion

Through their blog postings, the pre-service teachers revealed that their received and experiential knowledge were interacting through their reflective practices. Indeed, most of the blog reflections were based on the textbook ("Another aspect of the readings that really stood out for me is the importance of frequent re-evaluation of English language learners") and the classroom discussions ("During our class discussion last Friday, Francis pointed out that…"). Knowledge acquired through the textbook and the classroom discussions was often compared to the teacher candidates' past experiences as instructors, teachers, or tutors: "During my undergrad, volunteer experience led me to a once in a lifetime opportunity of working as a volunteer coordinator for a not-for-profit organization with refugees…" Others referred to their experiences as learners: "While reading your post I immediately thought to my own personal experience with language acquisition."

Pre-service teachers' experiences in their first practicum seemed to be the main point of reference to assess the knowledge they acquired in the ESL teaching course. Some reflected that their experiential knowledge had been well informed by their received knowledge ("My first practicum provided me with various opportunities to experience this concept first hand"); while others disagreed ("I found chapter one of the textbook to be a little bit unrealistic..."). It was through this process of confirmation and rejection that pre-service teachers made some decisions regarding their teaching practice: "I will ensure that my program for ELLs [English Language Learners] will use all of the strategies and skills I have learned in this course."

Indeed, the blog enabled teacher candidates to confront the information that was provided to them in the course with the knowledge they acquired in the classroom either as teachers or learners. As we can see, through the blogging process, pre-service teachers were indeed able to connect theory with practice.

Although the educational context of the blogging activity might have impacted the blog reflections (as will be discussed below), the interview data shows that the blog itself affected pre-service teachers' reflective practices. Indeed, six teacher candidates declared that the blog enabled them to reflect on the content of the course in a dynamic and informal way: "[It was] really, really a dynamic way to learn." One participant even said that, contrary to the face-to-face course, the blog enabled her to talk openly about her ideas: "I think I liked

the blog better because it was more free...” Some felt that the blog expanded the time and space available for learning: “Then it [the blog] took the learning to a place outside of the classroom as well.” It seems that the blog enabled some pre-service teachers to take the time to read the information and clarify their thoughts: “I think it’s a processing time that’s a lot different with blogging than it is in class and that I think can emerge a much more informed opinion rather than just so on the spot.”

Not all participants shared this opinion, however. As one interviewee declared, “Quite simply and bluntly, I’ve got nothing from the blog…” During the interviews, five participants admitted that the blog did not really impact their learning process, in part because they preferred communicating face to face. One participant even compared the blog to a chore: “Communicating through e-mail, blogs... I just find that it feels like a chore, you know?”

In the same vein, three participants declared that the blog entries were not critical enough and were simply repetitions of what was said in class. Another pre-service teacher tried to overcome this problem: “I noticed that most people were just writing reflections of the chapter reading and I am like ‘This is boring,’ so I am doing research for another... kind of reading.” To make the blog a more effective reflection tool, this teacher candidate tried to invest herself in the task by finding additional resources that allowed her to go beyond what was said in class.

Not all teacher candidates were as motivated, and some waited until the last minute to post their messages: “I waited right till the end to do the blog because I knew what I wanted to say.” In fact, most messages were published at the very end of the session, which limited some pre-service teachers’ contributions to the reflection. One participant even dedicated a message to this issue:

> I am fairly certain that I am not the only student who feels this way, though I may be the most extreme example based on the fact that I just posted all four of my blog entries in a row: I find it hard to effectively engage in online discussion forums like this blog, for classes...

In addition to the fact that some students preferred face-to-face discussions, the blog’s partial lack of effectiveness was likely due to its educational context. The very fact that the blog was a course assignment may have influenced participants’ feelings about contributing to it. As one participant mused, “Is this the same phenomenon that keeps us from reading a really amazing book that we would eagerly read on our own time, but won’t even touch if it’s a class requirement? Or is it something else?” Furthermore, these pre-service teachers already had multiple opportunities to use blogs as part of the requirements for different courses within the teacher education program. As one interviewee said, “I know that so many of us in the program are slightly sick of it [blogging]. Last semester we had multiple courses where that was the majority of what we did.” According to this interviewee, the teacher candidates were tired of the activity because they had already used the blog medium in other classes.

While the data reveals that the blog did provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to connect theory with practice through individual and collective reflective practices, it also demonstrates that, for some participants, reflecting on the blog was not an effective activity. Indeed, it seems that almost half of the pre-service teacher participants had an unsatisfying experience on the blog and did not really invest themselves in the task.

Discussion

In response to our research questions, the data reveals that it was through collective reflective practices that the pre-service teachers confronted their received and experiential knowledge, as well as solidified, challenged, and modified their convictions about teaching

ELLs. The blog did enable participants to take the time and have the space to connect the theory provided in the course with their practical experiences as learners and teachers.

A majority of the participants enjoyed the openness and informality of the blog. Some pre-service teachers asserted that the asynchronous nature of the blog conversation enhanced their reflection by allowing them time to think about what they wanted to say, which echoes previous research (c.f., Kuzu, 2007; Wu, 2006). However, it also appears that a significant number of participants did *not* enjoy their experiences on the blog mainly because of this same asynchronous nature. Other participants revealed that they were saturated with blogging, and most of the time they did not understand its relevance. As in other studies, some participants admitted they were bored with the blog because a majority of the messages were not critical and were simply repeating what was said in class (Bangou & Fleming, 2010).

The data also suggests that the educational context of the blogging activity had an impact on participants' investments in the reflective process. Some participants highlighted the fact that they did not invest in the reflective process mainly because it was an assignment. Such comments raise questions about the interrelationship between educational practices (such as grading) and pre-service teachers' reflective practices.

Although I was very much part of the blogging activity because the pre-service teachers knew that I was reading and grading their postings, I did not contribute directly to the blog because, as the course professor, I did not want to influence the teacher candidates' reflections or hinder their participation. Still, it might have been beneficial if I had contributed to the blog and modeled the types of behaviors and messages I was expecting from the participants (Bangou & Fleming, 2010).

The research suggests that blogs have the potential to enhance students' reflective processes by extending the time and space of the classroom (Kuzu, 2007). Although a majority of participants shared this opinion, a significant number of them felt that most of the postings were just repeating what was said in class. For those holding the latter opinion, it seems that the blog did not extend the classroom, but simply reproduced it. Contributing to the blog myself would have allowed me to post messages that complemented (and not just repeated) what was said in class. In addition, I would have made a point of bringing in additional resources, just like one of the participants reported doing. In this way, the blog could have become a true source of complementary information that nourished the pre-service teachers' reflections.

The only parameters provided for the participants' blog postings and comments were related to their number and length. However, it might have been a good idea to have specific requirements related to the content as well. For instance, the pre-service teachers could have been required to include additional resources in all of their postings, or address issues related to the field of ESL learning that were not covered in class. In addition, to ensure the regular participation of all the teacher candidates, it might have been beneficial to have made it a requirement to post every week (Bangou & Fleming, 2010).

Indeed, if I had modeled the blog activity through my own contributions, the blog could have become a true source of new and relevant information that fed the pre-service teachers' reflective practices and contributed to a better connection between theory and practice.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analyze a group of pre-service ESL teachers' reflective practices on a blog and assess if such a technological tool provided them with the opportunity to connect theory with practice. This study enabled us to show that blogs *can* potentially enhance pre-service teachers' reflective practices and help them make a better connection

between theory and practice. However, our study also revealed that this potential is impacted by institutional, affective, and pedagogical variables.

This study has implications for teaching. Indeed, to integrate a technological tool such as blogging into pre-service teachers' reflective practices more effectively, it is crucial to take into consideration both the instructor's and the pre-service teachers' prior experiences with blogging, their practices, and their representations and convictions. More research is needed to fully understand the impact of the educational context on the reflective potential of blogging experiences for pre-service ESL teachers.

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Effects of Online Materials on Student Achievement

Hatice Bilgin

Abstract

In order to investigate the effects of two online programs, *Active Reading* and *Tense Buster*, on beginner level ELT preparatory students' reading and grammar achievement, a quasi-experimental study was conducted in ITU School of Foreign Languages. Two classes were assigned as experimental and control groups. The teachers of the experimental class used *Tense Buster* and *Active Reading* in addition to the materials which were required to be adhered to by all the teachers in the school. The student achievement scores were compared with 2X4 ANOVA with repeated measures. The results of the ANOVA test revealed no difference in the grammar and reading achievement of these classes.

1. Introduction

With the development of technology, the computer is now easily accessible to almost everyone. It has also become an indispensable part of every field of inquiry. The use of computers in foreign language education is not a new idea (Kenning & Kenning, 1983; Higgins & Johns, 1984; Ahmad & Corbett & Rogers & Sussex, 1985). Even in the sixties and seventies, language laboratories were being installed in numerous educational settings. The traditional language laboratory was comprised of a series of booths, each providing a cassette deck, with an accompanying microphone and a headphone. However, much has changed since the 1960s.

Along with the changes in the way languages are taught and technological development, the use of computers in language classes has changed dramatically. The Internet has started to take an important place in foreign language learning (Dudeney, 2000; Teeler & Gray, 2000; Mithchell, 2009). We now have a new platform, which includes sounds, images, animation, social interaction, and various multimedia channels. This new platform, which has given rise to online learning also constitutes a ground for foreign language teaching and learning (Preston, 2004; Brenton, 2009; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2010).

All these developments in technology have also made current learners of our time fundamentally different. Prensky (2001) points out that "students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. Students today are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet."(p.1). He calls this new generation "digital natives", which he found as "the most useful designation" (Prensky, 2001: 1) for them. Baird and Fisher (2005-2006) use the terms "net-centric generation" and "neomillennial learner" to describe today's students. Similarly, Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) call this new generation "the net generation".

All these designations for this new generation indicate a change in their learning styles as well. According to Dede (2005) and Baird & Fisher (2005-2006), the learning style of this new generation is "neomillenial learning", which stems primarily from the world-to-the-desktop interface. Baird and Fisher (2005-2006) maintain that students have started to learn in a student-centered, technologically and socially rich environment, which is certainly on the rise.

It is clear that the new generation is different from previous generations in that students widely use new technologies not only in their daily lives but also in their learning. The way they communicate and process information reveals that they are comfortable with

the new technologies and accustomed to using them readily. They tend to use different kinds of technologies in every part of their lives without any hindrance.

In foreign language teaching, our aim should be to cater to these changes in order to make our teaching more compelling and appealing. We should be listening to our learners' voice in order to make our teaching more effective. It is clear that our learners are now more technologically oriented and able to utilize new technologies for their own learning. In a study investigating student attitudes towards the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and their perceived view of its relevance to their course of study, Ayres (2002) found that non-native undergraduate students highly appreciate and value learning through computers. 80% of the students participating in the study perceived CALL to be relevant to their needs, 77% indicated that computer tasks provided information useful to them, and 60% agreed that CALL should be used more frequently. These results indicate that CALL is a tool to supplement classroom tasks and needs to be tied to the curriculum closely.

In another study, Conole (2008) found that students use the web extensively to extend their understanding of concepts and supplement course materials. Students are also found to be using technologies, such as instant messaging software, virtual learning environments (VLEs), and MS Office Applications to support all aspects of their learning processes, such as communicating with tutors, doing assignments, and accessing online learning materials. Conole points out that students do not see technology as an add-on, but rather take it as central to the orientation and organization of their learning, suggesting a rich and complex interrelationship between learners and the technologies they use.

All of these changes attest to a new lease of life in language teaching and learning that has emerged all around the world. The use of new technologies in foreign language education is now considered to be an essential issue in many institutions which have started to integrate different technologies into their programs. Foreign language learners have already started to experience technology in combination with face-to-face instruction. Hence, this study aims to broaden the existing body of research by investigating the effects of two online programs, *Active Reading* and *Tense Buster*, on the achievement of beginner level English learners over one semester in a Turkish university preparatory program.

2. Methodology

2.1. Setting and Participants

At Istanbul Technical University, a one-year preparatory English program is compulsory for all undergraduate students who do not meet the English language proficiency requirements. This study was carried out in the fall term of the 2009/2010 academic year. The participants were students from two beginner level classes having 27 hours of compulsory instruction per week, 12 hours of which is grammar and 6 hours is reading instruction. There were 32 students in the experimental class and 27 students in the control class. There was a total of 59 Turkish EFL prep students in this study.

2.2. Instruments

In this study, four achievement tests, namely a pre-test, two progress tests, and a post-test, were used. The students in the experimental and control classes were given a pre-test before the treatment started in order to find out whether there was any preexisting difference in their achievement level. During the term, they were given two monthly exams as progress tests in order to assess their progress. At the end of the study, they were given a post-test in order to find out whether there was any difference in their grammar and reading achievement. The tests were prepared and evaluated to ascertain the suitability of the questions to the aims of the course, clarity of instructions, marking scheme, and appropriateness of content by the Testing Office of ITU School of Foreign Languages.

2.3. Procedure

Before the study began, the experimental and control classes were pre-tested. The students who participated in this study had to follow the books, materials, and assignments determined by the Curriculum Office of the School of Foreign Languages. In addition to these materials, they used *Active Reading* and *Tense Buster*, which present an interactive learning environment that helps students to practice English for one semester. Both programs are designed as a supplementary resource to be integrated into a teacher-led course.

Active Reading, which aims to help learners develop their reading skills, comes at six levels - from elementary to advanced. Each level includes ten units, each of which is organized around one or more texts, such as advertisements, articles, and poems. It focuses on a specific reading skill, such as skimming, scanning, and vocabulary strategies. The program also includes work on other skills: extensive listening practice as well as essay writing and discussion activities.

Tense Buster is a grammar program. It comes at five levels: elementary to advanced. Each level includes a number of key grammar areas. All the grammar points presented are tackled in a systematic manner from presentation, to practice**,** and finally to test. While the focus of *Tense Buster* is grammar, the program also includes work on pronunciation and vocabulary, and each unit includes a learner development element.

These programs were mainly used in three ways. They served as a refreshing change of focus in a lesson in the computer lab, the teachers took students to the computer lab in some lessons, and they were also used as a supplementary self access resource for talented students or as a remedial resource for weaker students. In addition, exercises from these programs were set as online homework.

During the term, the students were administered two monthly tests in order to find out their learning progress. At the end of the term, the post-test was administered to the control and the experimental classes.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The data collected through the pre-test, progress tests, and post-test was analyzed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. In order to find out any preexisting difference in achievement, their pre-test scores were compared with an independent samples *t*-test. The results of the *t*-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in students' reading and grammar achievement. Therefore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for all the scores. A 2X4 (2 Groups: Experimental vs. Control X 4 Tests: Pre-test, Progress tests and Post-test) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted to find out whether these online programs have an effect on the reading and grammar achievement of students. Alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

3. Results

The pre-test scores of the students were analyzed with independent-samples *t*-test. The result for the reading pre-test revealed there was not any significant difference in the scores of the reading pre-test between experimental (M=52.25, SD=25.33) and control (M=44.55, SD=22.42) classes; $t(46)=1.88$, $p = 0.282$. Similarly, there was not any significant difference in the scores of the grammar pre-test between experimental (M=46.75, SD=15.69) and control (M=45.90, SD=9.52) classes; $t(45.28)=0.233$, $p = 0.817$.

As there are no differences between the pre-test scores, the scores of the pre-test, progress tests, and post test were analyzed using a 2X4 ANOVA with repeated measures.

The means and standard deviations for each reading exam are presented in the table below.

	Experimental Class		Control Class	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-test	52	25	44	23
Progress test I	77	17	79	16
Progress test II	78	14	72	14
Post-test	66	17	66	13

In order to find out whether the mean differences of the reading scores are significantly different, the data was submitted to 2X4 mixed ANOVA with repeated measures. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated (chi-square = 14.854, p= .011); therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (epsilon = .802). The results show that there was a significant main effect for the test, F (2.405, 108.240) = 39.497, p = .000. However, there was not a main effect for group F (1, 45) = .627, p = .432, and there was no significant interaction between the test and group F (2.405, 108.240) = 1.252, p= . 293 >. The means and standard deviations for each grammar exam are presented in the table below.

	Experimental Class		Control Class	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-test	47	16	46	10
Progress test I	79	13	79	11
Progress test II	70	14	70	13
Post-test	67	18	68	9

In order to find out whether the mean differences of the grammar scores are significantly different, the data was submitted to a 2X4 mixed ANOVA with repeated measures. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated (chi-square = 18.641, p= .002); therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (epsilon = .807). The results show that there was a significant main effect for test, F(2.422, 111.397) = 90.383, p = .000. However, there was not a main effect for group F(1, 46) = .002, p = .969, and there was no significant interaction between test and group F(2.422, 111.397) = .088, p= . 967.

The results of the ANOVA test both for the reading and grammar achievement scores indicate that the experimental and control classes did not differ in their reading and grammar achievement in the given exams. However, the exam scores differed among themselves.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the present study is to investigate the effect of two online programs on students' reading and grammar achievement. When achievement scores of the students in the control and experimental class were compared, it was found that there were no significant differences in terms of grammar and reading achievement.

Contrary to the findings of Levine, Ferenz, and Reves (2000), there was no difference in reading achievement in this study. They found that the computerized learning environments in which students were provided with authentic texts accompanied by reading tasks via the class website contributed to the development of critical literacy skills in a university EFL academic reading course more than the conventional learning environment. However, in this study, the texts and tasks provided by the online program are different; they are not authentic. Levine, Ferenz and Reves (2000) indicate that the computer-networked environment combined the security and support of the language learning classroom, in addition to exposure to authentic reading materials while improving students' reading.

The finding on the grammar achievement is contrary to Al-Jarf (2005), who found a significant improvement in the grammar achievement of university EFL freshman students in a setting where online materials were used to supplement face-to-face in-class grammar instruction via *Nicenet*. However, in her study, the program, *Nicenet*, and the design of online tasks are different from the program and tasks of this study. In her study, students could post their questions about grammar points and short paragraphs on any topic of their choice to *Nicenet*, whereby they could interact with their teacher and peers while, in this study, the students could not interact with the teacher or the other students using *Tense Buster* and *Active Reading*. Learning environments where students can interact with someone to clarify any points they do not understand and get detailed feedback instead of just 'true' and 'false' responses can help them learn better.

On the other hand, the findings about grammar achievement are consistent with the findings of Nutta (1998), who compared postsecondary English as a Second Language (ESL) students' acquisition of selected English grammatical structures based on the method of instruction, namely computer-based instruction versus teacher-directed instruction, and found no significant differences between the computer-based and teacher-directed students' scores on multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank tests.

In a time and setting in which computers are no longer a novelty, this study offers some insights into the effects of online materials on students' achievement by showing a group of university beginner level EFL students' engagement in two particular online commercial programs as part of their courses. It must be noted here that the purpose has not been to endorse or to discredit any product available in the market, but to understand to what extent these programs are effective and useful in the ITU School of Foreign Languages class context in terms of learning outcomes. Further studies should be conducted with students of different proficiency levels in different learning settings.

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We Learn in Community: A Methodology of Partnership

Jane Hoelker

Technology and trade have propelled English forward as an international language and demand communicative competence. Consequently, materials and methods from the West have been imported into the classrooms of diverse cultures (Holliday, 2007, 1994). Some institutions might still grapple with large class size, limited resources, outdated materials, or inadequate support systems. Yet, even programs with unlimited resources and support from institutional and national administrations encounter unanticipated challenges.

Today, many English programs around the globe have been increasingly seeking accreditation from Western organizations and often craft a prescriptive curriculum in an effort to ensure attaining accreditation requirements. Discussion among instructors at an institution in the Middle East reveals that such activities or approaches successful in the West are not always successful in the new context; the more successful are built on cultural, pedagogical, or linguistic characteristics from the students' context, such as language, oral tradition, folklore, or group dynamics. Most of the research has been conducted in Asia with Holliday (2007, 1994) writing up class notes based on an ethnographic method on his work in Egyptian universities and programs imported from overseas to the Egyptian context. It seems that the results of the research in Asia could benefit those educators working in contexts outside of Asia because similarities can be found regarding the four primary issues discovered in conducting this particular study.

Four primary issues emerge from these classroom experiences (whether programs are funded with limited or unlimited resources) and will be explored through case studies. The first two issues are implementation of innovations, and teacher resistance to change and a model of a teacher change cycle as a response to innovation (Pennington, 1995). Further questions examine learner resistance (Coleman, 1996) and how the sociolinguistic notion that language is primarily social impacts learning (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Some examples of lessons based on cultural, pedagogical, or linguistic characteristics from the students' context are discussed. In light of the changing nature of language and learning, a revised design of curriculum as a partnership that defines structure and allows flexibility in decisions in a learner-centered system is proposed in an effort to bridge the gap and reconcile theory and classroom practice (Graves, 2000).

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE: THREE CASE STUDIES

The Local Context and the Influence of Teacher Beliefs

The first study (Canh and Barnard, 2009) illustrates the importance of the local context and the values incorporated in that context as well as the fact that teacher beliefs are keys to the implementation of change. The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) established a Communicative Learning Theory (CLT) curriculum from grades six through 12. A new theme-based and skills-based textbook was written locally. However, MOET institutionalized the multiple-choice test model as the only testing method for the standardized, high-stakes tests, and the two skills of speaking and listening are not assessed. There was a serious shortage of English-language teachers. The government attempted to retrain teachers of Russian to teach English, using the cascade model to transmit the new methodology.

The study took place in an upper-secondary school with limited facilities and crowded classrooms in the economically underdeveloped rural area of North Vietnam. The results indicated that CLT was not being implemented in the way it was outlined in the curriculum document. The teacher rationale for the classroom style was that they had to finish the textbook within a time limit and so they had no time to organize a communicative classroom. The students' language level was too low, so the L2 was seldom used and support for teachers like cassettes was not provided. Students in the relatively isolated region had few opportunities to speak English with others. The study concluded by highlighting the importance of considering key factors in local contexts and of taking steps to provide changes in teacher beliefs that they could implement CLT in their context.

Teacher Attitudes, Training and Understanding, and Supportive Supervisors

Teacher attitudes, training and understanding, and the support of the teacher supervisor were discovered to be keys to the implementation of innovations in a study by Carless (1998). Hong Kong introduced the Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC) in 1994 in three primary school subjects. The project would expand through the years. The three core concepts (Targets, Tasks, and Task-based assessment) were elements common to communicative methodologies. The major premise is that students are actively involved in their language learning, a radical concept in the traditional Hong Kong context.

Three English teachers participated in the case study over a six-month period in the early primary grades. Data was collected through interviews and observations of lessons. The study highlighted six significant comments by the most successful teacher; teacher open-mindedness to change, the possible effects of a too rapid implementation, the power of innovation to back teachers who implement progressive methods, school-based support, interest in professional development, and teacher reflection on teaching.

