Best Practice in ELT: Voices from the Classroom

Edited by Christine Coombe & Rubina Khan

TESOL Arabia
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Introduction

This volume is a labour of love by two partner TA organizations, TESOL Arabia and BELTA. TESOL Arabia as a professional organization has been supporting ELT educators for over 25 years, to engage in highly relevant professional development opportunities. It responds to the needs of the TESOL community in the UAE, the Gulf, and MENA Regions and provides opportunities for International Conferences, regional events, scholarships and publications. BELTA (Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association), established in 1984, has a similar mission of linking, supporting and developing English language teaching professionals throughout the country, leading to improved teaching/learning and subsequent capacity building at all levels.

With this common goal in mind and as representatives of these two voluntary organizations, we decided to compile this volume so that we could collectively showcase what was happening in the ELT scenario in different contexts. We believe in the credo that all learning must be ongoing and especially professional learning must grow and evolve to keep pace with the current times. A secondary goal was to uphold the spirit of collaboration and also to give ‘unheard’ classroom practitioners a voice and a platform to share their best practices so they could learn from each other.

When we sent out the call for papers for this volume in 2014, we requested language practitioners working at diverse institutions and geographical locations to send chapters/reports/empirical research findings on best practices they were engaged in, in their respective contexts. We received enthusiastic responses from colleagues and language teaching professionals from UAE, Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Tehran, Iran, Lebanon, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. And thus our collaborative journey began and the outcome is this volume.

This volume is significant for three reasons: First, it is the first e-book published by TESOL Arabia, Dubai, UAE, in 2015; later in 2017, BELTA published a hard copy of the volume in Bangladesh, supported by a small grant from the American Centre, enabling regional teachers in Bangladesh to get access to this resource readily. Second, the publication upholds the spirit of cooperation and collaboration across borders essential in current times to keep language education in sync with expanding perceptions. Finally, the volume offered both experienced and novice classroom practitioners a pathway to share their ideas and concepts on what they perceived as important and relevant for language teachers teaching at different levels and in diverse contexts.

This e-book edition being launched again in 2022 through the BELTA website, is our third collaborative attempt to disseminate this valuable resource to the ELT community.

The book comprises 25 chapters and is divided into six parts which focus on perspectives on best practices including learning styles and strategies, assessment, skills areas, technology, and research. A brief outline of what each part covers is shared below.

**Part I: Perspectives on Best Practice** contains 9 chapters focusing on the general features of best practice on a various matters: a moving target, secondary and tertiary education
scenarios in Bangladesh, learner autonomy in the South Asian context, peer observations as a model for developing new best practices, innovative and alternative ways of teaching young learners. The importance of cultural orientation and the value of incorporating student heritage in the EFL classroom is also explored and shared in this section.

**Part 2: Learning Styles and Strategies** offers four chapters examining issues of understanding student language learning styles, implications, effects, and the way forward.

**Part 3: Assessment and Best Practice** consists of four chapters dealing with the assessment landscape and highlights issues of academic integrity, student evaluation, assessment pragmatics, and the impact of the big data on the role of English language assessment.

**Part 4: Best Practice in the Skills Areas** covers three chapters and examines activities for recycling vocabulary, intensive reading, and student attitudes towards L2 writing.

**Part 5: Technology and Best practice**: this is a short section comprising two articles related to Pre-Covid times namely computer-assisted language learning and a study on the use of laptops by teachers.

**Part 6: Research and Best Practice**: this last section contains three chapters reporting research and study findings on topics like modes of eliciting information through different types of questioning, challenges in EFL vocabulary learning, and the benefits of individual feedback for improving students’ English.

The writers in this volume have shared their knowledge and experiences of classroom practices and research experiences during the pre-covid days. The book has provided them with an opportunity to share their ‘silent’ voices with the ELT community. The editors believe that the diverse chapters of this volume will be a valuable resource and inspiration for empowering English language teaching professionals in varied contexts.

The editors thank the authors for their contributions to this volume. Moreover, we are grateful to all others who volunteered their valuable time and energy in making this book see the light of day.

Christine Coombe

Rubina Khan
PART 1

PERSPECTIVES ON BEST PRACTICE
Chapter 1

Best Practice: A Moving Target

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Introduction

Michael Carrier recently made a comment about “teachers of English around the world (the 12 million in state education rather than the circa 200,000 native speakers in language schools)” (Carrier, 2014, p.83) which presents, yet again, the dichotomy between “real” teachers, teachers of school subjects, and those involved in EFL. It would be easy to critique this supposed division. Carrier gives no reference for his figures; he assumes that there are no non-native speakers working in language schools; he makes no reference to teachers working in private education. Yet the division remains (Widdowson, 2013). The irony is that close examination of both the qualifications and methodology of the two groups is likely to show that it is the EFL teachers who have the edge. Despite the fact that it is still disgracefully easy to enter the bottom end of EFL teaching, at the top it demands standard, mainstream teaching qualifications that have been augmented with professional retaining, Masters degrees and a list of publications.

In EFL teaching, moreover, continuing professional development and linguistic research have driven change in ways that have no counterpart in subject teaching. Lucantoni (2014) has referred to corpus driven research which enables teachers to anticipate misunderstandings caused by linguistic interference (Swan & Smith, 2001).

This work has no parallel in, say, the teaching of mathematics, where the basic concepts in both algebra and geometry have remained unchanged for centuries. State education, moreover, is often inherently conservative, changing only in accordance with the wishes of external stakeholders like ministers of education or examination boards. So let us examine some of these points in more detail.

State Education

I started school in 1955, and in those days best practice in teaching was about control. Pupils sat in rows. In “good” schools they wore uniforms, which generally consisted of a blazer with the school badge, a school tie, regulation shirts, skirts/trousers, socks and shoes. In the better schools pupils wore uniforms that clearly marked them out as being different – if not special; royal blue blazers for one school, navy blue for another; school office bearers wore piping round the edges of their jackets, special ties, or enameled badges proclaiming their status. Pupils were only allowed to speak after permission had been sought by raising the hand. Their movement was governed by bells and in many cases they were also expected to march. Many day schools displayed signs stating “No Parents Beyond This Point.” At boarding schools it seems to have been assumed that parents would only ever visit by appointment.

To a certain extent, much of this was to be expected. At the start of the twenty-first century, it is easy to forget how deeply Britain had been traumatized by the Second World War. The old order had been found wanting, and much of it lay in ruins. The Welfare State established by the Post-War Labour Government had yet to establish its legitimacy by providing tangible proof of its superiority to what had gone before. Decisions were sometimes taken for reasons of expediency. The 1945 decision to raise the school leaving age to 15 had little to do with education, and far more to do with ensuring that there were enough jobs for demobilized servicemen. Similarly the Post-War scheme of “Emergency Training” for teachers involved selecting senior NCO’s who were about to be demobilized, and offering them a six month crash course in teaching. The idea behind this madness was that “they would be able to keep the boys in order.” It was, again, about control rather than education.

Even when I started teaching in 1972, however, “good” teaching was still partially defined by a total absence of noise. Creber (1972, p.22) refers to “a film made by the National Union of Teachers intended, ironically
enough, to promote recruitment at secondary level. It shows a headmaster entering a room where a class is ‘discussing’ a story by Doris Lessing and congratulating the teacher because it was so quiet that he did not know a class was going on.” Order has been maintained, the teacher is in control. The fact that he has effectively deadened his students’ response is immaterial.

It would be nice to think that things have changed in the last 40 years, but the evidence suggests otherwise. In Britain, some schools have relaxed their dress code policies, but successive Secretaries of State for Education have shown a remarkable attachment to school uniforms – often on the entirely bogus grounds that uniforms eliminate obvious signs of social inequality. This reasoning assumes that school children are unaware that certain cars have more status than others, that watches, pens and mobile phones all come with differing price tags, and that addresses, parents’ jobs and choice of holiday venue are equally loaded with social significance. School uniforms of the British pattern of the 1950s, moreover, continue to be the sign of a “good” school not only across Angophone Africa, but also in the Pacific, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka as well as in many of those last nationalities’ schools in the Gulf. Short trousers remain regulation for little boys, while girls wear pinafore dresses and even gymslips.

In many of these schools, moreover, the old emphasis on order remains. Billah (2013, p.11), reports that, in Bangladesh, “traditionally the silent class is liked by all and the teacher takes credit when pin-drop silence is maintained in his/her class.” From Australia, moreover, Christie (1990) gives examples of classroom interaction in which teacher control effectively derails what are intended to be student-centred activities.

These include The Early Morning Period in Year 1 (Christie, 1990, p.5-9) where two children are reprimanded, and two have their contributions ignored because they failed to raise their hands before answering. All four are boys, justifying Hutchinson's (1999, p.23) question about "what message our children receive and internalize about their education when the adults entrusted with their care prioritize the rules of the school over the growth and development of the children.”

Then, having taken the register, and having openly commented "three boys away”, the teacher continues with the singing of "our morning song", including the couplet

"We're all in our places

With bright, shining faces."

As three boys are away, this is manifestly untrue, and even if we accept that the world of school has its own reality, it seems a particularly empty ritual.

Twenty years earlier, Herndon (1968) demonstrated the meaninglessness of such rituals, explaining how his son’s understanding of the pledge of allegiance was that “we talk to the flag”. The boy had no idea what they said to the flag, but “the kindergarten didn’t require him to talk to the flag himself, or understand what they were saying to it. All it required of him was that he stand up and look as if he knew what was going on. That wasn’t hard, and it didn’t take long, and so he didn’t mind doing it” (Herndon, 1968, p.193).

Christie’s teacher has clearly not read Herndon’s work. Nor has she read much about teacher-talk-time, as demonstrated in the debacle of Christopher’s show-and-tell. Christopher is six years old, and has some model cars to display. In fact, he only says 20 words in eight turns. His longest utterance is “Good morning, Mrs. B. Good morning, girls and boys” because Mrs B. completely dominates the activity (13 turns and 110 words). On three occasions she stuns him into saying “Um…” with the questions:-

1. What’s that make it go does it? (sic)
2. Are there many Geelong ones?
3. Who do you barrack for?

The first question is unanswerable, and violates the basic pragmatic rules governing interaction (Grice, 1975) that Christopher would have learnt at home. It is, in fact, an utterance that would be penalized if produced by
an EFL student. The second relies on awareness that blue and white are the colours of the Geelong
Australian Rules football team. The third is based on the highly sexist assumption that because Christopher
is male, he must inevitably be interested in competitive sport.

Christie, being concerned with classroom socialization rather than effective pedagogy, makes no comment
on Mrs. B’s lesson, but it is to be hoped that few teachers of English to Young Learners would be quite so
teacher-centred. In EFL, teacher-centredness is out, having been replaced by other methodologies, or post-
methodologies (Ur, 2013).

**English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

In 2008, TESOL Arabia published a volume entitled *Best Practice in Language Education* (Jendli, Coombe,
& Troudi, 2008). The book was subdivided into six sections – Approaches to Teaching and Learning;
Language and Culture; Language Skills; Assessment; Learner Autonomy and Critical Issues in the
Profession. The same year, Johnson issued a second edition of his *Introduction to Foreign Language
Teaching and Learning* (Johnson, 2008), in which he gave brief descriptions of “audiolinguism; immersion
programmes; context-based instruction; notional-functional-communicative teaching; humanistic approaches
and the development of task-based teaching” (Swan, 2010, p.98). Under “fringe approaches” he mentioned
Total Physical Response and The Silent Way, but even then the list was not complete. Grammar-translation
had been included in the first edition, but was omitted from the second, and there was still no reference to
Suggestopedia, Dogme ELT or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

When I retrained as an EFL teacher in 1977, none of this diversity would have been recognized, and it may
be a measure of our success as a profession that so many schools of thought are now able to contend. In
1977, however, “best practice” consisted simply of having mastered the one correct way to teach, and that
correct way to teach was prescribed and promoted by the Royal Society of Arts Certificate in the Teaching of
English as a Second or Foreign Language to Adults.

This was the forerunner of CTEFLA and DTEFLA, which themselves morphed into CELTA and DELTA.
Unlike its rival qualification, the Trinity College London Licentiate Diploma for Teachers of English as a
Second Language, entry to an RSA Certificate required no previous teaching experience, nor did the course
demand any knowledge or awareness of phonetics. It was generally taught on a one-year, day-release basis in
centres of Further Education, primarily in the south of England, where the Association of Recognized
Language Schools (ARELS) was expanding its membership network. The RSA Certificate was intended to
provide part-time teachers for those schools, and for Further Education, but in the mid-1970s there was little
suggestion that TEFL could possibly offer a full-time career.

The educational philosophy that underpinned the Certificate, moreover, was what has been described as the
“noncompatible view which is based on the belief that a particular teaching concept is valid, and others are
unacceptable and should be discouraged” (Richards, 1998, p.46). In Brown’s (2014) terms, it was a “dogma”
– a satisfying essential truth subscribed to by a group of insiders who had the power to punish deviance and
thereby instill fear in aspirant applicants to the club. Four things, in particular, were set in stone and I shall
now examine each of these.

**P-P-P**

The first was that teaching meant formal, teacher-fronted class teaching, on the Presentation, Practice,
Production (P-P-P) model. Today, that would be rejected. P-P-P is effective, but it is also limiting. If learning
depends entirely on Presentation, then only what is presented can be learnt. There is no scope here for learner
autonomy, or discovery learning.

Choi and Andon (2014, p.15), however, make the interesting observation that “in the South Korean context,
P-P-P is as radical as is pragmatically feasible in providing students with opportunities to use L2, something
that is completely lacking in many English classes.” Best practice, therefore, may be determined by outside
stakeholders and by high stakes examinations and both these factors will be considered later.
Audio-Visual Aids

Secondly, the RSA Certificate mandated the use of audio-visual aids in each class. Again, today, that would be regarded as highly prescriptive. Audio-visual aids, even in today’s technologically charged classrooms, remain what their name implies – aids. They are there to assist the learning process, but they should not take centre stage.

This is an important point, particularly in the light of Kamont’s (2013) recent endorsement of the virtual language environment (VLE) offered by Edmodo, which ends with the statement that “I cannot imagine my classes run without this aid.” (P. 45). Martin-Monje (2012), moreover, suggests that a personal learning environment (PLE) may have even more potential, particularly in the areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP).

This might well be a dangerous trend, as it places technological dependence at the heart of the learning process. The theory behind this approach, moreover, rests on the unresearched assumption that our current students are all “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). Benedetti, Coscia and Arriaga (2013) cite Skiba and Barton’s (2006) claim that the generation born after 1980 are characterized by their digital skills. It is, apparently believed that because “Generation Y” (Reilly, 2012) have grown up with technology, they are therefore completely comfortable with its use. Far from finding the use of ICT intimidating, these students are thought to both expect it and welcome it.

Price (2013), however, has questioned these assumptions. Her evidence suggests that while many of our students are adept at using social networking sites, they are far less skillful when they are required to conduct on-line research, or access material from on-line archives. This contradiction, moreover, is supported by Benedetti, Coscia and Arraiga (2013), who remark of their students that “despite the fact that they use a computer on a daily basis, are not always used to doing it as part of their academic life and as a complement to their classroom-based activities” (p. 10).

Choral Drilling

Thirdly, the RSA claimed that choral drilling was effective. The Chair of the RSA/CTESFL Sub-Committee for Further Education was the author of a book with the catchy title Oral Drills in Sentence Patterns (Monfries, 1963). In this she cheerily advocated that each class should do at least ten minutes of choral drilling every day as a kind of oral P.T.

The rise of the communicative syllabus effectively ended choral drilling, which was heavily dependent on the theory underpinning audio-lingualism. Kelly (2000), however, revived the concept, arguing that choral drilling allows students to practice anonymously. Her ideas were endorsed by Liang (2003) and Low (2006) but in this case the counter-argument from the 1970’s remains relevant. Choral drilling, though safely anonymous, can lead to the parrot-chameleon-fish syndrome. The parrot repeats without understanding. The chameleon does what everybody else is doing just to blend in. The fish opens and shuts its mouth, but no sound emerges. In all three cases, little or no learning is taking place. Secondly, in this case, modern technology, and particularly the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) endorsed by Hockly (2012; 2013a; 2013b) allows students to practice on their own. From TESOL Arabia, moreover, it was Heather Baba who first reported that her students had spontaneously started to record each other’s presentations, and then play them back for comment and feedback.

English Only

The final RSA diktat was that teachers should adhere rigidly to what Karmani (2003) describes as “the monolingual fallacy”. No word of anything other than the target language was to ever fall from a teacher’s lips.

Now it is just possible to accept this last point, given that the ARELS schools of southern England in the 1970s were educating polyglot groups of mainly self-selected students. It would have been grossly unfair, and bad for business, if the French and/or German speakers had been privileged at the expense of the
Spanish and/or Portuguese. In other words, this element was effectively a “situated methodology”. Beyond the very local circumstances that applied in Southern England, however, there was really no justification for arbitrarily jettisoning a valuable linguistic resource.

Differentiation

In a paper entitled “Differentiated Instruction; What Do the Best Teachers Do?” Pappas (2014) openly stated “When it comes to teaching, one size does not fit all”, and most experienced teachers, be they subject teachers or EFL practitioners (however defined) would be likely to agree with that statement. It is probably not going too far to suggest that Pappas’ statement is what now passes for common sense. While preparing this paper, I read accounts of English as a language of instruction in China (He & Miller, 2011), Turkey (Selvi, 2011) and at the University of the Basque region of northern Spain (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2011). It is inconceivable that any single method could be transplanted from Britain and remain effective with students from such disparate cultures and yet the RSA approach was based on just such an assumption.

There are also pundits who still claim to be able to offer check lists of “best practice”. Miller (1987/2012), for example, offers an interesting paper entitled “Ten Characteristics of a Good Teacher” This paper was based on 15 years’ experience in EFL but unfortunately, it approaches the theme from the point of view of a student, and couches beliefs in the rather subjective form of a list that begins “I want ….. “. Miller demands a teacher

1. who has a contagious enthusiasm for teaching
2. who is creative
3. who can add pace and humour to the class
4. who challenges the students
5. who is encouraging and patient, and who will not give up on students
6. who will take an interest in students as individuals
7. who knows grammar well and who can explain something on the spot if necessary
8. who will take a minute or two to answer questions after class
9. who will treat students as people, on basis of total equality
10. who will leave his or her own emotional baggage outside the classroom.

This is a pretty tall order. It suggests that a successful teacher has to be “a cross between Marcus Aurelius and Mother Teresa, a stoic at the service of all humanity” (Haran, 2003, p.16-17).

Another point here is that part of the list falls into the trap of being fine in theory, but unworkable in practice. In other words, it is bad theory, precisely because it does not work in practice. Point 8, for example, assumes that the teacher actually has time to answer questions after class. This may not be the case. The teacher may have another class, or a meeting, to go to. Secondly, if the teacher has a class of, say, 15 students, and takes “a minute or two” to answer questions after class, the total time involved could be as much as half an hour. These are the simple logistics of classroom teaching.

Miller also falls victim to the unthinking assumption that a “good” teacher has fixed characteristics. This is specifically denied by Burns (2011) who has stated that “No teacher can assume their skills are fixed.” Ask Omani students what a “good” teacher is, and they will probably say that a good teacher does not set homework, lets the class out early, and gives high marks. Al Yaaqubi (2012, p.21) goes further, saying that “in the eyes of many students, a good teacher is the one who betrays his duty and lets his students cheat in their assignments.”

This is an important consideration because Asante, Al Mahrooqi and Abrar-ul-Hassan (2012) actually conducted a study with members of the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University, and found that the variables of gender, length of teaching experience and teacher qualifications all affected the importance that teachers placed on motivational strategies. This is highly significant, because it suggests that the whole
concept of teacher quality is far more fluid than we might have believed. More importantly, as teachers, our attitudes may alter over time, but the most important finding of all was that:

Four of the 48 strategies were ranked among the top ten by respondents in all eleven sample levels. These were:

- Provides students with positive feedback
- Shows enthusiasm for teaching
- Is yourself in front of students
- Recognizes students’ efforts and achievement.”


These elements go beyond tips-for-teachers, and they go beyond Miller’s list of demands. They would appear to be central to EFL teaching, not least because they automatically weed out the back-packers; the “teachers’ who have trained for a whole month and who believe that they are fully qualified, and “the ignorant buffoon who has managed to fool the system and enters the profession expecting an easy job with long holidays” (Harris, 2005, p.273). Such people simply cannot meet these four requirements.

Stakeholders

Even so, teachers do not operate in a vacuum, and in many instances their conceptions of best practice may be circumscribed by political factors beyond their control. Speaking very generally, teachers as a profession rather naively believe that stakeholders are as committed to education, per se as they are themselves. Individual teachers may grumble over specific issues, but by and large they do not question the philosophical approach that underpins educational provision. This may be shortsighted, as history is replete with examples proving that stakeholders often have intentions that are positively maligned.

Ignoring extreme examples, like the Khmers Rouges’ simple prohibition of all education in Cambodia, and their murder of anyone they suspected of being an intellectual (Service, 2007) and the Afghan Taliban’s decision to prohibit the education of women, we also have examples of what could be regarded as the abrogation of the state’s responsibility to provide worthwhile education. Instead of simply refusing to educate, the state misuses educational facilities for political reasons.

One example here would be the 1953 Bantu Education Act which imposed Afrikaans on the black population in apartheid South Africa. Hlatshwayo (2000, p.65) describes this as a deliberate attempt to “miseducate Africans so that their certificates became irrelevant for the labour market.” More recently, however, Kamwangamalu (2013) has suggested that several other African countries – Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, post-apartheid South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe – are guilty of what Scotton (1990) describes as “elite closure”. This means that the ruling elite bow to the wishes of the general population by offering English as part of the national curriculum, but then educate their own children in private schools which guarantee a higher level of proficiency, and an exclusive social network that ensures they retain their elite status.

Perhaps most damning, however, is the following quotation from a member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS),

“I feel that inside, most politicians in India are very wary of English, they know its power which is why all their children go to English-medium schools, but I think that we need to recognize the fact that politicians are basically against the spread of English because they feel that once English reaches Government and municipal schools, people will be able to understand what all these American and British TV channels are saying. They will be able to access the internet or become a truly global citizen. Then they will start asking the question: Should I vote for this person? Or do I demand a higher quality of individual to represent me as my elected representation/……/ Everyone must understand that at least in India, we are battling this and any solution that we find has to be a
solution that does not openly confront anyone at the political level” (Bolton, Graddol & Meierkord, 2011, p.470).

This is realpolitik, and it goes far further than just India. This is the reality that underlies politicians’ concern for “standards” which are generally interpreted as meaning the highest level of economic return that can be had for the lowest investment. As far back as 1947, the Scottish educationalist Sir James Robertson pointed out that “education is life and preparation for life in its entirety and not simply the equipping of the young for remunerative employment” (Lockhart & McCombie, 2012, p.313).

Yet it is also probably unfair to place too much blame on politicians. Other stakeholders include parents, and here again Choi and Andon (2014) have interesting insights. The Teaching English in English (TEE) approach being instituted in South Korea is part of a government scheme aimed at “the improvement of students’ communicative competence in English, promoting English as the medium of instruction, and increasing trust in ELT in government schools so that parents will feel less pressure to pay for additional English classes in the private sector” (Choi & Andon, 2014, p.14). Choi and Andon believe that the third aim will never be achieved, primarily because parents are not particularly interested in the educational process. They are far more concerned with educational outcomes, and pay for extra classes in order to give their own children a competitive edge over other children in examinations.

**Washback**

High stakes examinations lead us to the two-pronged fork of washback. If we are teaching students whose future careers depend on success in specific examinations, then we may be failing those students if we do not make some attempt to prepare them for the tests’ demands. If that means that concentrating on specific “examination” skills to the detriment of others, then many teachers will do this in the interests of, firstly, their students, and secondly, their own reputations. In Bangladesh, for example, there are no listening tasks in any of the English language examinations, and so listening receives little or no emphasis in Bangladeshi schools (Billah, 2013).

In other words, regardless of the methodology favoured by individual teachers, there are times when this is likely to be over-ridden by examination washback. Real difficulties arise, however, when the system encourages washback to the extent that teachers’ are tempted to manipulate the system. Tanko (2014, p.39) is firm on this; “As educators, we have a moral duty not to put down our heads and teach to the test because it ensures our students will look good and we will have jobs next year and beyond.”

Even so, reality may intrude, and Ostovar-Namaghi (2012, p.46) demonstrates just how high the material rewards can be, at least in Iran:-

“The director-general gave me the award for advanced skills not for my knowledge but for my pass rate in the final exam. He wrote, ’We hereby thank you for your ceaseless effort which led to 100% pass rate in the finals in 2009. 100% pass rate is evidence enough to grant you the award of advanced skills. Since I had the highest pass rate in the past few years, they assigned me to the managerial post. Now I am the principal.”

Farrell (2014), by contrast, offers a negative inducement from Singapore, where those whose results have raised questions about their fitness to teach are openly designated “condemned teachers”.

**The individual teacher**

Ur (2013, p.472) cites Borg (2003) as saying that a major factor that influences the choice of teaching methodology is the professional belief, ability and/or preference of the individual teacher. The individual teacher is central to the teaching process. Much as some stakeholders would like to believe that teachers are really just “delivery agents” (Burns, 2011) the personal influence of a teacher can be crucial in any classroom. “Divorce personality from the teacher and you have no teacher – or no human teacher” (Brown, 2014, p.8).
Charismatic teachers can lift and inspire, while the droning bore will depress even the most motivated of students. So far as methodology is concerned, some teachers bring with them the “Mathew Effect”. Those who really believe in task-based-learning are likely to design tasks that will motivate students to the extent that the belief is vindicated. Similarly, even in a P-P-P classroom, noting students' individual mistakes makes it possible to provide individual reinforcement or support, targeting those who require assistance and making sure that the weaker students receive the attention that they require.

In other words, there is a difference between the committed, reflective classroom practitioners and the “delivery agents”. Troudi (2011) says that “Teaching is about passion, love of education and learning, compassion, consideration of the other, dedication to trusting students, belief in the power of knowledge and an incessant attempt to make a difference to the lives of others.” This is a tall order, it demands a great deal from the individual teacher, but those demands are likely to move reflective practitioners into what has been described as “principled eclecticism.”

This means selecting the materials and approaches that are most likely to engage student interest, regardless of whether they adhere to “specific types of classroom procedures” (Ur, 2013, p.468). This is teaching that is rooted in classroom experience, but it is far from easy to achieve. It depends on knowledge that has been accumulated over, quite literally, years of practice, and years of practice that have been informed by theory and pedagogic debate.

**Conclusion**

Ur (2103, p.468) states that “In spite of claims that we are in a ‘post-method era’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), many English language teacher preparation courses and the literature on ELT are to this day dominated by the concept of language teaching method. ‘Method’ is normally taken, in the context of language teaching, to refer to those methods which have been described and promoted (or criticized) in the professional literature, and are presented by their proponents as being more or less universally valid” (Ur, 2013, p.468).

I hope that this paper has effectively demonstrated that, in fact, Kumaravadivelu gives an accurate reflection of the reality that applies to the working lives of reflective practitioners. It is also true that there are short teacher preparation courses that claim to offer instant introductions to classroom teaching, but their shortcomings were adequately criticized by Hobbs (2006). Put simply, there is no one best way to teach. One size does not fit all, and the dynamic interactions between teachers, materials, learners and the wider society in which they operate will always ensure that best practice will remain a moving target – something to aim at, but difficult to hit.
References


Chapter 2

Making Tertiary Education Possible for Low English Proficiency Students

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Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most heavily populated countries of the world where employment for the rising generation in a reasonably well-paid job is heavily dependent on having higher education and better English skills from better-known universities of the country. Education at such institutions has English as the medium of instruction to ensure employability for graduates, as people employed in white collar jobs need to interact with multi-nationals and are required to know English well. Students applying for admission at universities aspire for well-paid white collar jobs, but a large number of applicants get eliminated in the selection exams as they cannot qualify in the admission test for universities. For most failures, it is because of a lack of adequate proficiency in English. If one considers that there are one hundred and twelve (78 private and 34 public) universities in the country where at least three to four students apply for each seat, the total number of unsuccessful candidates becomes a substantial number, a big challenge for a developing country. If even five percent of this number could qualify for a better life through a better education, it would make a difference to the country.

The problem of such failures has been solved at some universities by the introduction of a course that can train some of these students within one semester to become proficient enough to be admitted into the university as a regular student. This chapter will look into what is done to make such courses successful. If such a course was adopted by the other universities it could ensure better English language learning and even overall learning for students.

Languages in Bangladeshi Education

Bangladeshis are generally speakers of one language Bengali or its dialects. For such a homogeneous population, English is not necessary for communication among the people, as it is in multilingual countries like India. The use of English is limited to being the library language for university education, to the penal code at courts of law, to jobs at the corporate level, and with NGOs where one needs to interact with multi-nationals. This is why the use of English is more of a Foreign Language (EFL) rather than an ESL situation. Bangladeshis have to learn English in the education system (where it is a compulsory subject from the earliest level) where passing the subject is mandatory. However, the real need for English arises when students go for tertiary studies at private universities where all education tends to be conducted in English. Graduates from such institutions generally go in for corporate or NGO jobs.

School education in this country is generally rendered in one of two mediums of instruction: Bengali, the vernacular, or English. Students emerging from the vernacular background, and even from many English medium schools often tend to have low proficiency in English (LEP). This is because teachers in most of those schools tend to be less fluent and less proficient in English, and less proficient in teaching it. They receive no Pre-service training, and very little In-service training in methods for teaching English effectively. Besides this, teachers have to deal with very large classes, with 60-80 students each, but no facilities except the book and the blackboard. The situation is better in larger city schools, which are more affluent. Teachers at these better organized and financially better-off institutions are more proficient in the language and better trained for teaching. The facilities for teacher training and access to educational resources and amenities are difficult for smaller schools to afford, and the further schools are from the facilities of larger cities, the worse the situation. Obviously English and even other subjects are taught less well by less proficient untrained teachers in institutions that have little money, away from cities.
Admission into Universities

Universities in Bangladesh select students through admission tests. In public universities 20 to 60 students compete for a seat, depending on the subject. The rush at private universities is less as their fees are much higher. However, even the lower number at these universities can amount to a huge total across the 74 private universities as university education is seen to be the only way to a respectable job and career.

Students selected through tests in English and mathematical skills at private universities filter out a large number of candidates at the admissions point. To allow more students to get in, some private universities offer Pre-University courses to candidates who have failed English by a narrow margin. This course offers them a chance to improve themselves and qualify for university at the end of course examination.

Bangladesh is a small country with the eighth highest population in the world. Jobs are important to its people as there are not many other ways to a career. A procedure that can help a significant number of its people to qualify for a white collar job would be worth emulating across universities. It would create a positive situation for all. The universities could help qualify a larger number of graduates through training the more able among the failed students in English in a significantly shorter period. A larger number of university graduates would qualify for higher level jobs, removing some of the frustration and desperation that exists in society at the moment. In the long run the overall economic situation of the country could improve.

Situation of Teaching English in Bangladesh

To understand work being achieved by the Pre-University Course that this chapter will discuss, one must understand the teaching method of English at schools and college that gives students the proficiency they develop in English by the end of their higher secondary education and apply for admission into university. This will make clear the problem that students have in English.

**Teachers:** For employment as teachers in the vernacular schools in Bangladesh, suitably qualified people are tested in various subjects before being selected. After this the teachers are given training in teaching specific subjects. The people selected as English teachers are generally not fluent in the language, and the training given for English teaching is not extensive. As a result the teachers are not well-prepared to teach English, teaching through a very teacher-fronted grammar-translation method. Students’ learning is based on memorization and the use of guide books rather than on activities given in the textbooks. In addition to this, the general students get very little exposure to English except through the media. The method will be explained at greater length later.

Most school students need to go for private tuition after school. It is generally the case that if parents can afford tutors, the children will pass public examinations.

In the better established English medium schools the selection procedure for English teachers is different. These schools are financially better off and can pay teachers better salaries. So teachers are selected here based not only on their qualifications but also on their spoken skills and experience. Some schools even look at the training the candidates have received, and encourage them to get more in-house as well as outside training in teaching.

**Teaching Method:** English is an academic subject mandatory at all levels of education in Bangladesh, from the lowest till graduation from University and has a heavy weighting in the curriculum. As described above, in the two streams of school education in Bangladesh, in the general schools sponsored by the government the teaching is organized in Bengali, the vernacular language. In the other stream the teaching is organized in English. Most vernacular schools and some English medium schools do not have trained proficient teachers and do not teach English well.

Students of several universities were interviewed about the method used in school and college to teach them English. Their response generally has been: teachers read out the English texts, translated these into Bengali, sometimes writing the meaning of unusual vocabulary on the board. They would then pick out
‘probable’ questions for exams, explain these and write up answers on the board. Students would copy and memorize these for exams.

For teaching students to write essays, letters and paragraphs, teachers would generally suggest ‘probable’ topics likely to be set for tests, and mark these as important for exams. This meant, students should memorize these in preparation for school tests and public examinations. While this procedure helped them with school and even public exams, this did not often help them get through entrance exams at universities as some of these tests asked candidates to write their opinion and to give reasons for it.

Students also realize that the memorization procedure does not help them to actually learn the language skills, as revealed in the following responses from three different students in schools and college:

**Situation 1:**

“I am a student of Class 9. Our English 1st paper teacher is Mr.X. After coming to the class, he starts instructing the class in this way, ‘Open page 71, Lesson-9’ from the Guide book named ‘Communicative English for IX-X’. We may forget to bring our English textbooks but bringing this book is mandatory for us. We have to do the exercises one after another according to his instruction.”

**Situation 2:**

“I am a 1st year student of X college. In our first chemistry class the teacher entered the class and without greeting anyone he started writing his address and phone number on the board. After that he started talking about the difficulty of the subject. So, to understand this subject well and get good grades we have to attend his coaching classes regularly. He normally instructs us to read out one or two chapters in class. He administers quizzes or tests on each chapter in his coaching class and asks us to memorize the questions for the final exam. We don’t understand anything other than memorizing chemical reactions and other formulas. We are getting frustrated day by day.”

**Situation 3:**

“I’m a student of Class 7. In our English language class, our teacher reads out grammar rules from the book and we repeat after her. We do this several times until the rules are memorized by us. Our teacher tells us to read them again at home and memorize the rules for next class. But when we write any unseen composition, we often make many mistakes in grammar. We are not learning anything and getting frustrated about it.”

Such are the feelings of students about the system of teaching English. The general learning situation needs to be changed, introducing teacher training in new techniques in Bangladesh for qualifying a larger number of students for university learning.

**Literature Review**

To ensure better learning of language, three different types of factors are identified by researchers to be present and to operate in the learning environment. These are linguistic factors and learning activities; secondly, teacher factors to make learning factors available to learners; and thirdly, learner factors that will help them avail and take advantage of the learning and teacher factors

**Linguistic Factors**

There are various basic factors that different researchers in language learning hold to be necessary in the language learning classroom to help bring about learning. Some of these are:

**Input Hypothesis:** For language learning to take place, Krashen (1985) in his Comprehensible Input Hypothesis states that learners need to be passively exposed to Input in the language that is Comprehensible to them in order to progress in learning the language. This input must also contain structures that are a little higher than their present level, and includes structures that they do not know yet.
Krashen called this the \((i+1)\) level where \(i\) is language at its present level and \((+1)\) is a little higher than this level that they understand. Krashen holds the presence of both listening and reading input to be very important in the second language classroom for introducing students to the more challenging content. While his concept of \((i+1)\) input has been criticized, everyone accepts that language learning has to start with Comprehensible language Input being present in the learning environment.

**Affective Filter:** Krashen (1977) also insists that learning needs to be set up in an environment that does not put pressure on learners to block their mind from learning. Anxiety can be such a block, hampering input from becoming intake. The learners’ ability to learn language can be constrained if there is a threat or fear, embarrassment or anxiety for learners, as these push ‘up’ their affective filter, preventing the input from entering the learners’ learning channel. Its implication for the learning environment is the presence of negative factors in the classroom can hamper adequate learning.

**Interaction and Negotiation:** Long (1985) and others accept the primacy of language input, but they do not agree with the concept of passive exposure to input as being adequate for learning. In his Theory of Interaction and Negotiation, Long stresses that passive exposure to Input may not ensure its comprehensibility. He explains that comprehensibility can only be ensured when learners engage with the input to negotiate its meaning through interaction. He goes on to say that the effectiveness of comprehensible input increases when interlocutors negotiate in order to overcome a breakdown in communication by slowing down speech, speaking more deliberately, or paraphrasing, etc.

**Comprehensible Output:** Swain (1985) points out another aspect of language learning. Observing students in immersion education in Canada, she states in her Comprehensible Output Hypothesis that language learning takes place when learners encounter a gap in their knowledge of the second language during output. Such output is important for learners, so they modify their output and restate what they want to say. Swain believes that this is when learners discover gaps between what they want to say and what they are able to say. They notice what they do not know, and try to bridge the gap with items from their resources. When they say something to fill the gap, they are actually testing their hypothesis about how the language works. If the teacher or interlocutor confirms that the effort has been successful, they learn from this. Otherwise they reorganize their hypothesis and restate what they want to say.

**Task-Based Learning:** In the classroom one cannot simply make students interact in a new language. Students have to be given a purpose or a goal for interaction, and the means that students will use to reach the goal. One cannot ensure the presence of interaction and negotiation by teaching in the ordinary manner.

Prabhu (1987), Long (1997) and others have discovered a variety of activities that can be set up for students to perform, where the performance will lead to interaction and negotiation and language learning. They assert that while negotiation for meaning can help people to learn some language by focusing on meaning, one cannot reach high levels of competence through this method. For better language learning, students should engage in task-based communicative tasks where learners will experience not only the meaning of language but also focus on the form in context. Such encounters with both meaning and form in context can ensure their learning as well as language improvement as they interact to achieve the task goal.

**Teacher Factors:**

In the classroom, specially where there are weaker students, teachers are the most important factor to bring about effective learning through the tasks and activities they set up for the language learning factors to operate, the activities they get students to do to stimulate interaction and negotiation, the atmosphere they create in the classroom to allow students to learn; the skills they teach for students to become autonomous learners, and finally the training and feedback they give for students’ advancement. To bring about effective learning within a short time teachers must have a variety of qualities described below.

**Atmosphere & Relationship:** Research on learning shows that positive relationships with teachers is fundamental to students’ success. Only a positive student–teacher relationship can serve for teaching
students at risk of low performance. However, Brophy (1985) suggests that teachers see themselves primarily as instructors or socialisers, the perception affecting the way they interact with students. It is also found that instructors tend to respond more negatively to students who are underachievers, unmotivated, or disruptive during learning tasks. Teachers responsible for under-achieving students need to have a different attitude than this, to ensure that their students are affectively disposed to learn.

The need for support through teacher–student relationships may be particularly salient at transition points, moving from one stage of learning to another (Wentzel, 1998). Forming strong and supportive relationships with teachers allows students to feel secure, more competent to carry on learning, helping to make more positive connections with peers. Teachers have to convey emotional warmth and acceptance of students’ weaknesses, be sympathetic, knowledgeable and caring when teaching and giving feedback. They must make themselves available regularly for personal communication with students to foster the positive relational processes characteristic of support to lead students to make academic gains through effective learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2006).

**Personal Attention in Small Groups:** In the classroom teachers need to assume different roles for effective teaching: organizer; prompter, controller, assessor of accuracy, and a resource, to influence the classroom atmosphere and learning processes in a variety of ways. In this way effective teachers can create a learning atmosphere that is cognitively and affectively expanding, enabling learners to become more knowledgeable people (Pine & Boy, 1977). Teachers are responsible for setting up and providing the input necessary for learning, and ensuring that activities and tasks are progressing, giving rise to effective interaction on activities. To ensure this for weaker students, teachers need to organize the activities in small groups to make more interaction and negotiation possible. Teacher’s instruction and feedback can be more personalized in the small groups, suited to individual needs and levels.

**Involvement:** Teachers’ involvement with students working in small groups can best foster students’ classroom engagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), allowing instructional activities such as explaining, thinking about and correcting errors, manipulating different kinds of input. In this way teachers can contribute to ‘tutoring learning’ (Roscoe & Chi, 2008).

**Guidance & Supervision:** Supportive relationships with teachers who encourage and convince students that their development is manageable and achievable within a limited time, can help students work hard for improvement. While teachers are not the only source of support, students seem to perceive the teacher connection as the factor most closely associated with their achievement (Gregory & Weinstein, 2004). For motivating weaker students, teachers must clearly show them what they need to do, and how they need to perform in order to make the improvement. Teachers need to demonstrate in a positive manner how to take part in activities to reach their goals, and develop their knowledge and skills. It has been seen that the manner in which information is given to students (e.g. tone of voice, posture and proximity, timing), may be as important for motivating students to learn as is the content of what is said (Hamre & Pianta, 2006).

**Student Factors:**

The learning has to be done by students, so the factors that can induce them to learn must be brought into play by the students, with the help of teachers and interesting activities in a positive way to achieve and overcome the hurdles facing them in university admission.

**Motivation:** Researchers find that the essential personal factor for improvement in students’ achievement is their motivation to learn. Motivation means ‘a reason to act’ a factor that is extremely important for everything one does or wants to do. It is an instigated and sustained process of goal-directed activity, a crucial factor for language learning (Carreira, 2006).

Motivation is defined as the extent to which an individual works or strives to do something, (e.g. learn the language), from a desire to learn the language, and the satisfaction experienced in this activity. A “motivated
learner” is, therefore, defined as one who is: (a) eager to learn the language, (b) willing to expend effort on the learning activity, and (c) willing to sustain the learning activity (Gardner, 1985, p. 10).

Others see Motivation as a cluster of factors that ‘energize behaviour and give it direction’ (Hilgard, Atkinson & Atkinson 2003: 179-281). This can explain why, under similar circumstances, some students succeed in learning but others do not (Dornyei, 1994). Gardner’s (1989) model of SLA shows that when motivation affects and gives direction to working towards goals, it energizes such behaviour (Dornyei, 1994). Gardner and associates (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) have pointed out that motivation has much to do with achievement in L2 learning.

The significance of this is, while teachers can set up classroom learning activities and encourage students, in turn students too must engage with the activities, participate in all the work that is necessary for learning, for going ahead. The teachers can try to facilitate, but the students will need to connect with what needs to be done. It is the motivation within students that will have to keep them progressing on the path to learning by engaging in the activities.