Reduced Teacher Resistance, Increased Teacher Confidence, and Local Context-specific Issues

The third study (Todd, 2005) reports on how essential to implementation teacher beliefs are, even to the point of being influential in decisions to change an innovative curriculum when no clear system for revision is established. The study emphasizes that teacher resistance is reduced when the immanent model of implementation is used and that local context-specific issues need to be considered when judging an innovation to be successful or not.

A respected government university in Thailand changed the 10-year curriculum into a communicative program and even gave release time to teachers when planning the innovation, which originated completely from the faculty. Due to context-specific factors, such as the necessity to employ poorly trained part-time teachers and a great increase in the enrollment of a student body whose profile changed significantly, the teachers decided to give more emphasis to teaching grammar, weigh examinations more heavily, and reduce the importance of continuous assessment in the CLT courses.

TEACHER RESISTANCE AND THE CHANGE CYCLE: TWO CASE STUDIES

Teacher Intention When Implementing Change

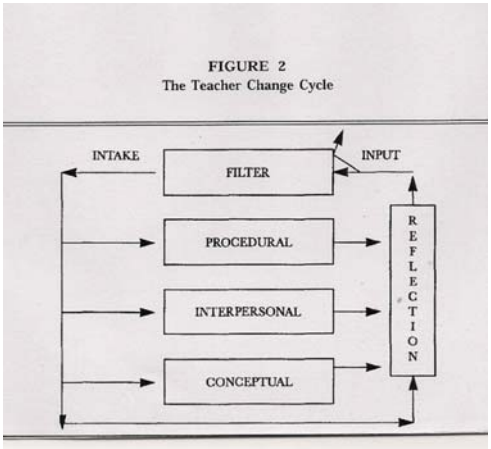
The first case study about teacher resistance emphasizes the need to tease out the teacher intention along with the factors that influence the intention: teacher beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). For some time, the perception in the field of English language instruction was that there was a cause-effect relationship between attitude and behavior (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). But Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) offers insights not previously available to the field. There is a need to tease out intentions with well-crafted questionnaires in order to understand how an individual arrives at an action such as implementing change in the classroom. The attitude may be positive, but it is important to assess how strong the intent is and the quality of other influences on the intention.

The Teacher Change Cycle and Materials and Techniques Appropriate to the Local Context

Pennington's (1995) study concludes that a teacher's experience and philosophy can act as a psychological barrier or filter when implementing alternatives. This filter permits certain alternatives to be considered and blocks others. Lasting change is achieved when the new activity or approach is reflected on and tried again and again, modified and reflected on perhaps numerous times; this is called "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1983).

The study was conducted in secondary school classrooms in Hong Kong where Confucian tradition supports respect for authority and writing is taught through the directive, transmissional model. To introduce the process approach to writing is a radical change. The data revealed that when implementing change in the classroom, as a rule instructors first focus on procedure. Once they are comfortable with how and what to teach, they focus next on the interpersonal aspect of the classroom or the feelings of the students and the teacher when engaged in the new activities. Once the interpersonal aspect is routinized, the teacher moves on to the conceptual matters and how the new approach interfaces with their philosophy of teaching.

FIGURE 2
The Teacher Change Cycle



After a time, the teacher engages in a loop cycle and returns to either the previous or the following step of the loop cycle, but with a deeper and more complete understanding of that step. The loops may recycle multiple times as ideas are reprocessed to fit into the

teacher's personal teaching approach. The filter in turn becomes more permeable to newer information, thus allowing even more information to be processed and accepted. What most supported them in implementing the change as reported by the instructors was the materials and techniques developed for the context and provided by the project manager.

LEARNER RESISTANCE TO NEW METHODS: TWO CASES STUDIES

The Source of Learner Resistance: Lack of a "Fit" between Methodology and Local Context

The source of learner resistance is traced by Shamim (1996) to a values conflict or the lack of a "fit" between the learners and the new methodology. Much like the class in Vietnam discussed in Cahn and Barnard's study at the beginning of this article, Shamim's Pakistani students resisted passively or aggressively her efforts at introducing change in the classroom activities. In the traditional context of the community, authority is exercised and respected and gives security to the students. For instance, when assigned pair work or small group work, the students refused to complete the assignment when Shamim circulated among the groups. However, when she sat behind her desk, reading or marking papers, the students engaged in the pair or group activities.

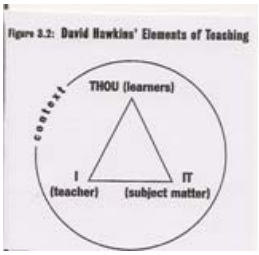
Learner Resistance Reduced through Project-based Work

In the same context of Pakistan in which Shamim taught, Sarwar (2007, 2000) implemented innovation successfully. Project-based work individualized large classes of 100+ Pakistani students and overcame learner resistance, much like the successful process writing program in Hong Kong, which used appropriate, motivational materials and activities. Sarwar (2007, 2000) reports that projects like producing a student newspaper, which even had advertisements, or a travel booklet about the Indus Valley civilization, complete with illustrations, motivated students to learn English outside of class time. She recommends this approach to learning English because more than half the world studies English in similarly large classes. In fact, the student motivation and enthusiasm were so strong that they spread throughout the English department.

LEARNING AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

Balancing the Interaction: The Teacher, the Materials, the Students

The teacher is the key factor in implementing change in the classroom as well as the one who is responsible ultimately for what goes on in the classroom. The instructor's background, experience, and beliefs play a significant role in the choices she makes (Graves, 2007). Graves (2000) also draws on the work of Hawkins (1967) and his use of the triangle as a visual to represent the classroom dynamic as balanced. "I" refers to the teacher, "Thou" to the learners and "It" the subject matter. (Graves' colleague, Carol Rodgers, has added the circle of context or the environment in which the teaching takes place.) The teacher maintains the balance in the interplay of the three classroom elements.



Finally, language is primarily social; it is the tool that people use to accomplish goals in the real world (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics are the systems that are used to communicate, but human beings focus on the acts of agreeing or disagreeing or praising. Thus, to understand the language as spoken by another person, the language must be based on an understanding of the context of the community in which the communication is taking place.

Some Practical Applications in the Classroom

As stated in the introduction to this paper, the more successful innovative activities are built on a characteristic (social dynamic, cultural, linguistic) from the students' context. Four examples of some activities (vocabulary, writing, reading, and spelling) popular with students and based on one of these characteristics follow. In addition, an example of using film to explain to the class why the teacher is employing innovative methods and materials is explained.

Vocabulary: The Majlas Social Dynamic

The majlas is a cultural practice in the Gulf. A tent is erected next to the house, where visitors are entertained. Many chairs or pillows are arranged in a circle and conversation is carried on in the large circle. The students are accustomed to competing for the attention of the large group when they are with their extended families and request working in large groups in class. The writer is used to a Western tradition in which individuals raise their hands, are called on, and give an answer. Since the students prefer the large group, the teacher had to shift her perspective on what is appropriate classroom behavior. The students report that they enjoy this activity.

The class is divided into small groups and each group is assigned a section of the reading text. Each group selects one word from their section of the text for the four categories: a word the group likes, a word the group dislikes, an interesting word, and a funny word. They fill in a chart on the board with their words. The teacher asks the class what they know about the words one by one and the students call out what they know, such as the meaning, the antonym, the root, the affixes, or the part of speech.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Like	Revolution	Flexible	Leisure
Dislike	Rise	Mundane	Intrusion
Interesting	Telecommunication	Import	Surveillance
Funny	Decades	Urban	Monitored

Writing: Using Folk Hero Stories to Practice Summarizing

Writing a summary on a folk hero story like Nasruddin, builds on the concrete language of the narrative before students use the abstract language of academic discourse, with its dense syntax. It also builds on the Middle Eastern tradition of story-telling. First, the instructor divides the class into small groups and gives each small group a different story. Each group reads its fable and takes notes by completing a chart. The students do not write sentences because they will retell the narrative from their notes in the chart.

	Nasruddin and the Beggar
Who	Nasreddin, the beggar
What	Nasreddin talks with the beggar
When	One day
Where	In street behind N's house
Why	The beggar wants money
How	Got with him to top, answered no

Next, each small group tells its story to the large class group, using their notes to summarize the tale orally. The groups no longer have a copy of their story. The class completes a second chart with information about the stories listened to until the notes for all the fables are completed.

Name of the story	Story A	Story B	Story C
Who			
What			
When			
Where			
Why			
How			

Finally, the students return to their original small groups and select the group favorite out of the stories listened to. They write a two- to three-sentence summary together.

A student example follows.

> One day Nasreddin was fixing the roof in his home. Then a beggar asked Nasreddin to come down. Nasreddin came down to the beggar. He said to him, "I want some money. Can you give me some?" After that, Nasreddin said to him, "Come with me." They went up to the top of the home. Then Nasreddin answered him, "I don't have any money."

Reading: News Articles on Cultural Topics

Reading news articles affords learners the opportunity to build a repertoire of collocations which Holliday (1994) recommends as a good way to segue into reading academic language, which uses a lot of collocations, especially noun heads. The Gulf Times published an interesting article on a new tourist attraction in Pokhara, Nepal, that allows tourists to fly with falcons. A free software program on the Internet located at www.lessonwriter.com composes comprehension questions, vocabulary lists with exercises,

an activity on affixes, and cognitive activities like KWL (What do you know about the topic; what do you want to learn; and what did you learn).

Before the reading lesson, the teacher might search on Google for some interesting films on YouTube like "Falconry: A Brief Introduction" or "Falconry: Our Intangible Cultural Heritage." A short discussion about such YouTube films supports the instructor in setting up the schemata at the beginning of the reading lesson.

Motivating Spelling Accuracy through Film: Akeela and the Bee

After viewing the video, Akeela and the Bee, and completing some of the exercises on the movie's website (www.akeelaandthebee.com), the instructor can next log onto the website for the Scripps Spelling Bee (www.spellingbee.com) to find word lists of English words borrowed from various languages, including Arabic. The instructor can create vocabulary activities using those words derived from their native tongue. The students are very proud that their language is acknowledged as contributing so many vocabulary words to English, their L2.

Explaining the Rationale for Using Innovative Materials and Methods through Film: The Miracle Worker

The film, The Miracle Worker, offers a number of opportunities to discuss different types of learning and teaching that the teacher is introducing into the classroom and the rationale for using these approaches to learning. Pedagogical concepts like discovery learning, independent learning, or learner-centered activities can be presented through a short reading paraphrased from a methods book or a Wikipedia text. The students then receive a handout with movie clips from the film and identify what concept is demonstrated in that clip. For example, when Helen finds the thimble in her teacher's mouth and learns to spell it, the class discusses this instance of "discovery learning." They can also brainstorm examples of lessons they have attended where they experienced that pedagogical approach.

Conclusion

To sum up, these studies reveal that the teacher is the key factor in implementing innovation, along with the local cultural context, motivational materials and methods that are culturally appropriate, and supportive supervisors. Teacher resistance is reduced when the immanent implementation model is followed; a deep understanding of intention and its influence on action can move instructors past resistance as well as provide them with ample opportunities to reflect on and redesign the innovation. Learner resistance can be reduced by the use of interesting and culturally appropriate materials and methods. Some examples of vocabulary, writing, reading, and spelling lessons as well as lessons based on film are provided.

This study proposes an approach to the implementation of innovation in curriculum design as a process negotiated among the three classroom elements: teacher, student, and content. This approach provides a structure that allows flexibility in decisions and appropriate adjustments. In this way, we reconcile theory with practice and ensure that learning takes place constantly and consistently in our classroom.

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The Relationship between Sentence Structure Awareness and Iranian High School Students' Performance in Reading Comprehension

L-Akbar Azizifar

Abstract

This study examines the relationships between sentence-structure awareness and reading comprehension. The significance of this study lies in the possibility that knowledge of text structure may create connections among the disciplines which could enhance understanding of content and promote thinking and reading comprehension abilities. After administering a standardized reading comprehension test, a group of 64 high school students was selected from a total population of 84. The selected subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. For the experimental group, the researcher administered a treatment which lasted for 4 weeks, two 90 minute sessions per week. During the experiment, both groups had the same instructor, curriculum, and schedule of instruction, while in the control group, the students had conventional learning methods, as they worked just with the reading passages without any explicit instruction or without any awareness, by being underlined, about the types of structures which were the target structure of the researcher, namely, adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives. For the experimental group, they received explicit instruction and awareness about the types of structures which were the target structures of the researcher. At the end of the study, the obtained scores on the pre- and post-tests were analyzed through different statistical procedures. The results showed that being aware about sentence structures and the explicit teaching of grammatical structures had a significant effect on improving Iranian high school students' reading comprehension performance. The results also indicated that significant relationships exist among the variables of sentence-structure recognition and reading comprehension. These associations support the theory that students may use sentence structure to improve thinking and reading comprehension processes. This association provides educators with a potentially powerful way to structure instruction.

1. Introduction

Reading for full comprehension and learning is a special type of reading, which needs a different type of processing in terms of focusing attention, and information encoding and retrieval from reading for enjoyment, or reading for general information.

Sentence-structure knowledge (awareness) helps a reader to see relations between ideas, including relationships between main ideas and details and also relations among each part of the components of a sentence in order to have a better analysis of the text and sentences, and hence a better understanding of them.

According to Mandler & Johnson, in both L1 and ESL, students who have been taught how to identify text structure and use this knowledge to guide their reading process have showed better comprehension and recall of information than readers lacking such knowledge (Mandler & Johnson, 1977). Students who are reading texts need to work actively at finding and using appropriate cues in texts in order to enhance their understanding.

Research has indicated that understanding how a passage is structured is an important factor in reading comprehension (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Meyer, 1979, 1982; Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). More specifically, it has been proved that readers who are able to

identify sentence structures as well as paragraph-level relationships of a passage are better able to understand the passage than those readers who remember only a collection of details (Meyer, 1985). Of particular interest in the present study is the comprehension of some grammatical structures, which are interpretable only through relationships that are presupposed in the text.

It's time to say something about another important dimension of the present study which is the explicit teaching of grammar by the teacher for the experimental group. This question needs to be addressed: What is the role of grammar instruction in language teaching? The grammar translation method, the audiolingual method, the cognitive code method, the comprehension method, and the communicative method all view the role that grammar should play in language teaching with slight variations. Very early in the days of the communicative competence movement, Canale & Swain (1980) proposed that grammatical competence was an integral part of communicative competence. Some language teachers moving into the communicative era may have reacted too quickly in assuming that grammar was not a significant part of language teaching and thus ignored its role in the classroom. Fotos (1994) states that the recent discussion of the role that grammar plays in language teaching is as follows:

> "(it) presents a dilemma for many teachers who have become committed to the use of communicative approaches to language learning, wherein learners are given a rich variety of comprehensible input, and teacher-fronted grammar instruction is generally omitted"
>
> (Fotos 1994, p.323).

Language teaching should place grammar back into the curriculum through a careful evaluation of the variables which influence learning and through appropriate techniques to make language learning enjoyable.

2. Sentence Structure Awareness

If awareness of text organization is essential for text comprehension (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1981), it follows that the presence of some grammatical structures in text should facilitate the instantiation of textual schemata (Kieras, 1985), help to direct readers' attention to important text information (Lorch & Lorch, 1986), and help in checking information in memory (Spyridakis & Standal, 1987). Typical research studies addressing the question of whether explicit text signaling facilitates comprehension compare the effect on comprehension of reading intact texts with texts from which conjunctions have been removed. Results have been controversial. Some studies lead to the conclusion that comprehension is not affected, whereas others suggest that awareness of grammatical structures facilitate comprehension under some reader and text conditions. Spyridakis and Standal (1987) found that signaling facilitated comprehension of expository texts by college students when passages were "neither too easy, nor too difficult" (Spyridakis & Standal, 1987, p. 285).

Skilled and less skilled readers have been shown to differ in the degree to which they infer logical relations in text (Bridge& Winograd, 1982; Evans & Ballance, 1980; Geva, 1986a; Geva & Ryan, 1985; Irwin, 1980). Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1981) showed that connectives facilitated recall among ninth-grade students who were poor comprehenders but did not among skilled readers.

The schema theory proposed by Bartlett (1932) stresses the importance of background knowledge and knowledge of structures (schemas) for text comprehension. Richards (1989) and also Brown and Yule (1983a) discuss different types of knowledge schemas, such as

frames and scripts. Richards defines scripts as a specific variety of knowledge schemas that comprise situation-specific knowledge about goals, participants, and procedures in real-life situations. Goodman and Niles' (1970) psycholinguistic view points out that the reader interacts with the text in the form of a guessing game. The aim of this guessing game is to re-construct the message that has been encoded by its author in the form of a graphic display. For this purpose, readers create meaning in a cyclical process by predicting, testing, confirming or revising their own initial predictions. A text does not carry meaning by itself; it becomes its meaning from the readers' actualization of their own pre-knowledge, including their knowledge of various grammatical structures which are used within the texts.

When students process a simple sentence, they mainly use word associations. Syntax merely helps them corroborate the associations. However, when the associations are ambiguous and/or the syntax is complex, students must have a good understanding of syntax in order to work out how each word fits into the sentence structure so as to, ultimately, comprehend the sentence.

Students are more likely to encounter ambiguity and complexity in reading than in speech; the grammatical structures used in written text are more varied and complex than those used in casual conversation. Thus, students must learn the rules of formal syntax in order to become fluent readers.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology

As it was stated earlier, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between sentence structure awareness and performance in reading comprehension. What follows is a description of the methodology used in the study.

3.1.1 Participants

The participants were 84 third-grade high school students at Bagerololom high school in Ilam. A Michigan test was used to screen the required number of students who were supposed to take part in the main part of the study. Among 84 students taking the Michigan test, 64 students qualified to be classified into the control and experimental group because their scores were between1 SD above and1 SD below the mean scores of all the subjects.

3.1.2 Materials

The materials used in this study were two texts from English Book 3 consisting of passages in which the researcher's target structures were used deliberately in order to convey a message. The researcher used passages that were more likely to contain large numbers of adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives.

A Michigan test (1997 version) of language proficiency was given to the subjects in order to come up with a homogeneous number of subjects. The test consisted of three sections: grammar (40 questions), vocabulary (40 questions), and reading comprehension (20 questions). Out of 84 participants, 64 participants were considered to be homogeneous.

3.2. Design

The statistical procedure used in the study was a series of Matched T-tests and Independendent-Sample T-tests.

The Design of this study was a: Pre-test Post-test Control Group Design:

G1 T1 X T2

G2 T1 T2

G1 = Experimental group, G2 = Control group, T1 = Pretest, T2 = Posttest, and X = Treatment

As mentioned before, on the basis of the results of the proficiency test, the Michigan test, 64 students whose sores were between 25 and 49 (1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean) were chosen as the key informants. Thus, scores which were too high or too low on the test were discarded. The selected subjects were randomly assigned to two groups of experimental and control. For the experimental group, the researcher administered a treatment which lasted for 4 weeks, two sessions per week, each session lasting for 90 minutes. During the experiment, both groups had the same instructor, curriculum, and schedule of instruction; however, in the control group, the students had conventional learning as they worked just with the reading passages without any explicit instruction or without any awareness, by being underlined, about the types of structures which were the target structures of the researcher, adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives. As for the experimental group, they received explicit instruction and awareness about the target structures of the researcher. The description of the design for the assessment of the variables at hand is as follows:

> The research hypothesis: *There is no relationship between sentence structure awareness and Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension.*

The level of significance for this two-tailed test was 0.05; the dependent variable was reading comprehension, while the independent variable was sentence structure awareness.

3.3 Procedures

The Michigan test of language proficiency was given to the participants. In order to come up with a homogeneous number of subjects, the exam papers were scored and the scores were scattered over a normal distribution diagram with a *mean of 37* and a *standard deviation of around 12*. After this, 64 out of 98 subjects were classified into Control (32) and Experimental (32) groups.

3.4 Data collection and analysis procedure

The effectiveness of a meta-cognitive approach to teaching adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives as grammatical structures and their effectiveness on the reading comprehension abilities of readers was the researcher's main aim, so in order to focus on this aim, the researcher gave a pretest in order to know if the two groups were at the same level; then, experimental subjects received grammatical-structure awareness training in order to be able to analyze, monitor, and understand the specific grammatical structures which were used in the texts and passages and determine whether their understanding had a crucial role in the understanding of the texts and passages.

After the treatment, the researcher collected the required data by giving a post-test to the two groups. By using a series of Independent-Sample T-tests, the mean of the two groups was compared in order to determine whether the difference between the mean of the two groups is so meaningful that the researchers can claim that the gains made by the

experimental group were just because of the study variable of grammatical structure awareness or not.

Table 1. Frequency Table of Statistics

	Pre-test Experimental	Post-test Experimental	Pre-test Control	Post-test Control
N Valid	32	32	32	32
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	10.0000	12.1875	9.9063	9.8750
Std. Error of mean	.48775	.63092	.45649	.56395
Median	10.0000	11.0000	10.0000	10.5000
Mode	11.00	9.00	8.00a	11.00a
Std. Deviation	2.75915	3.56902	2.58231	3.19021
Variance	7.61290	12.73790	6.66835	10.17742
Range	12.00	12.00	11.00	12.00
Minimum	4.00	7.00	5.00	4.00
Maximum	16.00	19.00	16.00	16.00
Sum	320.00	390.00	317.00	316.00

A Multiple model exists where the smallest value is shown.

The descriptive statistics are shown in table 2. This table is one more indication of the students' performance on the pretest. It shows the calculation for the mean, standard deviation, and variance for both sets of scores.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Pre-test for both groups)

Group	X	S	V
Experimental	10.00	2.75	7.61
Control	9.90	2.58	6.66

This table indicates that our two samples had, though not exactly, the same dispersion of scores which seemed to be suitable for our purpose in this research. Next, an independent T-test was calculated to verify the pretest results for both groups (table 3). It showed no significant difference on the pretest between the performance of the experimental and control groups prior to training.

Table 3. Independent T-test Experimental VS. Control Group on Pre-test

Observed t	Degree of freedom	2-tail p.	Critical t
0.14	62	0.05	2

As the table shows, the value of the calculated t is (0.14) which is less than the value of the critical (2) at 0.05 level of probability. Therefore, the two groups have little or almost no differences. The treatment which the experimental group received was related to explicit instruction of specific grammatical structures (here adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives) and also the underlining of these structures in order for the students to be aware of these structures within the passages. After 8 sessions which lasted 4 weeks, the same reading comprehension test with the same nature and characteristics with respect to organization, administration, and scoring as the pretest was administered with the aim of statistically determining whether there was any significant improvement in the reading comprehension ability of the participants in the experimental group. This was done through calculating and comparing the t-test of the two groups. Complete data analysis is given in the results section.

As indicated above, during the four weeks of treatment, the experimental subjects were instructed explicitly about the kinds of structures which were going to be used in the texts and passages of the post-test. They were also aware that their understanding of them was going to play a crucial role in the understanding of the texts and passages, and that the underlining of the above structures in the texts and passages during the treatment phase was also crucial. After two weeks, the post-test was administered, and a series of Independent-Sample T-tests were conducted in which the mean of the two groups was compared.

4. Results

As stated earlier, the purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between sentence structure awareness and Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension. To investigate this claim, the following question was raised, and the following hypothesis was initially put forward.

Is there any relationship between sentence- structure awareness and Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension?

Restatement of the Hypothesis:

There is no relationship between sentence-structure awareness and Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension.

In order to test the above stated hypothesis, a series of Independent-Sample T-tests and matched T-tests were utilized. The step-by-step procedure is detailed here.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics (Posttest)

Group	X	S	V
Experimental	12.18	3.56	12.73
Control	9.87	3.19	10.17

This table presents the calculations for mean, standard deviation, and variance for both sets of scores on the posttest.

An independent T-test is also calculated to compare mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the posttest.

Table 5. Experimental vs. Control Group on Post-test.

Observed t	Degree of freedom	2-tail p.	Critical t
3.12	62	0.05	2

The t-observed value (3.12) at (62) degree of freedom and at the probability level of 0.05 is greater than the critical value of t (2). Thus the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that experimental group (X= 12.18) outperformed the control group (X= 9.87) on the posttest.

Having compared the pretest and posttest scores of both groups, an increase in the posttest mean score of the experimental group is noted, which demonstrates empirically that explicit teaching and students awareness of grammatical structures play an important role in the improvement of the subjects' reading comprehension ability (Tables 4 and 5).

Therefore, the results of the study clearly indicate that explicit teaching and student awareness of grammatical structures have a significant effect on the improvement of the Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension. Therefore, more emphasis should be put on readers' explicit instruction and awareness.

5. Discussion

The results of the hypothesis of the present study demonstrate a positive relationship between sentence-structure awareness and reading comprehension ability of the subjects, meaning that the experimental group student scores on both the pretest and post-test changed significantly due to: a) explicit instruction during treatment and b) experimental group student awareness of the kind of specific grammatical structures (gerunds, infinitives, and adjective clauses) used in texts. The null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was proposed, specifically that there is a positive relationship between sentence-structure awareness and reading comprehension ability of the subjects .

These findings are in keeping with Mandler & Johnson (1977) and Meyer (1979) who claimed that, in both L1 and ESL, students who have been taught how to identify text structure and use this knowledge to guide their reading process have showed better

comprehension and recall of information than readers lacking such knowledge. Hence, students who are reading texts need to work actively at finding and using appropriate cues in texts in order to enhance their understanding.

Research has indicated that understanding how a passage is structured is an important factor in reading comprehension (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Meyer, 1979, 1982; Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). More specifically, these findings are in keeping with this claim that readers who are able to identify sentence structures as well as paragraph-level relationships of a passage are better able to understand the passage than those readers who remember only a collection of details (Meyer, 1985).

6. Conclusion

The present research is an attempt to investigate the relationship between sentence structure awareness and Iranian high school students' performance in reading comprehension. One research question was put forward as follows:

Is there any relationship between sentence-structure awareness and Iranian high school students performance in reading comprehension?

After four weeks of treatment and a post-test, the observed value of 3.12 was found to be larger than the most probable value found for the 62 degree of freedom. Indeed, the results showed a positive relationship between sentence structure awareness and reading comprehension ability.

6.1. Pedagogical implications

The results of the present study have implications for second language pedagogy in different areas, including second language teaching. The present study represents a research project which investigated the effect of raising the general metacognitive awareness of grammatical structures on student achievement in reading comprehension. The study addressed issues raised in the literature, for example: (1) whether there is any empirical evidence to the claim that conscious awareness of language grammatical structures correlates with greater reading comprehension ability, and (2) whether students actually profit from it.

In this study, it was shown that strategy training, being aware of grammatical structures, is needed to transform less successful readers into more proficient ones and to enhance the already steady progress of good strategy users. However, the success of strategy training as measured by the researcher is not as great as one might suspect.

From a pedagogical perspective, we can ask how learners' attention might be directed toward the formal features of input so that they may process them. That is, how can learners be directed both to making meaning and to making form-meaning connections? A type of grammatical instruction, "processing instruction", investigates the connection between input processing, comprehending input, and building linguistic systems. The research carried out to date, summarized in VanPatten (1996), consistently reports the benefits of grammatical instruction aimed at having learners attend to formal features of the input, provided they attach meaning to form (Cadierno, 1995; Cheng, 1995; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Sanz, 1995). In these studies, learners not only gain in their ability to comprehend grammatical form during input processing, but they also gain in their ability to use the correct form in output. Both theory and pedagogy have something to gain by a continued investigation of how learners attend to input data.

6.2 Suggestions for further research and investigation

The study can be replicated in the following ways:

The present study focused only on adjective clauses, gerunds, and infinitives. Other studies of the same type can be done by widening the scope of the research into other types of grammatical structures. More 'planned focus-on-form' research, which targets other additional grammatical features over longer periods of time for instructional treatments, is needed in order to further our understanding of how focus on-form can be implemented in the classroom.

Replication of this study using a larger sample size, additional levels of language ability, and lengthier tasks/tests, in addition to collecting additional data on student strategy use through think-aloud protocols or strategy-use questionnaires, is needed in order to shed light on the potential feasibility of the trends detected here.

6.3 Limitations of the study

As it is common with every study, this study has its own limitations. Grammar teaching was boring for the students, so students of the experimental group were not very interested in the classes. Another problem of this study was the selection of certain grammatical structures from a number of structures in the English language because the researcher didn't have any set criteria for focusing on these specific structures. In fact, these selected structures were the ones the subjects had difficulties with in the general proficiency test, the Michigan.

We are in need of intervention studies in order to determine whether development of text structure knowledge results in long-lasting improvements in comprehension. This is because it is felt that students would lose their knowledge of sentence structures with the passing of time. A final limitation is that it was not possible to remunerate the students for their participation in this research experiment. As it has been mentioned, lack of motivation may also have negatively influenced the results of this experiment.

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I Am Not My Tongue [2]

Lelania Sperrazza

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.

—Gloria Anzaldúa in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"

Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that the globalization of English-based technology has caused today's generation of Western-educated Egyptians to rely on English as the dominant form of electronic communication. I will then show how this technological reliance on English has infiltrated the everyday speech of young Egyptians—specifically those at the American University of Cairo—causing them to speak Arabizi, a mixture of Arabic and English. I will provide samples of writing by four Egyptian youth, which support Edward Said's (1999) postcolonialist argument that speakers of languages from two distinct cultures often experience conflicted identities. I will also employ sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theory that language is used as a form of capital, which legitimizes—and also excludes—certain members of society based on how they speak. Finally, I will argue that Egyptian youth should explore and embrace Arabizi as a legitimate form of communication and identity.

With its varying shifts in foreign rule, Egypt is no stranger to other cultures. Turkish, French, and English have co-existed with Arabic for centuries, and while Egyptians have acquired bilingual or multilingual fluency throughout the years, until now, they have never combined Arabic and English so consistently that it warranted its own slang term: Arabizi. In fact, after Egypt gained its independence from France and Britain during the middle of the last century, nationalism was at an all-time high among the youthful population, while anything suggestive of colonial power was shunned (Yaghan, 2008). What, then, has caused today's generation of Egyptian youth to not only embrace a Western language, but to incorporate it in their everyday speech?

Latinized Text in a Technologically Determined World

Before the mid-1990s, English was the predominant language available over the Internet and on cell phones (Warschauer, 2002). Since Arabic was not accessible through this technology, the only way to communicate in the digital world was by Latinizing the Arabic alphabet (Yaghan, 2008). Any Arabic letter that resembled the shape of an English letter or numeral was substituted. For example, the word "Arabizi" written in Arabic looks like this: العربيزي If one wanted to Latinize the text while maintaining the same pronunciation as Arabic, the first letter of the Arabic word, which is عwould be represented by the similar-looking number "3." Therefore, the word "Arabizi" written in a Latinized, Arabizi script would be spelled like this: "3arabizi." Also, any Arabic phoneme that sounded like an English phoneme would be substituted. For example, the glottal Arabic letter ق (which

sounds like "kong," as in King Kong[2]), would be replaced by the English letter "q" or "k." To spell "coffee" in Arabic with a Latinized text, it would look like this: "qawa" or "kawa," depending on the writer's preference (Aboelezz, 2009). And, a typical text message between two AUC students could very look something like this:

Student 1: Hi. Anta fane? (Hi. Where are you?)
Student 2: Hi. Kolyoom fi university. (Hi. I've been at university all day.)
Student 1: See you bookra. (See you tomorrow.)
Student 2: OK, yala. Bye. (OK, until then. Bye.)

Since there is no standard structure to Arabizi, users are able to mix and match letters to sounds according to their own phonetic design (for example, "coffee" can either be spelled "qawa" or "kawa" in Latinized Arabic), which has also contributed to its widespread use. Even more important, with the ever-increasing need to access information at all times during this age of technology, English still reigns as the preferred online language in Egypt (Warschauer, El Said, & Zohry, 2002). Although more and more non-Latin scripts are readily available online these days (Crystal, 2001), the use of Arabizi still remains popular either due to habit or its symbol as a new "teen identity" for young technology users ((Warschauer, El Said, & Zohry, 2002). According to a study on technology and youth at the University of Melbourne, information and communication technologies (ICTs) help young people develop a sense of identity, power, and community (Carroll, Howard, Vetere, Peck & Murphy, 2001). If this identity is produced electronically, without the physical presence of the speaker (Markham, 2008), then the actual words that texting and e-mailing require for communication are what linguistically shape the user's identity. With regard to Arabizi, when Egyptian youth construct their Arabic words using English letters, they are choosing a linguistic identity similar to the way one would choose an "avatar" in the virtual world: By physically assembling bits and pieces from the English language to electronically represent their thoughts, Egyptian youth are creating a desired reflection of who they want to present to the world (Markham, 2008). This text-like representation of the self, based on the use of Arabizi, has impacted the way young Egyptians verbally communicate with each other, as well. When questioned about their reasons for using Arabizi, the majority of Egyptian interviewees said that they did not feel comfortable communicating in classical Arabic when they spoke about everyday topics or that they felt Arabizi gave them the cultural freedom to discuss ideas not normally shared in Arabic (Yaghan, 2008). In essence, their electronic personas have merged worlds with their real-life personas resulting in a vocabulary that has moved them further and further away from their mother tongue.

Interestingly, though, the stigma of a Latinized, colonial alphabet taking power away from the Middle East, specifically in Egypt, has now shifted to *providing* power—the power of information. But, this newfound power also comes with restrictions regarding whether or not accessing online information influences the user to rely on a language from a different country and culture. Like immigrants in the United States, whose children are often forced to assimilate by only speaking English in the classroom, technology users from developing countries have often been forced to assimilate by using the dominant language of technology: A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development determined that 78% of Web sites in developing countries were in English, while 96% of those Web sites on secure servers in the ".com" domain were also in English (Hargittai, 1999). According to Postman (1992), all countries, whether dominant or submissive, obey

[2] This pronunciation suggestion was introduced to me by Heshaam Kanona, graduate student in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, at the American University in Cairo.

technology like disciples to a god, but a hierarchy still exists: after the computer comes English, then all other languages follow. This state of "Technopoly," as Postman calls it, is a digital bureaucracy, which, in accordance with Veblin's (Brette, 2003) view on technological determinism, shapes the behaviors, actions, and beliefs of society. This process is gradual, but eventually, human habits become more and more shaped by the machines that they use.

Unsettled Identities

The result of Egyptians relying on a predominantly English-based technology has influenced other areas of society. For example, the types of university-level courses, which were taught in English before the onset of the Internet (such as the sciences and medicine), have now expanded to include computer science and information technology (Warschauer, 2002). This, in turn, has forced more and more Egyptian parents to enroll their children in English-speaking schools so that once they graduate from university, those children can aquire or maintain, membership in the elite sectors of Egypt's economy. However, this desire for social mobility has led to a "cultural-linguistic dualism" (Findlow, 2006) in which Egyptian youth live, speak, and interact with both Arabic and English—not as separate languages—but within the same conversation.

This form of "language crossing" (Kramsch, 2000) is how my former Composition 101 students at AUC (American University of Cairo) communicate on a daily basis since they are mostly products of Arabic-speaking parents and English-based educations. However, the decision to cross over from one language to the other can become quite complicated when one of those languages is considered superior (English) and the other inferior (Arabic). As Said (1993) points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, the lingering, colonialistic relationship between the West and the East has left an existing disparity between the two countries. Since language is the basis for one's culture (Boas, 1940; Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1956), the struggle to construct social meaning can be very unsettling to the speakers of the "inferior" language. Said (1999), who was raised in a bicultural family, addresses the issue of having an "unsettled identity" when he recounts his experiences as an Arab and an American and as a child who cannot remember which language he spoke first—Arabic or English:

> I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities—mostly in conflict with each other—all my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. I found I had two alternatives with which to counter what in effect was the process of challenge, recognition, and exposure, questions and remarks like, 'What are you?' (p. 5)

Said's description of his conflicted childhood mirrors the upbringing of many of my Composition 101 students, highlighting the feeling of exclusion that culture can create in people's lives (Kramsch, 2000). The question, "What are you?" signifies that persons of bicultural or multicultural backgrounds defy the "norms" of an easily determined identity, which in turn, can make them feel unwelcome or invalid in the eyes of those around them. However, rather than desiring a monocultural identity for an entire lifetime, as Said claims, I want my students to be aware that they are products of a new era, and subsequently a new identity: one that is increasingly migratory and globalized, and one that is constantly in the process of adapting and reinventing itself (Warschauer, 2002). This identity, fueled by the power of an English-based technology, is the Arabizi identity. Therefore, I believe it is necessary for my students to recognize that they are members of a legitimate and valid community, which has emerged from the globalized and interdependent relationship between the East and the West.

Language and Identity Assignment

I decided to create an assignment based on the article "Arabizi" by Talal Radi (2008) that addresses some of the issues facing Arab youths who are bicultural products of the Middle East and the United States. Based on Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy of writing to empower, I wanted my students to actively express their emotions as they explored their identities "conscientiously," instead of feeling like passive students in a required composition course. This idea as a literacy process follows Freire and Shor's (1987) theory that learners should involve their reality of the world in the classroom so that they can learn socially and academically from those experiences. In this way, a continuous inquiry about Arabizi and identity fueled our discussions and allowed for further cultural analysis that went beyond the assigned reading. Since many of my students are conflicted about their bicultural identities, I wanted my assignment about language and identity to promote critical thinking and social awareness within Egypt, but even more important, to encourage my students to value their Arabizi identities.

I asked my students to write about (1) the many ways they are identified as an Egyptian or Arab because of the way they speak *or* (2) how they identify others because of the way they speak. Then, in order to prepare for the assignment, they wrote daily journal responses about the class readings. They also watched a documentary film called *Arabizi*, written and directed by Dalia Al Kury. The film follows the lives of a Kuwaiti journalist, an Egyptian English teacher, and a Jordanian musician, all of whom speak a mixture of Arabic and English on a daily basis. This also led to an activity where students interviewed people in their own lives about Arabizi. When it was time to choose a topic for their final paper, I did not want to influence my students' choice. Their decision about *what* they wanted to write was just as important as the writing process itself. Instead, I divided students in small groups and had them review their readings, journal entries, and interview responses. By the end of class, each group was able to create some wonderfully distinct and imaginative topics. Below is a sample of some of the ideas compiled from all three of my Composition 101 courses:

- Analyze the different ways people stereotype you based on the way you speak Arabic, Arabizi, or English. Or, analyze the way you stereotype others based on the way they speak.

- Describe what it was like growing up speaking several different languages. Did this make you feel confused about which culture to identify with (Eastern versus Western), and if so, how has this affected the person you are today? Or, do you appreciate this cultural mix?

- Arabizi represents a "new" identity in the Middle East: a combination of Eastern and Western languages, values, and beliefs. Describe this "new" identity in you or those around you.

Linguistic Capital for a Lost Generation

Employing Bourdieu's theoretical framework on language used as a form of "linguistic capital" (1991), I analyzed my students' final papers, concentrating specifically on how they viewed the legitimacy of the languages they spoke. Four major themes emerged from their writing and how they sensed their dual cultural-linguistic identities: shame, guilt, anger, and hopelessness.

Torn Between the Two

The shame Nourhan still feels when she was overheard speaking Arabic her first week at AUC exemplifies the lower status of her native language as compared to English. The "value" of Nourhan as a speaker was therefore lowered (Bourdieu, 1991) as well when she spoke Arabic, since lack of fluency in English is equated to lack of social status or wealth in Egypt. Many students at AUC make a conscious decision to switch from speaking purely Arabic, to Arabizi, or eventually, only English, based on the linguistic capital at play on the AUC campus.

Nourhan writes:

> During my first days at AUC, I used to speak ten words in Arabic and throw in one English word within my speech. When I talked that way with the friend of my friend, he looked at me disgustingly and told me, "You must be an ELI [English Language Institute] student, aren't you?" He told my friend that he wanted to leave from this "old-fashioned" Arabic area.

Unlike You

Ramy could be said to represent the "cultural capital" of education (Bourdieu, 1991) in Egypt, which dictates that attending an English-speaking school will perpetuate one's social and economic mobility. However, Ramy lacks the historical and traditional knowledge of his parents' generation because he only studied Arabic as a foreign language, not as his native language. Even worse, he feels that he is at fault for not having the same knowledge as his parents, who blame Ramy for not understanding popular Egyptian references to literature and art.

Ramy writes:

> I once asked my parents if this Arabizi phenomenon was present in the society when they were my age, and they told me that it was rare to see someone speaking Arabizi, while now it is very common, especially between teenagers. Every time I watch the Arabic version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" with my parents, and the show host asks a question about Arabic poetry, they always know the answer. When I ask them how they knew the answer, they say, "When we were your age, we used to read Arabic poems and books, unlike you."

"Colonized Tongues" [3]

Instead of internalizing a sense of shame at speaking a lesser-valued language, Abdelrahman takes pride in his Arabic language and identity. However, since his "worth" as an Arabic speaker is determined by a culturally more powerful English-speaking population, he feels frustrated that he lacks the linguistic capital to alter the legitimacy of his native language. The socially constructed "linguistic habitus" (Bourdieu, 1991) of his Egyptian environment, which Bourdieu considers constraining to one's individual desires, has

[3] *Colonized tongues* is a term Talal Radi uses in his article "Arabizi," found on wwww.wafiner.com.

therefore persuaded Abdelrahman to practice the social behaviors of those around him by imitating the West.

Abdelrahman writes:

> Why, especially, is our Arabic identity the one being Westernized and not the other way around? To make things clearer, why do we imitate the West and the West does not do so? In fact, if we really live in what is called the open world, we would find that everyone is trying to have the other identity. We would see Western people looking like Arabic ones in the way they dress or behave, but this is not what is happening. We are only imitating the West, including myself.

Imitating Your Mother

Alia, on the other hand, fears that "imitation" of a Western culture and language means Egyptians do not value their own worth as members of a legitimate language community. When she interviewed her friend, Abdullah, about the influence of English on speakers of Arabizi, he described Egypt as an inferior child needing the guidance of its mother. This colonialistic view upholds the unequal binary relationship between the East and the West, but even more concerning, it shows how some Egyptians view their own country as the culturally weaker partner (Findlow, 2006) when compared to the rest of the globalized world.

Alia writes:

> I asked Abdullah, a 19-year-old friend, who studies medicine at Cairo University, why he thinks Egyptians are speaking Arabizi and imitating Westerners. He told me, "Egyptians always feel that Westerners are better, that they are the leaders and suppliers, and that is why we imitate them." Then I asked him, "Do you think we, the Egyptians, are not proud anymore of being Egyptian?" He said, "No, we are always proud, of course. When you imitate your mother because you see that she is the most perfect person, this does not mean that you hate yourself."

Pedagogical Implications in the "American" Classroom

This assignment challenged my own understanding of how I viewed the identities of my Composition 101 students. At first, I assumed they led privileged, comfortable lives because many of them had been born into Egypt's wealthy class, the top 5% of the population, which in most cases, also gave them access to English in their everyday lives. But, after reading their papers, I realized how much the "privilege" of English had impacted their sense of belonging to the Egyptian, Arabic-speaking community. Often, their parents blamed them for not speaking Arabic fluently, even though the majority of them were placed in English-speaking schools at very young ages. They also felt conflicted because there was an expectation, especially at the American University in Cairo, to compartmentalize their Arabic language and leave it out of the classroom, but often, as well, to separate their native language from their relationships with their Egyptian peers at AUC. Because of this daily Western influence on their education and identity as students, there was a collective concern among all of them, no matter how "unsettled" or "settled" they felt about their identities, that they were losing their Arabic language, and therefore, what defined their Eastern, Egyptian self. However, this fear of language loss is based on the assumption that particular languages

and cultures are permanent and inflexible (Findlow, 2006), whereas, in fact, they are in a constant state of change and adaptation because of their intersection with globalization.

As an instructor at an American university situated in the Middle East, which is culturally very different from any university in the United States, I needed to reassess the pedagogical needs of my composition students. What they found meaningful, I discovered, was writing that was not exclusively Egyptian or exclusively Western, but instead, a bicultural mix of the two. For example, my students were incredibly engaged by Radi's "Arabizi" article because it spoke about them and their particular group of friends: young, upper-class, Western-educated Arabs who communicate as much via English-dominated technology as they did through face-to-face communication. Their eagerness to identify with this dual linguistic-cultural community was not so much about turning their backs on the traditions of their family and Arab culture but about finding an identity that explained who they were while validating their existence. In fact, none of my students had heard of the term "Arabizi" before and thought it was "just the way they spoke."

As students conflicted by their Egyptian and American allegiances, they felt empowered by the notion of finding unity through their Arabizi language—even though it is considered slang by the larger, Egyptian community (Yaghan, 2008). This linguistic construct of identity brings to light Anderson's (1983) concept of an "imagined community," which is imagined because of the unspoken association of each and every member: "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.49). Based on my students' writing, this specific connection to a community is what many of them want in their lives, and it would be a disservice to limit this awareness to only one writing assignment. For the future, I believe that a semester-long inquiry into the identity of my students, based on a critical pedagogical approach, will empower their academic and global voices even more than just one assignment on language and identity ever could achieve. Instead of feeling anger or shame because they are not completely Eastern or completely Western, they will hopefully find meaning in their own identities, which will be constructed by them, not for them.