Speaking generally, two main types of motivation are identified to be responsible for learning: Integrative and Instrumental. An Integrative motivation is seen to reflect learners’ positive attitudes towards the target culture, so the desire to learn the language arises from the wish to mingle and identify with target language speakers. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, arises from visualizing the present task (e.g. language learning) to be the key to something important in life, to achieve a pragmatic goal such as success in future studies for a good career etc. Much research has shown that instrumental motivation is more powerfully related to linguistic achievement (Kruidenier & Clément, 1986). It seems to be the factor that decides the amount of effort learners put into learning (Richards, 1993). On the Pre-University course, Instrumental Motivation can be the factor to push students’ learning.

While the motivational factors reside in the learner and need to be activated by them, teachers too can help to arouse the desire to succeed in students by encouragement, by making it appear possible, by using sympathy and encouragement.

**Self-confidence:** While motivation is held to be the strongest predictor of success in L2 learning, some researchers feel that self-confidence is what promotes learning best. Clément (1986) and his colleagues (Clément, Gardner & Smythe, 1977, 1980) found that self-confidence was the strongest predictor of linguistic achievement and friendship, travel, knowledge, etc. Altogether, it is to be hoped that the factors of motivation and self-confidence would be present in students for putting in their best effort for success. However, it is the teacher who can help raise students’ confidence through encouragement, through positive support. They can ensure the strengthening of confidence by helping to bring in the teaching and learning factors positively through their teaching and feedback.

**Learning Theory and Course Requirement for Students**

The next section summarizes the three types of factors that are prerequisite for language learning LEP students in the Pre-University course. They are:

a. Linguistic factors, like a variety of interesting input at the students’ level and beyond, needs to be available in spoken and written forms in the shape of books, CDs, videos etc. Students will have to engage with such input on task-based activities to manipulate the input to achieve learning. They will have to interact and negotiate about the information to produce acceptable goals for their tasks.

b. Teachers will have to set up interesting activities that appeal to students and can bring about learning. They will need to tell students the short term goal for each day’s activity and the long term goal for the course that students must reach in order to pass the final tests. They will have to guide students and give them sustained support during the learning process so that students can perform all activities. Their guidance and feedback will have to be given in a caring manner, positively to help students feel they are learning.
Finally, teachers must try to motivate students to learn and progress, and help develop their confidence by stressing on their achievements. Their principal role is to facilitate the whole process.

c. On their side, students will need to develop a positive attitude towards the hard work involved in learning, cooperating with other students and teachers to learn quickly and effectively. At such a critical point of their lives where the Pre-University course is the means for achieving the career they aspire for, they must try to build up a positive attitude to learning and achievement. Their principle role will be to connect with the learning, to engage with the process.

In this way, all factors need to interplay systematically to bring about learning.

**Teaching of English in Bangladeshi schools in the light of theories**

Considering the present situation of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh in light of language learning theories, regarding the presence of the language learning factors, there is some input present in the classroom, provided by the textbook and as the texts are read out and translated by teachers. However, quite a lot of this is in Bengali, rather than English. Also, students do not have to make any effort to understand the text as the teacher will translate it anyway. So students do not have to connect with the English text or make any effort to understand it or interact with anyone to negotiate meaning. Negotiation is not possible in the classroom as teachers want a silent environment. Students are passively exposed to the sound of the text, and its meaning in Bengali. Students do not engage with the language, they remain outside the process.

Students are not involved in the learning process actively, so it is difficult for them to be interested in the classroom process. They come because it will get them suggestions of questions that may be set in exams. Students’ interest is in how far their teacher will predict these questions for examinations and give the answers to be memorized. ‘Suggestions’ are very important in the student circle.

In the large classes of 60-70 students, there is rarely any relationship developing between students and teachers. Even with their private tutor they generally go for the probable questions with their answers to be memorized.

**Research Questions**

To get to know the techniques and methods used on the Pre-University course to develop appropriate learning in weak students over one semester, the following research questions were posed.

**What techniques do teachers use in their teaching on the course?**

The general trend of English language teaching that prevails in vernacular and some other schools and colleges in the country for 1600 hours (Rahman, McGinley & McGinley, 1984) does not give students enough English language proficiency to be admitted into the university. In fact the same report finds students to be six years behind the level of English necessary for education when they reach tertiary level. However, the Pre-University courses in universities help students to qualify for admission in 252 hours or one semester. So it is possible that teachers on such courses use teaching techniques that are not being used in the schools and colleges. If the teacher training for schools could include these techniques, if other universities could also try to run such Pre-University courses, it could be possible to improve the general level of education and employability in the country.

**What factors of language learning may the teaching help operate to ensure language learning during the course?**

The teaching and the learning on the course may be setting in motion the special factors of language learning during the course to allow the language learning to come about successfully in such a short time. Identifying these factors and training other teachers in the knowledge of allowing the factors to operate in their classroom would help students.
Which areas do students make their gains in learning?

The course has very limited time to develop the students’ ability. Does the course develop the linguistic ability holistically to be able to cope with the academic activities required at university, or does it help them more specifically, as students have learned in the past.

The Research Method

To conduct the research it was decided to observe the techniques and learning that took place on Pre-University courses at two universities over two semesters to find out the answers to the research questions.

The Pre University Course

The Pre-University Course is conducted in a few private universities in Bangladesh for students who have scored just below the passing grade required for entry into university. Some of these students take admission into such courses to be able to pass the final exam at the end of the course to qualify for university.

Group size: The students on the course are put into groups of 20+, with one teacher in charge of each group, but several teachers teach different skills to each group. The course focuses mainly on the four language skills, Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking, along with Critical Thinking. Students learn and develop skills by working on tasks based on texts and different types of audio and video material rather than set textbooks.

Schedule: The skills are practiced for 18 hours per week by reading books and articles, discussing and writing responses in the form of essays and paragraphs, watching videos and doing individual presentations, among other activities. Teachers introduce various socio-political issues, beliefs and current affairs, and lead students to discuss their views about ideas with peers and teachers, developing their awareness of the world around them as well as the language needed to discuss these. Each class lasts for 90 minutes, which gives teachers sufficient time to set up activities and tasks, and students to complete the skill-related activities in dyads or small groups of four to five. Teaching starts in plenary sessions where input is given, followed by activities performed in pairs or groups. This encourages students to interact and collaborate on the tasks, supervised by teachers. Their negotiation and collaboration on tasks gives rise to much speaking and listening, while the purpose of the tasks often require them to verbalize or write down the goals they arrive at.

Writing: Writing gets the greatest emphasis in the course, with four classes per week totaling six contact hours. As mentioned before, students do not have ability in autonomous thinking and writing, neither do they like to read texts with understanding. They cannot write in English on any topic they have not memorized, least of all to express opinions or arguments on issues. To develop adequately for tertiary education they need to be able to read intensively on a variety of texts and produce writings that are analytic and critical on issues. This is why writing is stressed most of all, followed by stress on reading.

Reading Skill: Reading is practiced in two classes amounting to three contact hours per week. As mentioned before, students are not encouraged to develop their habit of reading texts, books, papers or magazines in English, so that they find university education a great challenge. Teachers find students to be 'reluctant readers and writers', so the course tries to inculcate a taste for reading in students, to develop ideas and language through this, and be ready for the extensive reading necessary at university. Activities based around reading often have writing or speaking output.

Speaking and Listening: Speaking and listening skills in English are not taught nor tested at any level at school. In fact, teachers at many schools teach English completely in Bengali. Students emerging from such schools have very little proficiency in these skills that are very important for higher education, students are made to learn and practice these two skills for 4.5 hours per week.

For getting the maximum exposure to English, teachers use English in the classroom for all academic and interactional purposes and encourage students to do it too, although for them the use of L1 is sometimes allowed.
Critical Thinking: Besides the language skills, teachers work on developing students’ critical thinking skills by encouraging discussions on diverse international and national issues in English in class for three hours per week. Students are led to understand, discuss and investigate current affairs and socio-political issues from around the world, to explain and question ideas, and express their opinion about these issues in English. These are generally the skills that LEP students are taught and made to practice intensively for 18 hours per week in the Pre-University Course.

Tutorials in English

Besides the teaching classes on the course, one university also runs tutorial classes for the weaker students on the course for three hours a week. This brings the total to 21 contact hours per week, or 252 hours over the semester. These weaker students of each group are divided into two or three smaller groups of seven students, each meeting the teacher twice a week. In these small groups with so few students, students get better access and greater opportunity to interact one on one with the teacher, without the embarrassment they may feel in their larger group. There is a greater scope for one-on-one interactions with the teacher and other students to use language for help and advice, for clarifications and criticism. The close personal attention in such proximity helps teachers clarify for students what they need to do, explain and guide them more easily, so that students get motivated to learn.

While the tutorial classes are mainly for special attention to weaker students to cover the syllabus and improve, any student on the course can come in to discuss or clarify specific problems or questions. Over the semester, students work very closely with their teacher and peers to perform the work on the course. This also establishes rapport and a personal relationship with the teacher.

While Pre-University courses are there in the two universities observed in Dhaka for improving students’ proficiency, running tutorial classes for giving extra attention to weak students is not a common practice.

Evidence of Effectiveness

When asked about the effectiveness of such a short course for raising students’ proficiency to the acceptable level, all the teachers on the course claim that the Pre-University course is tremendously effective as most students qualify for university at the end of the course. Teachers prove their claim by showing the statistics of passes in the previous course-ending tests. About 96% of the students admitted into the course pass the end of course exam to get into university. No more than three or four students fail in each batch, who the teachers claim are the unmotivated students. The failed students may continue over another semester to qualify. Generally two semesters are enough for those who want to study, to qualify for university.

This research was conducted to identify the techniques that teachers use and the factors that operate within the course. The purpose of the research is to disseminate results to other institutions to achieve better English skills. This could help qualify a larger number of students in the country for a better educated workforce.

Research Method

The Place

The research was conducted at two private universities in Bangladesh, both of which offered an intensive course for English for students who could not qualify in the admission test by a narrow margin.

The Method of Data Collection

To provide insight into the teaching techniques and learning factors, the data for the study was gathered through qualitative methods only.

i. Interview of Teachers on the Course
ii. Observation of the Classroom Process

It was intended to collect data from present and past students on the course about its effectiveness to give the study greater validity. However, the situation in the university department did not allow this.

**Interview of Teachers:** Information was elicited from teachers on the Pre-University English course through a semi-structured set of questions made up around three basic questions

i. Why do you think the tutorial classes are effective?

ii. What special techniques do you adopt in your teaching to help students learn?

iii. Where is their improvement mostly visible?

Each interview started with an explanation of its purpose. Teachers were then asked for a general description of the course, about its components and organization, the deficiencies of students, and what happened on the course. This was followed by the question if they thought the course was useful, and why. They were then asked about their special techniques used to make the learning on the course so successful. Finally they were asked to point out the specific areas in which students improved most at the end of the course.

Information gathered through the oral questions was written down during the interview to prevent omission and distortion. Questions not understood were clarified during the process.

**Observation:** Some of the general and tutorial classes over two semesters for parts of classes were observed to note the teaching process and techniques, the teachers’ attitude towards students, the activities they conducted for teaching, and how feedback was given, the students’ participation and behaviour and the ambience of the classroom.

**Data**

The data about the general classes and tutorials as recorded from the observation of some of the classes. The following is a summary of the information from the observations which supported the data from interview and explained aspects, as reported below.

**Data from Observations**

1. **Proximity:** The first aspect to impress was the atmosphere of the classroom, particularly the tutorial class. Each teacher came to class punctual, and warmly greeted the students with a smile. In the classroom they would sit in horseshoe fashion while in the tutorials they all sat closely around a table with the teacher at the head. Being close together, sitting on the same level made interaction easy, allowing students to talk and ask questions quite freely. In the schools of this country students are generally not encouraged to ask questions. Students on tutorials seemed more free and ready to talk about problems in the small group tutorials than in the classroom.

2. **Teachers’ behaviour:** The teachers’ behaviour with students was most impressively and uniformly positive, affectionate, gentle and enthusiastic. Each teacher talked smilingly during teaching and giving feedback, pointing out specifically what the students should have done. They sometimes joked as they explained topics, bringing in other issues and topics, and talked at the students’ level rather than talk down to them. Their voices were happy, not stern, and never was there any annoyance.
3. **Notes for feedback:** For writing, teachers gave individual feedback on specific mistakes to students, discussed what the correct form would be, what other ideas they could have used, etc. To improve their presentation, teachers could be seen to take down notes as students spoke, using these notes for feedback afterwards and sometimes asked other students for their opinion as well. Teachers ensured students’ understanding the problem clearly while giving feedback.

4. **Clarification:** Test rubrics were clarified during tutorials to make the process of testing and correction clear to students. Questions too were explained when students had problems with understanding or even how to respond to questions. They were told what was expected, and how to rewrite them for practice.

5. **Students’ Attitude:** At the first few classes, students were quiet and serious, looking apprehensive. As classes progressed they became free with each other and the teacher, interacting with peers, looking at each other for help, commenting easily on each other’s work and responding easily to the teacher. At ease in class, they showed confidence.

**Data from Interviews**

The information received from teachers through semi-structured individual interviews is summarized and presented below:

**Special Teaching Techniques**

- **a. Reflection:** At the first meeting in tutorials teachers asked students to think over their own strengths and weaknesses, about where they needed help, and write these down in English. In these small groups, students focus on themselves, introspect for weaknesses and write these down. This helps to raise their awareness about where they need help. After this, when errors are analyzed and discussed during feedback sessions, students realize that they do have problems, can SEE their problems.

- **b. Confidence in the Teacher:** Students often feel that the grade given to them is not fair. Teachers explain the rubrics used for marking and ask students to check their papers against the rubrics. Students realize why they have been penalised, find out that the marking has been fair. They start to trust their teachers, seeing them more and more as their well-wisher rather than an enemy. This boosts their confidence in the teachers and their guidance and teaching.

- **c. Personalized Feedback:** Students come to the Pre-University course with a severe lack of confidence. They have not been taught to think; they feel they do not have ideas to write or speak about. One-on-one support is not possible in the classroom. During tutorials they are trained to think, to talk about given topics, to write about these topics from the syllabus. They do free writing for some time, followed by feedback on the production on individual and specific problems, such as structure, procedure, vocabulary, and others. When checking writing and speaking activities in tutorials, teachers take notes of errors for each student. These are used to give specific feedback about the main problems: in structure, procedure, grammar, vocabulary, linking etc. Students listen with interest to the personalized feedback and learn where their problems are, and the way they can improve.

- **d. Trust in their Teacher:** The closeness to the teacher during tutorials, the one-on-one talk with teachers and students about academic and personal problems makes students more attentive. Teachers tell students that the classroom is their practice ground where they should try out their learning to make mistakes and learn.

- **e. Manageable Feedback:** Teachers try not to overwhelm students by showing them a variety of errors, but point out ONE type of error at a time because they feel that students benefit from learning about the correct use of one thing at a time. As the course progresses, teachers systematically try to make students more self-reliant by making them edit their own work with peers’ help or by themselves. Teachers reduce the support
they give, and try to make students into people capable of thinking of ideas for production, and also able to
edit it objectively. However, teachers always reassure that they are present and ready to help if the students
need it. This gradually helps students develop self-confidence and become self-reliant.

f. Peer feedback: Peers interact in small groups, helping each other with language support and feedback for
written and spoken activities. They try to identify their errors together, discussing how these should be
corrected, how their ideas could have been developed better. Such discussion and feedback between peers
helps to make them use the language for different purposes, develop better fluency, making them feel more
mature, more independent.

g. Fluency before accuracy: For feedback, teachers initially focus on fluency, which will allow students to
gain confidence to produce. Gradually teachers draw students’ attention more and more towards accuracy,
particularly for expressing the correct meaning.

h. Learning to Improve: Activities on the course includes reading different types and genres of texts and
giving opinions on issues in speech and writing. Such tasks are very new for the students, so the weak ones
do not perform well to begin with. The tasks they find difficult are discussed and explained during tutorials,
with some examples of the language required. The structure of the writing is explained with some examples
of vocabulary needed. The importance of learning to explain one’s opinion and giving reasons is stressed.

Students re-do the tasks after the explanation, and get better ideas of how to tackle the tasks as they re-do
them. There is a lot of focus on expression of one’s opinion on issues, so the students improve with time as
the course progresses.

i. Error Correction: As students learn, some teachers do not discuss errors but underline some mistakes
and ask students to find out what is wrong by themselves or in groups. They also try to find out possible
alternatives for vocabulary, structure etc., thereby improving their performance. Some teachers also believe
in giving a lot of homework for practice, and motivate students to do these by awarding bonus marks.

j. Self-Confidence: Students do a lot of presentations during tutorials to their small group members so they
do not feel so shy. Over time they lose their fear of large audiences and gain confidence. Some other ways
teachers help is by pairing up weaker students and asking them to practice speaking with each other in
English on campus. Teachers also instruct students to translate their thoughts into English when they are on
their own, to increase their repertoire of English vocabulary.

k. Use of Technology: Some teachers use social media sites on the internet to connect with students outside
class time. Communication between teachers and students helps to increase contact, while at the same time
makes students comfortable in English. It gives them increased practice in using vocabulary and structures
while teachers use this to remind about deadlines, special classes, schedules etc. Students need time to
develop a system for making notes of important items. Such reminders help to keep students’ performance
regular.

l. Encouragement: As students improve they start producing some good work. Such improvement is read
out to others and displayed for all to appreciate. For example a good essay or poem by a student is read out
to all; or someone good at drawing is selected for drawing something on the board for the teacher, and the
ability is pointed out. The glory of others’ admiration inspires and encourages these students.

m. Loneliness: Students at a new institution far away from home can be very lonely. Teachers introduce
them to others through ice-breaking activities, through classroom activities that require participation and
interaction between all members, like writing, rehearsing and acting out a play on a topic by all members of
the group. These activities can force students to get to know each other, and make friends. Tutorials also
help to bring students and teachers closer together, establishing rapport. Group activities in most classes and
tutorials where cooperation and collaboration is the way of performance, helps share and solve problems,
buidling rapport and friendships between classmates. In fact, these group members often become the closest
of friends.
n. Encouragement: Teachers believe that a smiling face is very important when dealing with weak students. They insist that discussion and giving feedback has to be done in a positive manner so that students’ self concept is not disturbed. One teacher says: ‘You know everything but make some errors during writing. Let us discuss those errors.’ or ‘You are good, but I want you to improve more…’. Such a positive manner of speaking should always be used by teachers during tutorials and in class.

o. Reading & Listening: Teachers find students to be ‘reluctant readers and writers’, so when activities are based on reading they lose interest. Teachers have to think up simpler reading activities to draw their interest, and performance is always in groups. So they read a book to draw the characters; they make a story board artistically, or draw a time line of the story. Teachers work continually on thinking up new ideas and design innovative activities to get students involved since they realize that both reading and listening are essential for language learning.

p. Exposure: For additional exposure to language structure, students are made to copy text from story books, or listen to dictation CDs to practice listening and writing at home to raise awareness of grammar, cohesion and pronunciation of English.

Factors that Help Language Learning

Teachers’ comments and the observation helped to identify some of the factors that come into play during the course to bring about improvement over a short period of time.

a. Motivation and Effort: Most students improve because they realize they need to work hard to improve at this point, so there is motivation to improve. They know that doing well on the course is the only way to make a good career a reality. Also, they know that their performance was only slightly below the acceptable level, a deficit they cover during the course to enter the university.

Teachers have found the weaker students to be more regular in their attendance. As these students improve, they gain confidence, and get more inspired to work harder when they see improvement in their classroom scores and test grades. Others try harder when they find that those who had started out weaker than them are speaking more fluently in English, a challenge for them. However, teachers find that the higher the level of proficiency students start with, the less effort they put in. So, while students from both English and Bengali medium schools are there, the latter are generally more motivated and work harder.

b. Interesting Material: Teachers download a variety of attractive, colourful and interesting tasks and activities, with pictures, songs, poems and stories, and set up tasks that are new to students and interesting to perform to capture students’ attention and interest. The tasks put pressure on students to perform, and use English for performing the tasks, a constant force that compels students to practice the language. Students interact to be understood and gradually pick up the language.

c. Mistakes and Feedback: Teachers maintain a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and make students feel that the classroom is the place for trying out their language freely, that making mistakes is the way to learn. Teachers are there to provide the words they need, to tell them what is wrong with their constructions, and give immediate individual feedback for improving writing and speaking. All these motivate students to use the language for different purposes and try to understand what others are saying. Such uses of language to interact and produce output in writing and speech put pressure on students to improve.

d. Visible Improvement: Students have to maintain a portfolio of the work they do over the course. From time to time they are told to read and compare their older and newer writings. Teachers point out to them their areas of improvement which convinces students that they have made progress. Conviction about their improvement motivates students to put in more effort. Tasks performed well, essays written well are read out in class to other groups for appreciation and encouragement. Others in the groups learn and are motivated to try harder as they listening to the essay.
e. Incentive: Quizzes and examinations put pressure on students to improve. What they care most about is their grades rather than improvement in language per se. When quizzes and exams approach students really become serious.

f. Training in thinking: Doing different types of tasks also put pressure on students to think of ideas, particularly when teachers stress the importance for students to express their opinion about issues and justify them. Students have to think, explain and write their thoughts up after discussion. Repetition of such exercise forces them to use language as interaction, negotiation and comprehensible output. They become better thinkers and more coherent speakers in the new language.

g. Importance: To motivate students further, teachers use the closeness of tutorials to talk to students individually about themselves. Even when the discussion is about what they must do, their errors, students realize that the topic is themselves. They understand how important their performance is to their teacher. Such attention helps to create a sense of identity and importance, increases their self-esteem, pushing them to improve performance.

h. Peer help: Group work on tasks and projects require situations to work with each other, share information with each other and arrive at the outcome with everyone’s help. This also pushes them to do become better with everyone’s help.

i. Confidence in the Teacher: The course and particularly the tutorials bring groups of students and their teacher together. Such closeness makes students pay more importance to what is said to them. Teacher and students have one-on-one talks about students’ problems, academic as well as personal. Mentoring becomes an important part of these sessions, when teachers advise them about what to do. This gives confidence to students, a sense that someone understands and cares about them. The close interaction with teachers which can consist of the explanation of marking rubrics and discussing confidential problems all help to improve the teacher-student relationship.

j. Vocabulary Extension: During discussions over tasks and at other times teachers try to introduce vocabulary and texts from content area subjects that students will study in the future. The realization that they are handling something that is relevant to what they will study in the future makes students give the tasks more importance. The association between English and other subjects makes students realize that English is not just a subject as they used to think in the past, but something to help them do better in their major areas. As such, students start to take more interest in English.

The Area Where Students Improve

All teachers agreed that students’ improvement is noticeable after 2-3 weeks. When asked about the areas where students improved most during the course, teachers mentioned that while the improvement was not startling, there was clear improvement, an awareness of where to use what language, with their ability to think to write and speak more clearly and appropriately. The areas they highlighted are mentioned below.

a. Speaking: Students’ improvement was the most noticeable, developed the quickest, although errors persist. Giving the reason for this, teachers say this happened because students are forced to use English in class extensively for all purposes, from interaction to doing tasks of public speaking and presentation. Their improvement in speaking was noticeable even in their regular classes with bigger audiences, with no shyness. With their improvement, they gained confidence and volunteered to speak more in class. They also listened to video extensively for developing listening skills, and interacted with teacher and students, learning the code of proper behaviour in public.

While students did not become remarkably accurate or fluent, teachers insisted that their improvement was enough to be able to carry out activities inside and outside class, so that teachers on the next English course at University had remarked on these students’ fluency and better presentation ability compared to students who had qualified in the admission test.
b. Writing: All teachers also mentioned that students learned how to think up ideas and write creatively by themselves. Students could now think of and express their opinion on issues, and substantiate with reasons. They learned how to structure it, and organize ideas logically within the structure. Students developed the sense of writing texts appropriately.

Teachers told them to find good vocabulary from around themselves. Students were now able to look around for such words and infuse these into their writing improving the expressiveness of their writing. They learnt what was meant by unity of ideas and how to maintain it. Their writing was now more to the point, not rambling on about unrelated issues.

c. Grammar: Some teachers mention students’ improvement in their use of grammar over the course. This also went towards improving their writing, which had cohesion and carried better meaning. Students progressed from simple to compound and then to complex sentences, where their use of transitions improved in variety. While these students did not become perfect, they had a much better awareness of and the use of the mechanics of writing to be able to carry out their future writing requirements.

d. Formal/Informal: Teachers point out students’ improvement in their range of vocabulary and register as they picked up many new words over the course and understood how to use these appropriately. They could now distinguish and use formal and informal language in writing and speaking appropriate to the situation, in the right register depending on the need. Their range had not become extensive, but the better awareness and noticeable improvement was there.

e. Politeness in English: Students from different regions of the country are not aware of decorum to use when communicating in English, particularly when contradicting or criticizing others’ ideas in academia. They need to be taught the language and behaviour to accompany politeness while expressing opinions different from others in public. Teachers had to point out what was acceptable while expressing opinions, interrupting someone or to contradict. Students learned to avoid words and behaviours that were rude, learned to show respect for others. Teachers explained and demonstrated what was done when conversing and arguing in English, how to apologize in English, with appropriate gestures. This helped to prepare students for society.

f. Loss of Fear: Students who had said before that they were afraid of English, lost their fear greatly. The new place of learning had become familiar so they were able to participate in discussions more easily and extensively than before. They were confident now, ready to take on higher education.

g. Confidence: Teachers found that students’ confidence developed tremendously over the course. To start with they were severely lacking in confidence. They had not learned to think, did not have ideas to write or speak about. Over time they gained confidence by learning the language skills and interacting with people.

h. Rate of improvement: The stronger students caught on quicker and improved more rapidly than the weaker, once they had understood what areas they were supposed to improve in and how they were required to do it. Gradually they learnt to use English better. One noticeable aspect is there seems to be threshold of ability that students have to reach for learning to start. The weaker students took longer to understand instructions to reach the point when their improvement would start. They also seemed to be more timid, less ready to try out the language. Students who were more able caught on more easily and learned faster, with greater self-confidence.

Discussion

To take an overview of what was learnt from teachers and from observation, it is clear that the course was able to provide students the linguistic factors necessary for language learning, their own speech and interaction being a principal source of Comprehensible Input. Interaction and negotiation with each other, getting feedback and discussions with teachers and peers on a variety of topics for many different purposes allowed learners to handle the input and use it to learn. Besides this, their practice of the language on the course made them grasp the language far more fully than before. All this was done in an atmosphere where
the teachers cared about the students, were interested in their progress. So the students were motivated to
demonstrate what they could do with the input they got.

These were students whose confidence had been shattered. They were failures, and would, perhaps never be
able to achieve their dreams of a good career. Like good nurses, these teachers had cared for them and
helped them to take a good look at what needed to be done, and helped them do it.

Students saw the goal of the course to be achievable with the personalized attention of teachers, and went
ahead with trying to fulfill their dreams of qualifying for university.

Implications

The implication of the study is very important as Bangladesh has been found to be the country with the
highest number of unemployed graduates in South Asia. Employers say that they want people who can
communicate in English in speech and writing: that they do not find people with such skills. It seems that
communication skills are the factor that is standing in the way for graduates to improve their chance for
employment.

It is crucial to find a solution to this problem. The solution does not seem hard to find, nor very difficult to
adopt. The findings here show that a large number of students can be helped to acquire the skills of
communication in English, both in reading and writing if the universities would take on the responsibility of
training a group of their English teachers to conduct Pre-University courses in English. These findings show
that such a trained force would enable the other 110 universities to introduce such courses that could give a
large number of students the skills in English. Teachers would need to be given intensive training in the
techniques of teaching and supervision, followed by observation of some effective classrooms to enable
trainee teachers to understand what techniques to adopt, what activities to conduct and what pattern of
teaching to adopt for effective learning to take place.

Teachers would have to learn how to ensure the presence of the necessary linguistic factors of input in
different forms in the classroom, the possibility of interaction and negotiation by students in the language.
Teachers themselves would have to develop their own proficiency in English to talk to students in the
language and provide good models for students.

Teachers would also have to learn to impart instruction and training to students with caring behaviour and
attention so that students would have the attitude and motivation to learn. Such teaching could help counter
the non-learning that occurred in our schools and colleges.

Today, one has to acknowledge that English is the means for access to better knowledge and education, for
training and the use of ICT. It enhances employability, increases the possibility of economic opportunities
for each member to access the high level labour force in the country. One can no longer deny that without
adequate proficiency in English, our graduates are crippled. Each of them, in the present and in the future
gets disadvantaged every day in the larger world of jobs and careers. Opportunities that exist cannot be
availed of because of the lack of proficiency.

The possibility of good news is the presence of the large number of Universities in the country now who can
help solve this problem. They can ensure the employability of their graduates, not only by introducing such
Pre-University courses, but also by giving students the kind of skills through education in their institution
that will be required of their graduates to be employed at the end of their education. It is the responsibility of
each and all universities to help their graduates live with self-respect in the future.
References


Chapter 3

Developing Learner Autonomy in the South Asian Context

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Introduction

The term “learner autonomy” was first coined in 1981 by Henri Holec to refer to “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Since then the concept has been redefined variously - as an ability, a psychological trait, a situation, a set of skills and as a student right. For example, Little (1991) sees it as a “capacity” rather than “taking charge” and emphasizes a psychological view in relation to the process and content of learning - a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action (p. 4). Benson (1996), on the other hand, sees learner autonomy in terms of control over the processes and content of learning. In all these definitions the common theme is that of the “learner” being the central character in their learning rather than an external receiver of linguistic knowledge.

Benson (2007) in his state-of-the-art article states that learner autonomy can have different versions and can be realized differently in different settings depending on learner variables, (e.g. age, progression of learning, their perceived needs, etc.). In other words, autonomy has different levels and different representations according to context. The concept of autonomy can vary from culture to culture and is realized differently. From this point of view there is a need to explore the concept further in the local context.

In this chapter a brief overview of what learner autonomy entails as well as the attributes of autonomous learners will be highlighted. Results of a brief survey conducted in Bangladesh to elicit the views of tertiary level students on this issue are presented. Finally, some activities for enhancing learner autonomy for practicing teachers are shared and implications for pedagogy highlighted.

Literature Review

Learner autonomy is not synonymous with self-instruction. The following extract from Dafei (2007) will illustrate this:

Most people now agree that autonomy and autonomous learning are not synonyms of, 'self-instruction', 'self-access', 'self-study', 'self-education', 'out-of-class learning' or 'distance learning'. These terms basically describe various ways and degrees of learning by yourself, whereas autonomy refers to abilities and attitudes (or whatever we think the capacity to control your own learning consists of). The point is, then, that learning by yourself is not the same thing as having the capacity to learn by yourself. Also, autonomous learners may well be better than others at learning by themselves (hence the connection), but they do not necessarily have to learn by themselves. (Dafei 2007:5)

The concept of learner autonomy is related to giving the student more responsibility so that they can become more actively involved in learning. This capacity for active involvement has to be built gradually in phases. Therefore, learner autonomy does not mean the teacher will be absent from the scene or have no control. As Thanasoulas clarifies (2000), “learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher becomes redundant, abdicating his/her control over what is transpiring in the language learning process” (p. 1). Students may also take help from peers. However, within collaborative group work they need to take responsibility for their own contribution.
Attributes of Autonomous Learners

According to Benson (2001), the autonomous learner is one that constructs knowledge from direct experience rather than one who responds to someone’s instructions. That is to say, they have the capacity and strategies to construct their knowledge rather than passively take in transmitted knowledge.

Autonomous learners are thought to possess certain traits and these are the characteristics that teachers need to focus on, if autonomy is to be fostered. The seven main attributes characterizing autonomous learners (Omaggio, 1978, cited in Wenden, 1998: 41-42) are:

i. autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies;
ii. take an active approach to the learning task at hand;
iii. are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs;
iv. are good guessers;
v. attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy;
vi. develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and
vii. have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language.

Nunan (2003) identified some additional traits of successful autonomous learners. He mentioned attributes such as: a diversity of skills, passion and enjoyment for a particular field, a focused and active approach to learning. He also cites success stories of autonomous learners from Hong Kong. Examples reveal that motivated learners have strong decision making and critical skills and take dynamic initiatives to expand their learning beyond the classroom. They also demonstrated very positive and focused attitudes toward their target goals.

Clearly, research suggests that autonomous learners are expected to think critically and reflect on their learning and learning strategies and, as a result, are able to take responsibility of their own learning. The concept of “critical thinking” is directly in contrast to the dominant practice of rote learning in many contexts including Bangladesh. Learner autonomy also implies that the learner will move away from dependence on the teacher and take responsibility for their own learning and learn to learn which is again directly in contrast with the transmission mode of teaching and passive learning culture of many South Asian learners.

Learner Autonomy Research: Bangladesh

The national educational policy of Bangladesh places emphasis on “qualitative change” in the education system (National Education Policy 2010, foreword, p.vi). It aims to “foster creative and thinking faculties among the learners through a system of education that contains indigenous spirit and elements and which will lead to a life-oriented development of knowledge of the learners” (p.1).

While learner autonomy may be the key to this lifelong learning, unfortunately, little initiative seems to have been taken to implement learner autonomy at any level. Research too in this sector in Bangladesh is scarce. An attempt was made to introduce the concept of learner autonomy through a three year project (2008-2011) at Oxford International School, a private, English medium school in Dhaka. A programme for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was set up. Initially teachers were reluctant to participate in the teacher development sessions but on reflection it was revealed that the CPD observations were instrumental in helping teachers move towards increased autonomy in the classroom. Findings reveal that although the concept of learner autonomy was introduced, there was limited success mainly due to factors such as traditional student, teacher and parental expectations (Hudson, 2011).
A study by Jamil (2010) on learner autonomy at the tertiary level in Bangladesh showed that during the course when given the option, 65% students helped design course objectives and materials and 75% believed that they could take help from books and the internet to overcome their learning difficulties. However, some students completely alienated themselves from group activities like group work/ pair work when asked to work autonomously. While these may indicate that student, teacher and parent beliefs may hamper the initiative to foster autonomy, Jamil’s study (2010) revealed to some extent that students did respond positively when asked to participate in managing their own learning and this in the long run contributes in improving their confidence. Existing research evidence, therefore, seemed to be inconclusive with regard to learners’ readiness for learner autonomy and further research seemed to be necessary.

The Study

The small-scale study presented in this chapter was conducted in 2011 to gain insights about the awareness and extent of learner autonomy prevailing in Bangladeshi classrooms at the tertiary level. The specific objectives were to collect information on: a) students’ beliefs about their own learning; b) expectations from their teachers; c) strategies used for promoting learning; and d) their views on the benefits and challenges of becoming autonomous learners.

Methodology

The respondents were 42 tertiary level students and data were elicited through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was a mix of closed and open-ended questions and focused on the best way of learning, learning outside the classroom, student expectations from teachers, perceptions about taking responsibility for learning, learning strategies and constraints of autonomous learning. The main findings are discussed below.

Data Analysis and Findings

Best Way of Learning

Students were asked to identify the best way of learning. Results, as presented in Table 3.1, showed that the majority of the students’ psychological orientation towards learning is teacher dependent. Nearly two thirds of the students reported that “getting help from the teacher” was the best way to learn. Only one third were found to think of studying and learning on one’s own as the best way to learn and a little over one third perceived studying outside the syllabus to be the best method. Although in our society private coaching and tutoring is an indispensible part of a student’s learning life (see Hamid et al, 2009), it was interesting to note that only 2.38% students thought of it as a suitable way of learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of preference</th>
<th>Way of learning</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Getting help from the teacher and learning</td>
<td>64.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Taking initiative and studying outside the syllabus</td>
<td>40.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Studying and learning on one’s own</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Getting help from a private tutor</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Students’ Perception about the Best Way of Learning

Student Expectations

Regarding student expectations from their teachers, it was found that about half of the students expected teachers to give notes and explanations and about one third expected them to provide full clarifications of
points in class. Less than a quarter of the participants expected teachers to make students do their own work! Table 3.2 illustrates the breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will clarify everything in the class</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will give explanation and notes</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will give tasks to do on your own</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will ask you to solve your own problems</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Student Expectations

In order to elicit student’s perception about the responsibility regarding their own learning, they were given nine statements related to learning responsibility and were asked to respond as to whether they thought it was their own, their teachers’ or mutual responsibility of both parties. As can be seen in Table 3.3 within the three categories (teacher/student/mutual) the percentage that was statistically much higher than other categories (in bold) was taken to be the most favored opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Your teacher</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) making progress during English lessons</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>88.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) making progress outside the class</td>
<td>88.09%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) finding your strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) stimulating your interest in English</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>38.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) enhancing motivation</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>30.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) deciding the objectives of your course</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td>40.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) choosing activities and materials for your class</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) choosing the topics</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>50.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Evaluating your learning</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>26.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Students’ Perceptions about Responsibility for learning

**Student Responsibility**

It was found that except for making progress outside the class, the responsibility for all other categories was thought to be either solely with the teacher or the teacher and students collaboratively. The percentages for all these other items related to only students were found to be fairly low.

**Teacher Responsibility**

The formal academic course and evaluation-related activities (deciding objectives, choosing tasks and materials for the course, evaluating learning) were mainly thought to be within the jurisdiction of the teacher. Results showed that nearly two thirds of the students perceived “enhancing motivation” and “choosing activities and materials for the course” to be mainly the teachers’ job. More than half considered deciding objectives of the course to be the teachers’ domain too. The majority of the respondents also believed “evaluating learning” to be another teacher responsibility.

**Mutual Responsibility**

Finding one’s strength and weaknesses can be the only valid case where students think the liability lies with both teacher and student (supported by more than half of the respondents). The other two statements “stimulating student interest” (more than one third) and “choosing topics” (more than one third) have only a slightly higher value than the corresponding “the teacher” category.
Thus, it can be said that the majority of students think most of the responsibilities of the learning process lie with the teacher and secondly with "both". Students still seem to have a passive mental orientation towards their responsibilities in the learning process. It seems that it is important for teachers to inquire into the causes of their students’ apparent over-dependence on them before they are able to design appropriate intervention strategies.

**Out of Class Activities**

Student participants were asked to state the initiatives, if any, they take outside the classroom to promote their own learning. From the descriptive statistics considering the points “often” and “always” together it was found that watching English programs (total 32), taking notes in class (total 34) questioning teachers (total 26), looking up words in the dictionary (total 29) and forming study groups (total 25) are the activities most practiced by students. The mean for all these items are above or near 4. Another point worth mentioning is that, there is not a single student (total 0) who has “never” done these activities.

Results, shown in Table 3.4 below, reveal that half of the respondents often or always took the initiative of speaking in English with friends (total 22). Less than half consulted the teacher (total 18).

The items with a lower mean were “enrolled in an extra course” (total 5) and “did an extra assignment” (total 8). Perhaps because these required more time and effort on the learner’s part or as found in earlier responses, the course and task management related decisions were perceived to be part of the teacher’s responsibility and not the students’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) read newspapers in English</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) looked up meaning of new words in Dictionary</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>30.95%</td>
<td>38.09%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) watched English programmes on TV</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>54.76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) spoke in English with friends</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td>40.48%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) consulted teacher</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>45.24%</td>
<td>30.95%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) asked questions to teacher</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>19.04%</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) formed a study group</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>19.04%</td>
<td>40.48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) took notes in class</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) enrolled in an extra course</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>26.19%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) did an extra assignment</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Out of class Activities to Support English Language Development

Although we notice some degree of autonomous learning through activities listed in the charts above, in practice, however, it is perceived that students still have a long way to go as no activity reaches even 60% for any of the top two categories.

**Strategies for Successful Learning**

Students were asked to mention the strategies they used for being successful. They mentioned a number of activities they engaged in. For instance, as shown in Table 3.5, 68.42% said they engaged in special preparation for exams, 60.52% used the internet resources; 57.89% reported they set goals; 52.63% made notes; 50% studied selected questions for exams and 46.37% memorized answers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for exams</td>
<td>68.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use internet resources</td>
<td>60.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set goals for themselves</td>
<td>57.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek clarification</td>
<td>55.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make notes</td>
<td>52.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study selective questions</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorise answers</td>
<td>47.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Activities for Promoting Learning

Students were probed further and asked categorically what additional things they did if they did not understand something. Their responses are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity kind</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking help from others</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Discuss with classmates</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Solicit help from teacher</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Discuss with senior friends/siblings</td>
<td>38.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to solve alone</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Consult the dictionary</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Solve the problem yourself</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6: Additional Activities

The results indicate that most (about two thirds) students prefer group discussion for problem solving. The second most preferred option was soliciting help from the teacher and the third was getting help from senior friends or siblings. It is important to note that a very low percentage of students - only about one tenth - tried to solve any learning related problem themselves or even consult the dictionary on their own. It was noted that students are mentally much more oriented towards group work than individual effort when it comes to problem solving outside the classroom.

**Benefits and Constraints of Learner Autonomy**

This was an open ended question intended to find out student perceptions about autonomous learning in terms of benefits and constraints. Students came up with 40 benefits and 40 constraints which mainly center on the following summarized ideas:

**Benefits of learning on one’s own:**

- Remains in memory for a long time
- Sometimes helps to get a clearer perception
- Increases self confidence
- Comfortable and less anxious as there is no pressure
- Better understanding of weaknesses
- Increases ability to think
- Learning beyond the syllabus

It may be said students seem to be aware of the benefits of learner autonomy in terms of increasing cognitive capability and confidence. One important benefit pointed out was lowering of anxiety - a facet often overlooked in second language classrooms in our country. Another point worth mentioning is that students perceived that they better understood their own weaknesses when they learnt on their own. It may be due to the fact that in most cases, as learning is teacher dependent, students do not actively take on the
responsibility of self-monitoring and evaluation: although in question 3 about half had responded that it was a mutual (teacher & student) responsibility to find out one’s weaknesses.

Constraints:

- Can be confusing
- No one to guide/ make corrections
- Tendency to become lazy as there is less pressure
- Tendency to use Bengali, no pressure to use English

If we look at the constraints pointed out by learners it is evident that students lack the skill of self-regulation and confidence. One important word repeatedly used by students was “pressure”. They thought of teachers/parents/examinations as agents of pressure but that is how the learning took place. Once this catalyst “pressure” is removed they were found to doubt their own motivation or integrity to learn for the sake of learning. A common misconception was “no one to guide”. It needs to be emphasized that learner autonomy does not mean that the teacher will not guide and instruct.