Future Thoughts on Identity and Writing

Questioning one's identity is an ever-changing, lifelong inquiry that will never be answered in a one-semester composition course. However, providing my students with the awareness of an Arabizi identity certainly had a positive effect on their learning. They were more involved and invested in that writing project than in any other class assignment. They started questioning set beliefs about what identity truly means and realized that they did not necessarily have to make a choice about embodying either an Eastern or Western one. This, in turn, prompted them to explore more introspective, complex concepts during their semester with me, which I hope, will remain with them as they continue to grow and mature as students and adults. As Said (2003) insisted later on in his life, contradictions create complexity, which is necessary to be a lifelong "contrapuntal" thinker (p. 8). This term, when used in a postcolonial context, implies a critical understanding of the opposing, hierarchical forces in literature, which, when looked upon from both the oppressed and oppressor's perspective, can embolden rather than collapse a student's sense of self. If AUC students, for example, further explored the complexities of speaking both Arabic and English while living in Egypt, then they would be better equipped to accept their use of Arabizi as a legitimate form of communication. They would cease to regard it as just a type of slang that is, according to Radi (2008) and others, hurting the heritage of the Middle East. While identity is, indeed, linked to language, the use of English versus Arabic, or a combination of the two, does not mean that one's identity as an Egyptian, or as an Arab, is somehow tarnished or lessened in comparison with a monolingual Arabic speaker.

I Am Many Tongues

To deny the relationship between Arabic and English delegitimizes speakers of Arabizi who comprise a very real, and constantly growing, cultural-linguistic community of today's Egyptian youth. As the offspring of two very different, yet interconnected cultures, they should neither be criticized nor excluded due to the way they speak. Instead, Arabizi speakers should be valued for their linguistic and cultural contributions since they are the modern constructs of a globalized world that has helped to shape them in the first place. The role of English as linguistic capital in Egypt, fueled by the influence of Western-based technology, shows that the Egyptian culture is in a continual state of redefinition and regrowth as it adapts to the demands of a globalized world**.** Arabizi speakers, as products of this globalization, need to be acknowledged in Egypt as members of a legitimate language community since "a language is worth what those who speak it is worth" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652). Then, and only then, can Arabizi youth begin to shed their feelings of shame and anger and accept their cultural-linguistic identities. With time, it is hoped that they can appreciate their identities as speakers of "many tongues"—Arabic, English, *and* Arabizi—because pride in one's language will eventually lead to pride in oneself (Anzaldúa, 1987).

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Seattle Writes: Creating Poems, Sharing Values

Lisa Hundley

Abstract

To address challenges teachers in the field often face with providing learners opportunities for creative use of English, this paper will take a reflective, narrative approach to describe a lesson plan that can be conducted in a variety of settings and situations to elicit meaningful language through learner-composed poems. The lesson is based on the "Seattle Writes" civic poetry contest and lesson plans by 2009 Poet Populist Mike Hickey. By participating in this lesson, learners activate creativity via two writing warm-ups and then formulate and share one-of-a kind poems on the theme 'neighbors'. The medium of poetry should underscore that learners from a diversity of backgrounds, levels and situations can produce meaningful, enjoyable text in a foreign language. Further, this paper includes lesson plans, teaching ideas and potential connections to future research that can be implemented immediately for a variety of ages, levels, teaching goals, and availability of resources.

As an English Language Fellow (ELF), the challenges and rewards I have encountered through teaching have included finding, adapting and creating materials and lessons that stimulate language use in a way that makes students feel motivated and confident in their abilities. Last year during my EFL post in Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina, I worked with teacher trainees and high school and university students. At my host university, I taught a new integrated skills course called "English in Use" to all four years of English majors. While the focus of "English in Use" is integrated skills, the English department desired that this course focus on speaking and listening as much as possible, as I am the only native English-speaking instructor with whom the department's students have class. I quickly learned that most students were eager to have the chance to interact with an English Language Fellow, and also that they needed reinforcement of all major skill areas. Also, as "English in Use" was a new course, I had the flexibility to design materials and lessons to the best of my judgment of learner needs. In determining lesson plans, I endeavored to create as many links as possible between my course and students' other classes, aiming for activity-based instruction (e.g., Warner, 2004) to encourage communication.

My impetus for choosing a poetry activity was to foster overlap of the poetry analysis skills that my first-year students were working on in one of their literature classes last spring. In my search for ideas, I found "Poet Populist" (2009), a program "…to promote the practice of Art and Democracy, and to promote the literary arts and local arts organizations to a general audience city-wide." Motivated by the general information I found, I was pleased to find Poet Populist's citywide poetry contest called "Seattle Writes" by author Mike Hickey. Since I am from Washington State and had done introductory lessons with my students in Seattle, WA, the connections seemed very fitting. To my delight, I discovered that the Poet Populist page had a link to lessons for educators, including three lesson plans on writing poems for the contest. Hickey's (2009) lesson plan is the basis for this paper, and thereby for a description of how I adapted these activities for English learner populations: university students and teacher trainees in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and secondary students at an intensive summer language program in Salzburg, Austria.

"Seattle Writes" lesson plans, Hickey (2009)

In this section, I will provide an overview of the "Seattle Writes" (Hickey, 2009) lesson plans and then present how I adapted them for English language learners. The original lesson plans are available online and are free to the public. The overall goal of these lessons is to encourage emerging poets of any age to submit a poem online on the theme "Neighbors" for a 2009 poetry contest in Seattle, WA. The lesson plans are activities named as follows: "Neighbors," "The Cool Moon," and "Person/Place." The lessons are followed by instructions for the actual poetry contest (see Appendix I for complete original guidelines). The lesson plans are explained in further detail as follows:

"Neighbors"

In this first activity, the instructor writes the word 'neighbors' on the board. Next, the instructor asks all participants to state what qualities would make the *best* neighbor, and writes these on the left side of the board. Then, the instructor asks for words to describe the *worst* neighbor, and writes these words on the right side of the board. Referring to all the words on the board, participants then write about what it would be like to have the best and worst neighbor living nearby.

"The Cool Moon"

For this next activity, the instructor writes the phrase "The Cool Moon" on the board and then asks each participant to come up with a phrase containing the same structure, i.e., one with the definite article *the,* an adjective and a noun (e.g., 'the lovely time'; 'the cold heart; 'the disturbing noise'). Each student must provide at least one phrase and may not repeat previously stated adjectives or nouns. After a list is compiled on the board, the instructor encourages creativity by asking students to come up with new phrases from the given ones by mixing up words (e.g., 'the cold time'; 'the disturbing heart'; 'the lovely noise'). Next, the instructor asks each student to choose one phrase from the whole list and use it as the title of a poem that participants will write immediately. The instructor should foster a sense of urgency, giving a time limit of 10 to 15 minutes and encouraging everyone to write as fast as he or she can. After the time is up, the instructor asks for a volunteer to share a poem and encourages as many students as possible to read aloud to the group.

"Person/Place"

This exercise is similar to "The Cool Moon," above. Each student gives the instructor a name of a profession (e.g., 'an astronaut') and the instructor writes it on the right side of the board. Then, he or she asks for examples of places (e.g., a parking lot, home, restaurant) and writes them on the left side of the board. Students choose an occupation and place and use this as the title of a poem that they write immediately.

The poetry contest

After completing warm-up lessons, participants are given instructions for the "Seattle Writes" poetry context. Hickey provides detailed answers to questions via a "frequently-asked questions" (FAQs) section to address a number of queries that participants may have on writing an original poem for this contest. These questions relate to the topic of the poem, the length, the structure, and what to do if participants cannot think of anything to write about. Through these FAQs, participants are made aware that while the topic is defined ("Neighbors"), the format and style of the poem is up to the writer.

Adaptation of "Seattle Writes" lesson plans for EFL/ESL students

Materials

The materials needed for these lessons are quite simple and can be adapted according to resource availability. The materials needed for this activity are as follows:

- Whiteboard, blackboard, or computer/laptop with projector for sharing writing warm-up activities with the entire group
- Markers for instructor and participants
- Poster paper or large sheets of paper so participants can share their writing warm-up activity results with group
- Tape for posting participants' work
- Photocopies of Hickey's (2009) "Seattle Writes" poetry contest guidelines and ideas, adaptable to learner level and instructor expectations if needed.

Ideally, these activities should be conducted in a space where there is a whiteboard/blackboard, computer with projector, or wall space where the instructor can share information on poster paper with all learners. If these materials are not available, learners might write information down on their own pieces of paper. This activity could potentially be conducted entirely orally, although this mode would be challenging for beginning learners. In addition to writing materials, participants also need a copy of Hickey's "Seattle Writes" civic poetry contest with lesson descriptions and FAQs, which the instructor can adapt to his or her expectations and class level.

Sequence

I conducted the "Seattle Writes" lesson plan in three main settings: with my university students in Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina, with secondary school teachers as part of an intensive English language training seminar in Tuzla, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and with secondary school students at a summer English language school in Salzburg, Austria. Table 1 below shows an overview of what I included, eliminated, or added from Hickey's original lesson plans for all three participant populations, followed by detailed explanation of my lesson sequences:

Table 1:

"Seattle Writes" original lesson plan sequence	*Adapted sequence*
1. "Neighbors"	1. "Neighbors"
2. "The Cool Moon"	2. "The Cool Moon"
3. "Person/Place"	3. n/a
4. Write poem for civic poetry contest. Theme: "Neighbors"	4. Submit poem for homework for next lesson. Theme: "Neighbors"
5. n/a	5.Extension activities

Adapted: "Neighbors"

To begin this lesson, I shared a short story about one of my neighbors in Mostar and then encouraged students to talk about a neighbor to the class. Next, I began to elicit and write

down the best and worst qualities of neighbors on the right and left side of the board, respectively. I then informed students that we would be working on poetry and that we would be doing a few activities to guide them to write poems. I also let them know that I would be participating in the activities with them.

Adapted: "The Cool Moon".

For this lesson, I wrote the phrase "The Cool Moon" on the board and followed Hickey's guidelines of getting students to come up with phrases with the same structure. This proved to be feasible even for beginning students, as they were able to follow the formula of the + adjective + noun, especially after a few other students started sharing answers. This proved to be the liveliest portion of these lessons because some student responses were very creative, especially as it became clear that originality was encouraged.

The next step was always the point where students looked at me in initial disbelief: after I told them to choose one phrase on the board and use it as a title of poem that they had a maximum of 15 minutes to write, they could not believe that they actually had to create their own poems and moreover, many complained that they would not able to do so. However, in keeping with Hickey's tone of prompting students to write under time pressure and to keep their pens moving on their paper, I endeavored to create a feeling of urgency, stating that this process would allow them to activate their creativity and get their ideas moving. As students wrote, I also created my own poem using one of the available titles.

Almost without exception, students produced poems. If no volunteers agreed to read their poems out loud, I began to read mine, and then asked for students to read theirs out loud if desired. Depending on the time remaining in class, I also asked volunteers to write their poems on large piece of paper with markers to hang up for the whole class to see. This activity also allowed us to discuss the content and originality of the poem as well as any spelling or grammar errors noted even though spelling and grammar were not the primary focus of the lesson.

Adapted: "Person/Place".

To date, I have elected not to include the third warm up activity, "Person/Place" because its format essentially replicates that of "The Cool Moon" and because the results of the previous activity have always yielded a large amount of student poetry to work with.

Adapted: Homework/extension activity: "Neighbors"

After students completed their own (and often first ever) poem in English, I re-directed their attention to the initial list posted on the board or poster paper of the best and worst qualities of a neighbor. Next, I passed out Hickey's (2009) FAQs about writing a poem on the topic of neighbors and asked them to compose this poem as homework. In the next session, students read their poems out loud, first in small groups and then to the class as a whole if desired. During this time with my university students, I suggested potential ways that we might extend this assignment outside of the classroom to take student poems out into the public, either by holding a poetry reading, or by publishing them in a printed or on-line format. To date, one group of students has done a small poetry reading in a park in Mostar. Other student-generated ideas for the future include a poetry reading at a local café, or reading poems on a radio program. Enthusiastically, one student has even asked about establishing a "Mostar Writes" poetry contest. All these suggestions and activities are very feasible, and I look forward to discovering the ways that students' poems can be heard outside the classroom. See Appendix 3 for two examples of student poems on "Neighbors".

Value of "Seattle Writes" in the foreign language classroom

Examples of student poems

Overall, I have been very impressed with the poems that students have written during the poetry lessons, and with the fact that these original works have provided plenty of material for follow-up activities. Table 2 below shows three examples of poems written in 15 minutes as part of "The Cool Moon" lesson; each poem is from one of the three groups of learners I have done this activity with, i.e., secondary school teacher trainees, university students, and secondary school students. The poems are transcribed from students' handwritten original versions:

Table 2:

Author: secondary school teacher trainee	**'The Pretty Girl'** Stands and waits for a guy while the sun shines Her eyes roam over the street looking for a him
Author: 4th year English major, university	**'The Bright Side'** People always say you have to look on the bright side of life But how can I dream about the bright side of life when everyone around me is snoring?
Author: 6th grader, summer intensive course	***"The Blue Ocean"*** The blue ocean with a big blue belly with a lot of sea creatures in an ocean with a big blue ship on top of the big blue belly with a small blue belly button.

When I read the poems above, I see each learner's potential to evoke a myriad of emotions in an original text guided simply by his or her selecting a title from a class-comprised list of phrases. There are also numerous questions that the learners/authors could be asked. For example, in "*The Pretty Girl,*" the reader might wonder who the pretty girl is,

or why the author writes that she is waiting not for 'him' but for 'a him'. Also, when read aloud, it becomes evident that the poem has a unique rhythm via primarily one-syllable words. In short, this poem has potential for a discussion of structural elements such as the indefinite article 'a', e.g., how the poem's tone would change if the author wrote "him" instead of "a him" and for the rhythmic qualities when read aloud.

The second and third poems also highlight points for further exploration. *"The Bright Side"* is a poem that could be interpreted quite profoundly: the city of my host university, Mostar, is a post-conflict area where apathy, lack of initiative, and bleak employment prospects for many university students abound. The notion of '…how can I dream about the bright side of life when everyone around me is snoring?" could be interpreted as a metaphor for this outlook. Thirdly, *"The Blue Ocean"* reflects a playful contrast ('big blue belly; small blue belly button) of a sixth grader's imagination expressed via the vocabulary that he activated in this 15-minute writing time limit.

Suggestions for future lessons

Through the process of working through the "Seattle Writes" lesson plans, I have been reminded that bringing students' creativity and unique ideas to the forefront is very rewarding, yet also that different student populations require different amounts of modeling of the activities. Instructor flexibility towards those unwilling or unable to produce a poem is also very helpful. For example, university students and adult teacher trainees were, after initial encouragement, generally able to write poems and seemed encouraged by their results and with having fun with English in this way. In cases where students were not open to cooperating, I did not pressure them to produce but asked them to they listen as others shared their work, e.g., to participate as an audience for readers.

I had more difficulty with secondary students, many of whom were not able to initially understand or complete the task easily. For this age group in the future, I would provide more guided exercises in the form of fill-in-the-blank activities, such as an "I Am" poem designed for writers to first insert only adjectives (see Appendix 2). Alternately, younger learners could be shown examples of age-appropriate poems or song lyrics, as this population may not be very familiar with poetry in the first place Also, I found it helpful to ask secondary school students to create illustrations of their poems during class. Learners at this age seemed enthusiastic about coloring and drawing to provide imagery not only through their words but also by accompanying creative pictures. In short, the process has underscored the importance of understanding learners' familiarity with genre, expectations of the assignment, and comfort level when considering activity-based learning opportunities.

Implications for future research

In addition to being a basis for practical activities for the foreign language classroom, the "Seattle Writes" activities provide an avenue for linking theory and practice via exploring how learners engage with language. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed research agenda, this activity has implications for research into learning strategies, for example. According to Oxford (1990), six general strategies are particularly effective for learning: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. Table 3 below suggests potential connections to these strategies and the activities that learners engage in as part of their poetry lessons:

Table 3

Learning strategies (Oxford, 1990)	*Ways in which "Seattle Writes" activity touches on these strategies:*
Memory strategies: Help learners store and retrieve information.	Learners memorize and recite their poems.
Cognitive strategies: Let learners understand and produce new language.	Learners produce an original poem in English.
Compensation strategies: Let learners communicate regardless of language level.	Learners write their original poems based on their level of English for peers, instructor, community and/or self.
Metacognitive strategies: Let learners control their learning via organizing, planning and evaluating.	Learners compose their own poems within guidelines of assignment but have flexibility with how theme is interpreted and how final version is actualized.
Affective strategies: Help learners grasp their emotions, attitudes, motivations and values.	Learners share personal ideas, values, imagery, and attitudes on a universal topic such as "neighbors" via original poems.
Social strategies: Help learners interact with people.	Learners are encouraged to share poems with others via recitation and/or in written format; reading and writing as "socially embedded activity" (Kern, 2000). There is an audience to react to poems.

In addition to learning strategies, another area to be explored may be language play (e.g., Cook, 2000), with a potential for language play as a catalyst for texts reflecting personal values of adult learners (e.g., Tin, et. al., 2010). Also, learner-generated poems could enrich notions of what constitutes authentic material in the classroom. "Authentic material is language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers. It is normal, natural language, used by native or competent speakers of a language" (Harmer, 2007, p. 273) Thus, it can be argued that in the case of student-generated poems, non-native English speaking learners demonstrate that they are competent speakers of English, at least within the context of this activity. This competence is enriched, moreover, while learners are engaged with poetry,

when they also have the chance to experiment with non-verbal communicative aspects of language, e.g., body language, gestures, and facial expressions, as well as verbal aspects such as intonation, rhythm, stress, slang, and idiomatic expressions (Gasparro & Falletta, 1994). Learning strategies, language play, authenticity of material, and non-verbal communication are examples of potential research areas for future "Seattle Writes"-based lessons to further inform the field as well as material design for activity-based instruction.

Conclusion

The sequence of Hickey's (2009) activities and adaptations thereof are such that the instructor has a myriad of tools available for the creation of activity-based lessons; furthermore, there are several areas where these lessons could fit into research on learning and language. Practically speaking, by doing these poetry activities with three different populations of learners, I have seen firsthand that the activities are effective in the sense that they always elicit responses (either favorable or unfavorable), that the sense of urgency in the first activities makes it necessary for students to overcome their anxiety and produce text, however basic, and that there is always plenty of student-generated material to be used for reading and intonation practice, gesture, and rhythm. Moreover, these lessons nurture a sense of fun and enjoyment with English and their use in class has the potential to motivate instructors and students to take poems outside the classroom, help students to acquire greater confidence in their English language abilities.

Appendix I

"SEATTLE WRITES" LESSON PLANS

by Mike Hickey, 2009 Seattle Poet Populist

Through the "Seattle Writes" program, citizens young and old are invited to write a poem and share it online. In 2009, the theme of the program is NEIGHBORS. Poets will enter their poems directly online at www.poetpopulist.org.

Poets must be residents of King County, Washington State. Posted work will remain online for the public to read; 2009 Seattle Poet Populist Mike Hickey will choose a limited number of pieces for a printed book.

For teachers, Mike has written three lesson plans to integrate the program with classroom writing exercises.

Here are three interactive poetry writing lesson plans to use in class with your students. I use them in my college level courses, but they are fun and great imagination-builders for any age group.

1) Neighbors

Each student participates by saying one thing that would make the best neighbor in the world. The teacher fills up the left side of the board with these. Then everyone provides an idea that would describe the worst neighbor in the world. These fill up the right side of the board. Then everyone writes about what it'd be like of these two neighbors lived on either side of you.

FINAL NOTE: Perhaps one of these poems, especially #3, can be used as is or revised for our Poet Populist theme NEIGHBORS, but everyone should feel free to write a new poem for the website if they'd like. Ideally, we'd like to have every student and teacher (and principal) write a poem for the website during April, which is National Poetry Month.

2) The Cool Moon

The instructor starts by writing the phrase "the cool moon" on the board. Then every student adds another phrase that begins with the definite article "the" and an adjective and a noun. No adjectives or nouns should be repeated. I usually go around the room 2 or 3 times. I encourage students to say the first thing that comes to mind. Everyone participates – no one is allowed to "pass."

Then, when everyone has had at least a couple turns and the board is filled, I read all the phrases back to the class. This is where the fun begins! We mix and match adjectives and nouns that weren't initially together, and I allow the students to shout these out in class. The goal is to come up with new combinations and juxtapositions that are unexpected and unpredictable, which is a vital element in writing poems.

Now, it's time to write. Each student picks one of the phrases, either an original on the board or one of the new hybrids, and writes that at the top of the page as the title of his/her poem. Then they write a story using that phrase as a springboard. I usually ask my students to write as fast as they can for 5, 10, or 15 minutes (some grades write faster than others). They are not allowed to erase or stop to think of what to write. The pen must be in contact with the paper at all times. Ideally, they will tap into the subconscious mind where all the good dreams and memories and poem ideas are hiding and hibernating.

Finally, when time is up, all pens stop and volunteers read their poems aloud. Students are sometimes reluctant to read at first, but when one brave soul breaks the ice there is typically a steady stream of eager readers. Sometimes the poems are serious, sometimes they're funny, but my role as a teacher is to encourage participation and show them that writing is fun. Last quarter, one student wrote about "the funky chicken" that liked to salsa dance and wear dark sunglasses - now that's a poem!

3) Person / Place

Similar to "the cool moon", everyone participates in this exercise as well. First, each student gives the instructor a profession/occupation, and the teacher writes it on the right side of the board: doctor, lion tamer, mail carrier, lawyer, teacher, circus clown, etc. Then, each student says a place: parking lot, kitchen, construction site, hospital, courtroom, classroom, etc. The teacher writes these on the left side of the board.

Next, the students write a place and an occupation on the top of the page. This becomes their title. But again, the idea is to be unpredictable. Don't put a doctor in a hospital or a teacher in the classroom. Put the person in a place where he/she normally WOULDN'T be found: a swimmer on the moon, a ballerina in McDonald's, a mime in a cemetery. Then the students write a story about this person/place.

Again, I allow some time at the end of the period for volunteers to read. I always participate, too, and I'm never shy about volunteering to read my own offering, even if it isn't very good. The objective isn't to be "good," it's to have fun with words and nurture a love for language and imagery.

SEATTLE WRITES FAQ

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions (and answers) about Seattle Writes, plus some writing prompts, compiled by 2009 Poet Populist Mike Hickey. (This information is also offered on the web to writers who have gotten stuck in their process.)

Does poetry have to rhyme?

No. In fact, "free verse" is a great way to find and develop one's voice without the limitations of end rhyme.

Is there a theme?

Yes, our theme is NEIGHBORS.

Does the poem have to rhyme?

No. In fact, "free verse" is a great way to find and develop one's voice without the limitations of end rhyme.

How long should a poem be?

For this project, the maximum number of lines is 30.

Does a poem need punctuation?

Not always. It just depends on the poem.

Does verb tense matter?

Generally speaking, simple present tense enhances the immediacy of the poem.

What makes a poem good?

Usually a poem is good if it makes the reader think hard, feel a strong emotion, or both.

Does a poem have to mean something?

Some poems tell a story and they usually do mean something, they have a point. Some poems create a mood or tone and these are often referred to as "tonal" poems. Here, the meaning is often less obvious or direct. Either way, it's best not to guide the poem but to let the poem guide you. Often, if the poem has a point, you won't know what it is until you've written it.

What if I get stuck and can't think of anything to write?

Don't worry, that happens a lot. Here are some ideas to get you started: WRITE A POEM IN WHICH..OR

1) ...your neighbor has secret powers.
2) ...your neighbor's house is magic.
3) ...your neighbor's house is haunted.
4) ...your neighbor does something special that you'd like to do too.
5) ...the worms in your neighbor's garden talk to each other.
6) ...your neighbor is not a person but: a dog, a bug, a wind chime, fence, rock, trash can, sidewalk, telephone pole, street light, lawnmower, storage shed.
7) ...in which you make up a brand new word that describes your neighbor.
8) Write a list of five words that describe your neighbor and use them all in a poem.
9) Write a list of five words that mean "good neighbor" and five words that mean "bad neighbor" and use them all in a poem. *Style points: one of the words in each list should be made-up words.*
10) Imagine the perfect neighbor, and pretend they are writing you a letter. Start with "Dear Neighbor." Then what do they say?

Any more advice?

Yes! As Einstein said, "Imagination is more important that knowledge." Let's prove him right!

Appendix 2

'I AM' POEM
Warm-up (to accomany 'Seattle Writes' activity)
SOURCE: Article *„What is an 'I Am' poem and how can it be used in the classroom?“ by Jennifer Flood (2008).*
http://www.helium.com/items/813235-what-is-an-i-am-poem-and-how-can-it-be-used-in-the-classroom

1.

I am (two special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

2.

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you feel really sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

3.

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you really dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Appendix 3

Two examples of student poems: "Neighbors"

1. Author: 4th year English major

No Neighbors At All

There are some people

Who live next to me

But they're NOT

My neighbors!

2. Author: 2nd year English major

Neighbors

love them or hate
it is the same
any false move
will cause women next door
to say you are the one to blame
they can be nice and always there
but I can assure you
that is rare.

If you are not in a fight
due to loud music or screaming around
maybe they will forget
the night you came home
with your boyfriend at half past two
or was it around three
be sure they will know better than thee.

Always nosy knowing all
they don’t really need to know
sometimes you feel like
your life is Big Brother
and your neighbors’ eyes are like
small cameras, shooting it all!

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Internet: More than just Websites

Marwa Ahmed Abd El Azim

Abstract

The article explores how Facebook can be used as an educational tool to promote communication among EFL learners. The presenter used the Face book to motivate lower intermediate level to take the risk of communicating in an ESL conversation course. The findings show significant improvements in the learners' performance in the classroom and in their attitudes towards using the Internet in their learning. The demo will include discussion on the different tasks implemented by the learners, problems encountered and learning outcomes.

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, some external factors like motivation and anxiety can act as a filter that impedes acquisition. For example, if a learner has very low motivation, and a high level of anxiety, the affective filter comes into place and inhibits the learner from acquiring the new language. This means if the students are becoming motivated and relaxed about learning the target language, they would succeed in acquiring a second language.

Based upon this theory, the idea of creating an online discussion group was mainly initiated. Choosing a Facebook group in particular to implement the experiment was for its popularity among EFL young and adult learners in Egypt. So, cognitively speaking, Facebook was used to maintain the learners' attention on something interesting and motivating at the same time.

The experiment was conducted on 20 students aged between 20 and 36 who were enrolled in a conversation class taught at a lower intermediate level at the English Studies Division (ESD) of the American University in Cairo. The experiment lasted for three months. The Facebook group provided a channel of communication among the participants outside the classroom. The aim was to create a friendly atmosphere away from class room tensions. The students were engaged during the first week in some discussion questions on very general issues related to their personal life. To illustrate, questions about their current education, career or hobbies were exchanged. The goal was to assure their awareness of presented questions without tiring them in thinking about complicated unfamiliar topics. They also acted as an ice breaker between the students who are of different backgrounds and not familiar with each other.

As for the teacher, she acted as a monitor and moderator at the same time. At the beginning she posted pictures, brochures, discussion topics, questions and online articles suitable to their proficiency level. After three weeks, the students started posting their own videos, pictures and even articles to comment on. The teacher refrained from giving any evaluation for spelling or grammar. She interrupted only to encourage the students to participate or to draw their attention to a new discussion topic or an educational web link. Later on, the teacher interrupted the class to reflect on the quality of their online performance. In the classroom, learners resumed their online discussions on placed content in the form of individual or group debates.

As an evaluating tool, learners were required to pass four continual speaking and listening assessments during the term at regular intervals. At the end of the course and as a final achievement test, each learner presented two presentations on any topic of his/her choice, using the target language, to their colleagues in the classroom. The final grade was calculated based on the results of the students' four oral assessments and the final presentations.

The findings were extremely promising on different levels. On the level of anxiety and risk-taking, learners' anxiety was minimized during engagement in online discussion topics and chatting activities. Their motivation was increased by their feeling of belonging to one group. In fact, many researchers consider motivation as one of the main elements that determine success in learning a foreign language. The students succeeded in taking the risk and trying out the target language.

In addition, through the various online listening tasks, students' weak areas in pronunciation, sounds and meanings were increasingly developed. The students were able to communicate in English in direct oral conversations related to real life situations.

In conclusion, the findings show significant improvements in the learners' performance in the classroom and in their attitudes towards using the Internet in learning. It is clear that electronic interaction acts as an efficient tool to enhance language acquisition in a second or a foreign language learning context.

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Appendix

Assessments	Points
2 Listening (Session 7 & 11)	30
2 Speaking (Session 16 & 21)	30
Final Oral Presentations (End of Term) (Session 24)	40
Total	100

The above chart represents the ways of assessing the students' performance and the division of the Course Grades throughout the whole Course.

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Reading Rate: Implications for EFL Teachers

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Abstract

A slow reading rate may be symptomatic of inefficient word recognition or lack of sensitivity to the phrase--the natural unit of meaning in reading. Reading rate refers to the speed and fluidity with which a reader moves through connected texts. Rapid word recognition is crucial to proficient reading. Great variation exists in the recommended rates for readers at different grade levels and under different reading conditions. Reading rate and ways to increase it are associated with theories such as LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) Automaticity Theory, Perfetti's (1985) Verbal Efficiency Theory, and Carver's (1990) Reading Rate Theory. Several strategies have been used to develop reading rate, such as repeated reading, paired reading, and tape-assisted reading. Thus, EFL teachers need to be aware of the importance of reading rate and to incorporate techniques and strategies to develop it in the EFL classroom.

1. Introduction: Definition and Importance of Reading Rate

One of the most common behaviors that accompany difficult reading is a slow reading rate, which may be symptomatic of inefficient word recognition or lack of sensitivity to the phrase--the natural unit of meaning in reading. According to Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2005, p. 704), "reading rate comprises both word-level automaticity and the speed and fluidity with which a reader moves through connected texts. Automaticity is quick and effortless identification of words in or out of context."

The automaticity with which a reader can decode or recognize words is almost as important as word-reading accuracy. It is not enough to get the word right if a great deal of cognitive effort is required to do so; automaticity frees up cognitive resources that can be devoted to text comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, cited in Hudson et al., 2005).

Most educators quantify rate in terms of reading speed--either the number of words read correctly per minute or the length of time it takes for a reader to complete a passage. Poor readers are often characterized by slow, laborious reading of connected text. Students who read slowly often fail to complete their work, lose interest in school, and seldom read for pleasure (Moats, 2001).

There is strong evidence that increased reading rate is related to higher levels of comprehension in average and poor readers (Rasinski, 1999, 2000, 2001b), as well as in students with reading disabilities (Breznitz, 1991; Chard, Vaughn & Tyler, 2002). These studies have been carried out with L1 readers. Very little has been reported on the effects of rapid-reading instruction for FL learners. Research by Coady and Anderson (1993) emphasized the importance of including a rapid-reading component in reading programs and concluded that it is possible to increase reading rate in a foreign language without a concomitant decrease in comprehension. Nuttal (1996) stated that by reading faster, the reader is encouraged to read more and with reading more, comprehension improves. By increasing reading rates, FL readers are exposed to much more language than if they were to read at a slower rate.

2. Theories Associated with Reading Rate

Automaticity Theory:

The connection between automaticity and decoding was noted in the influential LaBerg and Samuels' (1974) Automaticity Theory, which is probably most frequently invoked as a framework for conceptualizing fluent reading (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001). LaBerg and Samuels outlined a basic limited-capacity argument, which holds that reading is a complex skill in which simultaneous word recognition and comprehension are possible only when they present a combined cognitive demand that does not exceed the reader's available resources (Breznitz, 2006).

This means that the execution of a complex skill necessitates the coordination of many component processes within a short time frame. If each component required attention, the performance of the complex skill would exceed attention capacity and therefore be impossible. By contrast, if enough components are executed automatically, then attention load would be within tolerable limits, permitting successful performance (Fuchs et al., 2001). Furthermore, LaBerg and Samuels suggested that automaticity in word recognition develops through practice, because practice decreases the attention requirement for word recognition, thereby freeing up limited cognitive resources to process meaning (Hudson et al., 2005).

In this sense, LaBerg and Samuels viewed human beings as single-channel processors; that is, we can attend to only one thing at a time. We are able to do more than one thing at a time only if we alternate our attention between two or more activities rapidly back and forth, or if one of the activities is so well learned that it can be performed automatically (Pikulski & Chard, 2003).

LaBerg and Samuels assumed that comprehension processes demand attention and therefore are not strong candidates for the development of automaticity; they considered lexical processes, such as orthographic segmentation and phonological coding, to be better targets for automaticity (Fuchs et al., 2001). Beyond lexical access is comprehension of sentences, paragraphs, and entire passages. During these comprehension processes, readers engage in literal and inferential comprehension of texts and monitor whether they successfully comprehend. According to the Automaticity Theory, comprehension processes are consistently and inordinately resource-demanding, so educators should aim at helping learners automatize lexical access through a great amount of repeated exposure to print. Only when readers execute word recognition fast and automatically, without using a great deal of their attention resources, can they utilize most of their attention resources to achieve better comprehension (Taguchi, Gorsuch & Sasamoto, 2006).

Verbal Efficiency Theory:

The Verbal Efficiency Theory introduced by Perfetti (1985) represents a landmark in the study of reading. Perfetti's model stresses the importance of accurate and rapid word recognition, working memory processes, general symbol activation and retrieval, lexical access and retrieval, and learning and practice, as crucial factors in enhancing reading effectiveness (Breznitz, 2006).

According to Tracy and Morrow (2006), the theory was built on three assumptions. The first assumption is that word recognition skills during reading are related to *speech access*. This means that as the reader reads, the sound of the word (the phonological code) is activated as the word is read (the lexical access). Thus, the first general assumption of the Verbal Efficiency Theory is that one's reading of printed text is related to one's internal hearing of it.

The second assumption of the Verbal Efficiency Theory is that the amount of time the reader takes to read an isolated word aloud is indicative of how well the reader knows the

word. The amount of time it takes to read an isolated word aloud is known as *vocalization latency*. The speed with which the reader can identify a printed word is also known as word recognition automaticity (Tracy & Morrow, 2006). Thus the second assumption of the Verbal Efficiency Theory is that "vocational latencies to single printed words represent the extent of automaticity of word recognition" (Kuhara-Kojimas et al., cited in Tracy & Morrow, 2006, p. 152). The Verbal Efficiency Theory suggests that faster word recognition is associated with improved reading because automatic word recognition requires less cognitive energy than decoding, thus freeing up cognitive capacity for comprehension processing (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001).

The third assumption of the Verbal Efficiency Theory is that a reader's decoding skill is the major source of variation in his or her vocalization latency. In simpler terms, how well a reader can decode will determine how quickly he or she can identify words when reading isolated words. The reading of isolated nonsense words is often a measure of decoding skill since this condition eliminates the reader's ability to see context or whole-word recognition skills for word identification (Tracy & Morrow, 2006).

The Verbal Efficiency Theory theorizes that even higher-level reading processes beyond lexical access, such as resolving anaphora, integrating propositions, using basic cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, and activating relevant background schemas, can be automatized through extended practice. The theory presumes a hierarchy among individual reading process sub-components. At the basic process of lexical access is letter identification, and beyond that is word recognition. According to Taguchi et al (2006, p. 3), "verbal efficiency refers to the degree to which readers' subcomponents of reading are exercised with speed and accuracy."

Carver's Reading Rate Theory:

One of the leading theories attempting to explain reading rate was put forward by Carver (1990) in his "Rauding Theory" where he focused on the links between fluency and comprehension. He introduced a different perspective to fluency-related research by emphasizing the different purposes of reading and the different rates that these purposes elicit in readers. These include the scanning, skimming, rauding, learning and memorizing processes. According to Carver, most reading is done in the rauding mode, that is, the mode used by an individual to comprehend each consecutively encountered, complete thought in a passage. Operating in the rauding mode, for Carver, represents the fastest rate at which an individual can successfully understand complete thoughts in each sentence. "The rauding rate is the individual's highest rate of comprehension whereby comprehension is relatively accurate" (p. 144). Such a rate involves the underlying components of lexical access, semantic encoding and sentential integration.

3. Recommended Reading Rates

Great variation exists in the recommended rates for readers at different grade levels and under different reading conditions. For example, Durrell (cited in Rasinski, 1999) found that fifth graders read orally at 150 wpm and silently at 180 wpm. Taylor (cited in Rasinski, 1999) found a 173-wpm rate to be associated with reading with comprehension for fifth-grade students and a 185-wpm rate for sixth graders. Huey (cited in Carver 1990) reported silent and oral reading rates for 20 post-graduate students; Huey's data established an average silent reading rate for college students at 300 wpm and a corresponding oral reading rate that was considerably slower, around 200 wpm.

Coke (cited in Carver 1990) gave 20 college students passages to read aloud and emphasized the need to read rapidly without sacrificing intelligibility. She estimated oral reading rate to be 187 wpm. Salasoo (cited in Carver 1990) gave 12 passages to 16 college

students and asked them to read them silently and orally. He reported that the students took longer to read aloud than silently but did not determine the reading rates in wpm.

According to Carver (1990, p. 291), the "maximum oral reading rate for adults and college students is around 200-250 wpm, which seems to be close to their rauding rate." He also suggested that maximum oral reading rate and rauding rate are equal for students in elementary and secondary school.

Higgins and Wallace (cited in Anderson 1999) suggested 180 wpm for mature oral reading in FL settings. Dubin and Bycina (1991) suggested 200 wpm for academic reading in FL settings. Segalowitz, Poulsen and Komoda (1991, p. 15) indicated that the FL reading rates of highly bilingual readers are "30% or more slower than L1 reading rates."

5. Developing Reading Rate in the EFL Classroom

Several strategies have been used to improve reading rate. Examples of these strategies are repeated reading, paired reading, and tape-assisted reading.

Repeated Reading:

Repeated reading is an instructional strategy originally developed by Samuels in 1979. The aim of this strategy is to help non-fluent readers build automatic word identification skills (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). The repeated reading strategy consists of a non-fluent student reading a passage several times. With this strategy, students are instructed not to proceed to the next section of the text, or next passage, until meeting a criterion level. The reading passages provided to students are chosen so that they are at the students' reading level (Samuels, 2002; Therrien & Kubina, 2006).

This strategy was devised by Samuels (1979) to translate Automaticity Theory into practice. According to this theory, a fluent reader decodes text automatically, without attention, thus leaving attention free to be used for comprehension. Thus, the repeated reading strategy is a means for developing automatic decoding. The repeated reading strategy, with its "iterative cycles of readings, provides the required practice for non-fluent readers." With extensive repeated reading practice, readers are expected to be able to direct most of their attention resources to higher order comprehension processes (Samuels 1997, p. 376).

The focus of Taguchi and Gorsuch's study (2002) was on repeated reading transfer effects for reading rate and comprehension to new passages. They found that the ten-week repeated reading program significantly improved the nine FL participants' reading rates and comprehension from a pre-test reading passage to a post-test reading passage (a different passage).

The purpose of Eber and Miller's Study (2003) was to design a repeated reading program in order to increase reading rate and raise comprehension among second and third graders. Results showed that repeated readings may have led to the improved comprehension and rate scores.

Paired Reading:

In paired reading, pairs of students take turns reading and rereading the same passage to each other. According to Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2008), paired reading is effective for several reasons. First, students benefit from practicing the reading of connected texts, and this strategy ensures that students spend significant amounts of time reading aloud or following along with their partners. Second, paired reading provides learners with the opportunity to read a text repeatedly, which supports the development of automatic word reading. Third, because students receive correction and support from their partners during the reading, they are able to practice a text that they cannot yet read independently.

Sutton's project (1991) used repeated reading and paired reading strategies for increasing oral reading rate. Results indicated a significant increase in the targeted students' reading rates, and a significant decrease in the number of word errors.

Tape-assisted Reading:

In tape-assisted reading, a student is able to work more independently, reading along while listening to the passage on a tape. Sometimes the learner is instructed to listen and read the passage several times. Tape-assisted reading is not the same as listening practice. The students, who have already read the passage silently at least once, will read the passage again as they listen to the audio model. Here they are "building a psycholinguistic connection between orthography, words and sounds. The audio model also adds a depth of meaning-rich features of pronunciation (pitch, intonation, rhythm and emphasis) embedded directly in the text" (Gorsuch & Arnold, 2007, p. 27).

Taguchi (1997) examined the effects of repeated reading on the English oral and silent reading rates of 15 EFL Japanese university students. Taguchi found that silent reading rates increased significantly even on the seventh reading of the practiced passages for all students. The lower-level readers showed more significant improvement in their oral reading than the high-level readers.

The effectiveness of repeated reading and listening-while-reading of third-grade students was compared in Rasinski's study (2001a). Both strategies resulted in significant gains in reading speed and word recognition accuracy.

Conclusion

To conclude, EFL teachers need to be aware of the importance of reading rate and to incorporate techniques and strategies to develop it in the EFL classroom. Repeated reading, paired reading, and tape-assisted reading directly target reading rate and can easily be integrated into any existing reading program.

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Online Communication and Enhancing Language Skills, Motivation, and Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effectiveness of an online communication program in three domains: enhancing language skills, increasing motivation, and promoting cultural understanding among non-native university students from 22 countries who were attending the Soliya Connect Program. An 18-item Likert scale questionnaire addressing these three domains was used to assess these students' responses. Results indicate that using online communication in EFL teaching enhances listening and speaking skills, promotes motivation and encourages cultural understanding.

1. Introduction

Information technology and the new use of computers have permeated every domain of life in the twenty-first century. One essential application of computer technology has been in the field of language teaching. Information technology has been used in teaching, learning and assessment for many years, from programmed learning and online tutorials which are teaching-centered, at one end of the spectrum, to computer supported collaborative environments, which are mostly learning-centered.

Online learning has seen impressive growth, giving the opportunity even to small schools and colleges to offer a wide range of courses. Institutions resorted to this type of delivery due to the ease of access and the cheap cost (Dudeney, 2007). Both teachers and students can gain access to information and exchange it in meaningful online communication.

The term e-learning has developed over recent years to subsume these and related terms. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is the concern of researchers, practitioners and students. According to Lamy and Hampel (2007), "CMC could potentially answer two needs at once: it could be the means through which teaching occurred, and it could be an end itself. Learners could engage in the communicative aspect of their study by exchanging language online rather than in conversation classes" (p. 7). They add that CMC has benefits related to "language acquisition and for socio-cultural and intercultural development" (p.8). Pena-Shaff et al (2001) point that

> asynchronous [CMC] discussion environments increased the opportunities for participants to develop sophisticated cognitive skills such as self-reflection, critical thinking and in-depth analysis of the course content, supporting the purposeful construction of meaning. The need to articulate one's own argument in this type of text-based environment encourages students to engage in analytical and reflective action. This process helps students construct purposeful arguments and transmit them to an audience. (p. 65)

Similarly, Lee (1999) explains that learners who go online can "enhance their language skills as well as develop a sense of target language communities, together with a concomitant feeling of personal enjoyment and enrichment" (p. 104).

This paper addresses the effect of online communication on enhancing language skills, motivation and promoting cultural understanding. The following sections are going to

examine the literature review related to the effect of online communication in developing language skills, motivation and cultural understanding.

2. Literature Review

A number of studies explore the effect of Internet resources and online communication on enhancing the four language skills. Studies show that internet resources can develop reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Other studies show that online communication can enhance listening and speaking skills. Khan (2005) explains, “Drill and practice is defined as a learning activity that helps learners master basic skills or memorize facts through repetitive practice.” (p.190). Zhao states, “Web provides the students with a lot of materials to practice the communicative skills”, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. His research shows some strength and weakness in light of using the web in developing the four communicative skills.

2.1. Listening and Speaking:

Speaking and listening are interactive processes of constructing meaning that involve producing, receiving, and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Research shows that there is evident support for the use of technologies in teaching language skills (Bates and Poole, 2003; Egbert and Hanson-Smith, 1999; Bonk and Zhang, 2008), and many others. One of the strengths that online communication offers is providing the possibility to talk with native speakers, which facilitates improving the listening skill. Moreover, online listening materials are available and can be downloaded and replayed. In addition, these online materials make learning more interesting and enjoyable as students are given the opportunity to practice listening and speaking using technology, which are not easy tasks because students are involved in two psycholinguistic processes: the first one is comprehension and the second one is production. Comprehension is very essential to understand language functions such as greetings, questioning, and informing. Without understanding language functions accurately, students will not be able to produce appropriate responses. This will lead to misunderstanding and sometimes to communication breakdown. This happens face-to-face, and it is expected to hinder online communication in a dramatic manner. As pointed out by Florez (1999) "opportunities for speaking and listening require structure and planning if they are to support language development" (p.1). Online communication can promote effective practice and development for listening and speaking by offering students opportunities to interact with native speakers. Moreover, online communication allows shy students to express themselves more freely as there is less teacher control and more authentic tasks. Egbert (2005) explains that online communication provides the learners with opportunities to orally communicate with a large number of people in an environment conducive to learning. A key advantage of this practice is that "learners can interact socially and receive authentic oral input from peers and others" (p.42). She adds that peer interaction gives the opportunity to practice "listening, speaking, and negotiating that other learners might not get" (p.42). Moreover, they can take advantage of the feedback that they offer to each other in a tacit way, especially when the interaction is taking place between native and non-native speakers or learners at different levels.

2.2. Reading and Writing:

Several studies report that online communication may enhance reading and writing skills (Al-Abbadi, 2007; Bonk and Zhang, 2008; Egbert and Hanson- Smith, 1999, Al-Jarf 2006). Bonk and Zhang (2008) report that reading online newspapers and magazines in foreign language courses, which might have students read online newsletters, newspapers, or

magazines, offers the students the opportunity of being exposed to authentic materials, increases their motivation and engagement, as well as maximizes their comprehension skills. Through using the web, a student can not only write for the teacher or other students, but also for a specific audience (Robb, cited in Zhao, 2003, p.13). After all, in order to make students more competent, efficient, and successful in the twenty-first century, technology should be engaged in both the learning and teaching processes (Morrison, 1999 cited in Zhao, 2003, p10).