Discussion

To summarize the findings it can be said that most students assume it is the responsibility of the teacher to make students learn through clarifications, explanations and notes. Only very few think teachers should make students solve their own problems and give them tasks to do on one’s own. Most students also thought of classroom and course related decisions (activities, materials, choosing topics, evaluation) to be the responsibility of the teacher or of the teacher and students together (motivation, stimulating interest, identifying strength and weaknesses) but not solely their own responsibility. It was seen that students are mentally much more oriented towards group work than individual effort when it comes to problem solving.

It is important to note that students engaged in strategies such as setting goals and using the internet resources for being successful. It was also heartening to note that they were aware of study skills and made notes and prepared for exams. They are also aware of the benefits and constraints of learner autonomy and to some extent do engage in activities which enhance learner independence. Students also suffer from the misconception that learner autonomy means total omission of teacher guidance and control.

The results presented in this chapter were the findings of a small-scale study and cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the findings are useful in that they reveal deficiencies in general awareness and can be used by teachers for pedagogical decision making. Based on the findings of the study, some activities for enhancing learner autonomy and implications for pedagogy are presented.

Activities for Fostering Learner Autonomy

Some activities which teachers carry out in the class can be partially relegated to students to promote autonomous learning. As teachers, we can guide them towards achieving their goals and objectives successfully by interweaving traditional activities with independent learning activities. The five activities outlined in this chapter can help build learner autonomy:

1. Designing a Needs-Based Basic English Skills Syllabus

Objectives: 1. Identifying needs; 2. Self and peer assessment; 3. Designing a syllabus (e.g. for first year tertiary level students) for a particular group of students to develop the four skills

Procedure: Group work: Learners work through several phases in small groups. As an out of class activity (e.g. could be a homework activity) learners carry out a small survey to identify the needs of the learners and also engage in self and peer assessment (the teacher can provide a self-assessment questionnaire). They bring the findings to the class and share with group members. Based on student needs, sample syllabi and relevant published articles on the topic at hand, they design the outline of a
syllabus for students. They can do a mini presentation highlighting the aims, objectives and features of their syllabus and also explain the rationale behind it. They can later again work in groups and take the best items from each group and prepare a final syllabus to be presented to the teacher.

This activity will trigger interest and motivation and will encourage learners as they will be involved in an activity which is usually carried out by a teacher in a traditional classroom. It will also enhance their negotiation skills.

2. Writing Test Items

Objectives: Peer/ self-assessment, designing test items e.g. MCQ (multiple choice questions), Matching and True/False questions.

Procedure: Students work in groups and share their test items as a PowerPoint presentation or a display on chart paper.

This could be a highly motivating activity for advanced level students aspiring to be teachers as students will be engaged in the decision making process. They will also have the opportunity to carry out research about different types of test items. This activity can be done in three phases. In phase one (first class) they do the preparation and in phase two (second class) present their items via a Power Point presentation. They could be asked to forward their rationale behind the test item type as this will make them reflect on why they chose the particular item. In addition, they could be asked to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each test item type. In Phase three, in groups, they prepare a complete examination paper, (e.g. write instructions, put the different items together, allocate marks for each item, etc.) and present it to the class. This could be a half-day workshop activity depending on availability of time and resources. The teacher can monitor students’ activities and will only guide if they need help.

3. Journal Entries

Objective: Developing writing skills through reflection.

Procedure: Students can be encouraged to maintain a structured reflective journal (e.g. a spiral notebook), where they can record twice/thrice a week comments or observations related to diverse areas, e.g. academia (teachers, exams, assignments), social/cultural events, travelling and personal issues which have impacted their lives. They could also report the problems they faced in a certain subject and the personal strategies they used to overcome these problems. This will not only enhance their writing skills but also improve their vocabulary and, more importantly, develop their narrative, reflective and critical thinking skills. The teacher can encourage by reading their journals and making pertinent and encouraging comments.

4. Watching English TV Programmes or Reading English Short Stories

Objective: developing speaking skills.

Procedure: Learners, in pairs, choose a particular TV programme or an English short story in advance and share the story line or highlights of the TV programme with the class. Giving them a choice will motivate them as they will choose something they really want to read or watch.

Mitchell (2014) stresses the importance of giving choice to learners for promoting independent learning. He says “In the modern world people are overwhelmed by choice….However, we rarely give our learners much choice about how they learn in school” (p.5).

This activity will not only provide enjoyment to learners but will build confidence and enhance their speaking skills. As a follow-up, a debate session could be organized around a popular TV show. If the show is in the local language, the discussion and debate will still be in the target language, English.
5. Out-of-class Collaborative Task through Portfolio-based Assessment:

It is now commonly understood that out-of-class activities go hand in hand with the concept of learner autonomy and can determine student achievement in the long run. It is, therefore, important to make sure students collaborate outside the classroom. This can be achieved through portfolio-based assessment where marks will be allocated for a series of collaborative projects which learners will complete and later submit to the teacher.

Objective: developing research, report writing and negotiation skills.

Procedure: Homework assignments may be turned into collaborative group projects. For instance, an essay on “The Biography of a Street Vendor” can be assigned to a group as project work as opposed to an individual essay. Students will be required to explore the world outside and interview someone in the real world, take photographs of the person at work, transcribe and translate the interview before they organize their data into a coherent essay. Students are likely to improve their research and report writing skills as well through participation in this collaborative work. Students submit initial drafts of their work and discuss the progress with the class teacher. Since students do not submit individual essays, the workload on the teacher arising from this process writing approach will be minimal. This task need not replace or significantly alter standard semester final examinations but could be incorporated alongside these. Students could also do a group presentation. This activity will engage students and help them to develop real life skills and ultimately autonomy.

The above-mentioned activities can work as a guideline and teachers can adapt these to suit their particular context and level of students.

Implications for Pedagogy

Based on study findings and the discussion above, the following implications may be highlighted for pedagogy.

Learners need to be proactive nowadays and thus they need to be aware of various learning strategies as well as their own strategy use. The strategies students are already using may be an indicator of the learning context and provide a useful guide as to how best to incorporate and facilitate learner autonomy in a particular context. Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) can be adapted by classroom teachers for this purpose.

Teachers need to be aware of learners’ beliefs and their learning styles as they will then be in a better position to negotiate tasks and responsibilities with their students. This will also help minimize any “perceptual mismatches” (see Kumaravadivelu, 1994) between students and the teacher. Students also need to be provided with choice and opportunities for collaboration.

Being well conversant with the principles and dimensions of learner autonomy is a must for the classroom teacher. This in turn calls for engaging in continuous professional development for the understanding and implementation of learner autonomy. In fact, both teacher and learner training are the need of the hour.

Teachers need to provide a platform for self-directed learning and emphasize out-of-class learning and portfolio assessment. As mentioned earlier, students can be given tasks and projects to complete in collaboration with other students. Greater allocation of marks for such tasks will also motivate learners to take responsibility and become autonomous.

A change of parental attitudes and beliefs is also needed to develop independent learners. Schools need to arrange discussion and counseling sessions for parents. At the same time, liaison with the Departmental Heads, Faculty Deans and the University Grants Commission (UGC) or concerned relevant authorities must be maintained for bringing about suitable changes in the syllabus and assessment procedures.
Conclusion

This chapter has briefly outlined the findings of a small scale study carried out in Bangladesh to assess tertiary level student views on learner autonomy. The main findings show that the majority of the students perceive that it is the teacher’s responsibility to teach, evaluate and supply all related information regarding teaching and learning. However, students are aware of the benefits of learner autonomy and participate in activities which build learner independence and do engage in using a few effective strategies. They also associate learner autonomy with a lack of guidance from the teacher.

Learners need to take charge of their own learning if they are interested in moving ahead in life. They need to be motivated and feel the urge to develop themselves and this awareness will help them to be more focused. It is also important to identify which learner strategies work for them. The effort should be to promote the attributes of autonomous learners: for instance, knowing about one’s style and strategies, taking risks, showing a willingness to communicate in the target language and having positive attitudes about it. In this connection the role of the teacher in assisting learners to be autonomous needs to be emphasized.

Developing learner autonomy is not only the ultimate goal of learning but it is also a measure of successful teaching. Despite stereotypes of passive student learning and teacher dependence, there is evidence to suggest that students can be led to greater autonomy through discussions, awareness-raising, strategy training and subtle changes in pedagogy. Although misconceptions exist, those could be eliminated if teachers were willing to engage in open discussions with students and negotiate with them. The five activities outlined above, if adopted and adapted by teachers to suit their particular contexts will help in the development of learner autonomy. Similar activities can also be designed by teachers to lead their students to greater autonomy and long-term success.

We, as teachers, are aware of the benefits of promoting learner autonomy and feel we have started to make inroads into learner autonomy in Bangladesh. Seminars, conferences and teacher training workshops in Bangladesh have begun to focus on learner autonomy and life-long learning which suggests awareness has already been created among a good number of teachers and trainers. We also understand that the path is challenging due to numerous contextual constraints and we have a long way to go. However, we feel confident that we can soon reach our goal if we can promote greater student understanding of what strategies they use for coping with learning and the need to be autonomous.
References


Peer Observation: Developing New Best Practices to Fit New Classroom Paradigms

Raymond Sheehan, Zayed University, UAE

Peer observation in the classroom may be defined as a planned event when one colleague of equal rank or standing takes note of what is occurring in another colleague’s classroom. The literature on peer observation regularly identifies a formative and summative dichotomy. At its formative best, the observation is a welcome part of continuing professional development, initiated by the colleagues themselves. At its summative worst, however, it is simply a box-ticking exercise initiated by the institution to satisfy part of an evaluative requirement that documents teacher performance and puts the findings in a folder, to be used to the teacher’s benefit or detriment. In most cases, peer observation may perhaps fall somewhere in the middle of a formative-summative spectrum and will satisfy a variety of stakeholders. Specifically, it should be of developmental benefit to the observer and the observed; it should enhance the quality of teaching practice, and the discourse about teaching, in the institution itself; it should improve the students’ classroom experience constructed by reflective teachers; it should deepen educational managers’ knowledge of who is working for them by providing them with a non-managerial and non-student perspective; and it should satisfy the demands of any external stakeholders who audit or seek to account for evidence of professionalism. The question is; why does peer observation so often fail to do so many of the great things it should and could do?

Despite its intended benefits, peer observation is problematic: primarily in that it is not universally welcomed by practicing teachers, and perhaps also because there are some doubts about best practice modes of conducting peer observation. Some teacher reluctance or even resistance is understandable. It can be stressful to have an extra person in the class, taking notes, potentially raising issues and questioning the observed teacher’s way of doing things. It may generate problems regarding trust between colleagues, and may undermine professional self-confidence. Some aspects of what might pass as best practice will only add to teacher reluctance. This is particularly the case when a peer observation in its format and documentation is little different from a supervisor’s observation and may ultimately have its formative purpose set aside because it is to be used for summative purposes with high-stakes consequences such as promotions and contract renewals.

The purpose here is to explore why peer observation might be perceived negatively, and to suggest how the negative aspects of peer observation can be overcome. Ways will also be suggested to widen the gap between peer and supervisory observations in order to change the perceptions of and the value of peer observations. It is time to get beyond the usual formative versus summative dichotomy and construct a new observer paradigm which will lead to more valuable ways to conduct peer observations that can benefit students, teachers and institutions. It will be argued in this chapter first that many of the negative issues arise because of conflicting paradigms of what good and effective teaching means. More importantly, it will be argued that such apparently antagonistic paradigms are capable of resolution, to the benefit of all. Secondly, it will be argued that the processes of peer observation need to be conceptualized differently in order to fit with a broader understanding of what really happens in dynamic classrooms. Finally, specific areas for action research into peer observation will be suggested so that an ongoing conversation can be held about this important aspect of professional development.

Two conflicting paradigms about teaching

One paradigm about teaching is that it is an unpredictable and dynamic process, full of unexpected events, classroom surprises and detours from the straight and narrow constraints of curricular specifications and lesson plans. Bailey (1996, 15) researched the myriad points when teachers must make judgments: ‘as to
what is best for our students, whether to stay with the lesson plan, safely on firm ground, or to head out into the uncharted waters of spontaneous discourse’. She recalls a memorable lesson where she was a learner and her teacher allowed a worthwhile moment to develop, thus abandoning the plan for a while:

Later it occurred to me that this responsiveness was one of the things that we most appreciated about our teacher, so I began to watch for examples of such flexibility in my own teaching and in that of other teachers I observed. (p. 16)

Teachers may decide to depart from their plans, she notes if, for example, they detect an interest that might increase engagement, or they suddenly see a way to accommodate different learning styles.

Such departures from planned learning events may appear like a departure from effective planning and yet they have authenticity. ‘Teaching is a complex, messy business of knowing what to do in the classroom’ (Freeman, 1996, p. 109). Most teachers will intuitively recognize the realism and accept the truth of this statement. Teachers know, from daily experience, that the best lesson plans, methods and materials can fall short of the planned ideal when actualized in the classroom, even when executed by the most accomplished teachers. Any planned interaction may go wrong when it involves social dynamics, time-frames, goals, varying levels of individual cognition and motivation, varying personal responses to content, varying perceptions of classroom management and self-management, … The list of reasons underpinning the paradigm that teaching is a ‘messy business’ could go on.

Cvetek (2008) goes far beyond the notion of messy to apply chaos theory to the nature of what happens in dynamic classrooms. Lessons here can be full of uncertainties and can be open to random events. They may have a non-linear development (quite unlike the linearity of most lesson plans). They are multi-layered and complex in their interactions, in ways that cannot be written into strictly planned events. Cvetek would see the random and uncertain characteristics of such classrooms as positive, creating new possibilities and opportunities. In the messy classroom, teachers and learners jointly construct the teaching and learning processes that best serve learning. These processes are not to be mistaken for methods, and certainly not for best methods.

Perhaps our profession ought to be beyond obsessing with methods such as the best way to teach the present perfect or collocations or essay-writing. Kumaravadivelu (2006) in a state-of-the-art article outlining the history of methods in TESOL posits that we are now in an era of post-methods, in a period of awakening to new possibilities. He states that ‘method should no longer be considered a valuable or a viable construct, and that what is needed is not an alternative method but an alternative to method.’ (p. 67). Approvingly, he summarises Allwright’s (2003) fundamental tenets of exploratory practice focusing particularly on the belief that the quality of classroom life in the language classroom is more important than instructional efficiency; developing a deeper understanding of that quality is more essential than constantly improving instructional methods. Such classrooms can function, according to Kumaravadivelu (2006, 69) ‘as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation.’

The opposite paradigm about teaching and learning can be more briefly stated since it is the more conventional one. It views good classrooms as the opposite of messy. It values perfect control in a strongly managed learning environment. It values a well-planned logically sequential series of events, with calculated balance and variety, based on clear teacher goals: This is what I aim to do and this is how I am going to do it; I can anticipate what difficulties will arise and I know exactly how to deal with them. The teacher will manage relationships in the classroom, and construct a variety of working situations. The teacher will also be aware of cognitive processing, checking constantly to gauge how learners are dealing with the target language. There may be few surprises in these classrooms, as long as everything goes according to plan. There may be great demonstrations of expertise in methods and management. There is usually a smooth transition from planning to execution. The teacher is most likely seen as an effective deliverer of a curriculum that needs to be covered.
A problem arises when soi-disant experts and even observer-colleagues might assume automatically that the messy bits are the bad bits and will feel called upon to suggest how the messy bits could have been avoided. Very often they encourage the observed teacher to reflect upon the lesson in order to determine what could have been improved. Following the conventional assumption that messy means bad; teachers often select those parts of the lesson that did not go according to plan as the areas upon which to concentrate. They may focus on those parts of the lesson that were apparently hijacked by learners who took the learning process in a different direction. They may view the classroom surprises as obstacles which prevented them from reaching their aims in that class.

If indeed we as a profession are now living in an era of post-method notions of what is to be valued in learning situations, we may need to reconstruct our notions of observation, including peer observation, to accommodate the possibilities that the messy moments may be the best, or at least that they may have great value; observations should recognize as potentially positive all that randomness, chaos, nonlinearity and classroom complexity. It should seek ways to articulate its recognition of the teacher’s professional skill, personal abilities and use of experience in co-constructing an empowering classroom environment where both the planned and unplanned are valued.

Reconceptualising peer observation

Miner (1992) comments that peer observation becomes more acceptable to management – and one might add, external stakeholders - if it is perceived as strict and rigorous. The many online pages from schools and universities in the United Kingdom and the USA which publish their peer-observation guidelines have long urged standardization in peer observation. This push towards standardization may be to allay feelings of institutional misgivings about the reliability of the peer observation process. They note the three most common ways to document both formative and summative observation: checklists, rating scales and written analyses. Once peer observation is seen in this way as little different from supervisory evaluation, the word training begins to appear, as it is feared that the peer observer has little experience in an observer role and needs to be developed in order to do the job properly. This has the additional unwelcome effect of increasing observer anxiety. Meanwhile, the observed teacher will be aware of being observed by somebody not fully developed in the role of observer and will worry about misjudgment and misinterpretation.

There are certainly general areas of best practice that could be agreed upon, no matter what the dominant paradigm of teaching. The University of Minnesota’s Center for Teaching and Learning, for example, recommends a pre-observation ‘conference,’ itemizes some rules of good conduct for the observation itself and recommends a post-observation ‘conference’. What will differ, however, are perceptions of what might happen at each of these stages. The University of Minnesota typifies many institutions in how it encodes the 3-stage process. At the pre-observation stage, the observer should find out from the teacher what the course goals are, and specifically what the goals and objectives are for the lesson to be observed. The observer should be informed of the goals and methods used to achieve the objectives, as well as the means by which the teacher will assess or measure how effectively those goals were achieved. The guidelines for the observation itself suggest an early arrival and describe how the observer will be introduced to the class. It also recommends the following:

Observers are not to ask questions or participate in activities during class; such behavior can detract from and invalidate the observations. An effective observation requires an observation instrument designed to accurately and reliably portray the teacher's behavior.

There is very much an emphasis on instruments, accuracy, validity and reliability. The focus is also on the teacher’s behavior. The same website provides a list of observable characteristics of effective teachers, and few would quarrel with its itemization of qualities and behaviors which find their way into many observation checklists and prompts. They include a focus on pacing, methods, examples, clarity, student-centered learning, class relations, teacher humor, presence as a real person, democratic student voice and so on. During the post observation stage, to happen within one week, the observer’s instrument/s of observation
become a focus for the discussion. A positive approach to feedback is encouraged, complemented by honesty and openness.

This is a classic process. It is logical, systematic and clear. It provides a crutch particularly for those observers who are relatively new to the role. These observers may feel insecure about the demands imposed upon them as observers to provide accurate, reliable and valid data as evidence of whatever documented claims and judgments they might make.

The process, in this conventional form and with this focus, does the job it is intended to do, and will have few critics within the teaching-learning paradigm which values linearity over non-linearity, well managed order over chaos theory and which views the human messiness of learning as innately problematic and to be corrected in the interests of efficiency. This same process may appear inadequate and/or disquieting when viewed within the context of a different paradigm, the post-method paradigm. The two paradigms are not irreconcilable. The fundamental argument here is that, if there is a paradigm shift in how teaching, learning and classrooms are beginning to be viewed, there must be a similar shift in how teachers are observed. An uncritical use of the instruments from one paradigm to observe what is happening in another context simply makes no sense. To take a simple example, it would be the equivalent of, say, an observer well-schooled in the efficacy of PPP methodology (presentation-practice-produce) arriving in a class where task-based learning was taking place; the observers’ strongly held beliefs about validity, reliability and accuracy derived from PPP would possibly make them blind to what was really going on. Even if the task-based classroom activities were perfectly orderly within a task-based learning framework, observers might fail to detect this different order or understand the underlying rationale.

What can be done is to take many of the positive elements of what is current and explore by what means they can be enlarged in order to accommodate a view that the potential randomness, non-linearity and the psychosocial complexities of classroom events can be valued rather than problematized.

The pre-observation stage, in addition to focusing on goals, objectives, methods and materials, should contain other essential elements. First, the observer and observed should come to some understanding of each other’s teaching philosophy. In other words, there needs to be some discussion of teaching and learning. Which paradigm does each primarily operate in? The observer and observed can identify elements of potential bias, unfairness and misunderstanding which can then be dealt with so that they do not cloud the subsequent stages. Second, there should be a psychosocial focus. The observer needs to understand some of the complexities of the particular classroom from the privileged perspective of the observed teacher who has gained ever-deepening insights both into the particular dynamics of a given group and into individuals and sub-groups. It should be suggested how the psychosocial elements can affect learning. Finally, there needs to be some discussion in order to arrive at a clear and shared understanding of what the observer’s own goals are, and where the observer stands on the formative-summative scale. This discussion will widen the focus, then, beyond a teaching philosophy to encompass an observation philosophy.

The observation stage need not be instrument-driven, perhaps the less so, the better. ‘The danger in looking for something particular is that you may be able to find it only at the cost of ignoring what is genuinely interesting’ (Richards, 2003, 110). Richard’s chapter on observation (pp. 104-171), although not strictly concerned with classroom observation, is valuable because it describes a range of approaches and strategies to get the observer beyond the limits of instruments designed to demonstrate accuracy, validity and reliability. ‘Observation is more than a mechanical process to be gone through; it is a commitment to apply the full range of our perceptual and analytic skills as intensively and extensively as we are able, in the pursuit of understanding’ (Richards, 2003: 106). Although Richard’s approach has strong elements of ethnography, that does not mean it is totally open-ended and without form. On the contrary, without institutional instruments, each observer needs to refine the powers of observation more and more over time, and to develop observation structures that encompass classroom events which go beyond measurements of methodological effectiveness.
Richard states that:

the data need to be captured systematically, and in order to do this the eye and mind must be trained so that it will be possible to follow standard procedures while at the same time holding on to an openness of viewpoint that snatches the unexpected and unguarded moments. It’s a tall order (p. 130).

Indeed. Richard suggests one tabular structure, adapted from previous researchers, which he explains in detail. This structure enables the observer to focus on categories and sub-categories of; (i) the physical setting itself, (ii) the people or participants within that setting, (iii) the systems that operate ranging from formal to informal, and (iv) behavior. It is quite likely that the observer may take copious notes and write narratives and descriptions of the lesson. Later on, these may become the primary material for discussion: perhaps discussion not only of enhancing teaching and learning but also of refining the act of observation itself.

The post-observation stage need not be a phase in which the observer’s well formulated and valid judgments are presented and discussed. It need not be an event which presents the observer’s findings in a friendly, polite but open and honest way. On the contrary, the observer’s notes, narratives and descriptions can become a source in which both observer and observed jointly seek understanding of the complexities of teaching-learning interactions. Although they will be dealing with a given group at a given place at a given moment, they may seek to articulate more generalizable truths beyond this, referring to their other experiences of teaching and observation elsewhere. At Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates, peer observers are encouraged to use what has been observed primarily to reflect upon their own teaching, not evaluate the teaching of the observed colleague, so that they can develop themselves based on what they have taken from observing another professional at work. In the least valuable kind of peer observation, one peer has been placed temporarily in a position of power. In the most valuable, both colleagues are peers in the true sense of the word, with both acknowledging that they still have much to learn about the complexities of classroom events and learning processes. If such is the case, then the post-observation session should become deeper, more meaningful and exploratory, with judgmental elements removed.

Further research

Most of the current research into peer observation deals with how the observer and observed deal with the instruments they are handed, within the institutional confines in which they operate, even while seeking meaning and some control (e.g. Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Shortland, 2004, 2010). The most exciting new research will surely attempt to push beyond those boundaries, as new research questions and new concerns emerge in response to our ever-expanding concepts of teaching and learning, and our quest to deepen our understanding of classroom complexities.

Because teachers operate in such specific contexts, small-scale research of a qualitative nature might be more useful than large surveys in seeking to explore the human complexities of observer-observed relations as well as classroom events. For example, how do institutional relationships among colleagues affect the process? Researchers might do well to record pre-observation interviews for their own developmental use. These recordings could be transcribed, or listened to together, to determine how limited or far-ranging the pre-observation event is. Is the pre-observation event merely cursory, or does the teacher develop any new insights in the process of articulating everyday classroom reality for another? Researchers might also seek to compare and contrast instrument-driven observation with a more open kind of narrative and description. They might investigate if peer observation replicates supervisory observation, or if it is free to go in quite different directions. They might consider the range and depth of pedagogic and human issues that are raised in both formative and summative evaluations. They might explore how they understand the non-linear and random events in the lesson, what insights they yield about the participants’ psychosocial experience and how these unplanned events relate to learning. Recordings and possible transcriptions of post-observation discussion will also yield valuable insights. They may focus not only on teacher performance, but also
observer performance, and may go much farther if the participants in the discourse raise deeper questions rather than simply state or negotiate judgments.

Overall, there is no reason why peer observation should not be an entirely positive experience for all concerned. The more its formative value is enhanced, and its summative aspects are either minimized or removed, the more it will benefit teachers, institutions and learners. Peer observation can enhance institutional discourse and practices as long as it is owned mainly by teachers, and developed by teachers democratically within an atmosphere of trust, freedom and shared exploration.
References


Teaching the Very Young Learners: An Alternative to Kindergarten Textbooks

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Introduction

In many countries around the world, very young children are now learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Although the traditional practice has been to introduce EFL instruction in the upper primary grades, the trend now is to introduce TEFL in the lower primary school classes, and, in some cases, in preschool or kindergarten. In half of the European Union member states, foreign language instruction is mandated at age seven (Enever, 2011), with English the most popular first foreign language. In Italy, English language instruction begins at the onset of schooling at age 5.5-6 (Lopriore, 2006). Some European and most Latin American countries are an exception to this, leaving the foreign language instruction to upper primary or middle grades.

This practice is also spreading in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the first foreign language (French or English) is introduced in kindergarten, while children in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Oman and Bahrain begin learning English in the first grade. The early TEFL trend is also observed in East Asia, with Thailand mandating TEFL in grade one and Korea, China, Taiwan and Vietnam in grade three (Ghosn, 2013a). In India, public schools begin TEFL in the third grade, while private schools introduce it in the first grade (Mohanraj, 2006), as do schools in Hong Kong (Tinker Sachs & Mahon, 2006) and Sri Lanka (Wijesinha, 2007).

Although brain mapping studies suggest that the optimal age for second language learning is between the ages of six and 15 (Thompson et al., 2000), in some cases children as young as age three and four are now introduced to formal English language instruction. In Korea, English classes are offered even for toddlers (Lee, 2009). This raises some concerns about instructional materials and pedagogical approaches, for young children do not readily take to formal, teacher-fronted and coursebook-based instruction implied by the currently available internationally marketed young learner materials. For example, at the time of writing, Oxford University Press, Scott Foresman/Pearson, and some regional publishers offer coursebooks for kindergarten classes. One international publisher even promotes a coursebook series for children between the ages of 2 and 5. Yet teaching children this young with a coursebook is not a recommended option regardless of how colorful or attractive the book. The American National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) Position Statement on the developmentally appropriate educational practice emphasizes the importance of play, dramatic play in particular, on children’s learning. Educators in the Nordic countries similarly stress the importance of play on young children’s cognitive development and learning. Yet little play is evident in the current young learner coursebooks. This paper argues against formal, coursebook-based instruction in very young learner classes and, drawing on whole language philosophy, proposes some practical alternatives that are developmentally more appropriate.

Young Children as Language Learners

Children’s cognitive development follows a rather predictable sequence, with neurological maturation constraining their reasoning ability (Kuhn, 2006). For example, children’s abstract reasoning ability does not develop fully before the age of 10 or 12, although children below the age of ten may occasionally demonstrate abstract reasoning (Metz, 1995), depending on their experiences.

Regardless of children’s mother tongue, their language learning is a developmental process. Linguistic features emerge in a fairly predictable pattern, although there are considerable differences in the rate of language acquisition between individual children. Native English-speaking children make predictable errors of syntax, such as overextending a rule. Corrective feedback rarely results in any change.
The following exchange between 2.5-year-old child and her grandmother illustrates this:

Kiira: [Grandma], I want the other one booki [book], please.
IG: You want the other book? Which other book?
Kiira: Yes, I want the other one booki. That one [pointing] [Gives Kiira the book and reads it.]
Kiira: [Grandma], I want another one booki.
IG: I’m sorry, what did you say?
Kiira: Please, read another one booki.
IG: You want me to read another book?
Kiira: Yes, I want you to read another one booki, please. (Ghosn, 2013a, p. 62)

Clearly, Kiira knows the expressions ‘the other one’ and ‘another one’ and applies them in her own way. Parents apparently know intuitively that correcting such errors is futile and, as Pinker (1994) notes, focus on the meaning instead. Developmental patterns are similarly evident in young second language learners’ morpheme and syntax development, and children’s interlanguage features errors common to all young English language learners (ELLs). Yet, many teachers persistently draw children’s attention to their developmental errors.

Very similar developmental patterns are observed in young English language learners (ELLs), whose language emerges in a sequence similar to that of their L1 peers. Telegraphic and formulaic phrases precede the productive use of language. Young ELLs’ morpheme acquisition follows also a rather predictable order, albeit different from the sequence observed with English L1 learners. Young ELLs demonstrate creativity in their use of L2 syntax, making intralingual errors common to most young ELLs, regardless of their mother tongue (Richards, 1971). For example, just as young L1 learners, they overextend rule application, producing sentences like my feets hurted. As Ellis (1994) points out, teaching syntax to young ELLs is likely to succeed only if the learners are ready to ‘assimilate the new rule into their mental grammars’ (p. 22).

Whole Language Revisited

The Whole Language Approach gained popularity in the 1980s in American first language reading classes, when it was understood that reading is a psycholinguistic process. The work of Goodman (1989; 1992) and Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores (1991) has had a significant influence in the field of first language reading, while Freeman and Freeman (1992) and Carrasquillo and Hedley (1993) brought whole language to North American English as a second language (ESL) classrooms.

Whole language is a theory grounded in research and practice, and practice grounded in theory, as Harste (1989) has pointed out. It is based on theories of learning about how humans learn ideas and concepts, and on a constructivist view of learning. It is also aligned with Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning. The basic premise is that humans develop concepts through their intellectual interactions with and upon their world (Weaver, et al., 1996). In other words, learning and learners are active, not passive. Extensive first language research tells us that children do not acquire language by sitting at their school desks doing pencil and paper tasks or practicing grammatical structures in drill exercises. Children acquire language by interacting with others, both adults and peers, and by using language within the context of meaningful interactions. Children learn about language, both oral and written, when they are presented with natural—‘whole’—language rather than simplified chunks of language typical in lower primary school language teaching coursebooks. In their seminal works, Vygotsky (1978) and Halliday (1975) have stressed the importance of social interaction in language development.

Whole language teachers engage their students in authentic activities rather than decontextualized drills, and teach vocabulary and skills within the context of these activities. Although whole language is surrounded by many misconceptions and has often been labeled as a fad (Freeman & Freeman, 1992), it is grounded in research and is embraced by the California Association for Bilingual Education, the National Council of
Teachers of English as well as many ESL teachers in North America. However, it has failed so far to find its way to EFL coursebooks, perhaps because it is challenging to develop EFL materials that would align with the whole language philosophy. Yet, the whole language approach is ideal in young learner classes, because it promotes the acquisition of language as opposed to instructed learning of language.

Meaningful Materials

Young learners must engage with the instructional materials, and the content needs to be meaningful for them. Memory research shows that meaningful information is learned faster and remembered better than less meaningful (Anderson, 1995; Mayer, 1996). Similarly, novel, emotionally relevant, or personally significant information gets the learners’ attention and gets the information processed to the working memory better than information less so (Barkley, 1996). When learning syntax, young children apparently employ their procedural memory (Ullman, 2001). Procedural memory helps us remember how to do things, such as driving or riding a bike, skills we learn gradually through rehearsal. This implies that young children would learn grammar best by repeated exposure and practice in context, not by explicit instruction in rules or in isolated, decontextualized drills. This poses a challenge because young foreign language learners are typically exposed to the target language only for short lesson periods, possibly only once or twice a week. The instructional materials and pedagogical approaches must therefore provide sufficient repeated exposure to target language vocabulary and structures in a meaningful and engaging context.

An example of meaningful and engaging material that also provides ample repeated exposure comes from Enjoy English! Grade 1 (Ghosh, 2011), a book intended for 6.5-7-year-old beginners in UNRWA schools in Lebanon. The very first lesson is an adaptation of the familiar song Five Little Monkeys, but the monkeys are jumping on the teacher’s desk, and the teacher calls the doctor. Children sing the song repeatedly and learn the number words from one to five, as well as the words desk, jumping, head, teacher and doctor. The vocabulary items are repeated throughout the unit but in different classroom and school contexts. The unit closes with Molly’s Walk, an adaptation of Pat Hutchins’ well-loved classic, Rosie’s Walk. However, in this adaptation, Molly the Mouse goes for a walk across the school yard that looks very similar to children’s own school yard, and she is chased by a cat. Teachers using the book have reported on children’s high level of enthusiasm from the beginning. The motivational level of this coursebook is further enhanced with familiar names and clothing and activities children are accustomed to seeing at home.

It is my firm belief that young EFL learners’ early lessons should be set in familiar contexts and feature content with which children can identify. The internationally marketed ‘global’ coursebooks are typically set in the target language culture, either British or North American. Culture learning is, of course, an essential aspect of foreign language learning, but culture learning can be introduced gradually through picture books set in the target culture and featuring themes to which children everywhere can relate; family and peer relations, fears, courage, etc.

Alternatives to Coursebook—Four Practical Classroom Examples

Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes are a natural medium in young learner classes. First, children enjoy rhyme. Second, the rhymes are typically short (or one can select just one verse from a longer rhyme) and present humorous situations, or situations children find familiar. There is a wide variety of rhymes from counting rhymes and tongue twisters to finger play verses, riddles and cumulative tales. Some nursery rhymes are an ideal medium for teaching English to Kindergarten-age children and can easily be adapted to meaningful and enjoyable lessons. The rhythm of the rhymes will develop young learners understanding of intonation, while the repetition of the rhymes will reinforce vocabulary and structures in an enjoyable context.

Although there is a controversy about ‘messing with Mother Goose’ by adapting the original texts, it is justified when working with young language learners. (After all, many of the Mother Goose rhymes reflect historical events and personalities and may, in their original form, not be as meaningful as slightly adapted
One good example that can help meet a variety of objectives with minor adaptations is the familiar Baa-Baa Black Sheep.

*Baa-Baa Black Sheep* is a good rhyme for beginners, because it can be used to introduce colors, numbers and pronouns. The time required will depend on the number of objectives selected. Possible objectives include numbers 1-5 (or more); black, white, red (and any other color of choice; imaginary sheep colors are OK); for me/you/him/her; ball. The rhyme is adapted slightly to read:

*Baa-baa black (white/red/blue...) sheep, do you have some wool?*  
*Yes, I do. Yes I do, 1/2/3/4/5) bag/s full.*  
*One for me and one for you. Two for me and one for you. One for you and three for her, etc.*

The teacher will need a basket of yarn balls in the target colors, sturdy paper bags or other containers (up to the highest target number) that can hold 3-4 yarn balls each, a cardboard shape of a sheep in the target color/s, and paper and poster paints (or markers).

The teacher holds the cardboard sheep as they chant the question addressing the sheep. The teacher then hides behind the sheep cutout and replies. This is repeated a few times and the children are encouraged to join in. *Black, white and red (or any other colors)* are taught using the cardboard ‘sheep’. Color vocabulary is practiced with the sheep and colored yarn.

Bags/containers are labeled, and a basket of yarn balls is placed in front of the bags. The children stand in line, and, as the teacher calls out colors, they take turns to pick the right colored yarn and put it in the correct bag. The children can also be divided into teams, if they like competition.

The children are given paints in the target colors and sheep shapes cut from sturdy paper or cardstock. Children paint their sheep the color of their choice. The teacher invites children to tell what color sheep they have and models: *I have a white sheep. What color sheep do you have? What about Maria’s sheep? And so on.*

Character cards can be made by punching holes in the sheep figures and by attaching a loop of yarn long enough to slip around a child’s neck. The children wear their sheep poster and the teacher chants the rhyme again, this time addressing questions to the children’s sheep: *Red sheep, red sheep, etc.* Then children can take turns to ask the teacher’s sheep the question, as she holds the different colored sheep in turn in front of her. The children can then take turns asking each other’s sheep the question and the sheep respond.

Once children are familiar with the colors, the above activities are repeated but by adding numbers. The teacher models by stamping feet or clapping hands at the numbers while chanting the rhyme and encouraging the children to respond by a number of their choice. Then the yarn ball activity described above can be repeated, but with numbers this time. As the teacher calls out colors, the children take the correct number of yarn balls from the basket and give the teacher some and keep some for themselves. (Teacher models first.) When children are familiar with the target colors and numbers, the lines for me, for you can be added.

The rhyme can be adapted to other concepts and activities adjusted accordingly: *Moo-moo red cow, do you have some milk? Yes I do. Yes I do. (Yes, I have). One/two/three pails full. Cluck-cluck brown hen, do you have some eggs? Yes, I do. Yes I do. One/two/three baskets full. Buzz-buzz busy bee, do you have some honey? Yes, I do. Yes I do. One/two/three pots full.* It is not necessary to have all the words rhyme.

Some Mother Goose rhymes are ready to use in their original form. *Little Miss Muffet, Hickory, Dickory, Dock* and *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* do not require any adaptations. From longer rhymes, such as *Little Bo-Peep*, one may select only the first verse. In rhymes with children’s names, one can repeat the rhyme and substitute names of children in the class. For example, in *Jack Be Nimble*, one can replace Jack with names of children, who take turns jumping over the candlestick. In *Lazy Mary*, one could also use children’s names and perhaps change ‘lazy’ to ‘sleepy’.¹

**Songs and Chants**

There are several songs and chants that are perfect for young learner language classes. The following are just some of the best known examples that have rich possibilities in the language classroom. (All the tunes can be found on YouTube.) *Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes* is ideal for teaching essential body part vocabulary. *Do the Hokey Pokey* introduces *left/right* and *in/out*, as well as *around*. Other useful chants are *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around*, *If You're Happy and You Know It*, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* and *Itsy, Bitsy Spider*. The familiar *This is the Way I Wash My Face* is one of those songs that can be adapted to introduce many other ideas. For example, in a grade 1 *Enjoy English!* (Ghosn, 2011, pp. 24-25) it goes like this:

This is the way we come to school,
Come to school, come to school.
This is the way we come to school, walking
In the morning.

This is the way we go to class,
Go to class, go to class.
This is the way we go to class,
Marching one by one.

This is the way we sit in class,
Sit in class, sit in class.
This is the way we sit in class,
so nicely and quietly.

**Picture Books**

The following example comes from a class of four-year-old language learners, where the teacher and children worked on Eric Carle’s classic, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. This is an ideal whole language story, which contains much repetitive language and introduces days of the week, some foods and some prepositions as evidenced by the example below. It also provides an opportunity to learn color vocabulary. On the first day, the teacher read the story, and after reading, she followed the children’s lead. The ensuing discussion—much of it in the children’s L1—focused on their favorite foods, and the teacher used reflective listening and ‘echoed’ children’s Arabic comments in English:

Rania: *Ana mab hib elkabees* (I don’t like pickles)
Teacher (nodding to Rania: You don’t like pickles?)
(to class) Does Rania like pickles? (pointing to the pickle in the picture)
Class: No!
Teacher: That’s right. She doesn’t like pickles. Pickles are sour (makes a face to indicate sour taste). Who likes pickles?
Three children: *Ana, ana!* (me, me)
Teacher: Ah, you like pickles. Hani, Tanya and Zeina like pickles. I like strawberries (pointing to strawberries in the book). They are sweet. Mmmm! Who likes strawberries?
Several children: Me! *Ana! Ana!*

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2 For a full report, see Ghosn, 1997.
Teacher: It seems we all like strawberries. They are sweet. Are strawberries sweet?
Class: Yes!

Children were clearly enjoying the lesson.

During free time, several children settled down with paper and colored pencils, as the teacher invited them to draw what they like. Not surprisingly, several food items appeared in their drawings. During a rainy-day break indoors, the teacher asked how the caterpillar moves, and children eagerly demonstrated. The teacher reinforced the preposition ‘through’ from the book every time children lined up to go out through the doorway. During snack time, the story was clearly in the children’s mind, as children examined each other’s lunch box content to find ‘caterpillar food’. Many wanted to know the English words for their foods. Daily calendar activity provided opportunities to review days of the week.

On Tuesday, the teacher asked if children remembered what the caterpillar had eaten that day. There was some disagreement, which, of course, offered an opportunity for a second reading of the story. The story was read several times over the week, and soon after the second reading, children were observed using some of the vocabulary in their own conversations. Free drawing time produced several pieces of work that featured caterpillars, butterflies and a variety of food items, as well as children’s attempts to write numbers and scribble letters. A week into the story, children still referred to caterpillar foods during the calendar activity, and they joined in with the teacher during reading. Two little girls requested permission to read the story to the class. They had clearly prepared themselves, and took turns to pretend-read the story. They had memorized many of the lines and their presentation was enjoyable to the class, as many children joined in to chant lines with them.

Finally, the teacher invited the children to write their own story. Using an adaptation of the Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1969), developed originally for first language literacy instruction, she had the children re-tell the story while she wrote their dictation on a large flip chart. Whenever children said something in their L1 or when their contribution included errors, she nodded approvingly and recast their utterance into correct English as she wrote it down. She typed the text on blank sheets of paper, and distributed them to children, who illustrated their own story, which they took home. One copy was produced for the classroom library.

Other activities during the unit included picture sorting, picture and number Bingo, dramatization with a puppet, painting butterflies and making papier-mâché cocoons. The Grocery store corner incorporated items from the story. A caterpillar chant was repeated frequently to the tune of Frere Jacques:

Caterpillar, caterpillar.
How are you? How are you?
Inside your cocoon, inside your cocoon,
What do you do? What do you do?