2.3. Motivation and Cross-cultural Understanding

Learning a foreign language involves knowing about its culture. Language and culture are twins. Although some educators consider culture as a marginal element in language teaching, research shows that language and culture cannot be separated. Accordingly, it is vital to incorporate culture in foreign language teaching. Holme (2002) suggests that culture is as inseparable from language as "knowledge of a culture presupposes a competence which is essential to the grasp of language's true meaning" (p. 212). Warschauer (1997) points out that "literacy is a complex social practice learned through dialogic communication and apprenticeship into literate discourse communities. It involves the skills of abstraction, reflection, analysis, interpretation, cross-cultural understanding, collaborative problem-solving, and critical thinking". He adds that "computers in and of themselves will not provide any of these, but carefully planned computer-networking projects can provide a valuable support for any teacher interested in enhancing the literacy of students in a foreign, second, or indigenous language."

Some studies have shown that online communication with native speakers has positive effects as it enables language learners to have contact with real audiences and provides them with authentic language experiences (Abrams, 2003; Beauvois, 1997; Hertel, 2003). Other studies have also shown that using email is a useful tool for enhancing cross-cultural communication (Moore, Morales, & Carel, 1998), and for "eliciting underlying cultural assumption and changing cultural stereotypes (Itakura, 2004). O'Brien and Alfano (2009) indicate "that cross-cultural collaboration made possible by effective use of communication technologies does give students the tools and skills they need to become effective and capable global citizens" (p.681).

Zeiss and Isabelli-Garcı´a (2005) investigate the effect of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) on Enhancing Cultural Awareness. They examine whether computer mediated communication between U.S university students and Mexican university students enhances cultural awareness. They conclude that "CMC may have a more positive effect on the acquisition of cultural awareness of students that engage in CMC than on those who do not." They conclude that CMC is most effective for increasing awareness about the topic of current events, in addition to matters pertaining to daily life and educational systems. They deem that "CMC not only may expand cultural awareness of selected topics, but it is also likely to augment student desire to study abroad."

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis is helpful for understanding the benefits of classroom interaction, both in a traditional classroom as well as in online communication. Comprehensible input is critical for second language acquisition; however, interaction can improve second language acquisition and fluency. According to Pica (1996), a two-way interaction is critical in learning a second language. Interaction should have "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985, 1994) which enables understanding of the message, as well as "output" (Swain, 1995), which offers opportunities for expression and negotiation of meaning. Lightbrown and Spada (1999) elaborate that "when learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities they are compelled to 'negotiate for meaning,'" (p. 122). Vygotsky (1962) presents a socio-cultural perspective that clarifies the

importance of social interaction for producing an environment to learning language, learning about language, and learning "through" language allowing for the interaction to be investigated through a broader social and cultural context. In Vygotsky's view, human learning and development are involved in a purposeful activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Through the Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky (1962) emphasizes that collaborative learning is essential for assisting each student to advance in his/her language development. He explains that second language learners achieve proficiency when they are involved in meaningful interaction with more advanced speakers of the language, for instance, teachers and classmates. Similarly, Bigge and Shermis (1999) stress the importance of engaging learners in "interesting, culturally meaningful collaborative problem-solving activities" (p.130). They emphasize the importance of encouraging learners to reach a goal where learners "begin a task with different understandings but arrive at a constructive shared one" (p.130). Bayer (1990) stressed collaboration among peers, meaningful problem-solving tasks and the use of expressive speech and writing. The teacher's role is a guide and students collaborate to create "connections between new ideas" (p. 7).

To sum up, the introduction of online communication enhances the four language skills; promotes motivation as well as increases cultural understanding. Research has indicated several advantages of using online communication, as it definitely enhances language skills. Moreover, it increases the learners' motivation and fosters cultural understanding. With this in mind, the researcher conducts this study to examine the effects of using online communication to enhance language skills, motivation, and cultural understanding among university students.

3. Statement of the Problem

English is the language which is used all over the world as a means of communication. The extended use of English is one of the main reasons for teaching it in a number of universities. Traditional teaching is generally used and it is known as didactic instruction, in which information is presented to students by the teacher in a classroom. In this case, the teacher is the sole information giver, while the student is a passive recipient. This, without doubt, affects students' motivation and their levels of English language proficiency. Recently, most universities began using e-learning and online communication to supplement their programs. The full potential and promise of using online communication in English language teaching have not yet been empirically explored.

4. Objectives of the Study

This paper aims at examining the effectiveness of an online communication program in enhancing language skills, motivation and cultural understanding among university students.

5. Research Questions

The research questions of the study were:

a. What is the effect of online communication programs on improving the four language skills among university students?
b. What is the effect of online communication programs on increasing motivation among university students?
c. What is the effect of online communication programs on developing cross cultural understanding among university students?

6. Methodology

The present section discusses the population, research instruments, the development of the questionnaire, including its reliability.

6.1. Population

The sample for the study consisted of 68 male and female students from 22 countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, the United Stated and Asia. The learners were enrolled in the Soliya Connect Program. The average age of the students was 21, and they were third-year and fourth-year students. All subjects are non-native speakers of English. The students met two hours weekly to discuss different topics of international interest. They were assigned to groups of 8-10 students.

6.2. Research Instruments

Development and distribution of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix) was developed based on the literature review conducted by the researcher and tailor-made for online programs. The items were structured according to three dimensions addressed in the study. The three dimensions are language skills, motivation, and cultural understanding. The questionnaire consists of 18 statements with a 5 point Likert scale, (strongly agree, tend to agree, neutral, tend to disagree and strongly disagree).

The questionnaire was distributed during the spring semester in 2010. It was emailed to a list of 103 students who attended the Soliya Connect Program. This questionnaire was used to elicit their views about the effects of online communication in enhancing the four language skills and motivation, as well as increasing cultural understanding. With the cooperation of instructors, the researcher was able to collect 68 questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed statistically by using the SPSS program.

6.3 Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was tabulated. The result showed that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the questionnaire is high ($r = 0.89$), indicating a very high degree of internal consistency, therefore presenting a considerably reliable instrument.

7. Results

This section presents results of the questionnaire. It aims to answer the research questions of the current study.

A. What is the effect of online communication programs on improving the four language skills among university students?

To answer this question, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for the questionnaire items that are related to the first dimension (enhancing language skills). The reliability coefficient for the 6 items was tabulated. The result shows that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the questionnaire items that are related to language skills is ($r = 0.86$) indicating a high degree of internal consistency. As table 1 reveals, the calculated mean of items and their standard deviation appear for each statement.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the language skills items

No	Statement	M	SD
1	The program developed my communication skills as a result of my participation	4.07	.834
2	The program helped me to improve my speaking skill	4.19	.885
3	The program helped me to improve my reading skill	3.69	1.162
4	The program helped me to improve my listening skill	4.28	.750
5	The program helped me to improve my writing skill	3.50	1.044
6	The program helped me to develop my critical thinking skills	4.25	7.99

As the table reveals, item number 4 received a very high degree of agreement among the participants, followed by items number 6 and number 2. Number 6 addressees the issue of fostering critical thinking skills. As the table shows, the students gave this item a very high rating. Similarly, the students gave a very high rating to item number 2 which addresses improving the speaking skill. The two items that received less agreement by among students are items 3 and 5. They are related to reading and writing skills.

B. What is the effect of online communication programs on increasing motivation among university students?

The reliability coefficient for the 6 items that are related to motivation was tabulated. The result shows that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for these items is (r = 0.80), indicating a high degree of internal consistency. As table 2 reveals, the calculated mean of items and their standard deviation appear for each statement.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation for motivation items

	Statement	M	SD
7	The program motivated me to study harder and to do my homework on time	4.05	.989
8	The program helped me express myself and my opinions freely	4.24	.794
9	The program helped me communicate my thoughts orally and in order	4.14	.718
10	The program gave me an opportunity to develop ideas and articulate them in front of people	4.24	.715
11	The program helped me feel confident while speaking with my partners	4.13	.879
12	The dialogue with foreign students or English native students encouraged me to speak English	4.29	.885

As the table reveals, all of the items that are related to motivation received a very high rating by the students. The item that reflects the highest degree of agreement among students is number 12 (mean=4.29), which refers to the importance of dialogue with foreign students or native speaker students to encourage students to speak English. This is a very important result. Similarly, the students gave items 8 and 10 a very high rating, reflecting a very high degree of agreement for both items (mean=4.24). These items address such issues, like the ability to express opinions freely and having the opportunity to develop ideas and articulate them in front of people. Likewise, most students tended to agree with items 9 and 11. Item number 9 deals with helping students to communicate their thoughts orally with a mean of 4.14, and item 11 pertains to developing confidence while speaking with others (mean=3.13). The least item to be agreed on is item number 7, which addresses the issue of how the program motivated students to study harder (mean=4.05). Nevertheless, agreement is high, but in comparison with other items within the same dimension, this item received lower agreement.

C. What is the effect of online communication programs on developing cross cultural understand among university students?

The reliability coefficient for the 6 items that are related to motivation was tabulated. The result shows that the overall Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the questionnaire is (r = 0.78) indicating a high degree of internal consistency. As table 3 reveals, the calculated mean of items and their standard deviation appear for each statement.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation for the cultural understanding items

	Statement	M	SD
13	The program enhanced social interactions among students	4.06	.667
14	The program helped me in making new friends	3.87	1.077
15	The program made it easy for students from different backgrounds and cultures to interact	4.28	.861
16	The program allowed me to communicate with people I would not normally be able to communicate	4.25	.887
17	The program helped me to develop an understanding of alternative perspectives	4.13	.731
18	The program helped me to expand my knowledge of the relationship between different cultures	4.13	.794

As the table reveals, most of the items that are related to cross cultural understanding received a very high rating by the students with the only exception of item 14 (mean=3.87), which is related to making new friends. The item that reflects the highest degree of agreement among students is number 15 (mean=4.28), followed by number 16 (mean=4.25). Item 15 is about how the program made it easy for students from different backgrounds and cultures to interact. Item 16 refers to the ability of the program to offer students the chance to communicate with people with whom they would not normally be able to communicate.

Similarly, the students gave items 17 and 18 a very high rating, reflecting a very high degree of agreement for both items (mean=4.13). These items address issues related to developing an understanding of alternative perspectives among students and expanding their knowledge of the relationship between different cultures. Likewise, most students tended to agree with item 13, which deals with helping students to communicate their thoughts orally and the mean is 4.14, while item 11pertains to enhancing social interactions among students (mean=4.06).

8. Discussion and Conclusions

The study reveals that there is an overall agreement with all the items in the questionnaire. The item that received the strongest point in agreement is item number 12 (mean= 4.29), "*The dialogue with foreign students or English native students encouraged me to speak English.*" The second item in terms of the strength of students' agreement (Mean= 4.28) is the one related to *improving the listening skill*. Similar results were obtained related to developing *critical thinking skills* and *improving the speaking skill*. This is in agreement with other studies that show that such programs enhance language skills (Bates and Poole, 2003; Egbert and Hanson-Smith, 1999; Bonk and Zhang, 2008), and many others. As mentioned previously by Florez (1999), online communication promotes effective practice and development for listening and speaking by giving students opportunities to interact with native speakers. Since the ultimate goal of modern EFL teaching methodologies is attaining communicative and socio-linguistic competence, it is obvious that online communication enhances and promotes interpersonal communication skills, in particular, and life skills, in general. As explained by Egbert (2005) online communication offers the learners with the opportunities to utilize oral communication with other students, where they can "interact socially and receive authentic oral input from peers and others" (p.42).

The results of the study show that students increased their overall motivation. Warschauer, (1996) concluded that there are a number of factors that influence students' positive attitude toward online communication like "the feeling of personal empowerment, and the enhancement of learning opportunities". The students in this study highly agreed with all of the items that are related to motivation. Online communication introduces the element of novelty to the EFL learning environment. Besides, it is a welcome relief from the traditional and boring "chalk and talk" method. Furthermore, online communication defiantly enhances students' motivation by offering a modern channel of communication which has tremendous appeal to young people everywhere. In addition, it offers a much needed immediate feedback to students. It is not strange to find that the strongest item to agree with is in the dimension of motivation. The results showed that item number 12, "*The dialogue with foreign students or English native students encouraged me to speak English*", received the highest level of agreement. The other items in this dimension are "*The program helped me to express myself and my opinions freely" (mean=4.24) as well as "The program gave me an opportunity to develop ideas and articulate them in front of people*" (mean=4.24).

Similarly, the results of this study are similar to the results of other studies that show that online communication is a useful tool for enhancing cross cultural understanding (Moore, Morales, & Carel, 1998), and "eliciting underlying cultural assumption and changing cultural stereotypes (Itakura, 2004). Since we all live in "a global village", in which we are not only citizens of a particular country, but as Abbas (1993) says "citizens of the world", using online communication is essential for cross-cultural understanding among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As item 15 reveals, students found it easy to interact with students from different backgrounds and cultures (mean=4.28), and "the program allowed them to communicate with people they would not normally be able to communicate (mean= 4.25). These findings lend support to other studies. For example, O'Brien and Alfano (2009) conclude that "94% of students agree that they acquired intercultural competencies through the measure of "developing sensitivity to and

consideration for others from diverse cultural contexts." They also found that 96% of students agree that such programs develop "a better understanding of how people from different cultural contexts perceive, analyze, and produce knowledge in the form of visual, written, or spoken texts."

To sum up, in addition to enhancing listening and speaking skills, as well as developing critical thinking skills for the group in this study, as evidenced by the statistically significant results, using online communication in EFL teaching can promote motivation, increase self-confidence, and encourage the students to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. In short, online programs enhance language skills, motivation and develop cross cultural understanding when students have sufficient social interaction with each other.

8. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Since there is a positive effect of using online communication, it should be adopted and promoted in EFL learning and teaching contexts.
2. Online communication should be incorporated as an essential ingredient in courses, such as oral communication, writing, and integrated language skills.
3. Technological facilities and infrastructure should be provided at universities to promote online communication.
4. Similar studies should be conducted in other EFL countries to assess other language skills and competencies by using online communication.

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Appendix

The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure the students' attitudes towards online communication through Soliya Connect Program. It is important that you provide honest answers, as it will allow the researcher to gauge the impact of the program.

Please read the statements carefully and answer them.

Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your views about the online communication through Soliya program by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box using the scale given below.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

No	**Language Skills**	1	2	3	4	5
1	The program developed my communication skills as a result of my participation					
2	The program helped me to improve my speaking skill					
3	The program helped me to improve my reading skill					
4	The program helped me to improve my listening skill					
5	The program helped me to improve my writing skill					
6	The program helped me to develop my critical thinking skills					
	Motivation					
7	The program motivated me to study harder and to do my homework on time					
8	The program helped me to express myself and my opinions freely					
9	The program helped me to communicate my thoughts orally and in order					
10	The program gave me an opportunity to develop ideas and articulate them in front of people					
11	The program helped me to feel confident while speaking with my partners					
12	The dialogue with foreign students or English native students encouraged me to speak English					

	Culture					
13	The program enhanced the social interactions among students					
14	The program helped me in making new friends					
15	The program made it easy for students from different backgrounds and cultures to interact					
16	The program allowed me to communicate with people I would not normally be able to communicate					
17	The program helped me to develop an understanding of alternative perspectives					
18	The program helped me to expand my knowledge of the relationship between different cultures					

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Referencing : A Threshold Concept

Racquel Warner

Abstract

A threshold concept is defined by Meyer and Land (2003) as one which is: transformative, integrative and irreversible. Students who enter foundation programs are being prepared to reach an acceptable standard in the academic community for particular disciplines which they will later study in undergraduate degrees. This paper explores teaching referencing as a threshold concept in order to provide a useful academic trajectory for learners in a foundation program so they can become confident in their engagement with primary or secondary sources as evidenced in their academic work. A productive way of examining transferable skills in a foundation program lies within the context of students' acquisition of threshold concepts.

Introduction

When students embark upon study at higher levels of education, they are required to conceptualize and negotiate information in ways they are not familiar with. A revision of their method of academic study is required as they now have to focus on the complex disciplinary conventions for each subject. In addition, they have to grasp core concepts that will lay a foundation for further development in their chosen discipline. "The successful educator must be one who understands the complexities of the teaching-learning process and can draw upon this knowledge to act in ways which empower learners both within and beyond the classroom situation"(Williams and Burden ,1997). This quote most succinctly captures the interplay between the learner and the teacher in higher education as both parties work toward perceiving the world and creating valid meaning from this perception. In this relationship the teacher has the role of imparting threshold concepts which are foundational to a student's progression. Many of these core ideas are foreign to students who come to university from a high school context where these concepts were never taught. Furthermore, these concepts also present a challenge for students as they require consistent application across all disciplines and levels of study at university. However, the benefits of threshold concepts are invaluable because they spill over into daily life as students learn how to better evaluate information and become more analytical in their selection of data, thus becoming critical thinkers.

Referencing as a Threshold Concept

Referencing can be considered as a threshold concept which is "akin to a portal, opening up a new way and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Meyer and Land, 2003), in that it is an essential part of writing at university because it adds to the community of knowledge in any academic discipline. When students acknowledge the ideas of others in their academic writing, it supports and builds up the very essence of academic study, which is to engage with the ideas and knowledge of other scholars in a critical and analytical manner in an attempt to support and ground their own experiences in any area of study. As with any social community, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the contributions other have made. In English for Academic Purpose (EAP), the same convention obtains. By referencing the work of primary and secondary sources in their writing, students are giving accolades and acknowledging the relevance, value, and validity of these sources.

Even in instances where the source is being contradicted, it is still an acknowledgement of the author's contribution (Hunt, 2002). By referencing their work, students are taught accountability for the information they write, as the reader is able to verify the information from the sources cited.

Teaching Referencing is Potentially Transformative

Learning the skill of referencing is a threshold concept because it is potentially transformative. Once students understand the concept of referencing there is a "performative transformation" in their behavior in that they are no longer fearful of plagiarizing because they have learnt and can demonstrate proper referencing conventions as specified by the university. At university one of the most threatening challenges is to be accused of *plagiarism*. This word looms large as the dreaded academic offence and is reinforced whenever ideas of referencing are introduced as a way of avoiding plagiarism. In a study called "A web of insecurity: Research on student attitudes toward referencing" done by Colin Neville of the University of Bradford (2007), students revealed that they were afraid that they would be accused of plagiarizing because they did not reference their work correctly. A postgraduate respondent in the same study felt that "the need to reference …diminishes the opportunity to develop [students'] own ideas for fear of not having properly referenced all knowledge in the assignment (Neville, 2007 p. 15). By teaching referencing as the antithesis of plagiarizing, teachers are negatively reinforcing the fears students already possess.

A threshold concept is best taught using positive reinforcement. Students often start their first year at university in confusion when they hear terms such as title, text and author, bibliography, citation, quotation, and references. They are thrown into a further quandary with the changing referencing rules provided by electronic sources on the plethora of sites. The proverbial cart is put before the horse when students are bombarded with information on how to use electronic plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin. The tacit message being conveyed is a distrust of the students' ability to be independent thinkers. It is no wonder the concept and skill of referencing is considered a punitive trap of higher education. However, in the EAP module, which is taught as part of any pre-university program, also known as the foundation program, it is imperative to teach and practice referencing skills to prevent students getting caught in this "web of insecurity."

At the foundation level, teachers equip students with skills that they will use throughout their undergraduate and postgraduate study. Thus, by exploring what referencing is (definition), why it is important (rationale), and how it is done (demonstration and practice), students will be able to apply accurate referencing conventions in a non-threatening and supportive environment. By first ensuring that students understand and can apply correct in-text and end-of-text citation conventions, the elements of fear and distrust are averted. This is possible because the assessment at this level is *for* learning not *of* learning. At higher levels of education, students' ontological view of referencing will thus be less threatening, and they will be able to confidently transfer their knowledge and skill in this area.

Unexplored in the current literature on threshold concepts is the notion that the transformative element is also evident and beneficial among teachers and institutions because it becomes necessary for teachers to have a clear understanding of the concept. To arrive at this, there might be the need for policy decisions among the academic deans about the importance of these concepts to the overall outlook of the university and professional development of teachers to ensure that they grasp these threshold concepts. For example, when an institution decides that the Harvard referencing convention is the one that is to be used across all disciplines in the institution, the teachers are required to position themselves intellectually and attitudinally to empower students to acquire the necessary skills to apply

this convention. Hence, teachers are themselves learning and applying the skills while imparting them to the students. Thus, referencing is a threshold concept that is transformative at three levels of universities: academic decision makers, teachers, and students.

Another characteristic of threshold concepts is their irreversibility. "The change of perspective occasioned by a threshold concept is unlikely to be forgotten, or will be unlearned by considerable effort" (Meyer and Land, 2003). By teaching referencing to foundation level students in the EAP module, they gain "freedom, responsibility and autonomy" (ibid). The freedom comes from learning that it is acceptable, in academic study, to draw upon the ideas of others in order to provide evidence to support personal views. Students are taught that with this freedom, as with many others, there is a responsibility on their part to ensure that they are including and citing the ideas of others accurately in a verifiable manner. Student autonomy is gained when, after much practice and review, they are able to independently do their research, select their sources, critically identify evidence useful for their work, and properly cite and reference this information without fear of plagiarism.

This transition to independent use of referencing conventions is a comfortable one as teachers in the foundation program ensure that the many components of making a citation are understood. Correct applications of these conventions are rewarded through positive reinforcement and constructive comments. Teachers consistently guide the practice of referencing and citation with the use of peer support and review, to ensure a common base of experience in the application and evaluation of referencing conventions. They also provide formative feedback by facilitating sufficient learning opportunities, keeping up with the changing rules and information sources, and just generally being positive about the entire process of referencing and citation. This skill, if taught as part of the first term in a foundation program, then becomes an irreversible concept which students will apply throughout the rest of their academic and professional careers.

The Integrative Nature of Referencing

The learned ability to see and make connections across disciplines using academic and practical knowledge derived from multiple sources is regarded as integrative learning. Many higher education curricula these days aim for a greater degree of integrative learning, and they create an environment in which students are able to see the interrelatedness of disciplines in order to optimize their learning. Not surprisingly, "integrativeness" is a characteristic of a threshold concept in the sense that it leads students to see the previously unexposed relationships between ideas. Teaching the concept and skill of referencing in an EAP module is an excellent opportunity to expose connections at multiple levels. Firstly, there is the connection between the students' ideas and the existing corpus of knowledge related to that idea. Secondly, there is the commonality of referencing which is required across all disciplines of study. Finally, the notion of acknowledging sources of information outside of oneself becomes a guiding principle throughout students' academic and professional lives.

Tackling the Problematic Aspects of Teaching Referencing

Having examined all the positive characteristics of a threshold concept, it is important to explore the more elusive aspects of this theory by looking at its designation of being "problematic" or "troublesome" (Perkins, 1999; Kennedy, 1998). Perkins (1999) defined troublesome knowledge as that which "appears counter-intuitive, or alien (emanating from another culture or discourse)…." At university, students are attempting to make sense of

information using ideas and concepts by thinking, establishing connections, and generally exploring new ideas. Entwistle (1981) and Biggs (1987) refer to this as the "deep approach" to learning. Because students are engaging with ideas that require more than a common sense approach to learning, some will find the concept of referencing difficult to accept and grasp. In many instances, it challenges their established organization of thought on how they are allowed to engage with and acknowledge the work of a secondary source. An alteration of their existing paradigmatic position is required. The EAP module of the foundation programme is able to bridge the gap between their existing constructs and the anticipated academic skill set required at the undergraduate level.

By providing the appropriate pace and sequence of activities to practice referencing, teachers ensure that the content is manageable. A two-hour lecture on referencing as part of a twelve-week module is grossly inadequate. This skill has to be taught over the duration of the twelve-week module, with each successive week being used to check and reinforce previously taught concepts before moving on. This is necessary to ensure that the concept is being retained and that it will be integrated into other areas of knowledge acquisition as time passes. For example, if in the first lesson the concept being explored is the definition of referencing, and why it is important, before moving on to practicing referencing, it is vital that examples which highlight the particular convention be shown to the students either on an OHP, in print, or on the computer. One way to do this is to give students the nominal framework within which the terms associated with referencing can be established. For example moving from known language such as '*direct*' and '*reported speech*' to the more elusive terms used in referencing such as '*citation*' or '*indirect quotation,'* provides a linguistic map and direction through which learners can navigate this new territory of referencing. The teacher could also use this time to identify the layout and format of the examples, providing students with the appropriate labels for each section of the reference. In the next class it would be a logical progression to review the first lesson before asking students to complete an exercise in which they identify quotations and reference them using the information supplied by the teacher.

This transition from known to unknown material should be followed right through the term to ensure that students gain confidence in the use and application of referencing skills. Practice sessions in class should include:

- multiple choice quiz questions
- colour coding of references for different types of sources
- going through articles to find the in-text reference and matching it with the correct end-of-text reference
- asking students to correctly sequence the bibliographic details of a source
- peer review of writing samples with citations

These are all tasks that EAP teachers can actively use to support this paradigm shift toward established academic conventions of referencing which are counter-intuitive to the students' past experiences. This approach ensures that the components of the threshold concept of referencing are being used to scaffold the progression from theory to practice and then to mastery. The teacher is also creating an environment in which the student can demonstrate whether or not they are making the necessary transition from surface learning to deep learning, and whether or not the concept is being internalised.

Since the rules about referencing are not always consistent among the various information sources, and especially with the use of electronic sources, learning this concept has become even more problematic because students find the multiple formats bewildering. It is not really necessary to instruct EAP students on all the variations of referencing such as the

APA, MLA, Chicago, Vancouver, or Harvard styles. But it is helpful to mention the fact that various disciplines adhere to different referencing conventions, for example humanities use the MLA style, while natural and social science disciplines use APA. To reduce the inconsistency and to make the information more accessible for students, one referencing convention recommended by the university should be identified and taught because that is what is accepted in the undergraduate degree programmes. The subtle distinction among information sources about referencing different genres or text types should never be penalized, and students should be encouraged to maintain a focus on the larger issue of acknowledging their source rather than whether the date in the reference should be followed by a comma or full stop. In so doing, an EAP course reduces the problematic features of this threshold concept.

Hendricks and Quinn (2000) describe teaching referencing as "an introduction to epistemological empowerment." This means students will develop a level of confidence and individual control over their use, construction, and rationalization of knowledge. Students must understand the distinction between originality of thought and independent thinking i.e. drawing upon the broader contexts and implications of the issue under consideration, as well as using detailed knowledge, to make balanced judgments. Students should also be made aware that the demonstration of academic rigour in engaging the work of others and using their ideas to support personal thoughts is a validation of their own academic ability. These distinctions will make students become more confident and less fearful about the notion of referencing. To do this, EAP teachers must provide multiple opportunities and an environment in which students can explore and select relevant research material, distil material to support particular ideas, critically analyse the evidence cited, and identify and acknowledge the source of the evidence. In essence, this is the best way to teach citation and referencing.

To sum up, threshold concepts with their inherent transformative nature may be problematic for many students and teachers alike. However, the benefit of identifying in the curriculum what the threshold concepts should be and ensuring that they are taught using the best available strategies will yield far more benefit than a punitive or apathetic approach. Threshold concepts should be introduced for their value in being integrative, transferable, and irreversible. Over time, students will come to realize the benefits of these concepts to their lifelong learning. Teachers might initially find the focus on threshold concept a bit arduous to impart, but will soon realize that the long term benefits are worth the effort. If threshold concepts are used as a benchmark for certain modules, then teachers are better able to evaluate themselves and their students against these measures.

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Utilizing Fiction to Promote English Language Proficiency

Suhair Al Alami

Abstract

Towards the end of the university stage, students residing in the United Arab Emirates and specializing in subjects other than English are expected, in addition to other university requirements, to have acquired adequate communicative competence as well as a repertoire of critical thinking skills. Despite every effort made in the field of teaching English to EFL university students, the output gained in terms of acquired competencies and skills is still below requirements (Al Alami: 2008).

Seen from the researcher's point of view, literature plays an essential role in promoting EFL students' communicative competence and enhancing their critical thinking skills. It is, therefore, the aim of the current research to offer a solution to EFL university students' disappointing achievements, through proposing and presenting a fiction course: LEARN AND GAIN. As far as methodology is concerned, the paper is based upon empirical research, undertaken at the Al Ghurair University in Dubai, where the researcher works. The research has adopted a true experimental design, incorporating an experimental group and a control group.

In light of the results, findings are discussed and recommendations are made.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

The teaching of English in the United Arab Emirates is based upon the communicative approach, which aims at equipping students with sufficient communicative competence, so that in the long-run, they will employ language skills effectively for communication purposes, as required and desired. Personal experience and the researcher's colleagues' observations, however, show that the majority of EFL university students fail to achieve adequate communicative competence, which in turn does not qualify them to use English as required by their curricula as well as by today's world.

What are some of the major factors which inhibit EFL university students' progress in the areas of communication and critical thinking? Seen from the researcher's point of view, a variety of factors contribute, with the most prominent being students' insufficient exposure to literature courses.

Seeking an *effective* remedy, the researcher argues that utilizing literature in the EFL classroom would be beneficial in terms of many essential aspects. This belief is in harmony with many specialists' suggestions for utilizing literature to promote communication skills. McRae (2008), for example, believes that the use of stories in language teaching has an extremely positive effect in that stories encourage students to read for pleasure. Eager to know what will happen next, the reader remains interested and keeps reading. Hall (2007) states that in EFL as well as ESL contexts, utilizing literary texts can be seen as a means of promoting one's proficiency in vocabulary, reading, and growth. Processing literary texts is often considered difficult, yet worth the effort as a rich source of relevant language data from which one can acquire language. What is more, a growing interest in "affect" in second language acquisition proposes that pleasure and involvement, of the type that literary reading creates, can significantly contribute to language acquisition.

As far as utilizing novels for teaching purposes is concerned, Shaw (2007) discusses the rationale behind choosing a novel when dealing with EFL students. Accessibility of

language, the engaging and true-to-life nature of characters/relationships/events, developing imagination, visualizing settings and characters, as well as the fact that fiction is emotionally evocative, are amongst the most prominent reasons for utilizing a novel in EFL contexts.

It would be reasonable to conclude, then, that literature in EFL contexts plays an essential role in promoting language skills on the part of learners. The current study, as such, has sought to investigate the extent to which this viewpoint is valid and reliable, through presenting a fiction course, designed and implemented by the researcher. The proposed course is fiction-based language teaching, adopting the view that literature is a resource rather than an object in itself, thus advocating the use of literature as one of the main resources in foreign/second language acquisition (see Baba 2008).

2. Study Questions

The current study has sought convincing answers to the following enquiries.

Question One

What are the components and specifications of a fiction course, proposed for promoting EFL university students' communicative competence, and enhancing their critical thinking skills?

Question Two

To what extent is the proposed fiction course effective in promoting EFL university students' communicative competence, and enhancing their critical thinking skills?

Within these two major questions, the following sub-questions have been addressed to further investigate the main issues discussed in the current research.

I. What differences are there between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative critical reading competence post-test?

II. What differences are there between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative critical writing competence post-test?

111. What differences are there between the experimental group students' performance on the communicative critical reading competence pre-post test?

IV. What differences are there between the experimental group students' performance on the communicative critical writing competence pre-post test?

V. What differences are there between the performance of male subjects and that of female subjects, on the communicative critical reading competence post-test?

VI. What differences are there between the performance of male subjects and that of female subjects, on the communicative critical writing competence post-test?

VII. What differences are there between the performance of subjects belonging to colleges of science and that of subjects belonging to non-science colleges, on the communicative critical reading competence post-test?

VIII. What differences are there between the performance of subjects enrolled in colleges of science and that of subjects enrolled in non-science colleges, on the communicative critical writing competence post-test?

3. Statistical Treatment

For the purpose of gathering sufficient data about subjects' achievements on the pre-post tests, the following statistical tests were conducted: the *Mann-Whitney Test* and the *Paired Data t-test*. The *Mann-Whitney test* was used to examine the first, second, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth questions mentioned above, while the *Paired Data t-test* was used to examine the third and fourth questions mentioned above.

4. Study Population, Sample, and Setting

The study population is EFL university students residing in the UAE and specializing in subjects other than English. The sample is a number of first-year students studying at Al Ghurair University in Dubai where the researcher works. Piloting the study took place during the first and second semesters of the academic year 2008-2009, with two different groups of the same language proficiency level, upper intermediate English. Conducting the experimental study took place during the first and second semesters of the academic year 2009-2010, with two different experimental groups and two different control groups of the same language proficiency level, upper intermediate English.

5. Study Variables

The experimental and control groups included males and females, some enrolled in non-science colleges and some enrolled in colleges of sciences. The study variables can be summed up as follows:

- Independent variable: the proposed course: **LEARN AND GAIN.**
- Dependent variable: students' achievement on the communicative critical competence pre-post test.
- Moderator variables: gender- male/female, college- science/non-science.

6. Conduct of the Study

Seeing the proposed fiction course as her "*newly born academic baby*," the overriding question which the researcher has always raised, is: 'Why do I implement what I implement the way I implement it?' To ensure quality implementation, therefore, the researcher herself conducted the study in her workplace: Al Ghurair University in Dubai, UAE. The experimental group students were taught the proposed course while the control group students were taught a general English course. To measure treatment effectiveness, the researcher conducted a pre-post test involving the two groups (see *appendix one*). The pre-post test was administered to the experimental and control groups, prior to and following implementation. Incorporating two parts, communicative critical reading competence and communicative critical writing competence, the test aimed to investigate whether or not the proposed course was of any significant effectiveness whilst at the same time examining the effects of the other variables involved, gender and college types. In short, the test was mainly concerned with measuring critical reading and writing skills.

7. The Proposed Course in Perspective

Initiating a slogan *"love it, live it" the* proposed course, **LEARN AND GAIN**, includes fifteen short stories and two novels, chosen to illustrate various modes of narration as well as a variety of settings, characters, and plots, as well as to provoke reflection and

discussion on a range of issues. All texts illustrate how great writers can, through their insight and gift for words, help us to see the world we live in, in new, probing and exciting ways.

What characterizes the proposed course, the researcher believes, is the integration of the skills of literary competence, communicative competence, and critical thinking within the same mould. This essentially combined input incorporates the two receptive skills of listening and reading, and the two productive skills of speaking and writing. Section eight describes the proposed course in relation to the general aims and main targets, content organization, and teaching approaches.

7.1 The Proposed Course: General Aims and Main Targets

Upon the completion of the proposed course, learners are expected to:

- read to find and handle information for a range of purposes, as well as to enjoy and respond to a variety of texts.
- write for a range of purposes, to convey meaning in language appropriate to purpose and audience.

Learners are required to develop their abilities in reading critically. In so doing, they should be able to:

- distinguish facts, opinions, and reasoned justifications.
- grasp implied feelings, opinions, and attitudes.
- deduce the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items from context.
- make judgments based upon personal knowledge and experience.
- recognize the effectiveness of employing literary devices for appreciation purposes.

Moreover, learners are required to improve their abilities in writing critically. In so doing, they should be able to:

- write coherent pieces of written discourse.
- utilize cohesive devices in a written piece appropriately.
- employ literary techniques in writing effectively.

7.2 The Proposed Course: Content Organization

LEARN AND GAIN is comprised of seven main sections:

- warm-*up,* including two activities-brainstorming and advanced organizers;
- *reading in action,* including five sub-stages as you read: finding out, keeping track, close study, reader's response, and follow-up activities;
- *language practice,* including three areas-word finder, grammar focus, and literary qualities;
- *oral production,* including a variety of oral language activities such as debates, interviews, and role-play;
- *writer's workshop,* including four substages: brainstorming, drafting, proofreading, and editing;
- *self evaluation,* including a self-assessment checklist;
- *building up a portfolio,* including project work activities (see *appendix two*).

7.3 The Proposed Course: Teaching Approaches

The proposed course adopts an eclectic approach, thus selecting what would be appropriate for a particular teaching situation. Aiming to integrate language, literature, communication, and critical thinking within one frame to ensure better academic outcomes, the *communicative critical language competence approach* has been proposed and initiated by the researcher. The approach is based on a number of previous approaches related to the areas involved. The linking of the language of linguistics, the analysis of literary texts, the skills of communication and interaction, and the skills of critical thinking is essentially the domain of this approach. Within this domain, listeners and speakers, readers and writers, are all partners. Of paramount concern for this approach is the impact a literary text has on learners as listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. An aesthetic response is conceived in terms of interaction between a text and a learner.

The prerequisites for the effective study of a literary text can be summarized as follows: capacity for sustainable attention; willingness to entertain risks rather than avoid them; tolerance for mistaken responses; paradox, and uncertainty; flexibility and openness to diverse cultures and views; and appreciation of literary techniques. Whilst dealing with a literary text, the following analyses are proposed:

- Conceptual analysis: analysis of major elements of a text, such as theme and characterization
- Comparative analysis: seeking similarities in texts of the same genre, theme, setting and so on
- Contrastive analysis: identifying differences amongst texts considering areas such as genre, theme, setting, style, and so on
- Critical analysis: judgments reflecting upon stated or implied main points/views

To end with, the approach assumes that it can serve four aims: mastering language skills, acquiring communication competencies, appreciating literary techniques, and meeting critical thinking requirements.

8. Study Findings

As mentioned earlier, *question one* has been stated as follows: What are the components and specifications of a fiction course, proposed for promoting EFL university students' communicative competence, and enhancing their critical thinking skills? To gain a deep insight into what could make up the components and specifications of such a challenging course, the researcher sought the wealth of knowledge offered by authors' writings within the pertinent literature. Reading through many valuable references, **LEARN AND GAIN** has been designed for study purposes.

As explained previously, *question two* has been stated as follows: To what extent is the proposed fiction course effective in promoting EFL university students' communicative competence, and enhancing their critical thinking skills? In an aim to investigate *question two* thoroughly, a number of sub-questions have been derived, each of which deals with one particular area. Based on the statistical treatment conducted for study purposes, the following results have been arrived at:

- There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative critical reading competence post-test, in favor of the experimental group.

- There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative critical writing competence post-test, in favor of the experimental group.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group students' performance on the communicative critical reading competence pre-test and the communicative critical reading competence post-test, in favor of the post-test.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group students' performance on the communicative critical writing competence pre-test and the communicative critical writing competence post-test, in favor of the post-test.
- There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of male subjects and that of female subjects, on the communicative critical reading competence post-test.
- There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of male subjects and that of female subjects, on the communicative critical writing competence post-test.
- There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of subjects enrolled in colleges of science and that of subjects enrolled in non-science colleges, on the communicative critical reading competence post-test.
- There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of subjects enrolled in colleges of science and that of subjects enrolled in non-science colleges, on the communicative critical writing competence post-test.

The answer to the second question therefore is: The proposed fiction course **LEARN AND GAIN** has been significantly effective in promoting EFL university students' communicative competence and enhancing their critical thinking skills.

9. Recommendations for EFL Practitioners to Consider

To begin with, utilizing literary pieces in the contexts of EFL/ESL would be of great value in terms of many aspects, such as developing language skills, promoting communication competencies, raising cultural awareness, and enhancing critical thinking. Concerned mainly with promoting *communicative critical reading competence* and *communicative critical writing competence* in EFL/ESL contexts, the second recommendation stresses the role literary texts play in this regard. For EFL/ESL students to acquire adequate *communicative critical reading/writing competence*, the third recommendation points out the instructor's role in this regard. The instructor should no longer be the unquestionable authority in class. His/her role is that of a catalyst, a coordinator, and a facilitator rather than that of a director or a dominator. As far as the selection of appropriate instructional approaches is concerned, the fourth recommendation is to adopt an eclectic approach. Each approach has its positive, and possibly, negative effects under certain circumstances. Depending on the given teaching circumstances, the instructor has to respond thoughtfully and wisely.

10. Closing Word

The current research has been of use to the researcher as well as to the study field, in the sense that the researcher has investigated a problematic issue and initiated a remedy which has yielded some fruitful results within the field concerned. To end with, it is hoped that the current research will serve as a model for EFL practitioners to benefit from.

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How Teachers Implement and Make Sense of ELT Curriculum Innovations

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Abstract

This paper examines three teachers' implementation of the English language curriculum in Libyan secondary schools and compares their implementation to what was recommended by this curriculum innovation. It also sheds light on how teachers' beliefs influenced the way teachers implemented and made sense of this curriculum. Data collection methods consisted of classroom observations in which audio recordings of the teachers' actual classroom practices were obtained, and follow-up interviews in which teachers commented on their classroom practices and revealed the beliefs which underlie these practices. The analysis of the data pointed to a limited uptake of the curriculum by these teachers. The interviews with the teachers shed light on the tensions between teachers' actual classroom practices and the intentions of the curriculum. This study illustrates the value of studying what teachers do, while implementing educational innovations, and how their beliefs influence the way teachers interpret and implement these educational innovations.

Introduction

This paper examines teachers' implementation of the English language curriculum in secondary schools in Libya and sheds light on the beliefs which underlie teachers' practices. Although this English language curriculum was introduced in Libya in 2000, there has been little attention paid to how teachers have implemented this curriculum. This lack of attention to how teachers implement curriculum innovation is not unusual; as Carless (2004) has noted, "how teachers implement changes in pedagogy is an important area which does not receive sufficient attention" (p. 640).

Following the introduction of this curriculum, several concerns were raised about its implementation. In my informal discussion with different Libyan educational officials, they often blamed teachers for not being able to teach this curriculum. On the other hand, teachers often raised the concern that they face obstacles during the implementation of this curriculum.

As an ELT educator in the Libyan context, I became interested in looking at what actually happens inside the classrooms. I felt that teachers' voices need to be heard, and that an investigation of teachers' beliefs which influence their implementation of the curriculum is needed. I believe that such an investigation could have significant implications for ELT in Libya and elsewhere.

Besides my personal interest in the topic, the literature suggests that curriculum planners and educational policy makers often focus on the planning and initiation issues, ignoring the dilemmas and obstacles that might evolve during the actual implementation (Markee, 1997), and that little attention has been paid to how teachers implement changes in pedagogy (Carless, 2004). Therefore, investigating how teachers' beliefs influence the way they carry out ELT curricula innovations in classrooms will offer insights for curriculum developers, policy makers, change agents, and teacher educators. As Ramanathan & Morgan (2007) suggest, "research on individual beliefs, everyday contexts, and practices, casts an instructive light on potential obstacles to policy initiatives and reforms" (p. 449).

Research Methodology

Given the crucial role of the teachers in the implementation of educational innovations, this study aimed to provide a picture of how three teachers of English implemented the English language curriculum in Libya. More specifically, this study investigated the characteristics of these teachers' practices, and the extent to which these practices were congruent with the methodological principles endorsed by this curriculum. It also shed light on the rationales and factors which had an impact on these teachers' practices.

In order to identify the characteristics of these teachers' work, I conducted classroom observations over a period of two weeks for each teacher. The teachers were observed while teaching lessons from the second secondary curriculum (textbooks). To maximize the accuracy of the data collected, and hence their descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1996), the lessons observed were audio-recorded, using a digital mp3 voice recorder. During classroom observations, I also took field notes to complement the recorded data.

The observational data provided a detailed account of the work which characterized the teachers' practices during the lessons I observed and showed the extent to which these practices reflected the curriculum principles. The observational data were fully transcribed to get a detailed account of the teachers' practices. Each teacher was given a copy of his/her transcribed lessons and given the opportunity to comment on these lessons.

However, a description of classroom observations alone does not allow us to understand why teachers implement curricula in particular ways. Borg (2006) argues that "observation on its own…provides an inadequate basis for the study of what teachers think, know, and believe. Researchers may draw inferences about cognition from what is observed, but verification for these must be sought through further sources of data" (p. 247).

Reflecting these concerns, this study not only focused on what teachers did, but also on the factors behind their actions. In order to gain access to the beliefs and factors which underlie teachers' practices, I conducted two follow-up semi-structured interviews with each teacher. During these interviews, teachers commented on what they were doing, explained the rationale for their actions, and identified the different factors which underlie their classroom practices. I now proceed to present the findings of this study.

Curriculum principles and teachers' practices

As mentioned earlier, classroom observations provided me with detailed accounts of the work which characterized the teachers' practices and showed the extent to which these practices reflected the principles of the curriculum.

Although there were some aspects of the curriculum which were implemented as intended, teachers' practices in most cases did not reflect the principles of the intended curriculum. Thus, although one of the curriculum aims is "for the students to communicate effectively and fluently with each other and to make talking in English a regular activity" (MacFarlane, 2000, p. 3), classrooms were generally teacher-centered and Arabic was the dominant language during classroom interaction.

During the reading lessons, teachers spent substantial time reading word by word and sentence by sentence, explaining vocabulary, translating into Arabic, and reading aloud. Little attention was paid to activities included in the curriculum such as working out the meaning of the words from the context, scanning the reading text for specific information, matching activities, and the after-reading activities. Grammar items were taught in discrete activities without developing students' abilities to use the grammar for communicative purposes.

A similar pattern was evident in the teaching of speaking and listening. Activities, which aimed to give the students a chance to speak the target language, were either omitted completely or talked through by the teachers, with little student involvement. Pair work

activities (a core component of the curriculum) were either skipped or carried out at the class level between the teacher and the students. The listening activities, which were designed to enhance the students' skills of prediction and listening for the gist and to develop their confidence and competence in comprehension, were omitted altogether by all three teachers.

Factors influencing teachers' practices

During these interviews teachers reflected upon their own practices and articulated both the beliefs and rationale, which had an impact on their classroom practices. In this section, I will discuss these influences and in doing so shed light on why teachers' practices and curricular principles are not aligned.