**Big Books**

Big easel books are another natural medium for young learner classes. Frequent pairing of oral language with print will gradually develop children’s sight vocabulary even when literacy is not yet the goal. The following example is based on The Little Hen Gets Help, a retelling of the familiar Little Red Hen, but with a positive twist. It can be downloaded free from http://www.thelittlehen.com and enlarged to a big book. If laminated, it will last a long time. (It can also be viewed and listened to on YouTube or downloaded from the AppStore).

There are a number of different ways teachers can approach the story, depending on the level and needs of their students, and their own preferred teaching approach. However, in story-based language instruction, I have identified a journey-like sequence of four stages: preparation, the story experience, reflection, and revisiting the story (Ghosn, 2013b.), which can all be approached from the whole language perspective.

Some preparation is necessary for successful story-reading, just as preparation is needed for a successful journey. With beginners, key vocabulary can be pre-taught using toy animals or pictures of the story animals.
The pictures can be pasted on large index cards and the animal name printed on the card. The teacher shows an animal and invites the children to make the sounds the animal makes. If children can already recognize letters and their sounds, one can paste the picture on one card and the corresponding word on another and have children play a matching game or ‘go fish’ card game. One can engage low intermediate learners, who already have some English communication ability, in a brief discussion about their experiences with cooperation. They can also be invited to share what they know about bread.

The story pages or the spiral-bound book is placed on an easel, and the teacher reads it to the class using a dialogic, shared reading approach. As the teacher reads, she uses a pointer to point to the words, stopping to point to the illustrations and asking questions such as “See the dog here?” and confirm, “The dog is guarding the corn”. This should not be done so frequently that it interrupts the flow of the story. It is important to keep in mind that when children are very intensely engaged with a story, too many questions can frustrate them. With the second reading, the teacher can also ask the children to come and point to the illustrations: “Who can show me where the cat is?” “Where’s the dog?”

It is important that children are allowed to use their mother tongue when commenting on or discussing the story. First, this will enable even the less proficient students to remain motivated and make meaningful contributions to the discussion. Second it will maintain the flow of discourse and will give the teacher important information about the level of the children’s comprehension. Most importantly, it provides ample opportunities for negotiated interactions. However, whenever students use their L1, or use incorrect English, the teacher should validate their contribution and recast it into English. For example, if an Arabic-speaking student says “My grandfather he has a hemār [donkey],” the teacher can validate the contribution, provide the needed word, and extend the exchange: “Oh, your grandfather has a donkey! Does the donkey help your grandfather on his farm?”

After reading, teachers often ask “Did you like the story?” However, this question is likely to generate only “yes” or “no” one-word responses. Research tells us that open-ended questions generate more student output than closed questions. Research also tells us that negotiated interactions generated by student output are important for language learning. Instead of the above question, the teacher can wait a few moments for any children’s reactions. It does not usually take much time for some of the children to offer comments. With beginners and low intermediate learners these comments are often in L1, and that is fine. Silence may imply that children did not connect with the story, either because it was not a good story, or because it was beyond their developmental level conceptually and/or linguistically. If, for some reason, silence prevails, the teacher can ask “Well, what do you think?” The responses will most probably reveal the reasons for the initial silence.

With beginning learners, the teacher goes over the story again and asks questions at different levels of language acquisition: “Is this the dog?” “Is this the dog or the cat?” “Who is this?” “Is the donkey helping the Little Hen?” The story is then read again. Intermediate level learners can engage in a discussion about the different skills each animal brought to the task. For example, pigs use their snout to dig and root for food, so digging the ground for planting was an ideal task for the pig. Goats are good at chewing leafy things, so cutting the corn cobs came naturally. All of us have some special skills or do some things better than others. Many times, different skills are needed to accomplish a goal. Children can be asked to think of tasks where many skills are needed. For example, in team sports, such as baseball, football or cricket, different positions require different skills. Preparing a meal may require chopping, stirring, measuring and mixing, etc. Encourage children to share what special skills or abilities they may have.

Intermediate learners can be given more challenging questions: “What if nobody offered to help?” They can engage in a discussion about the value of cooperation in everyday life, about their experiences when they cooperated to accomplish something, or when others did not cooperate with them. Such discussions should not be moralizing, but should help children construct their own understanding of the value of cooperation from their own experiences and from the story experience. The following activities provide opportunities to re-visit the story while practicing target vocabulary and structures. They are adaptable to different proficiency levels.
**Re-telling with pictures.** The pages are copied and pasted on cardboard. Lamination ensures that pages can be used multiple times. The teacher places the cards on the table or the floor and re-reads the story. Children take turns to come and select the correct illustration and place it on the chalkboard tray (or use masking tape to stick them on the board or the wall).

**Dictating the story.** Children are invited to re-tell the story, step by step, as the teacher takes down their dictation on a flipchart or the board. When language errors or L1 are included in children’s utterances, the teacher validates the contribution and recasts it into correct English as they write it down. Whenever there is a disagreement or something is forgotten, children are invited to revisit the story to check the facts/vocabulary.

**Sequencing.** This activity can be adapted to different levels of literacy instruction. The teacher gives beginners picture cards (one per child) and invites them to arrange themselves in the correct order (facing the class) from left to right as she reads the story. The class will then read the story together. When children have acquired beginning literacy, they can be given word cards (one letter per child) and invited to arrange themselves in the correct order (facing the class) from left to right to make a word. The class will read the word together. Split sentences printed on strips of cardboard can be used with a bit more advanced learners, with beginning capital letters/ending punctuations/quotation marks as clues.

**Dramatizing.** The character cards can be downloaded and pasted on 20x15 cm size cards and laminated. See the section on nursery rhymes for instructions how to make character cards. Volunteers act out the story wearing their character card. As the teacher reads the story (inviting children to join in) the ‘actors’ go through the motions. They do not need to speak if they choose not to, but soon they will begin to repeat the characters’ lines as well. This is repeated several times with a different group of children. Eventually, children will be able to act out the story without support.

**Creating a new story.** Children can write their own story by changing some of the elements. The teacher first discusses possibilities with the children. For example, they can change the corn to some other grain, or even vegetable. Wheat can be baked into bread while carrots could be made into carrot cake, lettuce into a salad, and so on. The teacher can prepare the animal-sound chart described below, and children can change the animals in the story and pick out their sounds from the chart. The children will print their story on heavy-duty white paper, illustrate the pages and make a cover page for the story. Pages are stapled or stitched into a book children can take home. Needless to say, children can use either the original story or their own copies for the sequence of events and spelling of the words.

**Additional activities**

**Animal sounds.** Animals have their own distinct sounds. Pigs grunt when satisfied but may squeal when distressed. Both goats and sheep bleat. Derek Abbott’s Animal Noise webpage has a list of animal sounds and a multilingual list of how people in different languages mimic animal sounds: http://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/personal/dabbott/animal.html. In a multicultural advanced class, children might be able to add to Abbott’s list. The list can be copied from the web and any new languages/items children will contribute can be added to the list. The list can be posted on the wall for children to peruse and use in the writing activity described earlier.

**Work with words.** The enlarged easel version of the story is used for this activity. Target words are covered with small ‘Post-it®’ notes. The teacher (or the class/volunteer) reads the story and stops at a covered word. Children try to think what the word might be. Gradually, the teacher uncovers the word, letter by letter until the children guess correctly. If pages are not laminated, they can be covered with clear plastic (overhead transparencies work well while lamination facilitates multiple uses over several semesters). Children use a non-permanent marker to circle or underline target words. Note: Young children may not have a clear concept of a ‘word’ or a ‘sentence’. This activity will tell the teacher where the students are in this regard. Children take turns to circle or underline given sounds (e.g. ‘th’); capital letters; punctuation marks; past tense verbs; phrases; sentences, etc.
Animal Bingo. Multiple Bingo boards are made of the animal pictures, pasted on cardboard and laminated. Depending on the objectives, one can use only pictures, a combination of pictures and words, or only words. Children need small coins, buttons, paperclips or small squares of paper to cover the pictures/words they hear. Alternatively, washable markers can be used with laminated boards.

Conclusion
All of the activities described in this chapter model the whole language approach as it can be realized in the young learner classroom. As the young learner language curricula are pushed down to ever younger children, we must pay careful attention to instructional materials and approaches employed in order to ensure children’s motivation and opportunities for success while preventing frustration and any sense of failure. There should be no pressure on children, and literacy-related activities, while providing the teacher with valuable information, should not be part of any formal assessment. Regrettably, in some contexts, children as young as 4 and 5 are subjected to having their language output marked and graded. David Elkind’s (1988) cautionary note in Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk about the false concept of young children’s competence is a useful reminder to teachers and materials developers alike:

Young children learn in a different manner from that of older children and adults, yet we can teach them many things if we adapt our materials and mode of instruction to their level of ability. But we miseducate young children when we assume that their learning abilities are comparable to those of older children and that they can be taught with materials and with the same instructional procedures appropriate to school-age children.
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[online www.loni.ucla.edu/~thompson/JAY/nature_paper.html]


Chapter 6

Cultural Orientation in the United Arab Emirates: 
Institutional Practices and Faculty Members’ Perceptions

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Introduction

As professionals in the TESOL industry, we often proudly profess to have had a wealth of international experience and with it, worldly knowledge. Our job is one which, if desired, can take us to multiple destinations and posts around the world which often are diverse in language, ontology, religion, landscape and autochthonous cultures. Some of us have had the opportunities to explore places quite different from our own homelands and with this comes not only cultural awareness, linguistic ability, a heightened sense of our own place in the world but an acute ability of intercultural competence.

One example of this would be an outsider’s perspective on teaching in the Middle East. One could say that the region requires cultural understanding, knowledge and concession in a country such as the United Arab Emirates. The UAE, a highly conservative and Islamic nation, demands a certain accord by its expatriate residents that jettison their professional practices. For instance, a teacher may be expected to be more of a disciplinarian with Emirati students than they have been used to. Cheating, plagiarism and “shared responsibility” are concepts which are often seen differently by Emirati students therefore, careful and strict steps are taken to ensure originality of course work and authenticity of individual student assessment. Another example of this would be the presence of an iron-fisted attendance policy which, in the case of the 2 institutions of research is 90% throughout the entire semester, with very little leeway given. This, however, is often encouraged to be eased when it comes to Prayer Timings. A new faculty member may be taken aback when asked to enforce a policy but at the same time use a certain level of sensitivity in judgment when situations like this may arise. Despite having previously taught in 5 other countries, upon coming to the UAE, I found that much of what I had perceived to be appropriate practice may not be so in this context.

Considering the stark contrast to that of Western regions such as Europe or the United States, suffice it to say that a certain level of cultural orientation is beneficial to all parties involved if not an absolute necessity. Higher education of the local student population is an area in which cultural understanding and self-awareness are crucial. In place at some institutions are cultural education sessions and orientation courses which seek to educate and guide faculty new to the region and to the practices and religious tenants which it holds. As well, teachers come into the region with preconceived notions of the local population and expatriate demographic. One could argue that these notions and possible stereotypes could be elevated with experience. This is not to say, however, that cultural orientation does not serve to ameliorate certain negative notions. This study aims to shed light on these aspects of the beginning steps of new faculty professionalism in the UAE in both academic and professional practice.

Aims

The focus of this chapter is to explore and examine methods of Cultural Orientation at a tertiary institution in the United Arab Emirates. Conducting Cultural Orientation for new faculty can serve as a crucial process for not only the incoming group of faculty but the students they are about to educate.

Much has been said and written in regards to the learners’ challenges, struggles and responsibilities in their own acculturation to an English-speaking environment. By this, learners are said to have been tasked with learning the target culture in efforts to learn the target language (Badger & Macdonald, 2007):
A society’s culture consist of whatever it is one has to know or believe, to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves (p. 217).

Notions such as this may very well be turned around to reflect the responsibilities and necessities of the TESOL professional in a foreign context where the target culture is not that of a native English speaker but that of the region in which they are teaching. This chapter focuses on the efforts made by the institutions to bridge this gap between the multicultural faculty and what I call the target culture, being Emirati culture by way of Cultural Orientation programs.

Defining Culture

This chapter seeks to explore practices and define faculty needs within the realms of cultural orientation. As already stated, Emirati culture is one which some faculty would benefit from gaining knowledge of before stepping into a classroom of its nationals. Defining Emirati culture or culture in general is a challenging task. A wide variety of factors contribute to what one or a society can define as ‘culture’. Holliday (2002) has distinguished between “small cultures” being those which are less “onion skinned” and exist as categories or groups of a social nature (p. 241). These ‘small cultures’ can exist within a profession, a company, a business or even a classroom and may be multi-faceted within what he calls a “large culture” which is of national, ethnic or regional boundaries. The components that comprise this concept of large culture may be complex and are certainly ever-evolving. Holliday argues that within a “large culture” there may be a multiple of “small cultures” to which individuals may also belong. The focus of this chapter is not to dissect the plethora of small cultures that exist as that would be impossible but rather take a broader view and examine the void of knowledge that might exist between the two large cultures and how two particular institutions of higher learning help to fill that void by means of a Cultural Orientation program.

DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) attempt to define culture as “universal, multifaceted, and intricate. It permeates all aspects of human society; it penetrates into every area of life and influences the way people think, talk and behave” (p. 254). Typically, this involves the beliefs, ideals, norms, values, attitudes, practices and traditions that one holds but is not exclusive to the individual rather it is a “collective mental programming of the people in an environment” (Hofstede, 1980). Kramsch (1998) takes this further by defining it as a “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space in history, and common imaginations” (p. 103). However, these statements and distinctions are not without danger of being cast as reductionist. Eleven years after the aforementioned citation by Hofstede, Holliday (2002) argues this treatment of large cultures leads to overgeneralization and imposes ‘othering’ on foreign teachers. The underpinning of this chapter however, leans towards the notion that to deny a distinction between large cultures is irresponsible and further that the basis and purpose of a Cultural Orientation program in any “large culture” is in place purely due to the fact that these distinctions exist.

Considering these ideas, how does one, then define Emirati culture? One would receive a wide spectrum of answers depending on the source. However, it is likely that certain elements would emerge, namely local interpretations of Islam and its humble beginnings which may be held in stark contrast with its modern-day affluence as a nation. The UAE can be described as a devout Muslim culture which is evident in many aspects of a local’s life. The interpretation of Islam in this country is one which a faculty member must be aware of as to not mistakenly conduct themselves or their classes in a way which might offend. An example of this would be some families’ prohibition of young ladies leaving their house independently to do academic field work. In this instance, cultural consideration should be given to assessments or projects in which it is required for young women to venture out on an academic assignment alone. One interpretation of Islam here prohibits these ladies from this practice as well as engaging in conversations or social media with members of the opposite sex.
Cultural Orientation as a Professional Learning Community

Despite the fact that many of the newly-arrived faculty may not know each other, they do fit into what Stoll et al. (2006) define as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Although problematic to rigidly define, Stoll et al. note that “…there appears to be broad international consensus that it suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-orientated, growth-promoting way” (p.226). Considering this, Cultural Orientation sessions and programs are set up to do exactly these things yet in a context and sequence in a position’s timeline that best suits the beginning of one’s work within a community, in this case a teaching community. Stoll et al. (2006) map out five characteristics of PLCs being: shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry collaboration and a group-sensed mentality.

What this community sets out to do and what will be described later is to educate and reflect as a PLC consisting of new faculty members, veteran faculty members and local Emirati nationals coming together to negotiate a greater sense of understanding between them. What was observed in the initial sessions at Emirates Women’s University was a sense of mutual respect, trust and support through the session and amongst all the members. The institution itself had organized the Cultural Orientation program to become a PLC and one that could not only be remembered, but more importantly, counted on to provide continued support as the new faculty members began their work in the UAE.

Essentially, what TESOL professionalism around the world both in EFL and ESL contexts aims to do is cultivate learners who have the ability to espouse language and culture together. While ESL programs often cite the target culture as that of a native-English speaking country, EFL programs should hope to allow L2 learners linguistic abilities to express their own culture though the medium of English. Zaid (1999) suggests that students of L2 should be “allowed to nativize the English language to fulfill their own roles” (p. 117). By this rationale, language teachers must be able to identify the cultural context from which the learners derive to acutely help them to acquire the linguistic abilities to express their cultural contexts in an L2. This element of cultural awareness leads the classroom teacher to further competence when teaching students coming from a different cultural context. This is echoed by Badger and MacDonald (1999):

If the interrelatedness of language and culture is taken on board, this implies that teachers need the same skills in relation to level and appropriacy with regard to culture as they have with regard to language.

The UAE is, I argue, a place where the professionalism of any organization, not only higher education hinges greatly on the intercultural competence of its workers. Cultural Orientation programs promote understanding and lead to greater efficiency in working conditions, personal identity, professional expectations and issues of ethics amongst colleagues.

Theoretical Framework

Elliot (1993) declares: “Teacher education becomes largely a matter of facilitating the development of teachers’ capacities for situational understandings as a basis for wise judgment and intelligent decisions in complex, ambiguous and dynamic situations” (p. 16). This quote could be applied to a variety of facets of teaching. For example, the “capacities for situational understandings” could very well be the intercultural competency which handle and deal with uncertainty and confusion in the context of a student-teacher discourse. This speaks not only to the understandings of local culture and context but to the multi-cultural professional workplace those in the UAE find themselves in. Edge (1996) continues: “Teacher education is one of the central places where a society keeps its own self-image” (p. 10). In a context such as the UAE where a teaching population is peppered with representation from all around the world, the “society” that Edge speaks of is the institution’s faculty demographic. How an institution educates and orientates this demographic manifests its own self-image. Further, in the context of the UAE, the society and the institution itself, is fraught with challenges and demands to educate the new faculty in the history, religion, familial power structures and expectations of the students.
Gopal (2011) asks: “If [teaching faculty] are not prepared to teach in a cross-cultural, globally diverse setting, how can they provide an equitable education environment for their students?” (p. 379). Although a great number of faculty are native to the Middle East, are native speakers of Arabic and also while another large number of faculty come from experience teaching in other parts of the Middle East, a great many of the teachers in the UAE are new to the region having little to no experience in the region of which they have become expatriates. This subgroup of faculty may well have had international experience before but some are “fresh off the boat” as it were, with no cultural experience, linguistic abilities of the region or self-reflective awareness of their own culture. It is these faculty members who are most in need of effective and informative Cultural Orientation. The UAE is a country with a population of over 200 nationalities. Those of us who live here live in a “cross-cultural, globally diverse setting” as Gopal speaks of every day (Gopal, 2011). This, of course is evident in the classroom and the demography of faculty and staff at its major institutions of higher learning such as the two explored in this chapter.

Data

Cultural Orientation

Upon arrival in the United Arab Emirates, new faculty members are typically given a two week Orientation Program in which many, and various, aspects of their new post are covered. Among these are multiple sessions familiarizing themselves with the local culture of their students. Although a broad stroke is used in such an intricate system of life, the “Cultural Orientation” seeks to educate new faculty on the lives, ontologies and point of view of their new students. As a research question, I pose ‘How do the small cultures of the tertiary institution orientate newly-arrived faculty to the large culture of the United Arab Emirates?’ Holliday (1994) emphasizes that academic and professional cultures can reach out across national or ethnic ones. To this, I add that it can also reach to religious cultures. Much of the cultural sensitivity that exists in a position such as a TESOL professional in the UAE is related to flexibility, understanding and rules that guide our context, which are what Littlejohn and Dominici (2007) meant in the process of self-reflection. For some faculty, this may be inherent as they are Muslims themselves, but for a large population of the TESOL faculty, primarily coming from Western countries, these are tenants that are not known, yet provide the foundation for the intercultural competence required for them to work and teach professionally in this context. These cases are what this study is concerned with. Each new hire comes to this context with differing degrees of intercultural competence and more specifically varying levels of knowledge or experience within the context of the Middle East, Arab students, Islam as well as the diverse cultural setting of which this context is comprised.

Gloria et al. (2010) claim that students in bicultural contexts often code-switch, much as bilingual individuals between home and school life. For many faculty members in the UAE, a similar sort of switching is necessary. These bicultural functioning strategies are ones which must be addressed and developed in the students’ population. Dual functionality among faculty is one which also needs to be fostered in an intercultural context. The process of acculturation is one which may come as a shock to the system to some faculty and their time in this context may be short lived. Proper Cultural Orientation programs have the potential to troubleshoot many issues and give the new arrival a sense of support and, more importantly, a point of reference when dealing with intercultural issues.

Edge (1996) states “On the basis of increased awareness and sensitivity, and this reclaiming of their own expertise, teachers begin to develop their practice in ways appropriate to their learners, their colleagues and their societies.” (p. 24) Again, we are reminded that this intercultural competency is imperative not only for classroom contexts but with the institution and society itself. New faculty members are added to the mix of a very diverse and ever-evolving workforce which possesses differing and, at times, conflicting ideas of appropriate work practices. Greene (1984) states “There will be diverse individuals in diverse contexts engaging in continually new beginnings as they work to make sense of their worlds” (p. 61). As Gloria et.al (2010) sought to explore the attitudes of Latina undergraduate students toward faculty and counseling programs, they found that the low levels of students’ utilization of the counseling programs were contingent on the faculty’s level of intercultural competency.
In other words, there were trust issues on the part of the students regarding the competency of the faculty to deal with their issues and understand their contexts. In the context of the UAE, faculty preparedness for students’ issues in this context is one which is most often gained through experience. However, there is much to be said about familiarizing the new faculty with the goals, ontologies and family situations of their students to aid and further this development and preparedness.

Participants

The participants of this study were newly-hired faculty members at Dubai Women’s University. There were a total of 21 new faculty members and from these I chose to focus on only seven of them. This choice was made based on the ‘newness’ of the members. None of them had taught in the UAE before and all had little to no teaching experience in the Middle East. This was done to shed more light on what it is that new faculty members experience without the advantage of experience. I believe that any orientation program must provide education to an employee that will aptly prepare them for the ensuing work and the post they are about to begin. Therefore, having previous experience would negate any effect of the orientation itself.

Methods

The research began with an observation of the Cultural Orientation session provided by the institution to all new faculty members. This session was required not only of the participants of my study but to all new members to the institution regardless of experience. This research was conducted by an ‘embedded observer’ where I was a non-participant in the Cultural Orientation sessions, being amongst new and veteran colleagues with whom I work and teach.

After this, a focus group session with the aforementioned seven new faculty members which consisted of semi-structured interview questions was held. The topics ranged from first impressions to newly-learned and valuable information. The focus group served to foster a greater understanding and assessment of the Cultural Orientation’s goal in adequately preparing these new hires for the new country and culture in which they live and the perspectives and ontologies of the students they are tasked to educate.

Initial Cultural Orientation Session

The host of the session was Dr. Huda Al Noobi, Dean of the Health Sciences Department and a UAE national. Permission was granted by her to attend and to conduct this research. I was reminded of Shemshadsara (2012) at the beginning of the session as she writes:

One of the most important aims of cultural teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker’s perspective. It is a matter of the L2 learner becoming sensitive to the state of mind of the individuals and groups within the target language community (p. 218).

This of course is referring to L2-speaking students in a foreign country to learn its L1. However, the same tenets can be said regarding foreign faculty members teaching a foreign language in a foreign culture.

With a welcome, Dr. Huda echoed Day (1999) in citing that the institution wished to foster a “constantly improving environment for our faculty, staff and students”. She noted that one thing foreign faculty members, especially from the West, have a hard time acclimating to the Arab idea of a people-orientated view of time as opposed to a schedule-driven view that most have in the West. She mentioned that students are not bound by time as much as could be expected and their relationships with their friends, their family, their God and themselves often supersede that which their schedules and time-tables may dictate. This often leads to, as Dr. Huda commented and as I can attest to, frustration among faculty members when academic elements such as due dates, class times and appointments are, at times missed.

Appropriately, the first point of discussion involved the perhaps most significant singular aspect of cultural orientation in the UAE, the presence, position and interpretation of Islam in the region and the students’ lives. Discussed were the points and interpretations of the local members of the panel on a variety of aspects
involving religion. Importantly, the Emirati member spoke of the distinctions between customs and beliefs of the religion. An example of this would be the leniency the teachers could expect to give for prayer timings. Also mentioned was the role of gender issues. The orientation, being held at a women’s university, of course the issues of sheilas, hijabs, and niqabs in terms of Islam were addressed. Interestingly, as the non-Muslim faculty members were informed about the necessity of the students’ wearing these garments and the mentioning that male faculty members may go an entire semester without ever having seen the faces of some of their students, also came the caveat to the Muslim faculty members that some students acknowledging the comfortable confines of the university walls opt to not wear them once in the university. Both points aimed at two varying sides of the religious spectrum seemed quite poignant regarding the need for the discussion at all.

Other discussions were had concerning the language, social practices, greetings, addressing and nomenclature of other Arabs compared with that of Emiratis. This then led to a discussion /information session by the local panel as to topics of discussion which should be avoided. Certain topics covered by the panel run the gamut from being inappropriate to must not be said or stated by the teacher at any time. These topics included politics, criticizing Islam or the royal families, personal questions about marriage (husband or wives) as well as personal comments by male faculty regarding the dress and/or appearance of their female students.

Focus Group

Brought together were seven new members from the pool of 21 new faculty members at the institution for a focus group to discuss their impressions, attitudes and thoughts regarding their Cultural Orientation provided for them four weeks after their initial arrival in the UAE. The participants were chosen based on their “freshness” to the region while time and scheduling issues prohibited some from participating. Along with the participants from Zayed University, all participants signed letters of consent and contributed of their own free will.

When interviewed, most responded with favorable reviews. Many faculty members who are from Western countries and are of a non-Muslim faith, stated that they feel many of the questions and worries were addressed appropriately regarding how they were to approach an Emirati classroom. One participant, Leigh from New Zealand has 15 years’ experience in TESOL in two different countries. He went so far as to say that the issues of Islam were “far overblown” in the Cultural Orientation session which he attended: “Our students are more similar to us than they are different” says Leigh. “The session did more to put me on edge with my students than give me a better understanding of who they are. People are people no matter their religion or where they are from. My students are just students. I teach them no differently than I would students from my own country.”

It was evident that the general attitude across all participants was the Cultural Orientation was, in fact, sine qua non for them that they benefitted greatly from the insight given to them by both the teaching ‘veterans’ of the institution as the local participants. As the choice of topics were chosen by Dr. Al Noobi and the local participants, it was a given that these were the topics which the designated local officials felt were significant and pertinent for the new faculty to know. Although not all elements of the orientation were viewed as beneficial, as suggested by participant Leigh, these examples and observations of Cultural Orientation serve as a light cast upon the intricate cultural exchange, understanding and therefore an important step toward the intercultural competence of the newly-arrived faculty. Differing levels of research had been done by the ‘newbies’ regarding teaching in the UAE but all agreed that there was no one present who could claim that something new was not learned. It would, perhaps have taken these faculty members semesters and academic years to gain the knowledge and be aware of the ‘cultural protocol’ of the UAE which was dispensed to them in a brief orientation program.
Discussion & Conclusion

The tertiary institutions offer their new hires Cultural Orientation training to allow a greater ease in the long process of what Deardorff (2009) calls intercultural competency. Although by different means, both institutions acknowledge the need of such orientation and recognize the benefits of their newly hired faculty members to become well-informed and culturally competent for their new post in the Middle East. The level of professionalism is what is at stake when an educator, or any professional, is thrown into different working contexts. The notion that TESOL professionals are individualistic and might resist such a formulaic Cultural Orientation program did not come up in this research. There seemed to be a sense of understanding of what Darling-Hammond (1996) mentioned regarding the “unique starting” points of the students and how those points are better understood by the teacher when approaching the class. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the teachers were at new starting points themselves as educators in a new country.

The participants’ professional identity, while having more than several years of working in professional environments, did not seem shaken by this change of environment. On the contrary, many participants noted the sense of a Professional Learning Community beginning in their initial days at the respective institutions. In addition, multiple instances of each of Deardorf’s (2009) core elements were addressed in the Orientation Week.

Although a variety of responses and reviews were reported in this piece of research, all participants noted the benefits of such efforts. Thomas from Britain offered the self-reflection that Teekens (2003) cites as a significant step to intercultural competence while drawing on his own experience in making a judgment call when faced with challenging questions from his students. While Leigh from New Zealand may have seen these sessions to have done some harm to his approach to teaching, he himself could not deny that they offered him a greater insight into the lives of his students.

Cultural orientation programs are conducted through the world in a variety of industries and under a variety of definitions of “culture”. It is my contention here that they are an invaluable resource to those who may have very little to draw upon when seeking to better understand the view from the other side of the classroom in a context in which many variables may exist. While we can agree that the lofty aspiration of becoming “interculturally competent” may be a lifelong process, it is comforting to see that these institutions make real efforts to further this along on our worldly journeys.
References

Chapter 7

Teacher and Student Teacher Emotions in Literature:
A Critical Review

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Introduction

This chapter explores the emotionality of teachers and student teachers which is at the heart of teaching. It also addresses the area of emotion in second language learning and teaching processes and refers to the available literature in the area of EFL/ESL pre-service teachers’ emotions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) context.

Theories of emotion

Emotions are multifaceted feelings that connect one’s cognitive structures to their emotions, thinking and actions (Ekman & Davidson, 1994). It is that strange feeling that emotions create and keep one wondering what is meant when the word “emotions” is used to describe a feeling, an event or an action. They seem strange because, as Goldie (2003, p.123) states, “expressive behaviour can come to seem strange if one dwells on it, rather in the way a familiar word can come to seem strange if intensely looked at on the page”. A good number of theories have been developed to investigate human emotions, how they arise, what causes certain negative or positive emotions, what comes first: thinking or acting in certain emotional events, and how constructive or destructive emotions can be.

In fact, theories of emotions date back to ancient times with philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, as well as Spinoza, Descartes and others (Damasio, 2003; Berman & Berman, 2012). Since then, theories of emotions have embarked on more empirical-driven research, which cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive due to the complexity of human nature and the emotions it embraces. Apart from theories, Shields (2002) believes that “we are all experts on emotion- we used them to influence others before we could talk, we have been thinking about what they are and what they mean ever since we could reason, and we have all at one time or another wished fervently that we could better understand and manage them” (p. 4). Elster (1999) confirms that emotions are essential for one to live and they absolutely matter because “if we did not have them nothing else would matter (p.403). More recently, Berman and Berman (2012) affirm that regardless of the fact that all emotions can be negative or positive, they can “affect judgment and how we express ourselves,…[therefore] people need to be aware of their emotions and know how they affect their judgment, behaviour, and communication” (p.40).

Due to this intricacy, copious literature has approached emotions from a wide range of perspectives in areas that include philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, socio-psychology, educational psychology, applied psychology, anthropology, linguistics and history. Since it is not the aim of this paper to provide a historical overview of theories on emotion or a detailed explanation of their nature, this chapter will only provide a brief view of the theories of emotions, highlighting the cultural-social and cognitive theoretical perspectives.

To start, it is of significance to state that there has not been a consensus or consistency on any definition of emotions due to the variety of approaches and difficulty in approving one definition over another, a matter which has been evidently argued in the literature. Kleinginna and Kleinginna (2005), for example, collected 90 definitions of emotions. Kagan (2007) stresses this difficulty in defining emotions and posits that “any proposed definition [of emotion] is unlikely to escape controversy or be permanently correct” (p.20). Similarly, there is no agreement in the literature on one classification of different emotions. Terms like
‘emotion’, ‘feelings’, ‘affect’ or ‘sentiment’ are used identically in research to cover the same phenomena (Barbalet, 2001; Weiner, 1992; Solomon, 2007).

Emotions are defined as states of positive or negative experiential quality (Weiner, 1992), they “are feelings connected to ideas, perception, and cognitions, and to the social and cultural contexts in which it makes sense to have those feelings and ideas” (Miller, 1997, p. 8), they “can mediate the individual’s capacity to adapt or respond to a variety of experiences” (DeGangi, 2012, p. 59), and they are “intentional psychological states...[that] involve feelings” (Deonna & Scherer, 2010, p.45). In addition, emotions have three main components: a) ‘cognitions’ that appraise events as good or bad, positive or negative, b) ‘actions’ or decisions made as a result of the initial appraisal, and c) ‘feelings’, viewed as post action outcomes (Kalat, 2012).

It is crucial at this point to mention that the greatest attention among all these types of emotions has been given to the negative ones; namely anger, anxiety, fear and guilt (Denzin, 2009b). However, recent research on emotions invokes the assumption that all human emotional experiences involve elements of positive or negative emotions, which may or may not last, and affect an individual’s personal world. Moreover, any emotional experience that an individual undergoes, results in states of reflection, cognition, feeling and interpretation (Denzin, 2009b).

Because human emotions are subtle and sophisticated in nature, theories of emotion have been compliant with a wide range of categorization. The standard categorization of emotions has grouped theories in terms of context. The theoretical perspectives of these contexts can be in the region of four types: 1) evolutionary ‘Darwinian’; 2) early experience ‘Freudian’; 3) cognitive appraisal; and 4) cultural-social. All of these perspectives have provided extensive insights into the nature of emotion. However, this chapter is mainly concerned with the last two; namely the cognitive appraisal and the social perceptions of emotion. It was felt that these two would best fit into educational contexts, where opportunities of interacting and communicating with others from different cultures or social backgrounds are inevitable.

Evolutionary perspective of emotions

This theory hypothesizes that human emotions are primarily an individual’s genetic heritage, through which all emotional responses are transferred. That is to say, “we are programmed to respond emotionally and that is no accident” (Fineman, 2003, p.9). According to this postulation, human emotions were developed over a period of time (i.e. a generation) and their genetic residue brought about the mixture of the present emotions and feelings human beings experience in their daily lives (Brandon, 1990; Lazarus, 1991). This perspective of emotion dates back to Charles Darwin’s two monumental works, “The expressions of emotions in man and animal”, first published in 1872 and “The origin of species” published in 1859. The fundamental theme of Darwin’s theory is the strong emphasis on the descent of human beings from other forms of life, and the common shared characteristics between humans and non-humans (i.e. animals). In this sense, Darwin’s evolutionary theory stressed the significance of common facial expressions of emotions existing in both humans and animals, of which wonder, curiosity, imitation, attention, memory, reasoning, and sense of beauty were the most emphasized (Lazarus, 1991). A number of researchers (e.g. Paul Ekman, Joseph LeDoux, and more recently Antonio Damasio) have developed this evolutionary perception of emotions and extended their research to areas that included the brain and neurological advances.

‘Freudian’ early experience perspective

This view of emotions was mainly proposed by Sigmund Freud. Current human emotions, according to this theory, are shaped by emotions of the near or far past (i.e. yesterday, last year/years). An individual can live the same feelings of an old experience without being able to realize the ‘how’ and ‘when’ of these feelings, because “the original feelings are so buried and deep seated” (Fineman, 2003, p.11). Painful, shocking, or fearful events in an individual’s childhood would still exist in the deep memory, and would accompany and guide that individual’s emotional reactions through the rest of his/her life, as if they are present. However, those early experiences with those emotional reactions are usually beyond the person’s consciousness. Obviously, the inference one may make about the validity of this theory is that a person’s present life is
imprisoned in his/her past. However, it is not the purpose of this chapter to further analyze this theory or to test the validity of its controversial supposition.

**The cognitive appraisal theory**

This theoretical perspective of emotions contends that emotions occur as a result of manipulating information generated in a situation or event. This manipulation is a cognitive process. Therefore, it is believed that emotions and thoughts are inseparable (Nussbaum, 1994; Weiner, 2006). Thus, the subjective incorporation of an individual’s emotional experience is highly emphasized. In addition, any cognitive activity, according to this theory, can be conscious or unconscious and can also be judgmental. This judgment is called the cognitive appraisal. This means, that emotions capture the fact that intentionality is part of any emotional action or behaviour (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Forgas, 2012). Thagard (2010, p. 98) asserts that “emotions are judgments about the extent to which a perceived situation accomplishes a person’s goals”. Thus, situations may contribute to someone’s happiness or sadness when they match or impede his/her accomplishments of certain goals.

Lazarus’ (1991) cognitive perspective of emotions states that when emotions occur, they undergo three processes in order: 1) cognitive appraisal of an event; 2) physiological changes triggered by the event (e.g. increased heart beat) which will lead to; 3) an action taken by the individual who feels the emotion, as he/she appraises it, and reacts accordingly. For example, if Sally sees a scorpion in her room, she will a) cognitively assess the danger of the scorpion in the room; b) her assessment will trigger a sense of fear that may increase the adrenaline pumped into her blood. Consequently, this physical change brings about c) a specific reaction that may take the form of screaming, crying or running away.

In addition, one of the main educational psychologists, Weiner (1986) has proposed another approach to the cognitive appraisal theory, which examines how individuals interpret their failures and successes. Later in this chapter, an overview of Weiner’s (1986) ‘attribution theory of motivation and emotion’ and its implications in educational contexts will be examined.

**The cultural-social perspective of emotion**

Emotions, as socially perceived, are the products of an individual’s mind, culture and society. Social interactions trigger certain emotional reactions which are centered in the person’s social world. Cultural-social theories of emotions are interactional, relational and sociological. Kemper, (1981, p. 339) states that “different outcomes in power and status relations instigate different physiological processes which are in turn related to different emotion.” Denzin (2009b, p.26) believes that authors of the cultural-social theories “posit a direct causal relation between the perception of an exciting social fact or social situation, internal bodily reactions, and overt behaviours, which are labeled, inhibited, or disguised in terms of social, relational, ritual and structural factors, as well as by emotional rules and cultural-sexual ideologies”.

With regard to teachers, Zembylas (2011, p.32) affirms that “different understandings of emotions have produced conceptually and methodologically different approaches to the study of emotions in teaching”. The socio-cultural perspective posits that emotions are constructed socially or culturally. That is to say, teachers’ emotions are conceptualized within the societal norms and cultural dynamics. Teachers’ emotions will be shaped according to the situations they experience and their reactions will consequently be constructed. Acknowledging this perspective, it is expected that teachers will interact with people in various discourses (e.g. students, parents, school principals or peers). The socially and culturally produced practices are the outcome of other affecting elements such as power and one’s ideologies of communication. In other words, teachers’ emotions and reactions to certain situations in their daily routine will be directly influenced by their educational environment (i.e. the school).

**Attribution theory of motivation and emotion**

Attribution theory as a field of investigation had its roots in research originated by Fritz Heider in 1958. This theory was then developed by other researchers such as Harold Kelley 1973 and Bernard Weiner, (1985, 1986, 1992, 2006). However, Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory has made its own contribution by linking
the individual’s motivation to his/her emotions in contexts of achievement. Therefore, Weiner’s (1986) theory of motivation and emotion has become the ‘framework of choice’ within educational psychology which can be considered a ‘thought-emotion-action sequence’ whereby, unlike other theories of attribution, the “causal thoughts determine feelings and feelings, in turn, guide behaviour” is more complete and comprehensive (Graham & Williams, 2009, p.22).

This theory focuses on how individuals attribute the cause of an event or a situation. People, according to this theory, are in constant search for reasons to explain why certain events occurred in a certain way. In other words, Weiner’s theory is concerned with the elemental dimensions that people use to interpret and understand their failure and success (Child, 2007). Graham and Williams (2009) claim that “much of the practical significance of attribution theory resides in its usefulness for understanding real-world motivational concerns that unfold every day in school settings, concerns such as emotional reactions to success and failure, self-esteem maintenance, and acceptance or rejection by peers” (p.11).

Weiner’s theory posits that individuals are “likely to explain outcomes and events in their lives that are perceived as novel or important” (Albert & Luzzo, 1999, p. 433). A student who has passed his exam successfully, for example, will not take a lot of time reflecting on the causes that contributed to his success. In contrast, failing a school exam can be negatively attributed to the teachers’ teaching strategies, bad luck or lack of time. Turner (2002) viewed attribution processes as part of sanctioning. If negative sanctions are attributed to the self, then negative emotions may be experienced such as anger, fear or sadness. Likewise, positive sanctions attributed to the self or others result in positive emotions like happiness or pride. Negative emotions are usually the outcomes of a confrontation between people’s expectations and negative unexpected events (Weiner, 2006).

A three-dimensional taxonomy formulates the core of the ‘Attribution Theory of Motivation and Emotion’: locus, stability and controllability. These are defined as follows:

a) Locus: is related to determining the location of the cause. This cause can be external (situational) such as a task or luck, or internal (dispositional) to the person such as ability or effort. Whether external or internal, the cause is thought to be influential in the way it contributes to how an individual perceives his/her feeling of self-esteem or self-efficacy (Turner, 2002). If, for example, an individual attributes his/her success to internal factors, this individual’s self-esteem and self-efficacy will be underpinned by a sense of pride. In contrast, if failure is attributed to an internal factor, self-esteem will be diminished; leading to a negative impact on self-efficacy.

b) Stability: is the second dimension in the theory that focuses on the individual’s perception that the cause of an event or situation will continue over a period of time. In this sense, causes can be constant or varying over time. Linked with the first dimension, the locus, an individual’s ability (aptitude) is unchangeable (stable) and this stability results in a relatively fixed aptitude for a task, whereas one’s efforts are inconstant and may vary from one situation to another in terms of efforts exerted and subsequent feelings.

c) Controllability: is the third and last factor which is concerned with an individual’s active involvement in controlling the cause. In this case, “efforts are (sic) controllable because individuals are believed to be responsible for how hard they try. In contrast, aptitude and luck are generally perceived to be beyond personal control” (Graham, 1991, p.7). Therefore, emotions such as anger, frustration, or shame may arise at a certain event as a result of failing to achieve a task, whereas pride and enthusiasm may come to light if success is attributed to one’s own abilities. Hence, an individual’s expectancies and enormity of emotions are influenced by the way he/she deems stability of causes which in turn will trigger specific motivated behaviour (Weiner et al, 1982).

In addition, diverse causal attributions raise qualitatively disparate emotional experiences, and according to Weiner (1985), perceived causality is not the same among individuals and they are even dissimilar within an individual over a period of time and across situations.
Another relevant theory in this context is Fredrickson’s (2001, 2004, 2009) positive theory of emotion, which will be discussed in the following section.

The Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotion

It is taken for granted that humans live with two sides to their lives - a positive and a negative one. At times where we feel tempted to focus on our negative side, positive psychology emphasizes that this part is only one aspect of the human, and focus should be given to “the other side - that which is good and strong in humankind and in our environs, along with ways to nurture and sustain these assets and resources” (Snyder & Lopez, 2007, p.9). Being aware of our weaknesses and attempting to improve or change them is not recognized any more in positive psychology as the best way for self-growth and learning. Rather, to work on our strengths and utilize them appropriately is more effective (Fredrickson, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010).

Within the field of positive psychology, Fredrickson (2001) has developed a new theoretical framework that accentuated positive emotions: “The broaden-and-build’ theory. Fredrickson’s theory postulates that “experiences of positive emotions broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires, which in turn serves to build their enduring personal sources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources” (Fredrickson, 2001, p.218). An overview of the literature on emotion has shown that positive emotions have gained relatively more recognition in terms of attention compared to negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2004).

It is thought that the literature which has examined positive emotions has not extensively highlighted the responses to those emotions (Lopez, 2011). In other words, Fredrickson believes that action tendencies connected with certain emotions “have been [generally] associated with physical reactions to negative emotions…whereas human reactions to positive emotions often are more cognitive than physical” (Snyder & Lopez, 2007, p.133). Emotions like anger, fear or disgust, for example, are usually linked with urges to attack, escape and expel, whereas a positive emotion like joy is associated with inactive pleasure and purposeless activation. In contrast, in Fredrickson’s model, an emotion like joy “creates the urge to play, push the limits and be creative; urges evident not only in social and physical behaviour, but also in intellectual and artistic behaviour” (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1369).

Fredrickson (2009) asserted that soft and ephemeral states can change a person’s mind and body in a way that subsequently transforms his/her life. Positive emotions, in other words, trigger one’s desire to change. Fredrickson’s ‘broaden-and-build’ model of positive emotions, in its simplest definition, is an invitation to people to be open and flexible to a wider range of options and perceptions in their lives. This broad flexibility will in turn “help people to discover and build survival-promoting personal resources” (Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011, p.35).

Emotional Intelligence

Recently, emotions have been explored from another perspective where human cognition and emotion are blended to construct what has been termed ‘Emotional Intelligence’. Although this term, EI, has been attributed to different psychologists (e.g. Bradberry & Greeves, 2010; Greenspan, 1989; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), it has gained popularity following Daniel Goleman’s publication of Emotional Intelligence (1995, 2011). Goleman’s model prioritizes five capabilities that an individual is born with and can improve in the search for better performance. Those domains include self-awareness (knowing your emotions), self-control (managing your emotions), social skill (managing other people’s emotions), empathy (understanding and dealing with other people’s emotions) and motivation (motivating one’s self).

Thus, learning to reason events and behaviour, understanding our own feelings, being able to control them, understanding how to use them with others, understanding the others’ feelings and being able to deal with them are all skills that an individual can develop within Goleman’s emotional intelligence model. Raddawi and Troudi (2014, p. 175) state that “integrating emotional literacy in school curricula brings positive
changes as children learn to maneuver their emotions and improve their academic performance while society can witness a decline in hostile behaviour”.

**Emotions in educational contexts**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, considerable research has been conducted on human emotion and its philosophical, physiological, psychological or sociological associations and impacts on an individual’s life. Yet, it is only recently that the focus has tended to include emotions in educational contexts as an area of investigation. A number of studies have problematized this absence of attention to teachers’ emotions and feelings in their work places (Hargreaves, 2001; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Beatty & Brew, 2004; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Osterman, 2010). Hargreaves (2001), for example, emphasized the importance of emotions in a teacher’s life and its immediate effects on his/her self, communications and teaching environments. This interest in teacher’s emotions, as Hargreaves (2001) points out, springs from the fact that teaching “is an emotional practice…a form of emotional labor [and that] teachers’ emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes” (p.838).

This dearth of research into teachers’ emotions has been justified by two reasons: “recency of the emotional revolution in psychology and American’s beliefs about emotions” (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003, p.328). It has been thought that describing a person as being emotional is equivalent to being irrational (Solomon, 2008; Scherer, Wallbott & Summerfield, 2010). The power of reason over human emotions has been exaggerated to the extent where one metaphor to describe the relation between the two “has been the metaphor of master and slave, with the wisdom of reason firmly in control and the dangerous impulses of emotion safely suppressed, channeled, or (ideally) in harmony with reason” (Solomon, 2008, p.3). Rebuffing this distinction between reason and emotion, Solomon (2008, p.243) asserts that “we experience thoughts. And many if not most human emotions involve thoughts. Thus I would insist that we include thoughts as essential ingredients in human emotional experience. Angry thoughts, tender thoughts, humiliating thoughts, are often the most palpable manifestations of anger, love, and shame, respectively”. This disconnect between reason and emotion for a long time has resulted in a lack of research regarding emotions in education in general and teachers’ emotions in particular, as researchers who support this position may refrain from investigating teachers’ or other workers’ emotions.

However, since interest in emotions in the field of education has emerged, research has approached this area from different perspectives, yet without a methodical or direct indication to emotions. For example, a number of studies have examined teachers’ professional, personal or social lives with no detailed reference to their emotions in their working environments (Graham, 1984; Woods & Jeffrey, 1998; Adams, 2002). Aspects of teachers’ concerns, anxieties, stress and burnout have become common in the literature (Zembylas, 1998, 2002, 2004; Goodson, 1992; Nias, 1989; Alfi et al, 2004; Swennen et al, 2004; Capel, 2001; Murray-Harvey et al, 2000; Cooper & Travers, 2012). Yet, with well-known books like the ‘Handbook of Research on Teacher Education’ (Sikula et al, 1996), only two chapters referred to teachers’ personal dispositions. Richardson (1996) focuses on teachers’ beliefs and attitudes in one of the chapters, while identity and personal meaning are addressed in the second chapter by Carter and Doyle (1996). In other words, emotions, as the core of teachers’ professional and social lives, have not been addressed.

An overview of literature regarding teachers’ emotions has demonstrated that the question of investigation in such studies was not mainly about teachers’ emotions. Rather, it was about finding and understanding reasons or factors that keep teachers in their professions. Emotions such as stress, frustration, burnout, anxiety, anger or caring have been the focus of numerous research studies (e.g. Galton & McBeath, 2008; Wilson et al, 2003; Sutton & Conway, 2002; Zembylas, 2009; Cockburn, 1996).

A growing body of literature has examined teachers’ stress and occasionally connected it to educational reforms and restructuring of educational systems (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Dunham, 1992; Hiebert, 1985; Keay, 2005; Thompson, 2005; Hayes, 2006; Kyriacou, 2000; Carlyle & Woods, 2002).
When researchers such as Hargreaves (1994), for instance, investigated the teachers’ negative emotions of stress and burnout, they questioned the role of schools and policy makers in perpetuating these emotions. Paying attention to these emotions once they occur or are noticed is essential in preventing unfavourable results that may affect teachers’ professional lives and their students.

Likewise, anger and anxiety have been examined in experienced and novice teachers (Graham, 1984; Wilson et al, 2003). It has been reported, for instance, that teachers’ anger could be the result of mismatches between the teachers’ expectations and the students’ interactions, or when parents, school administrators or policy makers overuse their power in the teachers’ classrooms including their control of lesson plans, teaching techniques or curricula. Moreover, examples where teachers were able to manage and control their anger have been also discussed (Roulston et al, 2003; Sutton & Conway, 2002). Teachers in those examples were reported as good at dealing with their anger where they utilized different techniques to overcome their feeling of rage. Their strategies included taking action such as changing the setting where anger took place, adapting or changing their attitudes and behaviour towards the annoying event or simply by seeking assistance.

Due to the ever-changing nature of education, there were attempts in research to examine teachers’ emotions in contexts where educational reforms were inevitable and teachers’ adoption and adaptation to them were mandatory (Hargreaves, 1997; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Van den Berg; 2002; Kelchtermans, 2005; Van Veen & Sleegers, 2006; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Research investigating the impact of educational reforms on teachers’ emotions pointed out that teachers’ voices, in any proposed educational changes, were ignored by most policy makers, curriculum planners, and school change experts. Van Veen and Sleegers (2006, p.240) deem that “while teacher involvement and commitment are currently hot issues in most reforms, teachers must still - in most cases - implement something that was created by others, developed by special committees, presented at workshops, designed by experts, and so forth”. Teachers’ responses to those reforms, however, ranged, as research studies reported, from happiness, satisfaction, frustration, loss to resistance (Hargreaves, 1994, Hargreaves, Liberman & Fullan, 2010). Within the same context of educational change and teachers’ emotions, some researchers have argued that most of the research conducted has emphasized teachers’ cognitions over emotion, assuming that cognition strongly affects individuals’ behaviour (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).

As one might glean from the previous discussion, most research on emotions in educational contexts lacks the theoretical framework that may help demystify the mixture of emotions teachers experience and connect them to the working environment and emergent motives. Besides, what is probably missing in the majority of these studies is a systematic detailed account of teachers’ emotions and the role they play in their professional lives and work. However, realizing teachers’ emotions to be a key factor in their professional lives, more recent studies highlighted the importance of understanding teachers’ emotions, recognizing their influence on the success of the teacher and the achievement of students in academic contexts (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Schutz & Zebmylas, 2009, Zembylas, 2005; Day & Lee, 2011).

Schutz and Zembylas’ (2009) book Advances in teacher emotion, for example, has drawn on a considerable body of literature of the current research on teachers’ emotions, emphasizing the fact that teaching is more than pedagogy, performance or student achievement. Teaching, in its simplest definition, is a human interpersonal profession that involves a great many emotional experiences. Denzin (2009a) affirms that “emotions are felt as lived-performances, staged in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds. In these spaces, teachers and students, as moral agents, enact the felt emotions of rage, love, shame, desire, despair, empowerment” (p.v). Schutz and Zembylas have presented a solid base of information on the influence of teachers’ emotions on the whole educational system. Research studies here provide the reader with a holistic picture of teacher emotions as perceived by well-known scholars in the fields of education and other disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, or cultural studies. All the chapters compiled in the book highlight a number of critical issues that have been rarely considered or totally overlooked in the earlier literature on teacher emotions.
Given that previous studies in the literature on teachers’ emotions have tried to understand those emotions in educational contexts, an overview of student teachers’ (pre-service) emotions within the teacher education programmes has revealed a lack of knowledge regarding the mixture of emotions student teachers may live in and experience during their learning and teaching process. The following section presents an overview of research conducted on student teachers’ issues in general, and studies that examined student teachers’ emotions in the practicum (field experience).

**Emotion in the Student Teacher Literature**

Since teachers have proved to be the most effective and vital components in the teaching-learning process for ages, most teacher education preparation programmes have focused on teachers and their development. Teacher education institutes, therefore, plan and organize their courses to shape and polish prospective teachers’ knowledge, skills and competence. However, teaching is not only about content knowledge and pedagogy. It is also about the emotional practice of teaching accompanied with content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Research on teacher emotions, as discussed in the previous section, lacks depth, theoretical frameworks and connectivity among the teachers’ emotions, professional lives, and the impact those emotions have on their working environments. It is not surprising then that student teachers’ emotions during their field training, as prospective teachers, are the least researched. Yet, research has investigated a range of practicum-related (internship) issues and concerns, in addition to a few studies that have recently surfaced with student teachers’ emotional experience as their research focus (Meyer, 2009). Understanding student teachers’ emotions during the practicum period, as Meyer (2009) acknowledges, “captures a part of the histories that teachers bring to their careers and classrooms” (p.74).

Practicum, field experience, internship, or, as it is sometimes called, the placements, are major requirements student teachers need to go through before graduation and then being allocated to schools as qualified school teachers. It is believed that such educational preparation programmes should build teachers of high quality who will lead learners to successful educational outcomes in any educational reform (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1998). Hence, the main purpose of teacher education, as might be presumed, is to produce effective and well qualified teachers (George et al, 2000).

In the actual classroom environment time, student teachers are supposed to gain new experience, knowledge and skills that will shape their teaching practices in schools and facilitate their future journey. They are supposed to learn how to teach, what to teach, what methods and teaching techniques to use at certain times. They learn how to manage their classrooms and their students’ behaviour by accommodating the variety of learning styles, individual capacities and physical conditions. In short, student teachers need to learn the art of teaching, as Shulman (1986) attests.

During the field experience, student teachers work in real teaching environments. Therefore, it is expected that they will confront a range of demanding experiences that may lead to stressful reactions. The school environment, together with other factors such as the college mentors, school supervisors, class teachers and students themselves may become sources of concerns to student teachers rather than facilitators of learning opportunities. In this context, Black-Branch and Lamont (1998, p.183) affirm that “teaching is considered to be among the professions in which employees are subject to high level of stress…and is capable of exposing student teachers to situations that are similarly, if not more, stressful than those experienced by practicing teachers”.

However among all these sources of stress, the primary origin of worries for pre-service teachers might arise as a result of the dual role they perform during their teaching experience as both students and novice teachers. This duality of roles creates a situation of uncertainty and worry. They need to learn how to cope with the new responsibilities required by each role, and also learn how to adopt or adapt accordingly to various situations.
Research studies indicate that student teachers’ main concerns emerge from “instructional proficiency, uncertainty about their exact function in the classroom, and fear of evaluation” (Harwell & Moore, 2010, p.1). In the same vein, teacher educators believe that stress can be a major component that impacts pre-service teachers’ behaviour and consequently affects their effectiveness, performance and competence. Stress can also influence the student teachers’ pupils during their teaching practice, and as a result those pupils’ achievement levels and performances may be negatively affected by their teachers’ stressful teaching (Murray-Harvey et al, 2000; Payne & Manning, 1990).

Similarly, Fontana and Abouserie (1993) assert that stress is a serious problem which is hard to define, as it may range from only words such as ‘tension’ or ‘pressure’ to complicated psychological or physiological reactions towards specific stimuli. This complexity emerges from the demanding nature of situations or events that require that an individual responds to certain encountered problems. In this context, student teachers’ stress rises from the need to respond to and resolve specific problems during their practicum teaching experience.

As is the case in teacher stress studies, a strong body of research has scrutinized pre-service teachers’ sources of stress from different perspectives and classified them under categories in relation to variables such as gender, age, anxiety, peers, evaluation or length of the practicum experience (Murray-Harvey et al, 2000; Swennen et al, 2004; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Talvitie et al 2000).

Looking into student teachers’ sources of stress can contribute to a better understanding of the multiple stages that trainees go through while transferring from one stage to another during their teaching practice as students and novice teachers at the same time. In other words, being aware of the different stressful aspects that engulf the student teachers’ practicum period may provide teacher educators with insights into what is missing in the pre-service teachers’ learning cycle including knowledge, skills, pedagogy or theories (Meyer, 2009).

The concerns of student teachers’ is another thoroughly explored area in teacher education research literature (Fuller, 1969; Harwell & Moore, 2010; Poulou, 2007; Cakmak, 2008; Conway & Clark, 2003). Fuller (1969) believed that student teachers experience three stages of concern during their teaching practice. Their adequacy in the classroom is the prominent concern. Then, their teaching practice comes with various issues and thirdly, their ability to accommodate their pupils’ individual differences, interests and needs. Conway and Clark (2003) echo Fuller (1969) and believe that such concerns move respectively from being about self to concerns about the tasks assigned to student teachers during their teaching practices and finally to concerns towards pupils and matters related to their behaviours and individual capacities.

Practicum-related concerns occupy a large area of the literature (Murray-Harvey et al, 2000; Liaw, 2009; Brandt, 2006; Atay, 2007; DaSilva, 2005; Main & Hammond, 2008). Interest in investigating pre-service teachers’ worries and concerns stems from the multiplicity of variables that affect the teaching-learning process during the field experience. Trainees’ personalities, social or educational backgrounds, ages and gender vary and consequently their concerns, interests, expectations or problems differ, especially when working in diverse contexts and settings.

Studies that examined student teachers’ concerns have shown that the trainees’ initial concerns in their practicum were focused on their inability to control their students and manage their classrooms (Kagan, 1992; Peters, 2008; Cakmak, 2008). A number of research studies, however, have shown that other challenging sources of concerns for pre-service teachers in their practicum have ranged from their concern about matching the theoretical part of the process studied in their colleges with the practical real experience, performance ability, amount of work, teaching strategies, to evaluation and task preparations (Harwell & Moore, 2010; Farrell, 2007, Boz, 2008). Those concerns as Dunn and Rakes (2010) point out do not only relate to the cognitive side of the student teachers, but also to the emotional level of thinking.
EFL/ESL student teacher emotions

Within the context of teaching English as a foreign language, many studies have reported student teachers’ concerns in their practicum experience. Those concerns were focused on areas that might be considered challenging for all student teachers from different disciplines (i.e. classroom management, teaching strategies, performance and the use of L2 to teach).

In fact, understanding these concerns and making efforts to improve teaching practices require reflection on the part of the trainees. This critical stage of reflection helps the student teachers polish their professionalism and contribute to a better understanding of self and personal teaching practices (Thurlow Long & Stuart, 2004). Educational researchers, however, assert that pre-service teachers’ learning in the practicum is a multi-tasking complicated process (Calderhead, 1991; Goodman, 1986). This complexity of learning evolves from the student teachers’ involvement in various dimensions during the field experience which entails, as Dobbins (1996, p. 16) affirms, being attentive to the “affective and cognitive demands of the experience”. Unless trainees are aware of the complexity of the learning process, their reflection on their teaching practices may not be authentic.

In ‘Stress and Emotions,’ Lazarus (2006) presents a clear distinction between stress and emotions. Three types of stress are defined: harm/loss, threat and challenge. The appraisal associated with each one of these types of stress, as Lazarus claims, is different. The harm/loss type of stress results from damage that has already occurred, while threat has to deal with harm or loss that has not yet taken place. The third type of stress ‘challenge’ consists of “the sensibility that, although difficulties stand in the way of gain, they can be overcome with verve, persistence and self-confidence” (Lazarus, 2006, p.33). Nevertheless, Lazarus affirms that even though stress seems complicated with these three subdivisions, it is much simpler than the concept of emotions. This is because “stress tells us relatively little about the details of a person’s struggle to adapt. Emotion, conversely, includes at least 15 different varieties, greatly increasing the richness of what can be said about a person’s adaptational struggle” (Lazarus, 2006, p.33).

Parallel to the rapid changes that education has witnessed, and is still witnessing, all over the world, a call has been issued to prepare student teachers of English language according to high quality standards that would enable those student teachers to cope with the career awaiting them (Larsen-Freeman & Manderson, 2011; Lu, 2002; Wertheimer & Honigsfeld, 2000). Consequently, it is imperative to investigate pre-service teachers’ concerns and challenges in terms of English language teaching and learning as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), especially in countries where English is used as a foreign or second language. As discussed earlier in this chapter, educational change and reform affects teachers’ professional and work lives. In the student teaching programmes, however, pre-service teachers have to cope with and adapt to two sources of challenges: learning as students in their institutions (i.e. pedagogy, teaching strategies) and teaching in schools as prospective teachers.

The most significant source of stress and challenge, probably, for EFL/ESL university students of different disciplines in general and pre-service teachers in the practicum is the use of the English language as the medium of instruction (EMI). In recent years, linguists have made attempts to examine EFL/ESL teachers’ beliefs about the educational pedagogy and teaching practices (Borg & Phipps, 2009). More recently, in their study in a UAE context, Troudi and Jendli (2011, p.39) confirm that “the salient challenges [of the participants] were linked to English language proficiency and the kind of academic skills required to perform well in an EMI environment”.

In addition, student teachers are required to link the theoretical knowledge they have learnt in their college/university courses to the real field practice in schools (Stewart, 2004; Liu, 2005). Research on EFL/ESL pre-service teachers has examined a variety of issues including challenges in the practicum (Tuzel & Ackan, 2009), learning how to teach (Fives, 2003; Johnson, 1994), teaching in a complex social environment (e.g. students, teachers, mentors, school principals, parents) that necessitates immediate interaction with a multiple mixture of people (Farrell, 2003; Liou, 2001), perceptions and attitudes towards learning and teaching (Street, 2003), motivation (Kyriacou & Kobori, 1998), knowledge and subject matter (Nelson & Harper, 2006) and beliefs about language learning and acquisition (Busch, 2010).
Tuzel and Ackan (2009), for example, have investigated non-native pre-service English language teachers’ practicum challenges in their language classrooms. The findings of the study indicate that “the common difficulties the student teachers encounter related to certain grammatical structures, explaining unknown words to students, modifying language according to students’ level, and authenticity of the classroom language” (p.271). In terms of their participants’ emotions in the practicum, the study referred to a decrease in self-confidence and anxiety on the part of the pre-service teachers in areas that included “Vocabulary, adjusting language to the students’ level, using classroom language and knowledge of grammar” (Tuzel & Ackan, 2009, p.282). Although this reference to emotions was one of the findings, no further explanation or theoretical perspective was provided for a better understanding of these two resulting emotions and their impact on the participants’ learning and teaching processes.

Research into learning to teach English as a second or foreign language, for example, has debated the impact of the practicum experience on pre-service teachers’ previous beliefs and knowledge (Tarone & Allwright, 2005). When students start their teaching practices in schools, they bring with them their own preconceptions about teaching since they were pupils behind their desks observing their teachers, regardless of what they have learnt in their teacher education programmes. Consequently, their professional knowledge, pedagogy and their growth as teachers are polished by their theoretical background and personal beliefs (Britzman, 2003).

An overview of research of student teaching and the role of emotions in shaping the student teachers’ identity, knowledge, pedagogy and experience indicates that this area of research is still in its infancy. Wilson (2005) starts the first page of her book ‘Supporting Teachers, Supporting Pupils’ with a title defining teaching as ‘The emotional business.’ She states in her introduction that the ‘biggest failure’ in student teaching programmes has been not preparing pre-service teachers for the emotional pressures that the teaching profession holds in it, nor for the relevance of their emotional responses to their accompanying behaviour and reactions.

Within the UAE context, the teacher education literature indicates a dearth of research studies regarding EFL/ESL teachers’ or student teachers’ emotions and feelings. To the best of my knowledge, issues investigated in EFL pre-service teaching included little or no reference to student teachers’ emotions and feelings. For instance, perceptions of the Emirati student teachers of the ‘Other’, namely Europe and Europeans, have been investigated by Kostoulas-Makrakis (2005). AL-Mekhlafi (2007) conducted a study to examine the perceptions of UAE prospective EFL teachers’ of their English language competencies gained during their TEFL programme. AL-Mekhlafi’s study looked at Emirati pre-service teachers’ views in relation to the “acquisition of: 1) necessary language competencies; 2) cultural, literary competencies; 3) linguistic competencies and; 4) whether or not the TEFL programme has provided them with adequate coursework in the above areas” (2007, p.1). Beatty and her colleagues (2009) have sought different ways to promote a culture of reading among EFL student teachers and Emiratis.

Conclusion

This chapter is inspired by the assumption that recent research of emotions has invoked: that all human emotional experiences involve elements of positive or negative emotions that may or may not last and affect an individual’s personal world. In addition, as Denzin (2009b) asserts, any individual’s emotional experience results in states of reflection, cognition, feeling and interpretation.

Based on the above discussion, the teacher’s and student teachers’ emotional experiences may vary from one trainee to another, or even within one teacher depending upon how they perceive the challenges they encounter at the time of their teaching. In relation to the attribution theory of motivation and emotion and its propositions, student teachers’ beliefs about the challenges encountered in the practicum can be caused by external, stable or uncontrollable factors which may trigger a variety of emotions. Consequently, different participants will live, experience and respond differently to probably the same situations, an issue which adds to the contribution of the findings this study provides.
On the basis of these assumptions, the way teachers or student teachers attribute and perceive causes of challenges encountered in their careers determines the subsequent magnitude of emotion experienced; positive or negative. These positive or negative emotions, as can be elicited from Fredrickson’s (2001) model of positive emotions, may affect the teacher’s or student teacher’s learning and commitment to the prospective teaching profession. Weiner (1986) emphasized the importance of causal dimensions in relation to an individual’s outcomes (successes or failures) in academic achievement situations. This theory focuses on the workplace as an ‘achievement oriented environment’ that allows for a variety of situations entailing a range of cognitive processes on the part of the individual, who is in search for causes of events and possible ways that facilitate achievement of goals in that environment. In this sense, trainees attributing outcomes of encountered events to certain causes will be engaged in analyzing those outcomes, which are perceived as unexpected, or challenging (Wong & Weiner, 1981).

To conclude, I hope that the issues raised in this chapter inspire student teachers, teacher educators, policy makers and curriculum developers. We all share Ciaccio’s (2004) message that says “if you are used to reacting negatively to most new situations…then teaching is likely to become an arduous task” (p. 24).
References


Voices from Rural Classrooms: Professional Development of Secondary School English Teachers in Bangladesh

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Introduction

Due to global economic and social imperatives, developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region have launched initiatives on educational policies and practices for the reform of English Language Education (Nunan, 2003). In Bangladesh, particularly with the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the nineties, there have been state-directed policies that have contributed to phases of curriculum revision, re-designing of textbooks and introducing ‘new’ classroom methodology at both primary and secondary levels. As a result, over the last decade, delivery systems of English Language (EL) learning and teaching have been attempted on a wide scale through national and international initiatives.

The State of EL Learning

A number of studies have been carried out on these proposed changes and delivery programs, mostly focused on secondary schools, and the findings generally point to a rather disappointing state of English learning and teaching (Khan, 2003; Rahman, 2007). The conclusions drawn point to the reality that these revisions and changes have been imposed on teachers without preparing them sufficiently in order to enable them to understand the underlying principles of the changes being proposed or to develop the language or the pedagogic skills that are needed to cope with the new ideas. Thus, the issue of appropriate and effective teacher development has become an imperative in educational management.

This chapter aims at analyzing the teacher education aspect in Bangladesh and identifying the interlinking factors that have a significant impact on the professional development of EL teachers, especially in rural settings. I take as my point of departure the results of a study I was involved in (Rahman et al, 2006), where we analysed a large non-government organisation’s country-wide education program that ran over a period of four years and was comprised of a 6-week residential training intervention that targeted nearly 5000 English Language teachers of rural secondary schools. The objective of this study was to find out to what extent capacity building of the trained English teachers had taken place in terms of their understanding of the CLT approach, their attitudinal changes and its effect on their pedagogic skills.

The study findings showed that although the trained teachers attempted more uses of the CLT approach, there was little evidence of much difference in the existing classroom practices of trained and non-trained teachers. Moreover, students’ perceptions indicated that although some trained teachers were using one or two new techniques in their classrooms not previously used, few students actually benefited from this. Most importantly, teachers did not believe that CLT could be effectively applied in the rural school classroom settings, thus implying there were pre-determined ingrained beliefs which influenced teachers’ attitudes and behaviour. Similar findings are evident in other studies. In a survey of higher secondary level teachers’ perceptions and attitudes on an in-service CLT training course, Rahman (2009) investigated the apparent mismatch between the traditional mindset of English language teachers and the demands made by the introduction of the communicative approach to ELT. In another study at the secondary/higher secondary level, Quader (2001) pointed to the presence of strong resistance to innovation and change not only from the end-users (the teachers) but also from a variety of stake-holders (head teachers, senior teachers, parents and even students themselves).

Developing an organic approach to teacher education

Emphasizing the need for an organic or culturally-friendly approach to EL teacher education, I turn to studies in cognition and culture. It is increasingly being felt that language needs to be taught in a manner
consistent with local cultural expectations (McKay, 2004; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). By the same token, it may be argued that teacher development courses need to facilitate English teachers to develop their pedagogic competence within the context of local and cultural settings. Bangladesh, like many developing countries, operates within its specific set of circumstances and therefore the concern has been to look for principles that can form the basis for a culture friendly approach to teacher development. The argument forwarded has the following as reference points: teachers’ belief systems, teachers’ cultural orientations regarding education, and the contextual factors within the country.

**Belief Systems**

Cognition studies have established that beliefs and attitudes influence all human perception and the ways in which events are understood and acted upon. In other words, meaning is culturally embedded and socially constructed. Pajares (1992) claims that belief systems are an important construct in education, and play a critical role in shaping teachers perceptions and behavior. Therefore, by the time prospective teachers enter a training program their beliefs are well formed and are resistant to change. These beliefs are seen as complex and difficult to unpack, and significantly, act as a ‘unique filter’ (Johnson, 1992: 440). In other words, belief systems have a filtering effect on thinking and information processing.

Based on this assumption, it is important that teacher education and educators appreciate, and are sensitive, to the phenomenon of teacher beliefs. Most studies on teacher preparation programs attest to the fact that teacher beliefs about their roles and about teaching remain largely unchanged during training (Stoller, 1994; Hayes, 2012). If we accept this statement, we are then confronted with the proposition that it is therefore useless to try to train teachers. Nevertheless, additional insights from cognitive psychology provide a way forward.

These insights speak of multiple knowledges constructed rather than stored. These multiple knowledges facilitate learning which involves continuous ‘construction’, ‘connection’ and ‘re-construction’ of experiences within personalized contexts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) claim that these multiple constructions are subject to continuous revision with changes likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into juxtaposition in a dialectical context. These different constructions may be perceived as the received wisdom or conventional knowledge imparted in teacher development courses and the dialectical context falls within the purview of the interaction of the multiple views within the course. In this sense dialectics is seen as a dialogue between two opposed or contradictory viewpoints – not to oppose or contradict but to understand each other’s positions from a broader and less partial viewpoint.

This cognitive approach supports the need for programs to provide opportunities for trainee teachers to understand the dynamics of how they think and act as they learn to teach by engaging in such activities that enable them to make sense of what they are being presented. This echoes what Ramani (1987) had said more than two decades ago about engaging with teacher perceptions. She used classroom observation techniques with the help of video recordings to reveal pre-conceptions and beliefs of teachers in an in-service program and claimed ‘teachers’ theoretical abilities can be engaged and strengthened if their intuitions are accorded value and if the entry point is close to their experience as practicing teachers’ (Ramani, 1987: 5). Thus, Wagner (1991) proposed that structural and psychological resistance need to be tackled with an approach that allows teachers to go deep into their schemas and engage with their prior mental constructs.

**Cultural and Contextual Orientations**

The word ‘culture’ in its traditional sense is seen as the social milieu that provides a group with a shared construction of reality, a tradition and a recipe for action (Berry et al, 1992). The rules of culture are transmitted through a learning process, either tacit or conscious. We are thus faced with educational culture, classroom culture, examination culture and learning and teaching styles embodied in our culture and woven into the context and the environment.

Moreover, contextual factors such as resource availability or lack of it, logistics and infrastructure and the social aspects of communities are significant to the educational phenomenon in any setting (Hamid, 2009).
At the same time, there are clearly centralizing tendencies of national syllabuses and examinations and widely used text-books and notebooks (Rahman, 2007) as well as clear perceptions of common practice among teachers within a local context.

Weddel (2009), among others, advocates that educational developers need to orientate themselves with the macro-aspects of the culture and the exigencies of the wider educational context in order to enable them to perceive the varied elements in the user culture and most importantly, to consider them as factors to be taken into account rather then as constraints to overcome. An example can be drawn from the element of routinization that is highly favoured in the traditional work culture of Bangladesh. Teachers’ instructional behavior in classrooms is understood as ‘routines’ (Prabhu, 1992) which provide relative security and stability for teachers. Rahman’s (2009) study of teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards the communicative form of teaching also points to the presence of a set of ingrained beliefs and behavioral patterns that are tantamount to routinized behavior. Although the idea of routinized behavior goes against the notion of autonomy and creativity proposed by progressive approaches to teacher education, the element of routinization in the Bangladeshi teaching culture may be turned to advantage and converted into a positive factor, rather than treated as a constraint.

To explain the above statement, I turn to the sphere of rural development. Mascarenhas (1993) has attributed success in South Asian rural development to the importance of routine – good practices are routine and they lead to positive results. If we extend this statement to teacher education, we may argue that teacher training needs to be presented in such a manner that ideas may be incorporated as routines. Let us take the notion of reflection by teachers.

The teacher education literature (Wallace, 1996; Richards, 1998; Bailey, 2003, among others) has singled out self-reflection as a major element that enables trainees to reconstruct their pedagogical values about teaching and learning in a manner that they find meaningful. If this element of reflection can be treated under the umbrella of routinization, it may be used to advantage. In other words, the element of reflection, analysis and interpretation may be used with such regularity that this practice becomes routinized in the trainee’s repertoire.

The three factors – the cognitive, the cultural and the contextual – together provide a rationale for promoting a multi-layered orientation to EL teacher development. Therefore, it is argued that in any teacher development initiative (initial, in-service, short / long) teacher educators need to recognize and incorporate these issues. They need to aim at a process through which trainee-teachers are able ‘to make sense of’, or understand and engage with, what is being proposed. The program needs to relate to the trainees’ mental constructs and an appropriate manner through which to engage with these deep-rooted constructs, at the same time working within the social and contextual realities of their environment and their very existence.

**Additional Factors**

Three additional factors need to be considered within the specific setting of Bangladesh. These are:

a. The necessity of an *English language improvement component* in a teacher development course. Without an acceptable level of language competence, teachers cannot be expected to perform effectively in class despite the training they receive. Often teachers ‘mis-teach’ rather than teach. Indeed, mis-pronunciation and a great use of ‘Banglish’ structures are largely the result of a never-ending vicious circle of mis-teaching by teachers at the lower levels of schooling. Again this component needs to be well organized and effective. The NGO study I referred to at the beginning of this chapter had this English language improvement component but used a traditional grammar-based items approach and so did not yield satisfactory results as far as language development was concerned.

b. The need for training of *simple atomistic skills of teaching and classroom management*, including the effective use of the blackboard and the efficient use of time. It is seen that our teachers often do not have these basic skills which disadvantage them in the classroom.
c. The program needs to recognize methodologies particular to subject areas. Through this, methodologies specific to English language skills development becomes a priority. It then clearly focuses on the learner engagement factor which demands interactive and participatory practices in the learning process.

An example of a teacher development program carried out by Morris (2004) in Bangladesh within the framework of integrating teacher beliefs and the local culture can be cited. The reflective approach to facilitate changing attitudes and mind sets was used in a 2-week intensive training program for 17 EL teacher educators from various teacher training colleges. The participants were taken through a self-directed strategy of reviewing the current B.Ed. English Elective course with a hands-on re-planning of the 22-week course including assessments in week 23. Through a series of directed study, assessment procedures and capacity building exercises, the teacher educators made revisions to the content as well as the methodology of the course. The report on the training program claims the teacher educators’ evaluation was productive and encouraging. The dynamism they displayed was impressive and ‘gives cause for optimism about the ability of the teacher educators to pursue their own CPD (continuing professional development) sustainably and enthusiastically in future’ (Morris, 2004: 16).

In spite of the optimism shown regarding this program, one needs to be wary about cultural and contextual factors too. This was a 2-week training program arranged by an expatriate educator. The participants were removed from their own regular work places and shared experiences with colleagues from other teacher training colleges in a congenial atmosphere, undertaking activities within a set target of time, place and resources where they functioned in harmony. Whether their ‘enthusiasm and dynamism’ would be carried back to their own work places and whether their attempts at motivating other colleagues would find a similar response remains to be seen. The education innovation literature is replete with stories of exasperation and failures when newly trained teacher educators try to bring fresh ideas to colleagues (Fullan, 2007; Weddel, 2009).

Conclusion

It is generally accepted that adequate EL teacher education is a powerful instrument for addressing the wide-ranging maladies afflicting the teaching of English in the curriculum. In terms of the weaknesses that were identified in the in-service development program for rural secondary school teachers in the NGO project I referred to in the beginning, together with similar reports on the apparent failure of various EL training programs, I have developed my argument for an adequate teacher development framework from cognitive, cultural and contextual perspectives. I have emphasized their importance in understanding the phenomenon of teacher’s construction of knowledge, their interpretation of the world around them and their orientation towards teaching. An emphasis has been made on the centrality of the teachers’ beliefs and an interaction with these beliefs in order to enable them to make sense of the training process.

Other assumptions that go beyond the training program are that:

a. Teachers are more likely to change their attitudes and develop their skills by working in their classrooms and schools and by working closely with other teachers;

b. This change needs the full co-operation and support of head teachers, local education administrators and other stakeholders;

c. Belonging to forums and networks enable the interchange of ideas and develop confidence. Thus, teachers associations, newsletters, access to websites, participation in seminars, workshops, conferences, networking in cluster groups, action research especially as a teacher-initiated group activity, all need to be encouraged.

In conclusion, it must be re-iterated that new approaches introduced solely into teacher education are unlikely to be sustainable if parallel developments do not take place in other areas of the curriculum. For example, in Bangladesh, the assessment procedure of EL learning at the primary and secondary levels show a clear mismatch between intended curriculum outcomes and current assessment practices, thereby creating
even more challenges for teachers (Das et al, 2014). It is argued that language education reform is likely to fail if the assessment system is not aligned to the curriculum. Likewise, the design of textbooks and appropriate methodologies together with opportunities for access to educational technology need to be part of a total education development package with all stakeholders encouraged and motivated to be involved in this initiative.
References


Chapter 9

Imbuing Student Heritage in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom: Projects from Japan and the United Arab Emirates

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Introduction

This chapter will introduce three projects that were developed to encourage English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to explore their own heritage. The first project is “Tell me about your Country.” It is a set of assignments and tasks that were developed in Japan and refined in Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They are applicable to any teaching environment from primary to adult, and have been used in both EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings. The second project is one that was developed with, and for, university students in Japan. “Speaking of Japan: a Conversation Game” is a board game that celebrates Japanese traditional culture. Used by Japanese high school students in advanced English courses, Japanese university students, and Japanese adult learners of English, it could easily apply to any advanced English course in any country. As it relied on the students to help generate the materials, it provided a sense of ownership to those students involved in its development. The third project, “Lives of our Heritage,” was a grant-funded effort to collect the personal stories of elder residents of the UAE and develop these stories into a resource for Emirati EFL students. The collectors of the stories were Emirati university students and the subjects were elder members of their extended families and of their local communities. It was also, as with the other two projects, an effort to engage students in developing a cultural resource for their community.

The projects showcased here take to heart the directive of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s World Heritage Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage as adopted on November 16th, 1972. Specifically, Article 27, where signatory countries were directed to use education and information programs to strengthen the understanding and appreciation of heritage and culture among their citizenry, with special focus on the young (UNESCO, 1972). It is of paramount importance to the authors that EFL and ESL students understand that learning English does not entail closing the door on their own culture and history.

Rationale

The authors accept Chism and Lou’s (2005) premise that one of the significant goals in a language classroom is intercultural understanding, and further, as Chism and Lou argue, that this intercultural understanding must include the student’s own culture. Therefore, in light of this principle, it is incumbent upon EFL and ESL teachers to create opportunities for their students to explore their own cultural and heritage backgrounds. Further, if Moran’s (2001) conclusion, that intercultural understanding is formed from cultural comparisons, is applied in this context, it indicates a need for students to reach a sophisticated understanding of their own cultures in order to understand other cultures. Like walking across a stream by stepping from stone to stone, a student must first appreciate his or her own culture and heritage in order to reach an understanding of another culture and heritage.

This fits with the dictates of schema theory. Studies have shown that students’ comprehension and retention of target language material is improved when familiar cultural contexts are used in the classroom (Post & Rathet, 1996). Lastly, and in regard to the use of cultural content in the language classroom, we have the argument by Lee and Van Patten (2003) that “Culture as people, customs, and artifacts is content and can be treated the same as any content in any course; teachers can use culture as content in the various kinds of activities that can be developed for communicative language teaching” (p. 5) Therefore, it can be argued that
providing English language students with the opportunity to learn about, reflect on, and interact with their native cultures and heritages provides a basis for their understanding of the world, and supports their efforts to come to grips with the complexities of learning English.

It would behoove us to take a moment to discuss what is meant by the terms “culture” and “heritage” in this context. According to Hofstede (1996) culture is a collective way of acting and thinking. Moran (2001) identified culture as being rooted in practices of behavior, artifacts, perceptions, and the matrix and interaction of the community and individual. Practices of behavior can be language usage, non-verbal communication, actions and interactions of individuals and the community. Artifacts can be tools, weapons, clothing, food, or dwellings, among other items. Perceptions, according to Moran, can be belief systems, religion, and or values. The interactions of the community and individual can be rooted in religious observances and rituals, and expectations of behavior and belonging. According to Moran (2001, p. 24), “Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts.” Each of the projects outlined in this chapter address one or more of these aspects of culture. In the case of the “Speaking of Japan: a Conversation Game,” all of the aspects are addressed in a student appropriate context and level.

**Project 1: Tell me about your Country**

The origin of this project was the prosaic task to prepare a set of Japanese high school students for month-long summer home stays in the United States or Australia. One of the authors was employed by a Japanese city as a supervisor of English instruction and part of his remit became to create an extra-curricular program to prepare students for international exchanges. The participants would be those high school students who had successfully applied to the city government to participate in the exchange program, which was under the auspices of the city’s sister-city program.

The initial preparation program comprised twelve, two hour lessons, conducted over a month prior to the students embarking on the exchange. There were approximately fifteen students preparing to be exchange students. The original lesson plans were focused on the culture and customs of the United States and Australia, and students received language training to prepare them to interact with their host families. After the students returned from their overseas adventures, the researcher gathered them together for a debriefing on their experiences and on whether the curriculum of the English preparation program had been adequate.

Students responded that they were ready to ask questions about Australia and the United States, and understood much of what was going on around them culturally, but they were not prepared to answer some basic questions about Japan and traditional Japanese culture and customs. They either (1) did not know much about their own heritage, or (2) if they had some ambient knowledge of Japanese culture they did not have the adequate English vocabulary to answer specific questions.

To address these deficiencies, the researchers devised a program of lesson activities to give students an opportunity to learn about their own culture and heritage and practice explaining this culture and heritage in English. Originally developed for Japanese high school students, they have been expanded and utilized for tertiary level students and adult learners of English. They were further structured to allow them to be used internationally, for students from diverse countries. Beyond Japan, they have been used in ESL adult continuing education courses in the United States, in Bangladesh high school and university English programs, and in public high schools and universities in the United Arab Emirates. They comprise, to date, a set of sixteen activities that range from simple one response activities to more elaborate individual or small group activities where participants develop elaborate explications of their culture and heritage.
Reviewed are five of the cultural heritage activities. These five are among the simplest to organize and actuate. They are the “Cultural Inventory” assignment, the “Culture Box,” the “Snapshot of my Culture” assignment, the “Cultural/Historical Tour”, and, finally, the “Menu” assignment.