Beliefs about teaching reading

The curriculum encourages purposeful reading activities such as skimming, scanning, matching, and working out the meaning from the context. In fact, one of the principles which underlies the teaching of reading is that "it is possible to understand the gist of the text without having understood every word" (MacFarlane, 2000, p. 3). The beliefs about teaching reading which teachers expressed during the interviews were at odds with the curriculum's approach to this aspect of language teaching.

A common belief among the teachers in this study was that the goal of reading is to develop accurate pronunciation. There was little evidence in the teachers' comments that they were aware of the communicative orientation towards teaching reading embedded in the curriculum.

Beliefs about the use of L1

One aim of the curriculum is "to make talking in English a regular activity" (English for Libya, 2000, p. 5). However, as noted above, classroom interaction in the classes observed for this study was dominated by the use of Arabic. One factor behind this frequent use of Arabic was teachers' views about the status of English. Two teachers felt that English is just a school subject, and that students do not need to use English outside the class. Clearly, this belief is not in line with the philosophy which underlies the curriculum. While the curriculum aims to make talking in English a regular activity, teachers tend to omit the activities which are designed to achieve this aim on the assumption that the students do not need to use English in real life.

Beliefs about the roles of teachers and students

When teachers talked about the rationales and the beliefs which underlie their classroom instructions, they revealed conceptions of the roles of teachers and students which are not in line with those implied in the curriculum. Overall, teachers reported that students' come to the classroom expecting the teacher to do everything for them, and that the students' role is to sit and listen to what the teachers say.

It is worth mentioning that such expectations are prevalent within the Libyan school curriculum and are not limited to the English language curriculum. Teachers within the Libyan educational culture are often regarded as the source of knowledge, and their role is seen to consist of imparting this knowledge to students. Students often assume that their role is to sit quietly and to memorize the information imparted by the teachers.

Beliefs about error correction

Although the curriculum considers making mistakes to be a normal part of the language learning process and suggests that teachers should not correct too much in order to encourage fluency and confidence, classroom observations showed that teachers spent

considerable time on correcting students' grammatical and pronunciation mistakes. When teachers talked about the rationales for these practices, they revealed beliefs which conflict with the curriculum's recommendations regarding the process of correcting mistakes. All teachers insisted that it is very important to correct students' grammatical and pronunciation mistakes immediately because if the teacher does not do so, students will keep making the same mistakes.

Discussion

As mentioned previously, teachers' practices in this study deviated considerably from those recommended by the curriculum. The fact that curriculum innovations may not be implemented as intended is a phenomenon which is widely noted within the wider ELT teaching literature. (e.g, Gorsuch, 2000; Karavas-Doukas,1998; Li; 2001; Nunan, 2003). However, as Frechtling (2000) argues "it is essential not only to observe instruction, but also to talk to teachers about their instructional decisions" (p. 281). During the interviews, teachers expressed a range of beliefs about the process of language teaching and learning which may help us understand why their practices did not reflect those suggested by the curriculum. I now proceed to discuss the crucial role of teachers' beliefs in determining how teachers implement curriculum innovations.

Teachers' beliefs and curriculum implementation

Clearly, the findings emerging from this study point to the crucial role of teachers' beliefs in shaping how they interpreted and implemented the curriculum. Teachers' practices clearly reflected deeply held beliefs about the process of language teaching and learning that were contrary to those embedded in the curriculum. This implies the need to realize that teachers are not only implementers of policies that are handed down to them by educational policy makers.

Educational policy makers and curriculum planners need to recognize that teachers interpret, filter, modify, and implement the curriculum depending on their beliefs and the context in which the curriculum innovation is being implemented (Borg, 2006). The importance of teachers' beliefs has been stressed by Tudor (2001) who argues:

> Teachers cannot be taken for granted or viewed simply as skilled technicianswho dutifully realize a given set of teaching in accordance with the directive of a more or less distant authority. Teachers are active participants in the creation of classroom realities, and they act in light of their own beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the relevant teaching situation. (p. 16)

Handal and Herrington (2003) also stress the central role of the teachers in implementing the curriculum, and call on policy makers to take teachers' attitudes and perceptions into account:

> Policy makers should no longer assume that curriculum implementation is a process that translates directly into the classroom reality. Teachers are those who ultimately decide the fate of any educational enterprise. Consequently teachers' attitudes, feelings, and perceptions must be recognized well before the launching of any innovation. Likely discrepancies between teachers' opinions and ideas underpinning a curriculum innovation need to be identified, analyzed, and addressed. (p. 65)

Such discrepancies clearly exist in the context under study here. The new English curriculum in Libya was introduced without consideration of teachers' prior experience, existing beliefs,

and the kinds of support teachers need to understand, accept, and implement this curriculum as intended. It is worth mentioning that teachers in this study were simply given briefing sessions about the new curriculum, and they were asked to implement it.

Thus, in the absence of adequate teacher training, teachers may rely on their prior beliefs and experience in interpreting the new curriculum. This in turn may have contributed to the mismatch between what the curriculum aims to achieve and what actually happens inside the classroom. Spillane (2002) reflects on the influence of teacher's prior beliefs and experience when he writes:

> Teachers' prior beliefs and practices can pose challenges not only because teachers are unwilling to change in the direction of the policy but also because their extant understandings may interfere with their ability to interpret and implement the reform in ways consistent with the designers' intent. (p. 378)

The above discussion leads us to consider the influence of teachers' prior experience and existing beliefs on how they implement the curriculum. This implies that we cannot expect teachers to completely abandon their accustomed ways of teaching and accept unfamiliar approaches to English language teaching. This in turn requires that any teacher training programs need to make links between the newly proposed practices and teachers' prior experience and existing beliefs (Wedell, 2005).

In fact, teachers may not be aware of the influence of their previous experience and their existing beliefs on their classroom practices. Therefore, it is the responsibility of teacher training and development programs to provide teachers with opportunities to uncover their beliefs and reflect upon their classroom practices. As Roehrig (2007) states, "it is through exploring teachers' actual classroom practices and the beliefs and knowledge that support or constrain these practices that more targeted professional development can be implemented" (p. 23).

Conclusion and implications

This research paper examined three teachers' implementation of the English language curriculum in Libyan secondary schools. It also shed light on the beliefs which influenced how teachers implemented and made sense of this curriculum. The observational data showed that teachers' practices deviated considerably from those recommended by the curriculum. The interviews with the teachers revealed the beliefs and factors which led to this incongruence between teachers' practices and the curriculum principles.

Although the research studied only three teachers, my experience of the Libyan educational context gives me the confidence to suggest that the findings that emerged from this study are relevant to an understanding of what happens in secondary English classrooms in Libya more generally. Thus, this study suggests several implications for English language teaching in Libya, and elsewhere.

First, it is vital for educational policy makers to understand that curriculum innovation not only means introducing a new set of textbooks, but it also implies a change in the way teachers behave and think. Second, educational officials need to realize that in order for the intentions of any English language curriculum to be implemented effectively, teachers need the skills and knowledge which enable them to cope with the demands of this curriculum. Finally, educational officials need to examine what the requirements embodied within the intended curriculum imply for teachers' classroom practices. We cannot simply ask teachers to implement a curriculum innovation without looking at what this curriculum innovation requires teachers to do.

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Developing Dynamic Classroom Interaction through Reading Circles

Susanne Rizzo

Abstract

Many students do not like to read in their native language let alone in a foreign one. Motivating students to read, building confidence in their reading proficiency and getting students to discuss what they have read are a constant challenge for instructors, especially in an EFL setting. Research has shown literature circles to be an effective way to combine cooperative learning, independent reading and quality group discussion—all important aspects of communicative language teaching (Boyd & Maloof 2000; Langer 2002; Marzano, Pickering & Pollack 2001; Daniels 1994). Literature circles are small groups of students that have previously chosen the material they wish to read and then meet to discuss their selected reading. Each member has a specific role to play in their discussion group. This paper will describe how to adapt this useful strategy to fit university EFL textbooks.

Much research has been conducted on literature circles as an effective strategy for increasing literacy for both L1 and L2 learners, including English Language learners (Daniels, 2002; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000; Dupuy, 1997;) . As defined by Harvey Daniels (1994):

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with notes needed to help perform that job. The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session. When they finish a book, the circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the wider community; then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading, and move into a new cycle. Once readers can successfully conduct their own wide-ranging, self-sustaining discussions, formal discussion role sheets may be dropped. (p.13)

Daniels' (1994) framework basically took the adult book dissussion model and adjusted it for the K-12 setting.

For L1 learners, the research suggests improvement in expressing and supporting their opinions (Jewell & Pratt, 1999) and using multiple viewpoints to understand the text in addition to the reading itself (Lehman & Scharer, 1996; Long & Porter, 1985). Additional positive effects include: increasing students' comprehension, enjoyment and interest in reading; their becoming more emotionally involved in the text; and students having opportunities to share their thoughts without there being one correct answer (Farnan, 1986; Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Monson 1986; Eeds & Wells, 1989). Similar effects can be found with second language learners both in younger children and older adults. (Ali, 1993; Boyd and Maloof, 2000; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000). With English language learners, research conducted by Peralt-Nash & Dutch (2000) proposes that the literature circle is a more comfortable experience as it is student-, rather than teacher- directed. The level of risk is influential in the ability to learn a second language.

The advantages provided by literature circles are substantial. Vygotsky (1978) posited that students who are in control of their own learning, have become aware of their own needs, and work together with better-skilled peers and adults, will have more effective learning. In

addition, the research by Brabham & Villaume (2000) and Peralta-Nash & Dutch (2000) indicates that competent readers understand more than just words: they are able to connect the text to their own life experiences and experiences with other texts that the other members of the same learning community can recognize. Thus, the literature circle is a place where students construct meaning through personalizing the reading, listening to others' interpretations, and making observations about their own learning in the sharing and disscussing of information. These then take students' understanding to a deeper level and create a more pleasurable learning experience.

What is unique about literature circles is the role aspect. Having roles helps to focus the reading (Burns, 1998; Daniels, 1994; Peterson & Belizaire, 2006). This is especially helpful to L2 learners as it increases "quality talk" in that their discussions are meaningful and develop critical thinking skills (Latendresse, 2004; Long & Gove, 2003; Sandmann &Gruhler, 2007). This quality talk is thought to be crucial to language development because learners are communicating in the L2 as they acquire it (Lantolf, 1994; Pica 1987, 1991; Pica *et.al*, 1987; Porter, 1986, Swain, 1985). The division into roles makes the learning cooperative, includes independent reading (Anderson, Wilson, & Feilding, 1988) and develops oral adeptness through group discusion. Independent reading has been linked with reading success. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that social environments give learners the chance to witness higher level thinking. Literature circles provide this organized social context. Learners can observe how their group members collaborate to create meaning while also being participants themselves. It provides a framework to interact socially. They gain confidence and increase their level of comfort in expressing their ideas and defending their opinions.

Rationale for Use with Textbooks

While traditionally literature circles have been used with fiction, the incoporation of nonfiction has delivered similar positive outcomes (Miller, Straits, Kucan, Trathen & Dass, 2007; Stein & Breed, 2004; Straits & Nichols, 2006) Experts feel that a logical transition from fiction to nonfiction would begin with historical fiction followed by biographies (Stein & Breid, 2004). In addition, the literature circle strategy can be adjusted to meet different learning contexts. For example, it has been adapted to improve vocabulary in content courses (Miller, et al., 2007) and to focus on science material in novels (Straits & Nichols, 2006). In my own teaching experience in both reading skills courses and integrated skills courses in Turkey and Macau, I adapted this strategy for outside reading, with students choosing their own newspaper or magazine article, and have had encouraging results.

With the support of research for literature circles for L1 and L2 learners and my personal experience using this strategy in an EFL setting, I wanted to apply the versatility that literature circles offer to course textbooks. The students who take courses at the English Language Centre at the University of Macau are passive learners who are given limited opportunities and training to develop critical thinking. They also lack the interaction necessary to develop strong speaking and listening skills. With the literature circle and its strong foundation of cooperation, enhanced critical thinking, and improved oral proficiency for the delivery and justication of opinions, it became clear that this strategy would be most applicable for our students to make them more active learners. It would also make our textbook, *Academic Encounters: Human Behaviors,* more interactive-- what our students need for improved levels of critical thinking, speaking, and listening. A fellow teacher, Teresa Lacuna, and I took the idea of literature circle and adapted it, calling it a reading circle since the readings in our textbook are not literature. For the roles and process, we followed

the strategy of "Textmasters"(Wilfong, 2009) and drew upon my previous experience conducting reading circles using newspaper and magazine articles. We felt these changes were necessary for our intermediate integrated skills course in which students are studying English as a foreign language. We decided that we would divide the class into groups of five. The groups would consist of these five roles: group mediator, vocabulary enhancer, comprehension questioner, personal connector, and summarizer. These roles helped develop skills for our course objectives in reading, writing, listening, speaking and critical thinking skills. Each role required that the student individually prepare a guidesheet before the reading circle day. On the reading circle day, the students shared the information they prepared beforehand as well as collected information from the group. The group mediators started the group discussion and made sure all the members had an opportunity to share and collect information. The vocabulary enhancers shared new or important words they had looked up and wanted to discuss in the group and then, together with the group, they chose three more words. The vocabulary enhancers then recorded these words on their guidesheets. The comprehension questioners created fact-based and open-ended opinion questions (with an answer key) to check their groups' understanding of the text. After going through their questions, the group created three more questions and recorded them on the guidesheet. The personal connectors shared what they had written about an experience that was related to the reading and then asked their group members to describe theirs. As a group, they chose one member's experience to record on the guidesheet. Finally, the summarizers shared the summary for their part of the reading. With their group, they wrote a summary together about the last part. The group mediators offered some final thoughts and closed the discussion. Each group submitted their role sheets, which were then marked. During the discussion, we encouraged the students to not just read from the sheets when giving the information they had prepared before class; we wanted them to work on having a conversation and discussion. This was part of the mark for this assignment. We also assessed them on the following: completeness of each role worksheet, both individual and group; the quality of discussion; and the quality of written work (a sample grading rubric is provided).

In my observations of the groups during the reading circle day, the students were actively speaking, listening and involved. I was impressed with the amount of English the was being used to negotiate meaning. They asked each other thoughtful questions and really enjoyed talking about their personal connection to the reading.

After the reading circle day, the students completed a reflection about the experience. The students had mostly positive reactions. For example, one student indicated, "I can learn English with other[s] so that I won't misunderstand the context of the article. Also, under the cooperation with classmates we strenghten the relationship with each other." Another indicated, "It's happy that all of us have contribute[d] to the tasks and have clear tasks and duties on our teamworks. Listening to others is very important as one of [the] communication skills." Even those who indicated that it was challenging still felt that overall it benefited them saying, "I think the reading is very difficult. Before this activity, I had not been been clear what the reading is talking about. When I was talking to a group member, we discuss the reading and then I can really know what the reading is talking about." Thus, for the students at Macau, the reading circle is an effective strategy which provides the interaction necessary for building critical thinking, speaking, and listening skills. This strategy is one that will be continued. The following includes a a detailed description of the roles and process used as well as the sample text, assignment sheet, role sheets, and grading rubric.

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ROLES

Group Mediator

The group mediator is in charge of creating general questions about the topic for the group to answer, continuing the discussion using transitional phrases, and keeping the group on track by making sure that each member has a chance to present and gather the necessary information (watching the time).

Vocabulary Enhancer

The vocabulary enhancer chooses important words from the reading to share with the group. After sharing the words during the reading circle, the vocabulary enhancer asks the groups for other words that the members found difficult and collects them. A list of vocabulary words for the test can be developed for additional practice and review activities.

Comprehension Questioner

The comprehension questioner creates questions to check the group members' understanding of the key concepts in the reading. The questions should be a mixture of "Wh-" and Y/N questions. The comprehension questioner provides an answer key on the back of the question sheet so that students cannot see it until after they have tried to answer the questions. When formulating the questions, the teacher directs the students to the question types from the reading textbook on p. 8 - Type 1. 2 and 3 questions (first semester).

Type 1: questions about the data (WH-questions).
Type 2: questions that develop concepts from the data (discuss, identify relationships between the data, compare and contrast)
Type 3: questions that call for critical judgment (evaluate, rank, assess parts of the data and justify your answer)

Personal Connector

The personal connector reflects on the reading and tries to see how the reading relates to his/her life. He/she thinks about a specific experience that happened to him/her directly or to someone he/she knows. The personal connector writes down that experience to share with the group. He/she makes it as detailed as possible. After sharing with the group, he/she asks the other group members to share their experiences. As a group, they select one and the personal connector writes it down.

Summarizer

The summarizer is responsible for identifying the main ideas of the text and summarizing them using the format for writing a summary: the inclusion of main points and the exclusion of unnecessary details and examples, written in the student's own words (except for technical vocabulary), having a topic sentence, including transitional expressions, **not** including the student's personal opinion, and including the author's name and source During the reading

circle, the summarizer shares the summary and then asks the group to change or add to any of the information presented and collects that information. A final, agreed-upon summary of the reading passage will be turned in. If the reading is divided into sections, the summarizer summarizes each section, leaving the last section to be completed by the group.

OTHER POSSIBLE ROLES

Visualizer

The visualizer identifies the important information from the reading and then organizes and presents it pictorially (drawn, images from the Internet or a graphic organizer). During the reading circle, the visualizer explains the visual representation, answers questions from the other members, and has the group members guess some of the concepts from the reading. A group negotiated and agreed upon picture representation will be turned in.

Paraphraser

The paraphraser's role is to help group members understand important concepts from the reading by putting the ideas into his/her own words. The paraphraser chooses some important sentences from the reading to put into his/her own words. During the reading circle, the group members examine the prepared paraphrases, offer suggestions, and then, as a group, choose several more sentences to paraphrase together.

Note-taker

The role of the note taker is to identify the main points in the reading and take notes on them to share with his/her classmates. This will help the group to review important information from the reading. In note taking, the note taker should use abbreviations (shortened form of the word) and symbols. He/she may use mapping or another form of taking notes. The note taker takes notes from the introduction and first three sections of the reading. From his/her notes, the note taker creates three comprehension questions to ask the group members. The note taker should remember to write the answers on the back.

On the reading circle day, with your group members, the note taker takes notes for the last three sections. He/she should use abbreviations and symbols that he/she will remember, and then create two more comprehension questions with the group members, remembering to write the answers on the back.

Investigator

The investigator chooses a concept, organization, person, or location mentioned in the reading and does research to find out more about it. The investigator then writes a brief summary about what he/she has learned, to share with the group. In the summary, the author and source information should be included as well as a topic sentence, main ideas, and transitions. The investigator should include his/her opinion about what he/she found. During the reading circle the investigator shares his/her investigation and then asks the group's opinion about it and writes it down.

PROCESS

A. Preparation Stage

Students can either choose groups and roles or be assigned by the instructor. Once the groups and roles have been decided, the group member receives the worksheet guide for the chosen role. Students read the text and complete the worksheet guide for the role. Each worksheet guide has a section that the group member completes individually before the day of the reading circle and another section to collect additional information from the group members during the reading circle. (See the chart at the end for an example)

B. *Reading Circle Day (In class)*
C. For the day of the reading the circle, the time allotted is up to the teacher. It depends on length of text and how involved he/she makes the roles. It has taken me 50-60 minutes at least

Students:
On the day of the reading circle, the group mediator begins and directs each role to first share what he/she has individually prepared and then gather the required information from the group. Each student collects and writes down the group information on his/her role sheet. (See the chart at the end for an example.) At the end of the class, each student should have his/her name on the role sheet and then staple the group's role sheets along with the group rubric (all group member names) on top.

Instructors:
On the day of the reading circle, before the students get into their groups, the instructor tells the students that their role sheet is to be used for reference as they share what they have individually prepared. Instructors should have students make eye contact with their group members and not just read off their sheets or put their sheets in the middle of the group for the group members to read.

During the reading circle day, the instructor walks around and observes each group making notes on what they should improve on for the next time. The instructor should focus on whether each person had his/her worksheet completed and how each person communicated his/her information and then gathered the group information. The instructor should also watch the group mediators and how they manage their groups.

If the class does not divide evenly by five, the instructor should have one person be the group mediator in addition to his/her chosen role and give him/her extra participation points for being willing to be the group mediator as well.

D. Post-Reading Circle Activity (if time allows)

The instructor has the students create a skit, game, or other activity in which they can demonstrate their understanding of the text and review the information for the test.

This strategy has been adapted from Wilfong, L.G. (2009, October). Textmasters: Bringing Literature Circles to Textbook Reading across the Curriculum. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53(2), 164–171. doi: 10.1598/JAAL.53.2.7

There is an additional explanation of how this strategy was carried out and sample role sheet available at http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/textmasters-shaking-textbook-reading-1180.html?tab=3#tabs

Example for *Universals of Nonverbal Communication* (Unit 4, Chapter 7 pp. 135-137)
Academic Encounters: Human Behavior Reading Text
Groups consist of students A, B, C, D and E.
Each student takes a separate role in exploring the reading.

Role	Preparation (Role Sheet Individual)	Reading Circle Day	Post Reading Circle
A. Group Mediator (white paper)	• **Comes up with general questions about the topic** • **Lists useful expression to keep discussion going**	• **Begins the Reading Circle** • **Makes sure all members present and gather group information** • **Keeps time** • **Keeps discussion going**	**Turns in role sheet with the questions (answers written down)and expressions used checked off**
B. Vocabulary Enhancer (yellow paper)	**Chooses 7 words and include:** • **Word** • **Word stress** • **Definition (own words)** • **2 examples of usage** • **2 synonyms** • **1 antonym (if possible)**	• **With group, chooses 3 more words** • **Adds the words to his/her sheet with the same information**	**Turns in role sheet with both individual and group work (total of 10 words)**
C. Comprehension Questioner (green paper)	• **Creates 7 comprehension questions (mixture of WH and Y/N questions –refer students to Type 1, 2, and 3 questions in reading textbook p. 8)**	• **Quizzes group members** • **Checks answers at end** • **Creates 3 more questions with group writes them on sheet and puts**	**Turns in role sheet with both individual and group work (total of 10 comprehension questions and**

Role	Preparation (Role Sheet Individual)	Reading Circle Day	Post Reading Circle
	• Provides answers on back of the sheet	answers on the back	answers)
D. Personal Connector (beige paper)	• Thinks about a personal experience that relates to the reading and writes it down.	• Shares the personal experience with the group • Asks group members to share their personal experiences • Chooses one of the member's experiences and writes it down	Turns in role sheet with both individual and group works (total of 2 personal connections)
E. Summarizer (blue paper)	For first four sections: • Writes a 3-4 sentence summary for each section • Includes, a topic sentence, main ideas, transitions, source name and author, and no personal opinions	• Shares summary of 4 sections and asks for additions from group • Group summarizes 5th (last) section together and the summarizer writes it down	Turns in role sheet with both the individual and group work (total of 5 section summaries)

See PDF file for sample text, assignment, roles sheets and grading rubric.

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