Each activity may be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Additionally, each exercise lends itself to a variety of methods of use. They may be completed as a paper and pencil activity, an opening activity for a presentation, a research program leading to a dialogue, a role-playing opportunity, etc. In each case, the researchers placed a premium on flexibility of usage, realizing that the materials needed to be ready to meet the needs of teachers and students from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of resources available. For this reason, most of the exercises can easily be duplicated on a chalkboard or done verbally.

Additionally, many of the assignments have multiple tasks. These tasks might include research, discussion, writing, drawing, presenting, and role-playing. This is to recognize the differing strengths of students as well as to provide the instructor with an assemblage of approaches for each exercise.

Finally, these assignments can be, and have been, used when an instructor wants his or her class to explore another culture. Each assignment lends itself easily as a template for the exploration of other cultures and heritages as well as the students’ own cultures and heritages.

**Five exercises from Tell me about your Country:**

1. **Cultural Inventory**

The Cultural Inventory assignment is a simple, ten question, exercise that asks students to identify in the space of one or a few words, their culture's traditional clothing, most important holiday, a famous historical personage, valued personality traits, exported cultural influences, art, cultural confusions, food, sport, and music. Two examples of questions taken from the assignment are, "What is the most traditional clothing in your culture?" and "What is a cultural food dish that visitors may not like very much?" The origin of the ten questions was a homework assignment and class session discussion among a Japanese year 12 high school advanced English class. Students were tasked with developing ten questions that one could pose to a visitor to the classroom. The questions were to elicit enough information about the visitor’s culture that a short descriptive summary of the visitor’s culture could be developed by the listeners. From the questions generated by the homework assignment the class selected ten that they thought would best encapsulate the culture and heritage of the visitor. These questions were first used to interview a group of high school students who were visiting from the United States. Afterward the instructor then turned the assignment around and had the students answer the questions in relation to Japan. (Please see Appendix A for an example of the Cultural Inventory.)

2. **Culture Box**

In this task students were asked to identify eight items that they felt best exemplified their culture. They were instructed that they could focus on both traditional and/or modern culture. In one form of the assignment, a student was required to create a simple box approximately 45 centimeters by 45 centimeters in size. On this box were displayed photographs, drawings, and other memorabilia that illustrate the native culture in some way. For example, students in Japan might have cutouts from Japanese manga or cartoon magazines, or origami cranes, or pictures of pop stars or traditional geisha. Each student, or group of students if it is done as a group activity, then carefully selected eight items that he, she, or they, believed exhibit the culture. The student(s) then proceeded to give a show and tell format presentation of the eight items. Since the space was always limited, ingenuity was required in the presentation of cultural items. For example, one student could not fit a kimono into the box, so she put a kimono sandal in to represent the full kimono. Students in the United Arab Emirates placed a gutra (male head covering) in the box rather than an entire set of traditional Bedouin male garments. (Please see Appendix B for the Culture Box assignment handout.)

An ESL teacher of adult continuing education courses, based near San Francisco in the United States, used
the Culture Box assignment. She had attended a conference presentation where the authors had presented some of their “culture and heritage” activities. This was her reflection on the class experience with the assignment:

We did the Boxes . . . . Students particularly liked this activity because, in addition to a natural approach to language, they told me that they felt they were discovering themselves all over again in a different language as they wrote . . . . I loved the comments and the realization. I was particularly touched to discover how many values and principles they brought into the activity and therefore it was not artificial in any way (Kay, 2004, 1).

It should be pointed out that the construction of an actual “box” can be considered ancillary to the thrust of this assignment and might not be necessary. Students could bring in items and explain their relevance to the culture as a show and tell activity. The creation of a box, however, has been a successful and fun part of this assignment, especially for high school students. It can also be seen as an avenue for expression for students who might have more of an artistic rather than linguistic skill set.

3. A Snapshot of my Culture

In this simple homework and class assignment, students were directed to take photographs of an object, location, or event that they felt exemplified their culture or heritage. Along with the photograph, students were directed to write a paragraph explaining why they selected their particular subject for the photograph, keeping the discussion to its importance as a reflection of the students’ culture(s). This has also been done as a verbal assignment where students show the pictures to the class and explain their reasons for taking the photograph in light of the subject’s importance to the culture. An example of a Snapshot of my Culture assignment is shown as Appendix C.

4. Historical/Cultural Tour

In this assignment students were asked to create a travel itinerary for a seven-day historical/cultural tour of their city, area, or country. They were to state what would be seen each day, give a description of what will be seen, and state why it is important enough to include in the limited itinerary. On the second page they must create a map showing the itinerary. Finally, they must list what to pack, with a reason for each item, and three famous souvenirs that they can purchase on the trip. This exercise has also been assigned as a digital presentation assignment where teams of students were asked to prepare a fourteen to twenty slide presentation outlining a seven day tour that they planned to give a friend keen on learning about the local culture and history.

5. Menu Assignment

In this exercise students were tasked with developing a menu for a restaurant serving unique and traditional dishes and drinks from their cultural heritage. They were required to give the restaurant a suitable name, include cover art, and then list appetizers (starters), main courses (entrees), desserts, and drinks. In each category they were to include pictures of the dishes and descriptions as well as prices. As an additional stage for this assignment, students were given the chance to play-act a restaurant scene where “first time visitors” visited the restaurant and were served by a waiter who was to explain the menu items and answer questions.

Project 2: Speaking of Japan: A Conversation Game

This is the one activity that is specific to Japan and Japanese culture; however, the concept could be successful with students from any cultural background in an EFL setting, or in a large ESL course where students could be grouped for the activity based on culture or country of origin. It could also conceivably be used to help ESL students explore their host country’s culture and heritage. Teams of ESL students could be assigned the task of exploring aspects of the host country’s culture and developing the game in light of their discoveries.
The origin of this project was the researchers’ experience in teaching an Intermediate English course at a public prefectural university in Japan. One section of the received syllabus for the course called for the students to complete a project showcasing a culture from anywhere in the world. The researchers decided to use the opportunity to have students assist in creating a conversational board game that would celebrate Japanese culture. The result was “Speaking of Japan: a Conversation Game.” An example of the board for the board game is shown as Appendix D.

The game has four pieces: a game board with fifty squares, twenty question cards, twenty picture cards, a set of place markers, and a die. The idea of the game is to move your marker from square one to square fifty and complete the questions or activities required. Participants roll the die and move their markers. They may land on a square that requests them to choose a picture card or a question card. With a picture card, he or she must identify what is shown in the picture. Each picture shows something from Japanese culture. Examples are a sumo wrestler, a katana (sword), a kimono, a bullet train, etc. Question cards ask the student to respond to questions about Japanese culture. For example, "What is a traditional wedding like?" "What do students wear to school?" or "When is a person considered an adult?" As participants move through the game, they might also land on squares that ask them to do certain tasks, like make a paper crane or show how a man should sit, or a woman sit, or sing a verse from a traditional Japanese song.

In most cases the game has taken four participants approximately forty minutes to complete. Suggestions for use that come with the game mention that students might also create their own questions and picture cards as a homework assignment. A response from one teacher who used this with her class was that this activity focused students on describing familiar things and made them aware "... of the difficulty of describing familiar things in English and [the students] learnt some vocabulary/phrases for doing so" (Dougherty, 2014, para. 12).

**Project 3: Lives of our Heritage**

Made possible by a grant from the Emirates Foundation, the “Lives of our Heritage” project accomplished three goals: (1) It gave university students an opportunity to learn about their own heritage via the stories of their community elders, (2) it provided an opportunity to set on record oral history from the pre-oil days of what would become the United Arab Emirates, and (3) it became an English teaching resource that came directly from the experiences of the local Bedouin community, celebrating its culture, traditions, and values. Regarding point three, it became, in the context of the local Emirati public school system, one of a very select number of resources available to junior high and high school students that offered them the
opportunity to learn about their own historical and cultural heritage via the medium of English language study.

The textbook comprised fifteen chapters. The fifteen chapters include twelve biographical stories, three UAE culture and history activities, photographs from around the UAE, and inspirational quotes from the late founder of the country, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. The stories were selected for their appeal to young Emiratis. Each story was selected because it offered some mix of history, humor, or an insight into human nature as well as being of historical significance. Each biographical story was referred to as a “life.” Each “life” chapter had, along with the biographical story, these set components:

1. A Vocabulary Section
2. A “Did you Pay Attention” section
3. A History and Culture Question
4. A section where students can write or talk about him or herself

Additionally, there were three chapters dedicated to UAE culture and history which were influenced by activities from the Tell me about your Culture project detailed earlier. These activities included one that had a UAE Cultural/Historical Tour, one that had students pretend to be a UAE tour guide explaining the significance of a historical site or a cultural event, and finally, one that had students participate in planning a UAE souvenir shop.

The text for Lives of our Heritage was printed as an easily photocopied folio edition which included a CD-R that contained a digital copy of the textbook and an answer key for teachers. Copies of the textbook were distributed to target schools in the Abu Dhabi Emirate by the local education council. They were also presented to junior high and high school teachers at education conferences in Ras al-Khaimah, Dubai, and Al Ain. Approximately 2500 copies were distributed throughout the United Arab Emirates.

Aside from obtaining the grant from the Emirates Foundation, the development of the textbook took approximately one academic year. One eighteen week semester was dedicated to introducing the concept to classes of English foundations students at a public university in the Abu Dhabi Emirate and assigning student volunteers to interview selected elders in the UAE community. These elders were selected based on their age and experiences, with the focus being on obtaining stories from before the oil-age in the Emirates and before the United Arab Emirates became a country. Hence, most subjects were between sixty and eighty years of age. The student volunteers were first year foundations students, completing intensive courses in English and mathematics in preparation for entering the Bachelor programs. Questions for the interviews were garnered from classroom discussions about what questions would lead to the best, most interesting, responses from the subjects. These questions were generated first in English and then translated into Arabic for the interview template. Students interviewed their assigned subjects in pairs, and, in almost all cases, conducted the interviews in Arabic. The interviews were written down and brought to the classroom where the students, with faculty assistance translated the interviews into English.

There were thirty-one interviews conducted, and out of these interviews, twelve were selected by a team of editors and students for further editing and inclusion in the finished text. Stories were selected for their appeal to young Emiratis, as high school students were the target audience. Hence, stories were selected based on their focus on history, elements of humor, or circumstances that showed human nature. One of the chapters, or “lives,” from the textbook is exhibited as Appendix E.
Figure 9.2 shows the stages that were involved in the process of creating and distributing the *Lives of our Heritage* textbook.

Conclusion

Chism and Lou (2005) stated that the “goal in a language classroom is intercultural understanding, not only the understanding of another culture but of one's own culture as well” (p. 2). The problem, on a practical level, is that most course books involve the student in learning about, discussing, and articulating the culture and history of native English speaking nations. This chapter offered examples of three projects, “Tell me about your Country,” the “Speaking of Japan: a Conversation Game,” and “Lives of our Heritage,” that have allowed students to explore, and then explain, their native cultures in English.

Further, the authors’ own experience as EFL and ESL teachers must be acknowledged as influences in the germination of these projects. With a combined forty years of EFL and ESL teaching experience at the high school, tertiary, and adult continuing education levels the authors feel qualified to make these assertions:

1. EFL and ESL students, specifically teenagers and young adults, often do not possess great quantities of information about their native cultures or heritages.

2. EFL and ESL students who have some ambient knowledge of their culture and heritage most often do not possess an adequate English vocabulary or expositional experience to discuss cultural or heritage topics in English. This is often the case in examples of adult learners.

Lastly, the authors’ experience in developing and teaching EFL and ESL classes with these projects have led to the identification of three significant benefits in the use of such projects. First, the students acquire English language vocabulary and exposition skills. Second, there is maintenance or improvement of understanding for the students of their own native culture or cultures. Thirdly, English language learning may be viewed by the students, and the community from which they originate, as an academic pursuit that is supportive of the students’ cultural heritage and not a challenge to that culture or heritage. In simple summation, a student's heritage can, and should be, a source of inspiration, stimulation, and confirmation in the EFL or ESL classroom.


Appendix A: Cultural Inventory

Cultural Inventory: How would you describe your culture?

Names: ____________________________
_______________________________
_______________________________

Answer these questions:

1. What is the most traditional clothing in your culture?

2. What is the most important holiday or festival in your culture?

3. What is the name of a famous historical person from your culture?

4. What are the personality traits that are valued in your culture?

5. What is the most important thing that other cultures have borrowed from your culture?

6. How would you describe your culture’s traditional art?

7. What is something that is difficult for people to understand about your culture?

8. What is a cultural dish that visitors may not like very much?

9. What is the most traditional sport that is played in your country?

10. How would you describe your country’s traditional music?
Appendix B: Culture Box

**Culture Box Assignment:**
What will you put in your "Culture Box?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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**Culture Box:**
A box you will decorate to reflect your culture. You will put eight items in the box to help show and explain your culture.
A Snapshot of My Culture

Picture:

Explanation:
This is the cherry blossom. In spring time Japanese go and have parties under the cherry blossom tree. It is a symbol of spring to us. Also, many Japanese poets have written poems about the cherry blossoms. Because the flowers are very beautiful and last only a few days, many people think that they represent human life. You will see the cherry blossoms shown in many Japanese art works. It is one of the symbols of Japan.

By Yumi K.
Appendix D: Speaking about Japan-- A Conversation Game

Speaking of Japan... A Conversation Game

1. Take a Picture Card.
2. Go to square 2.
3. Lose one turn.
4. Take a question card.
5. Tradition: 1. What is Hanemushi? (2) What is Seisobun?
6. Take a question card.
7. Take a Picture Card.
8. Relax
9. Lose one turn.
10. Tradition: (2) What is tawny?
11. What is the color that is never used for white in traditional Chinese paint?
12. How did people know it was your turn?
13. Take a question card.
14. Take a Picture Card.
15. Make one of these:
16. Move ahead three spaces!
17. Tradition: (1) How do you point to yourself? (2) How do you point to someone else?
18. Take a question card.
19. Take a Picture Card.
20. Tradition: Go how to your teacher.
21. Take a Picture Card.
22. Tradition: (1) Which numbers are lucky? Why? (2) Are there any lucky numbers?
23. Take a Picture Card.
24. Move to square 2.
26. Lose one turn.
27. Traditions: What is your favorite Japanese folk tale? Why is it your favorite?
28. Take a question card.
29. Move ahead three spaces!
30. Traditions: Which is your favorite kind of tea? Why?
31. Take a Picture Card.
32. Take a question card.
33. Tradition: (1) Show how a man should sit. (2) Show how a woman should sit.
34. Relax!
35. Lose one turn.
36. Take a picture card.
37. Take a question card.
38. Take a Picture Card.
39. Take a picture card.
40. Traditions: (1) What is otoshidama? (2) When is it used?
41. Take a Picture Card.
42. Lose one turn.
43. Traditions: Do a sumo stance.
44. Take a question card.
45. Traditions: What do you say when you are surprised or shocked?
46. Take a Picture Card.
47. (2) Show you greeted the teacher at the start of class in high school.
48. Go back to square 42.
SUNNY MORNINGS AND MEMORY LANE

1. How lucky are those who have the chance to know the older generation. How lucky they are to see their grandfather or grandmother alive and experience their past with them. I am one of those fortunate ones. I had the chance to talk to my grandfather and to go down memory lane and visualize his past.

2. On a bright sunny morning we all went on a picnic on a beach. I was sitting with him after lunch while the others were having fun on the sand. I asked him to tell me something about his life in the UAE before oil was discovered and people lived a very simple desert life.

3. He told me that he was born in Abu Dhabi in 1930. He was part of a small family of just his parents and his elder sister. His sister married early and left him alone to enjoy the love and affection of his parents.

4. The food and clothing that they had then were all very simple. They used to eat simple food that mainly consisted of fresh fish, goat or camel meat, milk, and dates. For breakfast they used to eat bread with home-made butter and cheese that his mother churned. For lunch and dinner they often had soup and vegetables.

5. They wore traditional clothes like the kandoura and longi. They lived near the sea in a hut which was thatched with palm leaves.

6. When he was a boy he went to the mosque school where the teacher used to give him lessons about the Holy Quran, Arabic, and some mathematics. There was no concept of elementary, junior or senior high school then. Their job as students was mainly to memorize their lessons and repeat them the next day. In the evening and on weekends he and his friends used to play outside. Swimming and running races were his favorite games.

7. I asked him about any house chores that he was required to do. He replied that his main chores were to run errands, collect leaves and branches for the cattle, and to cut wood for the fire. He added that his father would take him on trips to the nearby coast to fish. The only ways of making a living then, he said, was through pearl diving or fishing. Both were tough, as the sea could be dangerous.

8. When I asked him about his most memorable experience, his face beamed like a teenager’s. He said that it was the day his father gave him a canoe that he had made. He used it to go fishing in the shallows. He also mentioned the time his father took him by steam ship to visit India. It was his first time to experience a different land and a new culture.

9. The sun went down and we all started for home, my grandfather holding my hand. He walked slowly toward the car as if he had gotten tired from the long journey down memory lane.

Vocabulary

Complete the sentence with a word or phrase from the text.

1. Cows, bulls, and calves are all ________________.
2. Earning money from your job is ________________________________.
3. An idea is a ______________________________.
4. If you are lucky, you are ____________________________.
5. When you think of the past, your mind travels into a place called ________________________.
6. A small boat which is rowed is a ____________________________.
7. If you have an opportunity, you have a ____________________________.
8. If a liquid, milk, is whipped very fast it is ________________________________.
9. Short journeys to get something or to pass something to another person are ____________________________.
10. To learn something so you don't forget it is to ________________________________.
11. Woven together with materials like straw or leaves: ________________________________.
12. A smile which shone with light ________________________________.

Did you pay attention?

See if you can answer these questions without looking back at the reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why does the writer think he is fortunate?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What did the writer ask his grandfather to tell him about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where was he born?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did he eat for breakfast?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What clothing did he wear?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What subjects did they study?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the two ways of making a living?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did his father give him?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why was the writer’s grandfather tired?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

History and Culture Question: What is a “longi?”

Write about you: Choose one of the following topics and write your response.

Look at paragraph #6-- What subjects did you study in elementary school?

Look at Paragraph #8 -- What was your most memorable experience from childhood?
PART 2

LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES
Learning Styles

Stewart and Felicetti (1992, p. 17) define learning styles as those “educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn”. Thus, learning styles are not really concerned with what learners learn, but rather how they prefer to learn. Some students like theories and deductions, while others are comfortable with facts and actual experiences; some prefer active learning, others introspection. Some prefer visual representation of information, while others seek verbal interpretations. One learning style is neither superior nor inferior to another, but is simply unique with its own specific strengths and weaknesses.

The key to actively involving students in the learning process lies in understanding their learning style preferences, as these can positively or negatively affect a student’s performance (Birkley & Rodman, 1995; Dewar, 1995; Hartman, 1995). “Understanding the role of learning style in the learning process is an important concept for those committed to meeting the demands being placed on education and their own personal commitment to learning excellence (Sims & Sims, 2006, p. xiv). Designing materials to meet the diversity of learning styles can also benefit students (Agogino & Hsi, 1995; Kramer-Koehler, Tooney & Beke, 1995). Birkley and Rodman (1995) acknowledge that just as there are striking differences in the way people learn and process information, there are also significant differences in how learning styles are defined and measured. A goal of instruction should be to provide students with the skills related to every learning style category, irrespective of students’ personal preferences, as they will need all of those skills to perform successfully in their professional lives.

Learning style research supports what experienced classroom practitioners know intuitively; that students absorb new materials and skills through their senses, and prefer some senses over others in specific situations (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Reid, 1995; O’Brien, 1989). When lessons are presented visually as well as verbally, and reinforced through writing, drawing, or speaking activities, students are not only able to learn in the way best suited to their style, but are also able to develop a full and varied repertoire of modality strengths.

Fundamentals of Learning Styles

Reid (1995, p. xiii) asserts that learning styles have some fundamental characteristics on which they are based:

- Every person, student and teacher alike, has a learning style and learning strengths and weaknesses;
- Learning styles exist on wide continuums; although they are described as opposites;
- Learning styles are value-neutral; that is, no one style is better than others;
- Students must be encouraged to ‘stretch’ their learning styles so that they will be more empowered in a variety of learning situations;
- Often, students strategies’ are linked to their learning styles;
- Teachers should allow their students to become aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses.

Why Integrate Learning Styles into Teaching?

Montgomery and Groat (1998, p. 2) cite the following reasons for incorporating learning styles into teaching:
• **Making teaching and learning a dialogue** – ‘dialogue’ emphasizes “the interactive, cooperative, relational aspects of teaching and learning” (Tiberius, 1986, p. 148). Thus, a class may include a variety of ‘active learning’ techniques that truly engage students in the collective dialogue.

• **Responding to a more diverse student body** – student bodies are increasingly diverse in terms of age, nationality, cultural background, ethnicity and gender. This diversity can affect classroom settings in many ways, including the diversity of learning styles. For example, older students who can draw from their life experiences are more likely to be independent, self-directed learners (Knowles, 1980).

• **Communicating our message** – teachers tend to communicate knowledge of subject matter to students, sometimes not realising how much of that material is actually being conveyed. For example, in a typical 50-minute lecture class, students retain 70% of what is conveyed in the first 10 minutes, but only 20% from the last 10 minutes (McKeachie, 1994, p. 56). To really convey a message, teachers need to orchestrate the material in a multi-faceted manner across the range of student learning styles.

• **Making teaching more rewarding** – by making an effort to consider student learning styles, teachers may be able to reap equal satisfaction from reinvigorating their teaching practices.

• **Ensuring the future of our disciplines** – “Over time…selection and socialisation pressures combine to produce an increasingly impermeable and homogenous disciplinary culture and correspondingly specialised student orientations to learning” (Kolb, 1981, p. 234). Ultimately, to ensure the long-term viability of their given field, teachers must guarantee that students with a diversity of learning styles are welcomed and encouraged.

**Learning Modalities**

Research projects conducted over many years, including close and detailed observation of the way we communicate, have identified three main learning modalities: visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

**Visual Learners**

*learn through seeing...*

Visual learners are learners who “prefer to learn via the visual channel. Therefore they like to read a lot, which requires concentration and time spent alone. They must have written directions if they are to function well in the classroom” (Oxford, 1995, p. 35). They learn best from visual aids like the following:

- illustrated textbooks
- videos / pictures
- diagrams / charts
- handouts
- flashcards
- use coloured highlighters for information

**Auditory Learners**

*learn through listening.....*

Auditory learners are “students who enjoy the oral-aural learning channel” (Oxford, 1995, p. 36). They interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard.
They learn best from auditory aids like the following:

- record lectures (replay later)
- reading written text aloud
- verbal repetition
- speeches
- giving presentations
- creating mnemonics and musical jingles

**Kinesthetic Learners**

_**learn through moving, doing and touching...**_

Kinesthetic learning “implies total physical involvement with a learning environment” (Kinsella, 1995, p. 172). These learners need a hands-on approach. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration. They learn best from hands-on experiences and aids like the following:

- touching and feeling materials
- moving around while receiving information
- scientific or lab type experiments
- gesturing when speaking
- taking frequent study breaks
- snacking or chewing gum while studying/listening to lectures

(Omrod, 2011; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

Fleming (2006) developed an extension of the Neuro-Linguistic Programming description of learning styles which investigates how we communicate and how this affects our learning. He notes that when we gather information from the world around us, which includes the information that we need for learning, we make use of all our senses. Some people, however, employ one sense more than others. The **VARK** system assesses how much people rely on the following senses:

- visual
- auditory
- reading/writing
- kinesthetic

**Pedagogical Implications**

Many different learning style checklists are available in the literature (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989) to help determine students’ learning styles. Instructors must design a **balanced** teaching approach that addresses the learning needs of all their students. For example, knowing that a large majority of students in a class are sensory and visual learners, should motivate the instructor “to find concrete and visual ways to supplement the presentation of material that might normally be presented entirely abstractly or verbally” (Kinsella, 1995, p. 181). Kinsella suggests that if these students are taught to map, diagram or illustrate concepts to aid comprehension and retention of new terms, they can use those skills in other classes too. They will have
acquired not only more English language proficiency, but also the tools for learning other subjects. Lawrence (2009) offers various recommendations for designing instruction to address the full spectrum of learning styles.

**Learning Style Models**

The five models of learning styles that are most frequently cited in the literature and most prevalent in research, are as follows:

1. **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) developed by Briggs and Myers (1975), identifies four personality types based on Carl Jung’s concept of archetypes (Myers & McCaulley, 1986; McCaulley et al., 1983). These personality types can be interpreted along the lines of some of the other learning style descriptions. According to the model, learners may be:

- **Extroverts** – who are happy to try things out and who focus on the world of people;
- **Introverts** – who are more likely to think things through and to focus on the world of ideas;
- **Sensors** – who tend to be practical, detail-oriented, and who focus on facts and procedures;
- **Intuitors** – who are imaginative, concept-oriented and focus on meaning;
- **Thinkers** – who are skeptical, and make decisions based on logic and rules;
- **Feelers** – who are appreciative and tend to make decisions based on personal and more humanistic considerations;
- **Judgers** – who set and follow agendas, and seek closure and completeness even without having the full picture; or
- **Perceivers** – who adapt to changing circumstances and will defer completion until more is known. (Pritchard, 2009, p. 45)

Thus, people can be said to belong to one of sixteen categories, based on their preferences along each of these dimensions. For example, one learner may be an I-N-F-J (introvert, intuitor, feeler, judger), while another may be an E-S-T-P (extrovert, sensor, thinker, perceiver). There is a wide range of different types of learners across all sixteen types, all of whom can be found in classrooms everywhere. Examples of the characteristics of each of these personality dimensions are shown in Table 10.1.

**Table 10.1 – Preferences of Myers-Briggs Personality Types** (Briggs & Myers, 1975)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation to Life</th>
<th>Extroverted</th>
<th>Introverted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group interactions</td>
<td>Working alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>Concepts and ideas</td>
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<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Sensing</th>
<th>Intuitive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facts and data</td>
<td>Impressions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>Not routine</td>
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<tr>
<th>Decision Making</th>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
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<td>Logical</td>
<td>Search for harmony</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Perception</td>
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<tr>
<th>Attitude to Outside World</th>
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<th>Introverted</th>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Perception</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
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The Myers-Briggs Model has been widely used to classify student learning styles in various disciplines (Schroeder, 1993; McCaulley et al., 1983). However, according to Grasha (1996, p. 55), the predominant learning styles of college students contrast sharply with the predominant styles of university faculty. About two-thirds of faculty are intuitive, and over half are introverted, therefore, while instructors prefer to focus on abstract and theoretical ideas, the majority of students prefer to start with practical examples and applications, eventually building to abstract theories.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Once again, instructors should strive to provide a variety of learning experiences such that each learning style is addressed at one point or another. Activities that are particularly engaging for sensing learners include case studies, group projects and presentations. To challenge both sensing and intuitive learners, problem-solving incorporating rote and open-ended problems could be assigned. A combination of individual and group work activities should be included to satisfy both extroverts and introverts.

2. Kolb’s Learning Style Model

Kolb’s (1981) learning style model proposes a four stage process which is based on the Experiential Learning Theory (McGill & Beaty, 2001) illustrated in Figure 10.1. The ELT model classifies individuals over two continuous dimensions as having a preference for:

- The *concrete experience* mode or the *abstract conceptualisation* mode (the dimension concerning how the learner takes in information);
- The *active experimentation* mode or the *reflective observation* (the dimension concerning how the learner internalises information).

![Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle](Kolb, 1984)

An underlying assumption of this model is that all learning entails a cycle of four learning modes, but each individual is likely to feel most comfortable in one of the four modes of the cycle based on his/her preference along two dimensions, perception and processing (Harb et al., 1995; Kolb, 1984, 1995). Perception (abstract/concrete) has been found to correlate with the Decision-Making (feeling/thinking) mode of the Myers-Briggs model (Kolb, 1984); while Processing (active/reflective) primarily encompasses the Orientation (extrovert/introvert) mode of the Myers-Briggs model (Kolb, 1984).

Research also indicates that male and female students have adopted different modes of learning based on this model. For example, in a study conducted by Philbin et al. (1995), nearly half of the male respondents (48%) preferred the assimilator (abstract/reflective) mode, whereas only 20% of the females did. The predominant learning modes of the females were diverger (concrete/reflective) and converger (abstract/active). Based on these findings, the data provided in Table 10.2 would suggest that many female students are more likely to respond to faculty who adopt either the role of motivator or coach, while male students are more likely to feel comfortable with faculty who assume the position of expert.
Pedagogical Implications

Kolb’s learning model is further distinguished by the types of questions related to each of the four learning styles: “Why?” “What?” “How?” and “What if?” The Kolb model suggests following a learning cycle that addresses these questions in order. Table 10.2 offers some examples of supplemental activities that can be used to enhance students’ educational experience. By teaching through this learning cycle, teachers can ensure that all learning styles have been addressed in so far as all four questions have been answered: “Why are we learning this?” “What are the primary purposes of this subject matter?” “How do I use this knowledge?” “What are the consequences of using this information in other contexts?”

Table 10.2 – Sample Activities and Role of Faculty for each Kolb Learning Style  
(Kolb, 1984)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodators</th>
<th>Divergers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What if?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty as Evaluator/Remediator</td>
<td>Faculty as Motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open ended problems</td>
<td>Motivational stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>Group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design projects</td>
<td>Group projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective exams</td>
<td>Subjective tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulations</td>
<td>Field trips</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convergers</th>
<th>Assimilators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty as Coach</td>
<td>Faculty as Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework problems</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer simulations</td>
<td>Textbook reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Trips</td>
<td>Demonstration by instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals’ reports</td>
<td>Independent research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>Objective exams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Honey-Mumford Model

A similar but perhaps more comprehensive model was developed by Honey and Mumford (1995). This too describes four principal learning styles or approaches to learning as follows:

- **Activists** – they prefer to learn by doing, immersing themselves in a wide range of activities, particularly in group work so that ideas can be shared and tested;
- **Reflectors** – they like to stand back and observe, collecting as much information as possible before making a decision;
- **Theorists** – they are good at making connections and abstracting ideas from experience. They have well organised minds, taking a logical one-step-at-a-time approach to problem-solving;
- **Pragmatists** – they look for the practical implications of any new ideas or theories before judging their value. They are most comfortable in problem-solving situations.

There is arguably a strong similarity between the Honey and Mumford styles/stages and the corresponding Kolb learning styles:

- Activist = Accommodating
- Reflector = Diverging
- Theorist = Assimilating
- Pragmatist = Converging

Like Kolb, Honey and Mumford argue that everyone has some ability in each of these styles and that all four phases of the learning cycle must be passed through for learning to occur. They devised a Learning Styles Questionnaire to help individuals ascertain which type of learner they might be. Sample activities for each learning style type are shown in Table 10.3. Honey and Mumford (1995, p. 56) postulate that with this information, a learner will be in a better position to do three really useful things:

- Become smarter at getting a better fit between learning opportunities and the way you learn best. This makes your learning easier, more effective and more enjoyable. It saves you tackling your learning on a hit-and-miss basis. Equipped with information about your learning preferences, you will have many more hits and fewer misses;
- Expand the ‘band width’ of experiences from which you derive benefit. Becoming an all-round learner, increases your versatility and helps you learn from a wide variety of different experiences – some formal, some informal, some planned and some spontaneous;
- Improve your learning skills and processes. Increased awareness of how you learn opens up the whole process to self-scrutiny and improvement. Learning to learn is your most important capability, since it provides the gateway to everything else you want to develop.
# Table 10.3 – Sample Activities for Honey and Mumford’s Learning Styles (Honey & Mumford, 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activist</strong></td>
<td>brainstorming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>puzzles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>role-play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflector</strong></td>
<td>paired discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self-analysis questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personality questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observing activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feedback from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theorist</strong></td>
<td>models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applying theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatist</strong></td>
<td>time to think about how to apply learning in reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 4. Felder-Silverman Learning Styles Model

The learning styles model developed by Felder and Silverman (1988) incorporates five dimensions, two of which replicate aspects of the Myers-Briggs, Kolb, and Honey and Mumford models. The Perception dimension (sensing/intuitive) is analogous to the perception of Myers-Briggs, Kolb, and Honey and Mumford; while the Processing dimension (active/reflective) is also found in Kolb’s model, and Honey and Mumford’s model. Felder and Silverman posit three additional dimensions: Input (visual/verbal), Organisation (inductive/deductive), and Understanding (sequential/global).
Table 10.4 summarizes the five learning style dimensions.

**Table 10.4 – Felder-Silverman Learning Style Dimensions** (Felder & Silverman, 1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sensing</em></td>
<td><em>Intuitive</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data obtained via senses</td>
<td>Symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts and observations</td>
<td>Interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Visual</em></td>
<td><em>Verbal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charts and pictures</td>
<td>Spoken word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Inductive</em></td>
<td><em>Deductive</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts and observations</td>
<td>General principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Active</em></td>
<td><em>Reflective</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing something</td>
<td>Introspective processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sequential</em></td>
<td><em>Global</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear connections</td>
<td>Holistic connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small connected chunks</td>
<td>“Big picture”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructors should endeavour to teach to a sufficient diversity of learning styles in order to encourage innovation in their fields (Reich, 1991). In this respect, Felder (1993, p. 288) recommends a balance between extremes in each learning dimension. He suggests incorporating the following into courses:

- Providing a context for the concepts addressed, such as connections with relevant material from students’ everyday experiences (global);
- Balancing theory and models (intuitive) with demonstrations and examples (sensing);
- Using pictures, sketches, and diagrams (visual) to supplement verbal information;
- Using numerical as well as algebraic examples (sensing, inductive) to illustrate abstract concepts (intuitive, deductive);
- Providing time for both student participation (active) and reflection on the material presented (reflective).

**5. Grasha and Reichmann Learning Styles**

The learning styles typology developed by Reichmann and Grasha (1982) is distinct from the other four models in that it is based on students’ responses to actual classroom activities rather than on a more general
assessment of personality or cognitive traits. This model focuses on how students interact with the instructor, other students, and with learning in general. Grasha (1996, p. 127) comments that learning styles, like teaching styles, are best thought of as a blend or profile that resides within every student. Some students possess more of one style than another and it is typically the dominant qualities that are most easily seen in class. Table 10.5 summarizes the characteristics of the Grasha-Reichmann learning styles.

**Table 10.5 – Characteristics of Grasha-Reichmann Learning Styles** (Reichmann & Grasha, 1974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Classroom Preferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Compete with other students</td>
<td>Teacher-centred, class activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Believe they can learn by sharing ideas and talents</td>
<td>Student-led small groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>Uninterested and/or overwhelmed by what happens in class</td>
<td>Anonymous environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Eager to take part in class activities</td>
<td>Lectures with discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Need structure and support</td>
<td>Clear instructions, little ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Like to think for themselves and work alone</td>
<td>Independent study and projects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another distinguishing characteristic of Grasha’s (1994) approach to learning styles is that he has also developed a corresponding typology of teaching styles, similarly based on actual classroom behaviours. They include the teacher as:

- *Expert* - transmitter of information;
- *Formal authority* - sets standards and defines acceptable ways of doing things;
- *Personal model* - teaches by illustration and direct example;
- *Facilitator* - guides and directs by asking questions, exploring options, suggesting alternatives;
- *Delegator* - develops students’ ability to function autonomously.

(1994, p. 143)

Grasha asserts that almost everyone who teaches possesses each of the five teaching styles to varying degrees. He advises that particular teaching styles might encourage students to adopt certain leaning styles. The end result is that learning and teaching styles can be mapped together to more fully describe the social dynamics of the classroom setting.

Rather than attempting to accommodate all learning style preferences at all times, an awareness of these styles can help faculty with their teaching techniques and their methods of presentation (Grasha, 1994). For example, introducing open-ended questions to close-ended assignments should engage the independent learner; providing opportunities for small group discussions can engage the collaborative learner; and
providing direction early in the semester could aid the dependent learner. Faculty should assist students in developing the learning styles they are weak in, for example, providing less direction to dependent learners should promote and foster an independent style.

Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner (2006) claims that all human beings have multiple intelligences. These intelligences are located in different areas of the brain and can either work independently or together. He believes that human beings possess the following nine intelligences in varying amounts:

- **Verbal-linguistic**: enjoyment of and facility with reading, poetry and all things literary and linguistic;
- **Mathematical-logical**: enjoyment of and facility with maths and science, games of strategy and any logic-based pursuits;
- **Musical**: enjoyment of and facility with music – listening, playing and perhaps composing;
- **Visual-spatial**: enjoyment of and facility with images, drawing, construction games and tactile puzzles such as jigsaws;
- **Bodily-kinesthetic**: enjoyment of and facility with activities that involve touch and movement, dance, sport and other practical activities;
- **Interpersonal**: enjoyment of and facility with other people, communication, leadership and the ability to empathize;
- **Intrapersonal**: enjoyment of and facility with self-motivation, no dependence on others, awareness of one’s own feelings more than those of others – often seen as shyness;
- **Naturalist**: enjoyment of and facility with the natural world, with ability in recognising patterns and classification; and
- **Existential**: enjoyment of and facility with asking and examining questions about life, death and ultimate realities (Pritchard, 2009, p. 34).

Gardner (2006) alleges that these differences challenge an educational system which assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way, and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning. He maintains that a contrasting set of assumptions is more likely to be educationally effective. Students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive, therefore, Gardner and Hatch (1989, p. 9) conclude that it may be worthwhile for teachers “to detect these distinctive human strengths and use them as a basis for engagement and learning”.

In planning lessons to cater for multiple intelligences in the classroom, the teacher has to consider the variety of activities related to the content of the lesson and the skills learners have to master. This will provide a range of opportunities in order to respond to learners’ different strengths and learning styles. These can be approached by seeking to answer the following questions:

- **Logical-mathematical**: How can I include the use of numbers, classification, critical thinking and calculations?
- **Spatial**: How can I include pictures and diagrams, colours, art or graphs?
- **Intrapersonal**: How can I include private learning time and choice?
- **Interpersonal**: How can I include group work, peer sharing and discussions?
- **Bodily-kinesthetic**: How can I include movement, practical apparatus, drama or art and craft?
- **Musical**: How can I include music, sounds, rhyme, rhythms and dance?
- **Verbal-linguistic**: How can I include reading, writing and speaking?

(Pritchard, 2009, p. 35)
Conclusion

Inevitably, students bring to the classroom a great diversity of learning styles. The scope and depth of learning styles vary because as Oxford and Erham (1995, p. 69) contend, “not everyone fits neatly into one or another of these categories to the exclusion of the other, parallel categories (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)”. This view is further supported by Willing (1994), who advocates that several different ways of learning are now held to be equally valid. There is no evidence that one style brings more benefits than others, and there is no good/right or bad/wrong style (Srichanyachon, 2011), nevertheless, they do appear to have an effective impact on the learning cycle (Wilson, 2012).

Should teachers adapt to learners or learners to teachers? Pritchard (2009, p. 54) states that since it is the prime role of a teacher to facilitate and encourage learning in all of their students, it is fairly clear that the real responsibility to accommodate lies with the teacher. Brown (2007) purports that the teacher’s role is to stimulate and assist so that students can step out of their comfort zone into a more challenging situation; however, some accommodating is also required on the part of the learner. Matching teaching style to learning style does not resolve all classroom conflicts, rather Nieto and Bode (2012, p. 63) caution that, “matching teaching and learning styles could be limiting rather than liberating”. As McKeachie (1994) points out, factors such as classroom climate, previous learning experience, gender, and multicultural issues will of course greatly influence the quality and extent of learning that takes place. Burris et al. (2008, p. 44) further stress that, “student learning styles can impact a variety of areas in the classroom such as environment, student praise or reinforcement, class structure, and teaching methods”.

Research conducted over the past forty years (Ahmed, 2012; Hall & Mosley, 2005; Cassidy, 2004; Drysdale et al, 2001; Dunn et al, 1986, 1982; Lemmon, 1985; MacMurren, 1985) to identify the relationship between academic achievement and individual learning style has fairly consistently supported the notion that pupils do learn in different ways to each other; pupil performance in different subject areas is related to how individuals learn; and their achievement is significantly increased when pupils are taught with approaches and resources that complement their particular learning styles. Eliason (1995) provides a fitting conclusion to student learning styles and their pedagogical implications:

... we may very well find that the most important outcome for learning-styles assessment and information dissemination is not whether we label ourselves and our students as visual or kinesthetic, ... or as accommodators or divergers, but rather whether we are able to acknowledge and celebrate the various types and processes we and our students bring to the classroom, while continuing to both accommodate and diverge. (1995, p. 32)
References


Publications.
**Chapter 11**

Understanding Learning Styles

Elena Roberts

**Why learning styles?**

“There are no difficult students – just students who don’t want to do it your way”.

(Revell & Norman, 2014)

As teacher practitioners, we know that an individual teaching style is a “mirror” of one’s personality rather than one’s teaching qualifications. An explanation of this phenomenon should be quite straightforward: yes, as human beings we are all different. It is great that students become exposed to a variety of teaching styles during their lifetime learning experience, but what does this mean for us, the teachers? I remember a conversation with a frustrated colleague teacher in which he stated the following: “If only I could physically “pack” the knowledge into this individual’s head! This would be my last resort. I don’t know how else I can explain this grammar to this student of mine!”

Does this sound familiar? I’m sure most of my readers have been in a similar situation. Possibly, the above-mentioned teacher viewed his student either as a) lazy and not caring about learning; or b) not smart enough to grasp the concept. But has it ever occurred to that teacher, or those of us who have had similar teaching experience, that the learning process is not the same for each student and it often does not match with our teaching approach? In teaching a group of students, let’s face it, sometimes we get to the point that we lose faith in some individual students’ success, as we feel they are completely disengaged with the lesson. We think in this line: “Well… I have spent so much time and effort to prepare this lesson! Those who want to learn will learn, and those who don’t want to learn, to hell with them!” If only we knew more about different approaches to learning as a result of personal differences, our lives would be so much easier! Put simply, to be successful teachers, we just need to approach creatively every teaching task; for example, change the tactics during the lesson, explain the same concept in different ways, or have students work on it another way (More, 1993). Unfortunately, this is not reality. In real life, we are often constrained by lesson time and pressured by the curriculum and the “work plan” that just does not allow us enough time to “cover” the material. However, there is “the light at the end of the tunnel”. We teachers can try to modify our one and only teaching style to adapt to the varieties of learning styles of our students.

The purpose of this chapter, strictly speaking, is not focused on a literature review or contradicting the respective authors. Rather, the goal is to present an overall picture of the learning style concept, based on existing research, and its possible implications for the language classroom. This will hopefully provide some “food for thought” to the readers.

**What is a learning style?**

*Background history and definition*

According to some sources, accounting for individual learning styles goes back to the times of Aristotle, as early as 334 BC, when individual differences in young children were noticed. However, active research in the area of learning styles has existed only for the last four decades (Cassidy, 2004). When we mention the term learning style, we associate it automatically with “school and education”, i.e. with academic studying. In reality, research in the area of learning style expands much further and covers a vast range of disciplines including medical and health care training, management, industry, and so on. As a result of such interest in the subject, a number of theories, models and tools for measurement of the learning styles has “sprung up to the surface” and is somewhat overwhelming.
Let us begin with a workable definition of the concept of learning style for the language classroom which suits our purpose of a) gaining more understanding of the issue and b) understanding the possible implications of the learning style concept in the classroom.

One does not have to review the entirety of the relevant literature to come across at least ten different definitions of learning style. It has been generally agreed by researchers in the area that a) learning style is basically a preferred way of learning and b) learning is described as a set of continuous processes with a lesser focus on outcomes, i.e. academic achievement (Hawk & Shah, 2007).

The very general definition of learning style: “…the manner in which individuals choose to or are inclined to approach a learning situation” (Cassidy, 2004). Despite the simplicity and straightforwardness of the chosen definition, the area of learning style is quite complex. Such variables as cognitive style, learning strategies, personality, multiple intelligences and you name it, have firmly taken their place on the research market. These variables have been widely used by the proponents of multiple learning style models and instruments. The question is which model should we adopt?

Before we start looking at the existing learning style models, it is important to draw a distinction between the definitions of learning style and learning strategy. Learning style involves human psychological characteristics such as personality and multiple intelligences which are internal and pretty much stable over time. On the other hand, learning strategy can be seen as a “tool” for dealing with the task, and this can be learned externally. According to Hartley (as cited in Cassidy, 2004), learning strategies are quite simply “the strategies students adopt when studying”. One example of teaching students learning strategies is training for the IELTS test, when the students are introduced to various strategies for dealing with different types of tasks.

**Learning Style Models: Curry’s Onion Model**

There are at least 70 models of learning styles circulating in the literature related to the subject (Coffield, Moseley, Hall & Ecclestone, 2004). It would take a vast amount of space and effort to try to describe or analyze all of those models and theories; I will leave this task to the interested readers. We will use Curry’s Onion Model (Cassidy, 2004; Coffield et al, 2004) as a starting point for discussion, as it consolidates the important variables of learning style in a logical and very accessible way.

Imagine this vegetable, which we use widely in cooking, and its layers. According to Cassidy (2004), Curry proposes a layer-like model of learning behavior illustrated as the four layers of the onion, from its outer layer (the fourth) to the inner layer (the first). The following components of the learning style are represented in Curry’s model:

1. **the 4th (outer) layer:** instructional preference, i.e. individual’s preferred choice of learning environment, the most susceptible to influence and therefore the least stable component
2. **the 3rd layer:** social interaction which relates to the preferred mode of the student’s interaction during learning, such as dependent/independent, collaborative/competitive, and participant/avoidant
3. **the 2nd layer:** information processing style which essentially is the individual’s intellectual approach to the processing of information and is a more stable component
4. **the 1st (inner) layer:** cognitive personality style, the most stable and relatively permanent component as it is related to one’s personality.
Which approach should we adopt?

By now it may have become clear to the reader that the concept of learning style is a complex one that includes cognitive as well as personality aspects. To describe these aspects, many labels or categories have been proposed by researchers in the field.

To second language learners, the following constructs appear to be the most relevant (Cassidy, 2004):

- **wholist** - processes information as a whole
- **analytic** - processes information broken down into components
- **verbalizer** - represents information as words
- **imager** - represents information as images
- **field-dependent** - prefers clearly defined performance goals, has a need for structuring and guidance
- **field-independent** - prefers learning in isolation
- **impulsive** - quickly responds to the task
- **reflective** - scrutinizes each alternative before making a final decision
- **convergent** - accepts only one correct answer to the problem
- **divergent** - considers a number of potentially acceptable solutions to the problem
- **leveler** - oversimplifies perception of the task, reduces complexity
- **sharpener** - complicates the task
- **holist** - utilizes significant amounts of information, focuses on major parts and trends
- **serialist** - operates step-by-step approach to learning dealing with small amounts of information
- **verbaliser** - processes information verbally
- **visualiser** - processes information imaginatively
- **assimilator** - solves problems creatively
- **explorer** - solves problems through familiar strategies

For every construct, measurement tools in the form of various assessments and tests have been suggested by the respective proponents of the above categories. If only we could “label” every individual student as belonging to this or that category and adjust our teaching accordingly! However, for any language teacher, even those well equipped with learning style theories, it would be extremely difficult to label his/her students according to these constructs. The main reason for that is the limited time that we spend with a given group of learners in the classroom. Besides, some of the learning style assessments/tests require additional expertise to conduct which is beyond the teaching scope. Also, advice put forth by Tomlinson (as cited in Varlas, 2012) “refrain from labeling kids” sounds extremely sensible.

Instead of analyzing the existing models and constructs of the learning styles, let us take a closer look at Curry’s Onion Model and the list of the proposed constructs. Good news! There is a significant overlap between the list of constructs and the 4 layers of the Onion Model.
For example, the field dependent (need for structuring and guidance) label overlaps with the social interaction (collaborative, participant) category of the Onion Model; the field independent (learning in isolation) label overlaps with the social interaction (competitive, avoidant) category of the Onion Model.

Cornett (1983) grouped the various characteristics of the learning style into three major categories: Cognitive, Affective and Physiological. The author defines the cognitive aspect as the aspect dealing with our encoding, processing, storing and retrieving information. The other two, affective and physiological, include emotional/personality and sensory/environmental characteristics respectively. By consolidating Cornett’s group of characteristics, Curry’s Onion model and the list of constructs into one model, our newly-devised model of learning styles may be presented as a combination of the three: a) Cognitive-Affective-Physiological Cornett’s model; b) Instructional preference-Social interaction-Information processing-Cognitive personality Curry’s Onion model; c) list of constructs.

As Cornett’s model contains in itself most categories and labels from the other models, we will use this model for analyzing the concept of learning styles within the three parts as proposed by Cornett: Cognitive, Affective and Physiological.

The three aspects of learning style: Cognitive, affective and physiological

It is generally agreed that learning style, as the way of approaching a task, is a more or less consistent pattern of one’s behavior. Nevertheless, the notion that learning style does change through one’s lifetime has also been widely accepted. For implications for the language classroom, let us look individually at the Cognitive, Affective and Physiological components of learning style and how permanent they are as parts of human nature. This analysis will help us understand how, if at all, learning style may be influenced by the teacher as well as the students themselves for the learning process to be enhanced.

Cognitive aspect of learning style

We will start with the cognitive part which has been defined by Cornett (1983) as a combination of an innate style and acquired thinking skills. Similarly, in Curry’s Onion model, the cognitive part is represented by the information processing/cognitive personality “layers”. The innate style part is more concerned with the subject of psychology, so we will only consider the thinking skills category. As thinking skills are acquired through one’s learning process, they are subject to qualitative changes. Also, it has been noted that “with maturation, cognitive style tends to move in the direction of greater abstraction and field independence” (Cornett, 1983). This shows us the changeable nature of the cognitive part of the brain, provided of course, that a person is exposed to higher level cognitive functioning and environmental stimuli; otherwise, cognitive abilities will not be developed. A well-known case of Genie (Curtiss et.al., 1974), a child, whose linguistic communication abilities were impaired as a result of unprecedented social isolation, is a good example. Hence, it is possible to influence the cognitive part of a person’s learning style by assisting in developing his/her thinking skills, and this became our primary task as educators. Bloom’s taxonomy is one of the resources that is worth examining as it serves as a tool for teaching thinking skills in the appropriate order, from lower to higher.

Due to the brain differences, everyone has their “predominant” cognitive style, which is problematic if not impossible to evaluate under classroom conditions. Therefore, it becomes the teacher’s agenda to have a set of teaching strategies from which to draw, to expose learners to a variety of learning styles, to activate the “preferred” ones (Cornett, 1983).

So far, we have concluded that it is a teacher’s responsibility to choose the strategy for the task in order to activate students’ “preferred” learning style. The valid question is: what about learners themselves? After all, it is their responsibility to learn. “No matter how good teaching can be, each student must take the responsibility for his own education” (Carolus, 2014). Well said, but how should we make students aware of their learning styles? As it is problematic to make an accurate assessment of each student’s unique learning
style, it is unrealistic to leave this task to the students themselves. Developing students’ autonomous learning, (i.e. learning how to learn), is the path to follow. Once the students know how to learn, they become more in control and less dependent on the teacher; therefore, they can easily adapt to the teaching style of their instructor and use their preferred cognitive style.

In order to accomplish this Cornett (1983) suggests that teachers present concepts and skills in a logical sequence, (i.e., from the concrete to the abstract or from the easy to more difficult). Another recommended strategy is to use variety of teaching strategies and change the pace of the instruction as appropriate. A third recommendation is to act as a model especially where THINKING in concerned by demonstrating and practicing what you preach.

All said, this is not any kind of revelation unless you are a novice teacher. This is what teachers normally do in the classroom on a daily basis. Without denying our diligent efforts, the purpose of this discussion is simply reminding ourselves of the variety of learning preferences and thinking in terms of different learning styles every time we walk into the classroom.

**Affective aspect of learning style**

Let us refer back to the Curry’s Onion model and its 3rd layer social interaction, which essentially is the preferred mode of the student’s interaction during learning. By combining the social interaction layer with motivation, self-efficacy and sociability categories from other proposed models, we will create a new set of the affective variables of learning style. The Affective aspect of learning style, therefore, is represented by:

- Social interaction
- Motivation
- Self-efficacy
- Sociability

Despite being a subject of debate among researchers in the areas of learner differences and measures of learner success, it is agreed that the affective variables are emotional/personality traits. Therefore, they are relatively stable, especially, the personality part. Is there a chance then for the teachers to intervene? The answer could be “no” as one’s personality is not subject to change. Motivation, however, is one of the constructs which deserves closer attention.

Motivation is a human characteristic that is immensely complex and is generally defined as “a hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do” (Dornyei, 2001). The author also points out the significance of motivation for teachers, students, researchers and practically every aspect of our life. As part of Curry’s taxonomy of learning styles, motivation is considered as a personal characteristic which influences learning behavior (Chin-Chun & Gamon, 2001). According to Dornyei (2001), no sufficient language knowledge can be achieved without motivation, regardless of the students’ language aptitude and other cognitive characteristics. It is, therefore, no surprise, that in the language classroom, the term motivation becomes particularly “hot” and is used to describe successful and unsuccessful learners. So, is it possible to influence students’ learning style by way of motivation? The answer is definitely “yes”. Unfortunately, there is not enough room in this chapter to discuss the great variety of motivational tricks to use in the classroom.

For those interested, I would highly recommend Zoltan Dornyei’s books and articles as excellent resources of motivational strategies. There are also multiple contemporary motivation theories available which suggest various explanations for complex human behavior. However, as Scheidecker and Freeman simply put it, “unfortunately, and realistically, motivating students yesterday, today, and tomorrow will never be a singular or simplistic process” (as cited in Dornyei, 2001). What we can do though, as teacher practitioners, is to try to create “initial motivation” conditions. Those conditions will work toward the learners’ expectancy of success, that is, self-efficacy. Clearly, students who believe in their own abilities will learn better and achieve more. Bandura’s Self-efficacy theory (Dornyei, 2001) suggests that this particular trait will determine an
individual’s choice of the task attempted, the amount of effort and the persistence displayed, hence an individual’s \textit{learning style}. \\

As we know, commonly a lack of motivation comes from the students’ disbelief in their own success or in the relevance of the task. How often do we hear from the students: “Why are we doing this? Is it going to be on the exam?” Once the students have a clear understanding and acceptance of the goals of the task, their sustained attention and mental engagement with the task are more guaranteed. According to Cornett (1983), Hunt sees the following strategies as possibly effective: a) providing a rationale for the goals of the task; b) emphasizing the task relevancy; c) giving students choices in goal selection which helps them learn to structure their own learning. In other words, if at the start of the lesson the teacher lets his/her students know what exactly it is they are going to do and why, there will be fewer puzzled faces in the classroom and greater engagement in the task. To sum up,

- \textit{Social interaction}, \textit{motivation}, \textit{self-efficacy} and \textit{sociability} are affective variables of learning style. These are relatively stable personality traits that determine an individual’s approach to learning.
- \textit{Motivation}, when it is present, creates \textit{self-efficacy} which is defined as expectancy and belief in one’s own success.
- \textit{Self-efficacy} positively influences an individual’s learning process. This makes it important to foster \textit{self-efficacy} in the language classroom by setting clear goals of the task and focusing on the task’s relevancy to students’ needs.

\textit{Physiological aspect of learning style}

Finally, the third major aspect of \textit{learning style} according to our newly-constructed model is the \textit{physiological} aspect. The word "physiology" is derived from the Ancient Greek \textit{physis}, which means "nature, origin", and \textit{logia}, which means the "study of". In other words, physiology is the study of the way living things, including humans, function. Science states that physiologists are forever attempting to find answers to key questions, from how single cells function to how human populations interact and what role our environment plays in this process. This again reminds us of the complexity of the world, and the idea that every human being is different from others in many ways. In the case of \textit{learning style}, what does this mean physiologically?

In our context, the aspects we are interested in are the preferred learning environment and the sensory perception differences such as visual, auditory and kinesthetic. The latter probably are most frequently associated with the term, \textit{learning styles}, by teacher practitioners. Various surveys and questionnaires are conducted in the classrooms to categorize the students as visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners. In reality, \textit{sensory perception} differences represent just a fraction of the possible variables in \textit{learning styles}.

It should be noted here, that the \textit{preferred learning environment} aspect which includes time of day, light, noise level and temperature, is the least stable; therefore, it can be altered easily. On the other hand, the \textit{sensory perception} aspect consists of the individual characteristics, namely, visual, auditory and kinesthetic, and these are relatively stable. Let us explore this notion further.

In Curry’s Onion model, the physiological aspect is presented by the “outer layer” of \textit{instructional preference} that is the \textit{preferred choice of learning environment}. This aspect overlaps with Cornett’s model of environmental characteristics, such as noise level, light, temperature, room arrangement, and time of the day (Cornett, 1983). Environmental factors have been researched extensively and are considered the least stable for measurement and the most susceptible to influence (Cassidy, 2004). Indeed, we, as teachers, are responsible for creating a supportive and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. It will be the students themselves who choose the specific environmental conditions and preferred time of the day that suit their learning needs.
Teaching becomes even more challenging when sensory perception differences (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) of our learners come into play. Yes, we must think of some learners who do not always learn the way we want them to learn. I remember an eager student from one class who was always the first to “shoot” the correct answer verbally, but who was completely “lost” during a simple kinesthetic activity of matching vocabulary cards. “Non-talkers”, on the other hand, were able to get on with the task successfully. The question therefore is: how do we assess every individual student’s sensory perception differences and how useful are surveys and questionnaires conducted in the classrooms? As Tomlinson (as cited in Varlas, 2012) says, “be wary of the reliability and validity of learning style survey instruments.”

Conclusion

Due to individual differences, the learning process is not the same for each student and often does not match our teaching approach. Awareness of the different learning styles provides more chances for successful teaching. We can modify our own teaching style to adapt it to the varieties of learning styles of our students. Since learning style is defined as a preferred way of learning, which is a set of continuous processes, learning style has a lesser focus on outcomes and achievement.

The complexity of the concept of learning style, which covers multiple areas of human behaviour, has brought to light a number of theories, models and measurement instruments. The cognitive and psychological characteristics of learning style are grouped into three major categories: Cognitive, Affective and Physiological (Cornett, 1983). These constructs have been analyzed individually in terms of being either permanent or subject to change. The goal of such analysis is to determine a) how stable learning style is as a human characteristic; b) how learning style may be influenced by a teacher or students themselves to enhance the learning process.

The Cognitive variable is changeable in its thinking skills part, as a result of the external influence which leads to developing a person’s “preferred” cognitive style. Activating the “preferred” cognitive learning styles by selecting the appropriate teaching strategies and striving for students’ learning autonomy are possible ways of utilizing the concept of learning style in the classroom.

Out of the relatively stable set of affective variables, motivation may be influenced in the classroom in a positive way by applying various techniques to raise the students’ interest for learning and promote self-efficacy. In a set of the physiological variables, the preferred learning environment characteristics are the least stable and may be influenced in the classroom by a) the teacher providing a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere; b) students’ personal choice of the learning environment. Sensory perception differences (visual, auditory and kinesthetic), though stable, may be successfully engaged by a creative teacher by the choice of the means for presenting the task and the choice of teaching strategies according to the nature of the task.

A final thought on the “essence” of learning style…

Getting things done is not always what is important. There is value in allowing others to learn, even if the task is not accomplished as quickly, efficiently or effectively” (Clyde, 2014).
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Chapter 12

Students' Learning Styles and their Effect on Learning

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Introduction

Many things can affect the way students learn and the way they perform in the classroom. Some have to do with internal issues related to the student and some are related to external matters that have to do with the different ways instruction is carried out. The things that students bring with them (internal) are based on their genetic make-up, and their disposition to learning. The external depends on the methodologies and pedagogical techniques teachers use in the classroom to enhance learning.

Many studies and much research have been done on individual differences and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) as part of the internal make-up of the students. These tackle the idea that people have different ways of thinking and different ways of processing information. This way of thinking and processing of information is commonly called "style of learning." Learning depends on the individual's style, experiences, qualities, backgrounds and personality of the student (Guild, 2014). The purpose of learning styles analysis is to assess the performance of students. Here the teacher tends to give instructions to students based on their own individual learning style.

The above studies and research also talked about the teachers' style of teaching as the external factor affecting learning. The way teachers deliver and impart knowledge to the students differs from one teacher to the other. Just like the students, teachers' styles affect how they process information, how they think and how they deliver and disseminate that information.

If it were true, if teachers' styles matched students' styles, everything would be fine and no issues or problems would be seen in the learning and teaching process. However, this isn't the case. Most of the time, there is a mismatch between the teacher's delivery of the information and the learning styles of the students. Because of that, many problems surface in the classroom and students lag behind or become disinterested in learning and either quit school or perform poorly.

In the next pages, the author will look at what students' learning styles concept is and how this affects the way students internalize information. He will look at two approaches to learning styles. The first is the VARK model and the second is the Kolb model.

What is meant by learning styles and how does it affect student learning?

Different researchers and educators have defined the term "learning style" in different ways. This is because they each look at it in diverse ways. Each person tackles such issues in a particular way. They use assorted cognitive processes to deal with the everyday matters that they face as they go through life in general, and their school work, in particular. Chick (2014), for example, defines the term "learning styles" as the way in which it is used "to describe how learners gather, sift through, interpret, organize, come to conclusions about, and “store” information for further use." (p. 1). Honigsfeld and Dunn (2006) define learning styles as a biological and developmental set of personal attributes that make learning effective or ineffective to the learner. In terms of language learning style, Reid (1995) defines it as the natural, habitual and preferred manner in which students internalize and deal with new information. Students' cultural and even religious backgrounds could affect their learning and their performance in class.
The premise behind learning styles is that because each individual student has his/her own style of learning, teachers ought to cater to that way of learning to achieve the best and highest student internalization of information. Pashler et al (2008) suggest that tailoring instruction to the style of the students allows for better and faster learning.

Burrows-Horton and Oakland (1997) suggest that not only the teaching style should be modified, but also the curriculum and the way it is presented. They believe that this adaptation of the curriculum and the way it is transmitted would take into consideration the students’ individual differences and make accommodations to help them. This match between the students’ preferred style of learning and the way it is taken into consideration would lead students to be more involved in their learning and better motivated (Smith & Renzulli, 1984; Wallace & Oxford, 1992). The students would also feel that they are less bored and more willing to share their experiences, backgrounds and thoughts to help aid their learning process (Abu-Rmaileh, 2007; Abu-Rmaileh, 2014).

Many researchers agree that if there are mismatches between the learning styles of the students and the teaching styles of the teachers, many issues may arise that hinder the learning process. Some of these problems may lead to the students being bored with what they are doing in the classroom. Students may start becoming less motivated or even de-motivated because they are discouraged due to their classroom performance and their poor test results (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Godleski, 1984; Oxford, Ehrman & Lavine, 1991).

This mismatch of learning styles may lead students to behavioral and attitudinal problems when dealing with other students, teachers, and with the learning process itself (Fleming & Baume, 2006). This is particularly important in a language classroom, especially when students are learning a language other than their native language (Felder & Henriques, 1995; Stebbins, 1995; Reid, 1987).

**The VARK learning styles model**

The term VARK was coined by Neil D. Fleming. His VARK model was launched in 1987 through work done at Lincoln University (Fleming & Baume, 2006). The acronym VARK stands for Visual, Auditory, Read/Write and Kinesthetic learning styles. Sometimes the term is VAK is used which takes out the Read/Write part of it.

**Visual Learning Style**

Visual people make up approximately 65% of the population (studyingstyle, 2014). Visual learners learn best by seeing. Some other characteristics they possess have to do with something they can view with their eyes. They best absorb written information rather than oral instructions. They look for and keep notes, diagrams, graphs, flashcards and pictures. They like to have colorful and appealing handouts, books and notes. They may possess extraordinary "photographic memory" where they can remember which part of the page information is located.

On the other hand, these individuals hate not being able to have a quiet place to reflect and study. They also hate the fact that they cannot take notes and feel uneasy when their teachers ask them to put their pens down and not take notes. Visual learners feel uneasy when they cannot ask to have oral instructions repeated or written for them.

**Aural/Auditory Learning Style**

In contrast to visual learners, auditory individuals can recall things best through hearing. They are able to recall things preferably given to them orally. They learn more by being attentive listeners and speakers. Auditory students prefer to have a classroom where they can speak and discuss things. They possess good interview and debate skills. They are also good at giving oral reports. Finally, auditory students like to have a live and vibrant classroom where they can express their thoughts, ideas and feelings about different issues in the learning process.
However, these students hate to sit and just listen. They like to be active participants where they can share their ideas. They hate to have a quiet classroom where everyone is reading silently or working on written tasks. This is due to the fact that they read slowly so that they can grasp and understand what they are reading. Auditory learners also hate to have to read written instructions as it becomes arduous for them.

**Read/Write Learning Style**

Read/write individuals often have strong reading or writing preferences in learning. They best learn through the use of words. These students are usually excellent note takers who can take down very detailed and meticulous notes. They are avid readers who can read continuously without interruption. In addition, they are able to translate abstract thoughts and impressions into words very easily. They can remember written words and their explanations without much effort. They like to have handouts which they can read and follow. They also like to have a textbook at hand to consult with. ESL students who have read/write learning style enjoy reading and taking notes. They like the traditional method of learning where they can take notes and copy what is written on the board.

Read/write learners hate it when others read for them. They do not like to read in a loud place where they are distracted by the sounds around them. Many ESL students hate the fact that they are required to listen to lectures without taking notes. They also hate it when there are no textbooks to use in the classroom.

**Kinesthetic/Tactile Learning Style**

Kinesthetic people do things by touching or manipulating objects. They require things that involve the whole body to work at solving problems or understanding processes. They best learn when they are actively involved in the process of learning, using "hands on" activities. They use movement as part of their learning by going from one place to another and that helps them in functioning as a memory aid. These learners can build things, especially if they are asked to take a concept and make a model for it. Their learning is heightened when they move around and work in groups. For foreign language learners or ESL students, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a good method for them because they remember vocabulary, structures, and concepts more if they were acted out in the classroom.

However, kinesthetic students find it difficult to sit still in one place for long periods of time. They cannot absorb or internalize the subject matter while they are immobile. They are usually fidgety during class and because of that, teachers tend to criticize them and appear to pick on them.

**How can teachers help students with the VARK Model?**

**Visual learners**

With visual learners, especially ESL students, teachers can write things down by jotting down key ideas that students can look at. Teachers can allow and give students time to copy what's on the board. Teachers can position students close to the board where they can see both the board and the teacher. Teachers can use mind maps to link and summarize information and place them in groups and lists. Furthermore, teachers can bring in videos to the classroom in order to explain abstract concepts. They can also use flashcards and different marker colors or highlighters.

**Aural/Auditory learners**

Aural/auditory learners can benefit from the use of the phonetic approach. Teachers can use games, songs and rhyming words. They can help them by having them read aloud or by reading aloud to them. Teachers can also use auditory materials to teach lessons. Some of these may include videos and audio tapes, books on tape and others. Teachers can help auditory learners by providing them with oral instructions and conduct discussions on different topics. They can also allow students to have oral exams as an alternative assessment.
to the written exams which they may not enjoy. Teachers can have learners give speeches or debate certain current issues or hot topics. For ESL students, teachers can have these students read aloud, discuss or defend points of view using oral language. Finally, they can use jazz chants to teach grammar or vocabulary.

Read/Write learners

Read/write learners can be helped by having teachers put the information into words, diagrams and charts. Teachers can help their learners under this style by giving them definitions and explanations of different concepts or allowing the students to find their own translation and explanations of those concepts. ESL students in particular can be helped by writing words for them over and over, explaining concepts in words and arranging exams to be in the form of writing paragraphs with clear beginnings, middle and endings. Finally, teachers can arrange word lists using points and hierarchies.

Kinesthetic/tactile learners

Because kinesthetic learners have trouble sitting at their desks for long periods of time, teachers can help them by providing activities for them where they can move around, feel things and touch objects they are working with. Because these learners enjoy physical activities, teachers can help them by having them build models. Teachers can provide students with hands-on learning tools that enhance their internalization of the subject matter. They can use clay, drawing materials, puzzles, cut out numbers and letters, and others. For ESL students, teachers can use field trips, role playing, projects, games, flashcards and other techniques to help internalize and absorb the various targeted language items.

The Kolb Learning Style Model

David Kolb published his learning styles model in 1984. This model later developed into what is known as Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) which is a multi-linear model of adult development (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), the best learning occurs when teachers draw on the students’ ideas and belief systems that can be evaluated and incorporated with new experiences and ideas. For Kolb and Kolb (2008) learning is considered a holistic process of adaptation which entails the integration of the whole person's feelings, thinking, perceptions and behavior.

According to Kolb (1984), there are two major dimensions as to how people internalize information or an experience. The first is how people grasp the information or experience they are facing and the second is how they transform it, process it or deal with it. To do this, the ELT model looks at four modes of grasping experience and the transformation of such experience.

The ELT theory has developed two ways of grasping information. The first is through Concrete Experience (CE) and the second is Abstract Conceptualization (AC). There are also two modes of transforming the experience which are the Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE).

These four modes are described as follows: **Concrete Experience** – which is learning from particular experiences, relating to people and situations, and sensitivity to feelings of people, etc. **Abstract Conceptualization** – which is the logical analysis of ideas and concepts, methodical planning, reacting based on the intellectual understanding of a situation, etc. **Reflective Observation** – which is careful observation before making a decision or judgment, looking at things from different viewpoints, and looking for the meaning of things, etc. **Active Experimentation** – which is the ability to get things completed, risk taking, affecting and influencing people, etc.
In addition to the four modes Kolb identified, there are four different learning styles that are associated with different approaches to learning. These are Diverging, Assimilating, Converging and Accommodating (see Figure 12.1).

**Figure 12.1.** The specific ways of learning (listed outside the circle) and general learning styles (listed in the quadrants inside the circle) as defined by Kolb’s Learning Styles

A Diverging style learner has CE and RO as dominant learning abilities. These kinds of learners are excellent at working with concrete situations as outlined above. It is categorized “Diverging” because someone who possesses such abilities performs better in areas that call for generating fresh ideas or brainstorming. Students with diverging learning are great at gathering information and they are imaginative in the way they deal with such information. These types of students like to work in groups because they can empathize and sympathize with those around them.

On the other hand, a student with an Assimilating learning style has AC and RO as the prevailing learning abilities. Students with assimilating learning style are good at understanding an extensive collection of information, placing such information in logical and rational order. They are great at understanding abstract concepts, especially those dealing with numbers and analytical information. These kinds of learners are less interested in people and more interested in information and the way they deal with it.
A learner with a Converging style has AC and AE as dominant learning abilities. These types of learners are best at applying ideas and theories. They are good at solving problems and making effective decisions. These students can deal with technical issues and problems. They are good at working with technology whether it be computers, hardware and software, or fixing things by doing simulations, models and practical applications.

Students with an Accommodating style have CE and AE as dominant learning abilities. These students are “hands-on” types of learners. They like to involve themselves in new and challenging experiences, using people for information to know how to work with things. These types of learners enjoy working in groups and draw on the experiences of others to try and work things out. They favor working with other students to do assignments, set goals and find solutions to problems and experiences they are required to do in class or outside the classroom.

How can teachers help students with the Kolb learning styles model?

Once identified with a certain dominant learning styles, teachers can help students in many ways. They can look at what best helps students from the description of the quadrant to which they belong.

As for the Diverging style learners with Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation, teachers can help students with real life experiences about the topics they are working on. They need to allow them to be creative and imaginative in finding answers to questions or when working on various projects. They need to allow these students to brainstorm different solutions and ideas to approach the task they are working on. Teachers need to allow these students to work in groups to collect information and find alternatives.

As for the Assimilating style learners with Abstract Conceptualization and Reflective Observation, teachers can assist students by involving them in planning, organizing and gathering information in a clear and logical manner. They can create graphs and charts that would allow them to understand things. Teachers can allow these students to work alone at times to help them focus on the task they are doing without interference from other students. Teachers can assign these students extra readings that they can do by themselves in a quiet area without interruptions from outsiders.

As for the Converging style learners with Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experiment, teachers can use analogies to help students. They can allow them to work alone on solving problems because they do not like to work with others. Teachers can use these students in making decisions by finding real-world uses for ideas and notions. Teachers can ask them to work on technical matters, create lists and categorize things. They can also allow them to experiment and create new ideas and work with practical applications.

As for the Accommodating style learners with the Concrete Experience and Active Experiment, teachers can create “hands-on” activities by setting schedules, encouraging them to ask questions, challenge theories and help them find logic in what they are doing. Teachers ought to allow these students to work in groups and teams to solve problems and complete tasks. Teachers should also allow these learners to take risks because they generally work based on their “gut” feeling rather than basing it on logical analysis.

Learning Styles Theory and its Implications for teachers

Students come from different backgrounds and they carry with them their own personal, cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes. Due to this variety of experiences that students bring with them, teachers cannot treat them all in the same way. It is crucial that educators consider their students' learning styles in order to help them get better experiences in the classroom and in the school.
In order for teachers to help their students succeed in the classroom and outside, they need to:

1. **Consider their students’ styles in their teaching.** Because students come from different backgrounds and have experiences that are unique to them, teachers ought to treat students as individuals and not as a collective. Students have individual differences either in their level of maturity, understanding or processing of information. Students, in general and ESL students in particular, bring with them their own understanding of their cultures, customs, languages and socioeconomic status. They also have their own learning style that may completely differ from the student sitting next to them or the teacher's. For that reason, teachers ought to consider the above issues and reflect on the students’ learning styles. By doing this, they give value to the students and to the skills, experiences and backgrounds they bring with them. When students feel that they are seen as individual students and not as a collective in the classroom, they become more motivated and more willing to work with other students and the teacher. Once the teacher knows how students think and process information, the easier it becomes for him/her to help students get motivated and succeed.

2. **Modify their teaching styles to help their students.** When teachers know their students’ styles, it becomes easier for them to help their students. The way to help students is for teachers to modify their own teaching styles. Teachers would become more sensitive to the needs of the students and would realize what fits students best. They can use a variety of teaching techniques to help provide students with fruitful and enjoyable learning experiences. Modifying teaching techniques would result in better internalization of the learning content. When teachers modify their teaching styles to fit their students’ learning styles, increased motivation and interest in the subject matter is heightened. Students are not bored anymore because they are taking an interest and they can take part in what is going on in the classroom. Moreover, this would result in more cooperation between the students and the teacher and amongst the students themselves. Finally, when teachers understand their students, they are better able to find an angle by which they can be approachable to the students without looking too authoritative.

3. **Modify their assessment techniques to suit their students’ styles.** Different students have different ways of responding to taking an exam. Some are great students, but because of the notion "exam," students become anxious and scared. When teachers modify their assessment techniques, they can alleviate the fear that students have. Teachers ought to use alternative assessments to evaluate students. Having oral assessments, written assessments, team projects, individual projects, journals and others help students find ways where they can motivate themselves to learn. Even when there are written or oral assessments, a variety of questions need to be used. These could be multiple-choice questions, essay questions, short answer questions among others.

4. **Step out of their comfort zone and develop themselves.** Teachers usually have professional development (PD) courses, workshops or conferences in order for them to keep up with the latest, up-to-date information in their fields. Having the need to help students with different learning styles and modifying their teaching methodology to suit students’ styles would require them to know more on how to do it. Having an in-service program can help polish the teachers’ skills and can give them a better understanding of how to help their students. The PD sessions that teachers attend can help them find varied and better ways to teach when they have students with varied learning styles.

5. **Use technology in their teaching.** Technology is a great tool that teachers and students can use to help them in the learning process. Teachers can use various up-to-date technological tools to assist them in teaching the subject matter. They can use email and wireless internet in the classroom. They can also teach using e-content like ibooks, journals, etc. (Abu-Rmaileh & Hamdan, 2007; Abu-Rmaileh, 2014). They can create online courses or online chatting to connect with students outside the classroom. Furthermore, they can use videos and films to help learn the subject matter by using action and movement and visual documentation. Most students are technologically savvy and can
even help the teacher maneuver with technical equipment. This would also give students confidence and allow them to feel that they have done something useful in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

Students are not empty vessels ready to be filled with information. Students are individuals who are valued for the things they bring with them to the teaching and learning process. They are valued for their skills, experiences, backgrounds, cultures and perceptions. They are individuals who can contribute to the learning process.

As such, much research has been conducted to try and figure out how to help students succeed not only in the classroom, but also in the real world. Some of these studies relate to the learning styles students operate under.

Two models of learning styles were described. The VARK model and the Kolb learning styles model developed by Fleming and Kolb respectively take into consideration general modes of the way students learn. Also described was the way in which teachers can help students with a particular style of learning.

Finally, some implications for teachers were suggested. These are suggestions for teachers to take into consideration in order to help motivate students to learn and to excel in what they are doing. Things teachers need to do is to consider their students’ styles in their teaching, modify their teaching styles to help their students, modify their assessment techniques to suit their students’ styles, step out of their comfort zone and develop themselves, and use technology in their teaching. If teachers were to consider these implications and others, their teaching/learning experience would be more enjoyable and rewarding.
References


Introduction

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are highly dynamic concepts in the field of second/foreign language education in which new avenues and perceptions continually evolve. Versatile educational notions around the world are open to learning strategies’ varied categorizations, definitions, interpretations, measurements, and research approaches in both theory and practice (He, 2003; Anderson, 2005). Given the multidimensional nature of LLSs, it is likely difficult to provide a generally agreed-upon terminological and conceptual definition of LLSs (Cohen, 2007). However, Oxford (1990) has generally defined LLSs as “steps taken by students to enhance their own learning” (p.1). More specifically, according to Cohen’s widely accepted definition, LLSs are “thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance” (Cohen, 2011, p.7).

LLSs might have been recognized as absolute in the sense of categorical definitions of L2 strategies. This implies that we can define LLSs by making a distinction between language learning strategies and language use strategies (Cohen, 1996), by operationalizing strategies in receptive and productive language skills (Cohen & Weaver, 2006), by taking up a functional approach to LLSs in terms of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990), and by probing factors influencing the use of LLSs such as gender, age, proficiency level, culture, academic major, learner beliefs, carrier choice, motivation, and learning styles (Cohen & Macaro, 2007).

It is indeed difficult to offer anything new about language learning strategies as the prominent scholars have talked about them in more eloquent ways than we ever could (Anderson, 2005; Cohen, 2007; Oxford, 2011; Griffiths, 2008; Macaro & Cohen, 2007). These studies, addressed different topics, potential problems, and tried to analyze them from different perspectives and propose solutions.

This chapter introduces new perspective on language learning strategies, the S2R model, which mostly concentrates on bringing learner self-regulated or autonomous L2 learning (Oxford, 1990) into language learning strategies.

LLSs in Retrospect: Evolutionary Trends and Theoretical Background

The history of LLSs since about 1975-the inception of language learner strategy research-can be seen as a succession of orientations to LLSs, a cycle/trend in which particular classifications of language learning strategies achieve dominance. This historical sketch delineates 5 major models of LLSs that have been evident in the last 48 years. The most recognized models include: (1) Rubin’s classification of direct and indirect strategies; (2) O’Malley and Chamot’s three-part strategy taxonomy; (3) Oxford’s six-category strategy model; (4) Cohen’s distinction between learning and use strategies; and (5) Oxford’s new two-tier system of strategies and tactics (S²R Model).

The earliest records of LLSs date back to 1975 when Rubin and Stern outlined the important strategies recruited by the ‘good and successful language learner’. Later Rubin (1981) conceptualized LLSs as a two-way process: direct (e.g., strategies of clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, and inductive/deductive inferencing) and indirect (e.g. strategies of creating opportunities for practice, and employing production tricks). What we can see in this era (1970s), as Cohen (2007) asserts, is that “there
was no focus on what learners were doing in language classrooms, and it was assumed that good teaching automatically leads to good learning” (p. 683).

Stimulated by the work of Anderson’s theory, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) defined language learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). Their widely accepted model includes strategies for three major dimensions of L2 learning: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective. Simultaneously with cognitive-based theory of LLSs posed by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) came another widely accepted classification system, Oxford (1990)’s model of LLSs, which comprises six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). Oxford’s research led to the development of a self-report questionnaire known as the Survey Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which has been widely used in the world. In sum, this era signifies a time when practitioners and researchers of LLSs came to recognize that strategies were perceptible and quantifiable (Cohen, 2007) and could be classified in a systematic way (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). However, given the advances provided by this model, Oxford (1990) cautioned that “there is not complete agreement on how many strategies exist; how they should be defined, demarcated, and categorized: and whether it is – or ever will be – possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies” (1990, p.17).

Post-1990 era on classification of LLSs, as Cohen (1996) asserts, also continued to make a distinction between strategies for the learning of language material (language learning strategies) and strategies for using the material (language use strategies) with the focus on individual agency. More specifically, the following strategies marched under the banner of language use strategies: retrieval strategies (similar to Oxford’s memory strategies), rehearsal strategies (used to practice grammar structures), coping strategies (similar to Oxford’s compensation strategies), and communication strategies (used to express a message). Cohen took up a functional tradition by attempting to classify language learning strategies in terms of cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective categories. However, the way that Cohen (1996) conceptualized a two-way categorization of LLSs indicates that using cognitive and metacognitive strategies only “occurs during the learning phase and not the use phase of language” (Anderson, 2008, p.764) and that learning can only be accomplished via use, represents the ‘fuzziness’ and ‘inappropriateness’ of this distinction (Oxford, 2011). Given the diversity of taxonomies and purposes behind LLSs, the field expanded very quickly in terms of types and perspectives.

In sum, the three main paradigm shifts of LLSs in terms of theory and research, one informed by a psychological paradigm with a mission of association to mental structure or schemata (Wenden, 1987), the other social-cognitive with a mission of association with task-phases, self-efficacy, and social comparisons (Oxford, 2011), and still another sociocultural paradigm with its higher mental functions (Gao, 2010), have often been regarded as discordant. One way to avoid such challenging incompatibility is to argue the case for a fourth paradigm, that of S²R, which has come to be regarded in the literature as an emerging LLSs research paradigm which integrates and provides a better balance of the three major traditions above (Oxford, 2011). This model honors the three afore-mentioned paradigms to show how they can enrich and be enriched by each other. It might be inferred from the literature on this new paradigm that the current thrust in the LLSs field favors a synergistic and more pragmatic model of LLSs to research and theory building.

This renewed classification of LLSs, informed by the self-regulation model of language learning, has been proposed by Oxford (2011). This recent agenda for LLSs research, as Oxford (2011) asserts, aims to bridge the poles of individual strategies and tactics for efficient learning. According to Oxford (2011) “tactics are the highly specific, ground- level applications of strategies in real life situations for specific purposes and needs” (p.31).
The following section provides a brief overview of S²R model and the factors and theories underlying the model.

**Oxford's Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R) Model of L2 Learning Strategies**

In the S²R model, *self-regulated L2 learning strategies* are defined as “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn the L2” (Oxford, 2011, p.12). In this new system, strategically self-regulated learners approach challenging tasks and problems by choosing from a repertoire of tactics, the ones they believe are best compatible with the situation and purpose (Oxford, 2011). Furthermore, the main thrust of Oxford’s argument into characteristics of strategies favors different types of consciousness (awareness, attention, intention, and efforts), whole learner, utilizing strategy chains, transferability of strategies to other related situations, and learning effectiveness. The model’s other key focus is on factors that make learning easier, more enjoyable, faster, and more efficient.

It is clear that the appeal of S²R is growing and proving valuable for a wide range of learners in a variety of academic situations. As partial evidence of this appeal, strategically self-regulated learners, actively take part in their own learning (Dornyei, 2009); set their own learning goals by controlling different aspects of their learning (Oxford, 2011); regulate their cognitive, affective, observable performance, as well as their environmental conditions for L2 learning (Zimmerman, 2000); choose what strategies are appropriate and what works in relation to different conditions, purposes, and contexts (Oxford, 2011); and reveal awareness raising of the association between strategy use and learning performance (Malpass, O’ Neil, & Hocevar, 1999).

Concerning the classifications of L2 self-regulated learning strategies, Oxford (2011) clusters S²R into *Strategies* and *Metastrategies*. Each cluster is subdivided into three parts. Strategies subsume cognitive, affective, and sociocultural-interactive (SI), while metastrategies include metacognitive strategies with an aim to help learners control cognitive strategy use, meta-affective strategies with an aim to facilitate learner control of affective strategy use, and meta-SI strategies, which enable the learner to control SI strategy use (see Oxford, 2011 for more information and examples). The S²R model or the “Two-Tier System of Strategies”, causing a “virtual explosion” in the field (Zeidner, Boekaerts, & Pintrich, 2000, p.750), has currently established itself as a systematic, coherent, and process-oriented approach of LLSs rather than product-oriented approach with its own agenda for research, implementation, evaluation, and renewal of traditional LLSs classifications (Dornyei, 2009). The overall purpose of this strand of inquiry of LLSs is to help learners get control of strategies in the cognitive, affective, and social camps and materialize the multidimensional reality of L2 learner (Oxford, 2011).

**Mediated Learning in the S²R Model**

S²R is based on two main assumptions. They are: (a) the use of appropriate strategies enables everyone to learn an additional language effectively and (b) Strategies can be learned through mediation or assistance.

Since not every student has strategic expertise at the outset, they need to be developed in the individual students with the mediation of expertise (Gu, 2010, p.1). This perspective is in line with Vygotsky’s sociocultural model, as well as in the S²R model, which all learning is assumed to be assisted (mediated) performance. In Vygotsky’s sociocultural model, as well as in the S²R model, all learning is assumed to be mediated. Vygotsky states that “the more capable other” by means of mediation (various kinds of assistance and scaffolding) and student’s “zone of proximal development” or ZPD (the area of learning that a particular student can optimally transfer through assistance), can foster actively engaged students. This idea of mediation through the teacher or another person by modeling “higher mental functions”, such as Conceptualizing with Details or Conceptualizing Broadly, is related to the concept of strategies in the S²R model.

In addition, the S²R model is in line with sociocultural theories which suggests that all learning is embedded or situated in particular sociocultural settings (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, Greeno, 1998). In this
perspective, learners are viewed as active agents, whose choice of strategies is influenced but not determined by the sociocultural context (Oxford, 2003).

The $S^2R$ model agrees with several sociocultural models and states that in a community of practice, a learner ideally participates in what is called cognitive apprenticeship, i.e., a strategic, practical, learning-based relationship with a more capable other (Collins, 1988). Learners’ strategy use can be identical to cognitive apprenticeship in literacy in the native language ($L_1$) and the $L_2$ (Lee, 2007) if languages are relatively similar, but their strategy use can differ dramatically across the $L_1$ and $L_2$ if one is an alphabetic language and the other language involves characters. An example of similarity between cognitive apprentice and the $S^2R$ model is the Reciprocal Teaching Approach to reading (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). In this approach the teacher first models and scaffolds expert reading strategies, such as summarizing, predicting and inferring both categorized in $S^2R$ strategies) and then fades the scaffolding gradually when it is no longer needed.

Research shows that strategically self-regulated learning in classroom communities of practice is useful for all students, from the most expert students to those who have serious linguistic or cognitive disabilities (Harris & Graham, 2005). Thus, the use of appropriate strategies helps learners to get the most out of mediated learning.

**LLSs in an EFL Context: Current Status, Research Trends**

This section summarizes 194 studies published explicitly in the area of learning strategies/ self-regulated learning strategies. This overview can provide practical guidance and is useful for further research in the ELT context. Note that the chapter does not follow the $S^2R$ model, because existing research has been done with a variety of different models of L2 learning strategies. Furthermore, while many of these models lead to self-regulated learning, not all of the research used the term or concept.

These studies were compiled by the authors through journals, websites and using the Google Scholar search engine. The table provides a selection of journals that have published articles on learning strategies and self-regulation strategies.
Table 13.1 A Selection of Journals that have Published Articles on Learning Strategies and Self-regulation Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Review of Applied Linguistics</td>
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<td>Applied Language Learning</td>
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<td>Applied Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Review of Applied Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Journal of Educational Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Journal of Linguistics/ Revue canadienne de linguistique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Modern Language Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognition and Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Psychologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Psychology: International Review of Experimental Educational Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Teaching Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Teaching Forum (US State Department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC Digests (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literary Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language Annals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACET (Japanese Association of College English Teachers) Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Language Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Research Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReCALL Journal RELC (Regional English Language Centre) Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies in Second Language Acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>System</td>
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Overall 214 articles were found by using the Google Scholar search engine and an in-depth search of the journals mentioned in the table. After manual duplication removal, 194 articles remained. The articles were published between 1981 and 2013. The number of articles per year has increased steadily over the past decade (Figure 13.1) from one publication in 1981 to 32 publications in 2012. The decline in the number of publications in 2013 is, in part, due to the date that the search was performed.
Iranian language learners were studied in 32 articles (16.5%) followed by Chinese and Korean language learners, 16 (8.2%) and 5 (2.5%) articles, respectively. Most articles were published by *Foreign Language Annals*, 27 (13.9%) papers followed by *The Modern Language Journal* and *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 17 (8.7%) and 10 (5.1%), respectively. Fazeli et al. authored 13 articles followed by Oxford et al. and Chamot et al., 12 and 3 papers, respectively. These articles serve to draw the attention of EFL and ESL educators to the potential areas of research within this important field of study. A meticulous study of the above data reveals that language learning strategies and the S2R Model deserves further empirical testing in the areas of assessment (strategy research method), language strategies by skill areas, individual, group, and situational factors affecting the use of LLSs, and the use of technology (distance education, computer-assisted instruction).
References


Erlbaum Associates.


PART 3

ASSESSMENT AND BEST PRACTICE
Chapter 14

The Impact of Big Data on the Role of English Language Teaching and Assessment in the Classroom

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Introduction

This chapter reviews the move of the textbook from hard copy course books, often published alongside student workbooks and teacher guides, to the latest interactive digital textbooks and learning platforms. The chapter also traces the simultaneous impact of big data and analytics on assessment and how we can expect this to impact on the traditional one time drop dead exams for linguistic ability. The author presents a future, none too distant, where on-going language assessment occurs in the classroom feeding into reliable analytics that provide learners, teachers and assessors with effective and accurate language level results. He then further predicts that, as the effectiveness of this continual language learning platform assessment is confirmed through benchmarking and research, the traditional role of the major language assessment groups such as ETS and University of Cambridge will shift dramatically from the development of exams to the accreditation of assessment tasks and the training and recognition of qualified assessors. This chapter gives a realistic insight into how the digital world is already beginning to impact English language teaching and assessment and provides an optimistic view of how the role of the teacher should be enhanced by these developments.

Terminology

This chapter uses terminology that is readily understood and yet most language teachers will have slightly different interpretations of what each of these terms mean. Therefore, this brief list is presented below to clarify the author’s personal understandings and definitions.

*Adaptive Learning* – an approach to teaching, learning and course design, which adapts the input to the progress of the learner and their output.

*Analytics* – the analysis of big data and its display as easily understood visual outcomes.

*Big Data* – sets of data that are so large and complex they cannot be processed by individual teachers using standard software and databases.

*Learning Management Systems (LMS)* – web based course management tools that allow a teacher to design and deliver a course in an online medium. Examples of these would include BlackBoard Learn, Moodle, and WebCT.

*Platforms* – the author uses the term synonymously with LMS.

From then until now

Most of us who have been teaching in the ELT world for more than the last twenty years remember the times we have worked with textbooks such as Streamlines, Strategies and others to help our students reach specific language proficiency goals. We worked from these textbooks, along with their teacher guides and student workbooks, whilst creating locally relevant supporting materials to help our students reach their English language learning goals which even then were often determined by the IELTS or TOEFL scores they required to study abroad or pursue local goals which were dependent on a specific language level.
We used student textbooks, homework supportive textbooks and workbooks to guide our learners to achieve their targets. As the world of technology encroached on our teaching methodologies we guided our students towards CD-ROMs and other additional resources that allowed us to move towards a more learner-centered approach to our eclectic teaching philosophy. It is a tribute to the quality of English language textbooks that most of us today still depend on very similar texts such as Headway, Q-Skills and others which now come with links to teacher and student support sites on the web. The goal of many English language learners worldwide remains the attainment of a recognised proficiency through IELTS or TOEFL.

This continued reliance on recognised English language examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL is due largely to the approach taken by the examination boards in ensuring the accuracy of their statements of learner proficiency. This approach is best described by Cyril Weir (2013):

*The 2012 Cambridge approach to language examinations, where the language construct to be measured in the test is seen as an evidence-based product of the interaction between a targeted cognitive ability based on an expert user model, a highly specified context of use and a performance level based on explicit and appropriate criteria of description.* (Weir, 2013:6)

It is this approach which has ensured that more than four million candidates took a Cambridge English exam in 2013 (Milanovic, 2013:31), and it is this approach that has seen other language assessment criteria base themselves firmly on the Common Framework of Reference (CFR). Pearson’s Global Scale of English has been specifically developed as they found that the CFR was too broad in its levels to provide the narrow proficiency assessment they required for their learning platforms such as MyLabs.

MyLabs is one publisher’s response to the movement we have witnessed since the millennium of courses and curriculum being launched on learning management systems with platforms like Blackboard Learn, originally WebCT, and Moodle. These platforms allowed teachers to add their supplementary material, manage their courses and build upon them year after year as well as share them far beyond the institute’s walls. Many of these new teacher developed courses continued, and still continue, to rely on the traditional textbook often in its new interactive online format sometimes even embedded within the learning management system hosting the teacher’s course. The Pearson MyLabs platform is one example of a publisher working with teachers to blend the two texts – publisher book and teacher supplementary material – into one powerful platform supported by real time analytics of each student’s progress and time on task etc. Other publishers such as MacMillan, McGraw-Hill (mConnect), Wiley (WileyPlus) are all developing their own platforms, and the next few years will see publishers compete at a platform as opposed to a textbook level.

All of these developments, many in just the last couple of years, have lead us to the fringe of an exciting new era for English language teaching and learning.

**Moving Forward**

Much of the literature on how technology can impact assessment has argued for the use of new technologies to replace summative assessment with more formative approaches (Earl, 2003; Earl & Katz, 2006). The argument is best summarized by Hill (2013), who also suggests why the practice has not been as successful as the theory predicts:

*There is compelling evidence from meta-analyses of hundreds of studies to indicate that formative assessment, when used to provide feedback on a daily basis to both teacher and students, is one of the most powerful interventions ever recorded in educational research literature. But it is rarely practised. The time and effort involved in making, recording and analysing daily observations of student learning defeats most teachers.* (Hill, 2013:65)
However, this chapter argues that the blending of technology enabled formative approaches to assessment with summative theories and approaches can produce a future of accurate language proficiency assessment that is based in the classroom and the learning environment but which simultaneously adheres to the rigour and standards of the more traditional exams.

Selwyn (2014) suggests that the best way of making full sense of educational technology is to adopt a pessimistic perspective as the reality is that digital technology has transformed very little in higher education over the past thirty years. Whilst recognizing much truth in Selwyn’s pessimism, the author believes we are now at the turning point where technology will begin to change how we learn, teach and assess. It is the changes in assessment that this chapter foresees that will create the conditions for change in both higher education and language teaching alike.

At the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), UAE, we have been fortunate to work closely with Apple, Microsoft, all of the international publishing houses and their aggregators, such as VitalSource, in the development of interactive online e-Textbooks through our BlackBoard Learn LMS and iPad initiative. Our experience and research is showing a notable impact on student motivation and application with learners clearly demonstrating a positive response to being given greater responsibility for their learning.

Gil Allouche (2014) suggests there are four main ways that big data is impacting education and whilst these are broad and largely undefined they still provide a starting point for further discussion and reflection. First is the speed and accuracy of feedback with the latest analytics providing not just almost instantaneous results but also guidance on the types of errors the student is making and even suggestions as to how they can correct the most common mistakes. Programmes that can correct student writing as effectively as trained English language teaching examiners giving consistently accurate bands are already being piloted and used with increasing success. The latest voice recognition software also provides the opportunity for software to accurately band learner’s spoken language as well although this is realistically some years away. Secondly, big data can improve teaching by providing teachers with this more accurate and faster feedback. Teachers can then adapt their teaching to the students’ needs more quickly and effectively. Thirdly, learning can be improved by the students taking action themselves on the automated feedback, especially when this action is given with clear guidance. Finally, it is claimed that big data can provide more privacy with results given only to targeted individuals. The GSMA Mobile Education Landscape Report (2011) provides one of the most extensive overviews of the key players in education technology, all of whom make the same four claims.

Michael Fullan in his book Stratosphere (2103) explores how technology could be used to deepen and accelerate learning with a strong teacher-learner partnership, and the author’s experiences working with the development of e-books was the focus on developing individual learning objects as independent HTML5 activities that were both platform agnostic and closely linked to the curriculum and course learning goals. When this approach to materials development is tied to sourcing the best from wherever and everywhere, the development of course material takes on a truly social constructivist methodology (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Adaptive learning and software can only be as personalized as the content and curriculum behind the platform allow. When adopting an open materials development approach such as the one described here and when allowing multiple teacher contributions from just about anywhere, we can move towards a future of English language teaching and learning that can draw upon the full range of social network media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, podcasts, wikis, blogs) and web resources (encyclopedias, online dictionaries, webinars, online English courses, etc.) and thereby become truly personalized. That is, truly personalized if we can ensure accurate language skills and systems assessment through the learning platform.

Our recent work at the HCT with our international publishing partners such as Pearson has demonstrated that the latest learning management systems and platforms are now blending the best of individualised constructivist learning (Piaget, 1973) and social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978; Smith, 2001) team and group learning by doing (Mayo, 2013).
This is also supported by some of the latest movements in language assessment which can be “concurrent, embedded, and transformative; that is, it is just-in- time, available on demand, and comprehensive” (Scardamalia et al., 2014:1). When we blend these assessments and materials on platforms with sound background analytics, which clearly display student performance in easily understandable dashboards that show a student’s current language level in each skill and overall proficiency using for example recognised CFR levels and IELTS bands or Pearson’s GSE (Global Scale of English), we have a glimpse into the future of English Language Teaching and Assessment.

The Future

The technology enabled learning environment of the future, which extends far beyond the classroom and institution walls, as envisioned by Collins and Halverson (2009) and Bonk (2009) still requires valid and reliable assessment of language proficiency.

Gary Motteram (2013) has compiled a fascinating glimpse into how technology is being used around the world in English Language classrooms and each chapter in his edited volume echoes the creativity we have experienced in the HCT. These are the kinds of innovative teaching practices this author envisions being shared around our professional world through learning platforms we can all access and benefit from. If these examples can be captured as a series of learning objects or student tasks that are clearly labeled at a specific language level within a widely accepted curriculum, we can begin to upload them onto a platform and begin to map a constructivist learning pathway whereby a student or groups of students can be guided from one task to another. This is not a call for a student to log onto a learning portal and move seamlessly from A to B to C. This is a call for high quality material to be shared by us all and then mapped onto a curriculum that requires students to continually demonstrate a specific level of language proficiency.

The author suggests that current exam boards such as ETS and Cambridge ESOL could play a major role in the creation of these learning platforms by assessing tasks, materials and activities at a specific level on the CFR, for example. The students would be assessed on each task and thereby demonstrate their ability to work on a specific skill at the level of that task. Some of these assessments could clearly be automated, especially in reading and listening skills and ever more frequently in writing skills, and give instant feedback guiding both the teacher and student to further texts that focus on the specific errors of the student. Others however, and especially those in the speaking skill, will require assessment from the teacher. It is this area of teacher assessment that will potentially create the biggest shift in how education technology via learning management systems and examination bodies work in the future.

The author sees the examination bodies providing materials and assessment papers and tasks at cost, editing and assessing the level of produced materials at cost and finally and maybe most importantly extending their examiner training and certification on a far wider scale so that all teachers assessing to a specific portal can give accurate speaking and writing bands.

This vision, far from seeing the deterioration of the teacher’s role in a technology enabled language learning world, sees the role of the teacher being enhanced as a key assessor in an enabled socially connected language learning world. This would be a world that uses technology to enhance our students’ learning opportunities and transforms the teacher’s daily classroom assessment into a key feature of a cohesive language-learning platform built upon a curriculum that is intrinsically linked to the CFR, for example.

A student studying on this newly envisioned platform would clearly see their level for each language skill as well as an overall band. The student would be required to complete a number of tasks and activities consistently at a certain level before the analytics would demonstrate they have reached that level. This approach would allow teachers and administrators alike to see how a student maintains their level as well as the time taken to raise their skills.

This description reads like many of the platforms being developed by publishers and education technology companies (GSMA, 2011). However, the author argues there are at least two key differences and both of these are essential to ELT pedagogy and assessment theory. First, almost all of the platforms witnessed to
date have a very narrow set of parameters within which materials must be developed, whereas the vision espoused here sees an open forum of materials, activities and tasks that can be uploaded and then assessed as to their suitability, usability and level. Second, the role of examination boards in not simply assessing and providing materials and tasks but also in training teachers and maintaining assessor credentials creates a truly blended approach to the use of technology and especially the new wave of Web 2.0 and 3.0 social media.

When these two elements are combined with technologies from the gaming industry especially, the author foresees a future which changes teaching as we know it yet never loses sight of the teacher’s essential role in effective education. It is a future where examination boards provide the validity and reliability of assessment that brings an end to the need for English language exams as we know them, because the continuous student assessment provided through the platform described will be recognised, rigorous and reliable. Those exams that have been at the forefront of so much of the language teaching world will be overtaken by accurate English language assessment at the continual coursework placement level. Yet the role of the examination bodies such as ETS and Cambridge ESOL will be more essential and teacher connected than ever before.
References


Chapter 15

Academic Integrity: Current Perspectives of Tertiary Librarian Educators in the UAE

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Introduction

Educators in tertiary institutions in the UAE generally have concerns relating to their roles that are similar to their contemporaries the world over. These include, among others, current and modern information literacy (IL), pedagogy best practices, copyright as applicable internationally and locally, academic integrity, how to cope with their workload, ability to get involved with research and scholarly activities as lifelong learners. Among the educators are librarians who hold qualifications that are required of all academic librarians regardless of geographical location, and are expected to live up to the informed librarian expectations of their institutions. They have largely received training from Library Science schools whose certification is recognized by the American Library Association (ALA), the UK Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Receiving training from institutions that meet internationally recognized standards and specifications are one of the reasons that they are able to work in a variety of libraries. It helps in positively suppressing the fact that they individually originate from a variety of academic and cultural backgrounds. What becomes important is the relevance of contextual challenges that they encounter in addition to coping with the fast changing world information environment while collaborating with fellow educators in their academic environments.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity in this chapter is used interchangeably with academic honesty. The concept of academic integrity is broad and includes ethical use of information and resources while acknowledging the original source of the information used. It also includes originality and creativity. On the other hand, academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, falsification or fabrication of data or information, copying without acknowledging, submitting outsourced assignments, “using someone else’s language, ideas, or other original material without acknowledging its source” (Correa, 2011, p. 66). However, a discussion on academic integrity does not stand on its own without a context. In this case, it is in UAE academic institutions relating to learning.

Contextual challenges that academic librarians face

Academic librarians always aim to provide quality service especially that now libraries have become gateways to comprehensive digital collections and access to information resources, and they facilitate interactive learning. Librarians play the multi-faceted part of educators, mediators and content creators. It is important to keep in mind the context or environment that the librarians work in, such as is addressed in this chapter relating to a multilingual situation, different backgrounds and values. This is due to the fact that people generally interpret messages differently for many reasons, including morals and values, beliefs, family background, social influences, education, and national culture.

This chapter targets personal and cultural values as factors that have an impact on the way communicated messages are interpreted particularly regarding academic integrity. This is in the context of academic librarians in the UAE where most of them are themselves from a variety of expatriate backgrounds, making it important to understand effective ways that messages or points are conveyed to culturally and linguistically homogenous student groups in a manner that makes sense to the students, or in a clear manner. The view in this case is that interpretation is a part of the communication process whereby people assign meaning to a particular thing. It is therefore useful to understand the Emirati national culture insofar as it

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helps in putting into perspective the educator function of librarians. This point is relevant to the involvement of librarians in teaching about academic integrity through IL instruction.

To find out the state of the academic environment and academic integrity, a literature review was conducted with special focus of Middle Eastern-related studies and findings about academic integrity. More information was gathered from listening to voices from educators expressing their experiences and thoughts.

**Investigation method**

In this investigation, there was use of listening to narratives as a way of finding out what academic integrity concerns educators have. This is in line with Callahan and Elliott (1996) who point out that “narrative method is a particularly rich approach that is well suited to the study of everyday understandings and real world behavior”. The importance of conversations and comments that librarians had regularly been encountering to become relevant due to the fact that some of them expressed consistent messages. Some of the issues raised also appear in the literature review about the academic environment in institutions of higher learning in the UAE.

In a paper that discusses listening and message interpretation, Edwards (2011, p. 62) concludes that “work on message interpretation suggests that communicators understand messages differently…” even when listening is a central aspect of interpersonal communication. The intended purpose of this chapter is therefore to introduce the need for an actual broad-based field research on this topic, driven by issues arising from the literature review and hearing or noting educator comments and views. Further investigation is important to refute or validate interpretations of the ideas arising from the literature as well as from educator expressions. Thus, a more robust investigation will help put value to conversations with and among educators in relation to the academic integrity topic. The context is one in which a large number of educators are expatriates, therefore may unintentionally have a variety of interpretations of academic integrity. To avoid any such confusion, a clear awareness of a cross-cultural education setting and accompanying teaching guidelines are key.

**Cross-cultural issues**

The primary concept to clarify is the meaning of culture. Oberembt (1998, p. 125) suggests that national culture refers to the way that a “like-acculturated group of people think about and do things”. It includes all behaviour that is learned through social interaction with others, such as the use of language, rituals, social organization, traditions, beliefs and technology. Of importance in this study is the finding made by Markus and Kitayama (1991, p. 224) that:

> many Asian cultures have distinct conceptions of individuality that insist on the fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other. The emphasis is on attending to others, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence with them.

This perspective is confirmed by Simadi and Kamali (2004) in their United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) study of the value system of university students. The significance of this for librarians is the importance of understanding the Emirati value system so as to be able to interact with the library user groups in a culturally sensitive manner that makes sense to them. A discussion on culture inevitably refers to values. These are an “individual’s mental judgment about things, people, and social events” (Simadi & Kamali, 2004, p.19). The UAEU study also revealed that “religious and cognitive values came first in the structure, while social and economic values came in last” (Simadi & Kamali, 2004, p.19).

Considering that language is the basis for most communication and learning, it is relevant to note the effect of the use of English language writing and speaking proficiency on perceived effectiveness of intended learning benefits. This is because the UAE policy makers express in their Education Vision 2020 that English as a medium of instruction is crucial if school graduates are to participate in the global knowledge economy (United Arab Emirates. Ministry of Education and Youth, 2000, p. 60). The UAE Education
System Overview of Performance in Education document by the UAE National Qualifications Authority (2013, p. 8) also reflects that students are expected to graduate from high school with a high English language proficiency. This is intended to be part of the UAE human capital development program. The question therefore becomes one of emphasizing effective communication in transmitting the academic integrity message, just as in all other teaching scenarios.

While discussing communication and learning, it is relevant to include the fact that there are differences in high-context versus low-context cultures as explained by Rosch and Sigler (1987). They point out that in high-context cultures such as those of Arabic origin and the Japanese, messages tend to be implicit and indirect, and voice intonation as well as timing of facial and non-verbal expressions plays important roles in conveying information. This is in contrast to low-context cultures such as Germans and Scandinavians where the opposite applies. The relevance of this factor is that as librarians, every mode of communication matters to the students that need to benefit from the instruction provided. That is because messages can be lost in the manner that they are communicated in, as well as in translation, usually causing misunderstanding, hence a failure in communication.

It is also useful to get acquainted with such research publications as by Nardon, Steers and Stone (2012) that discuss language, culture and cognition in cross-cultural communication, including the way messages are interpreted, in a manner that helps inform IL perspectives. That is because misperception results in ineffective communication. For librarians who fill the role of mediator and educator, that can be a big challenge especially as there is an emphasis on IL due to its importance as one of the 21st Century skills of a knowledge-based environment.

Cultural values and academic integrity

There have been debates relating to the likelihood of people from some cultures being more likely to plagiarize than others, but especially those non-native English speakers (NNES). While this may be discussible, Wheeler and Anderson (2010, p. 171) point out that “plagiarism may indicate a deficit in appropriate skills and not intentional academic dishonesty”. In fact, shortage of a broad English language vocabulary may very well be contributory where students are not able to adequately paraphrase. In agreement with the same authors, the suggestion to have institutions establish an institutional response to plagiarism that is comprehensive, appropriate, fair, developmental, transparent, and educative regardless of geographical location is the most practical way of getting those that are learning to attain academic integrity. The Zayed University Student Handbook (2013-2014, p. 3) expresses that “academic integrity is a fundamental principle upon which every reputable educational institution is based”. Additionally, an Honor Code and Honor Council advises student behaviour on academic integrity.

The Abu Dhabi Women’s College (ADWC), also explicitly mentions that it has developed policies that are supportive of academic honesty (Wheeler & Anderson, 2010). This is where librarians play a key support role of educating not only students, but faculty too about this phenomenon.

A survey by Lee (2009) reveals that Arab communities have a strong tradition of helping each other. This is reflected in a research study by McCabe, Feghali and Abdallah (2008) who found out that “Lebanese university students are strongly influenced by the norms of the collectivist society in which they are raised as compared to the more individualistic society found in the United States”. While this is a study in Lebanon, the result confirms that culture has a significant influence on ethical decision-making. However, that is not the only determining factor in student behaviour in the academic integrity discourse. Results from the same study reveal that:

student academic dishonesty shows a significant positive relationship with the perceived perception of peers’ behaviour and significant inverse relationships with the certainty of being reported, perceived understanding/acceptance of academic integrity policies on campus, and the perceived severity of penalties for violations of these policies (McCabe, Feghali & Abdallah, 2008, p. 463).
Essentially, the literature reveals that all students require guidance when it comes to awareness of academic integrity, resulting in many universities and colleges adopting honour codes (Thomas, Raynor & McKinnon, 2013). The degrees to which academic dishonesty is discovered may vary, but all students need assistance in reducing it. In fact, it is useful and practical for academic institutions to review their academic integrity policies so that even the teaching practices and outcomes are tailored to suit specific environments. Thomas, Raynor and McKinnon (2013) recommend more use of oral exams, whenever applicable, to assess student acquisition of knowledge than written ones in the Gulf context. To librarians in the same region, that recommendation suggests a proven approach that works in creating IL instructional materials. A variety of assessments also helps in addition to enabling opportunities for creativity and innovative writing tasks.

**Student perceptions of academic integrity**

While librarians can guide students on matters of plagiarism and academic integrity, it is important to review the students’ perceptions about the subject. The question is whether there is a common explanation and understanding of the concepts that creates a background for the students to develop some perceptions. Institutions such as Zayed University, UAEU, University of Dubai, Abu Dhabi University, and more, have webpages that clearly explain what academic integrity in all its forms is. However, as students enrol into university, the likelihood that they read what is posted is low, unless regular encouragement and consistent reinforcements come from educators. The results of a study by Koshy (2008) on using the plagiarism detection software Turnitin at Wollongong University in Dubai, for example, revealed an inadequate understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. Students in that study were found to concentrate on avoiding text-matching in Turnitin, rather than use the tool as a guide in developing originality of ideas expressed. The finding suggests that there is value in academic institutions discussing and teaching what constitutes plagiarism whether there is use of plagiarism detection software or not, clearly explaining concepts such as similarity percentages and originality reports, and the meaning of academic integrity to both teachers/instructors and students. This also includes being clear about discouraging unacknowledged copying and pasting of seemingly relevant and valuable passages from the internet with no originality reflected, or the use of unauthorised sources and/or paper mills (essay mills), and providing correct information about best practices, including being consistent about demonstrating the consequences of academic dishonesty.

If educators do this, they are enabling a learning culture of academic literacy (“skills in reading, critical analysis, writing and presenting orally” (Hampton, 2011, p.351)), to which academic integrity is closely associated. This ties in with the idea expressed by Pecorari (2013, p.39) that “learning a distaste for plagiarism is part of learning academic values and orientation, part of the process of academic acculturation”. According to the online Encyclopaedia Britannica (2014), acculturation is a process of “change in artefacts, customs, and beliefs that result from the contact of two or more cultures” In an academic environment, IL plays a major role in demonstrating the library’s function as a place that nurtures specifically academic acculturation (a process of adaptation and learning different and effective ways of knowledge acquisition in an NNES context as suggested by Cheng & Fox, 2008, p.309). Collaborative efforts among faculty and librarians make the IL programs clearer to educators and effectively relevant to the students.

**Faculty awareness and collaboration with librarians**

A case study survey at an American university in the Middle East by Tabsh, El Kadi, and Abdelfatah (2012) reveals cases where faculty participants were unaware of their university’s code of ethics, and several of them stated that they would ignore violations of an ethical code of conduct committed by colleagues. The implication of this finding is that academic integrity is not a concept that is always misunderstood solely by students, but sometimes by their educators too. When faculty and librarians work together in educating and creating tutorials for students about plagiarism and how it fits in with academic integrity as suggested by
Jackson (2006), then the role of the library makes sense in supporting student learning as well as reinforcing educator awareness. That is a part of information literacy (IL) teaching.

At Abu Dhabi University, an Office of Academic Integrity was created after a revision of its Academic Integrity Policy in 2009. Its library has created a comprehensive guide on the topic, including providing more information to the university community about it, specifically pointing out the responsibilities and accountability of faculty and of students. This is because major challenges arise when faculty is not sure about academic integrity since that affects the way they guide students. The degree to which the library is able to support its university’s community in terms of academic integrity varies and ultimately depends on the university’s policy towards the quality of work produced by its faculty and students.

If IL is systematically embedded in the curriculum, then there is an obligation on all educators to collaborate to make it applicable. The need for this approach arises from the fact that academic honesty is a skill that needs reinforcing consistently. In a case study about UAE copyright law, Abdulla (2008, p.462) suggests that the goal for librarians, educators, and scholars “is to find that equilibrium whereby the widest access to scholarly works is ensured while the intellectual property of copyright holders is protected”. That suggests a certain degree of consciousness about academic integrity issues in the UAE.

Librarian as mediator and educator

Instead of sticking to the traditional role of selecting, collecting, and the acquisitions of books and materials, the academic librarian’s role has expanded in scope to include mediating between information and related technologies and users of the information. Abram (2008) refers to:

moving from a technology-centric strategy to one in which the real needs of our clients must predominate. Aligning technology with user behaviour no longer suffices to ensure success. We need to understand, and understand deeply, the role of the library in our end-users’ lives, work, research, and play.

The library faces competition from resources like the Open Access Initiative (Suber, 2007), Wikipedia, Google and other internet resources, which library users regard as alternative and more interesting sources of information, potentially relegating the importance of the library to insignificance and making the investment in library resources a waste. In institutions of higher learning in the UAE, the library world is following world trends. This means librarians have to be prepared for the various ways that new technologies such as mobile devices are adaptable to what is on offer. For example, some commercial library database apps occasionally play-up if one is not familiar with how they work. In this environment, the library has to operate with usability and standardization issues for its services, while encouraging library users to use the information resources that are available to them ethically. However, when librarians explain ethical use of information, there is merit in transmitting the message as one of the specifications of any given assignment, implying joint or collaborative efforts with faculty.

Suggestions and Conclusions

While there is evidence that institutions of higher learning in the UAE are aware of academic integrity matters, it is important that the policies be in sync with local culture in order for them to be well understood and in compliance with standard procedure. In that respect, if local librarians work with international academic integrity organisations such as the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), and PlagiarismAdvice.org, that may help in localizing practices.

With policies in place, making them known to the entire academic community is important. This starts with the educators and then the students so that everyone understands it, is aware of the implications and consequences of academic dishonesty, and gets the necessary support from their respective institutions. The
library is one of the essential organs of an academic institution in its IL program since that always includes academic integrity information.

Possible use, by regional libraries, of such a research network as Ankabut can also facilitate and enable the creation and accessibility of policies that are in the context of the Gulf. This is because Ankabut electronically interconnects education institutions, and is a reliable space to create resources for academic integrity that all institutions can tap from. The implication is that there has to be a champion (s) who takes up the task of creating the resource. Once created, the resource then requires maintenance and upkeep, meaning that various types of investment (manpower, time, expertise, web space) have to be put in place in the case of creating it.
References


Beliefs and evaluation

Student Evaluation of Teaching surveys (SETs) are ubiquitous in tertiary education worldwide and Burden (2009) has suggested that students evaluate using a global rating on these forms along a single dimension of ‘liking’ or ‘disliking’ English. As students use schemata from the past to evaluate the present, this chapter examines Japanese university students’ antecedent beliefs about English education in senior high school (SHS). Student evaluation is often based on cognitive background schemata of previous learning beliefs (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000) from their three years of compulsory SHS English study, and Burden (2009) found that language learners have a tendency to assign a global impression on SETs, instead of distinguishing among levels of teacher performance on different dimensions. As one participant commented:

There are students who evaluate from a liking or disliking perspective I feel. At university, the English evaluation is a reflection of our experiences of English up to now [at high school] and we clearly feel ‘able’ or ‘unable’ to do English with English being a ‘weak point.’ If we feel English is a weak point, no matter the enthusiasm of the teacher, the students will not be receptive to English (Burden, 2009, p. 273).

Other students equated ‘liking’ English with being ‘good’ at it, while those students who thought they were ‘poor’ at English suggested that they found it a subject that was difficult to like. One student recalled her own perception of being “poor at English from the beginning so I would likely to evaluate lowly” (Burden, 2009, p. 273).

English teachers worldwide need to understand what has occurred during the learners’ educational experiences to lead to negative cognitive or behavioral beliefs which have adversely affected their learning motivation. Despite having studied English for six years in middle and high school, many students find themselves in ‘false beginner’ classes and the level of course can impact on SETs: students in higher level courses give higher ratings (see Cashin, 1995) and perceived communicative ability may influence teacher and learner rapport (Braskamp & Ory, 1994). Many students resent and do not respond well to having to study compulsory English while low prior interest in the subject is generally associated with lower ratings (see Marsh & Dunkin, 1992). While the “ratings ritual ends quickly, the implications of the results can be far reaching” say Abrami, d’Apollonia, and Rosenfield (1997, p.321) so the aim of the present study is to get some insight into learner beliefs and considers why many students maintain feelings of incompetence, or consider English to be their ‘weak-point’, among learners assigned to low-proficiency classes despite six years of English at junior and senior high school.

It is also worth noting that the use of TOEIC as a class placement test in Japan is contentious. Newfields (2005, p.99) suggests that Japanese students with relatively high scores tend to be “pro-active in attempting to raise their scores further,” while students with low scores “tend to perceive themselves as ‘bad English learners’ and easily get stuck in a rut of ennui”. Similarly, Pennington and Young (1989, p. 628) suggest that the “lower the level of study, the lower the course tends to be rated,” so that ELT students who have had negative experiences of communicative English, such as those in streamed conversation classes may attribute discrepancies in performance to teacher effectiveness so as not to undermine their self-image.
Previous studies in Japanese SHS

As Ushioda (2001, p.119) reminds us, we need to consider “the poorly motivated unsuccessful language learner, seemingly trapped in a vicious circle of negative learning experiences and negative motivation.” Dörnyei (2001, p. 18) states that one precondition for high learner motivation is feeling competent, and this is gained partly through feedback and positive affirmation from others as learners are concerned about the perceived status they are held in. As Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) note, teachers need to understand learners’ motivation and what factors discourage students from learning, because examining the causes of demotivation may help teachers themselves from being (future) factors or causes of their learners’ demotivation. Kimura, Nakata and Okumura (2001) found that many learners had negative learning experiences due to poor teaching and may also possess high negative anxiety, and Falout and Maruyama (2004) concluded that learners lacked self-confidence, demonstrated poor attitudes towards English itself, English courses, and their teachers, while 72.7% of lower proficiency learners indicated that they did not like studying English.

Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) found five factors for demotivation including low test scores, non-communicative teaching methods, and teachers’ competence and teaching styles. Students commented on low scores on tests such as “when I can’t get good scores on tests, I start to feel that I’m not talented” (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009, p.195), while Kikuchi (2009, p.468) concluded that many factors related to demotivation are connected with an “old style teacher-fronted approach.” The focus of this approach is an achievement-based education where the curriculum offered is “designed in such a way that the main emphasis is on preparation for entrance exams” (O’Donnell, 2003, p.33).

Although 20 years have passed since the introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT) in high schools in Japan, Lockley, Hirschel and Slobodniuk (2012) found that 95% of 309 students suggested that traditional, dedicated grammar lessons with a focus on grammar, vocabulary, and reading were common, while Tahira (2012) found CLT uptake to be “sluggish” with 48% of teachers stating that less than “half of the students’ utterances were in English during oral communication activities” (Tahira, 2012, p.5). Nishino (2008, 2011) similarly states that classroom hours, class size, textbooks, and the lack of teacher proficiency and confidence were all obstacles to CLT use.

Research questions

The study seeks to gain an understanding of students’ beliefs as a way of understanding potential confounding factors in SETs through examining antecedent conditions that learners bring into the university classroom at the start of a course. Firstly, as success-oriented students often show high ability as well as high effort, participants reflected on the degree of effort they made both in SHS class and, voluntarily, out of class. The degree of teacher praise on learner’s effort was asked to gauge whether the students felt an achievement oriented setting was in place in the classroom. Students were subsequently asked about the degree of testing in SHS as success is often defined in terms of whether students can pass a test or not and because students consider poor test results as being a major impact on motivation. Assuming that the students are frequently faced with testing, the study also sought some idea of how students felt both before and after testing situations as antecedent attributions of success and failure. The students were also asked whether they liked or disliked English in SHS, and, if they disliked the subject, were asked to demonstrate from when. Therefore, student insight was sought on the following questions which guided the research questionnaire:

1. What was the frequency of English classes and what was the self-perceived level of ability?
2. How successful did students think they were in SHS, and, if they felt unsuccessful, to what did they attribute these feelings?
3. What was the degree of effort made by the students, and how much praise did the learners receive from teachers?
4. How often did the learners have English tests in SHS, and how did the learners feel after English testing?
5. Did the learners like or dislike English in SHS, and if they disliked English, from when did these feelings appear?
6. What were the students’ feelings prior to attending English class in SHS?
7. How much voluntary study of English was done outside class, and what was the content of voluntary study?

Data collection and analysis

A questionnaire comprising open and closed items was administered in six classes taught by the author. Responses were received from 217 students comprising 153 males and 64 females in classes of first year students majoring in engineering, law, or radiology, in compulsory English classes that met once a week for a single semester of 15 weeks at a Japanese National University in Western Japan. A form of TOEIC test as a class placement test had been taken, and these 217 students placed in the lowest band with scores ranging from 180 to 320.

Although the study was a convenience sample, the students were informed of the purpose, participation was not obligatory, and anonymity was guaranteed. The questionnaire was administered in English and Japanese. Subsequently, the fifteen week course ended with the completion of the obligatory SETs.

The ten fixed-category questions used a scale of between 5 and 7 items and the data also included three open questions so that the students could elaborate their views. This data was analyzed by using a grounded approach which categorized the underlying structures and recurring themes of the questions into units of information that became the basis for defining categories following the “constant comparative method” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

English class frequency

The students have studied English as a compulsory subject for six years of junior and senior high school (SHS) with 68 respondents, or 31.3%, stated that they had five classes a week, while 51 students or 23.5% had more than five classes a week in SHS. This means that 54.8% had more than one class a day in SHS. As mentioned earlier, all students were placed in the lowest band after the TOEIC placement test, and, according to Trew’s (2006) analysis of test scores, meant that many students were functioning at a very low level of language competence. Trew (2006, p.3) suggests that score of less than 470 on TOEIC indicates that “knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and structure is generally inadequate.” Further, a score of 220 suggests that learners are “capable of the minimal communication in ordinary conversation” (Trew, 2006, p.3). This indicated that learners could not effectively make themselves understood, despite the high class frequency. Anticipating the large number of classes, the next step was to ask how they perceived their ability.

| Table 16.1: Q.1 How many English classes did you have in a week in SHS? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Frequency | 1 | 12 | 37 | 48 | 68 | 51 |
| Mean | 4.49 |
| SD | 1.206 |
| Percent | 0.5 | 5.5 | 17.1 | 22.1 | 31.3 | 23.5 |
Student self-descriptions of English ability

As success-oriented students often show high ability, students’ self-perceptions of English ability are often gauged through a classroom focus on testing or appraisal which leads to comparisons with classmates. As those that do poorly on tests often question their own ability, Table 16.2 asked the students to reflect on their perceptions of ability in SHS. While 15 of the students recalled that they were the best in the class, conversely, 79 or 36.4% saw themselves as below average. Twenty-eight, or 12.9%, saw themselves as worst in the class which, while acknowledging research findings that suggest Japanese downplay their sense of ability (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000), may have close links with self-esteem and feelings of achievement especially in compulsory classes taken up to 5 times a week. As 107 students or 49.3% see themselves as at best “below average,” this low sense of ability may be a reflection of repeated lack of sustained success in the classroom.

Table 16.2: Q.2 Looking back, how would you describe your ability in SHS?  n=217

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The best</th>
<th>Better</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below average</th>
<th>The worst in the class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in the class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student sense of success

Thirdly, students were asked to reflect on how successful they felt in their SHS English learning and if they felt unsuccessful, they were subsequently asked to suggest through key words or phrases some possible reasons for those feelings. This question sought to gain insight into whether learners dwelled on their (past) learning experience and performance level and 46 or 21.2% of 217 students recalled that they ‘always’ or ‘usually’ felt successful with the English classes while 71 students or 32.7% were ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ successful. If these students have at least a one class a day during three years of SHS, this will undoubtedly have a negative impact on on-task learning, and persistence.

Why students did not feel successful in English class

Table 16.3 collated 179 comments about reasons for lack of success from the 71 students above who recalled that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ felt successful in English classes. Thirty-two comments were attributed to the lack of interest or engagement the students felt towards the class or learning English, while the use of grammar, memorization and vocabulary were mentioned, which is perhaps a reflection of an exam-centered teaching tradition.
Table 16. 3: Why students did not feel successful in English classes in SHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student comments about the lack of success</th>
<th>Number of participants mentioning item (n = 71)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not interesting, boring, makes me sleepy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only grammar and memorization, vocabulary practice</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class speed or progression is too fast</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher not suitable, not talented, lacking ability</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too difficult</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot understand teacher explanation or class content</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor at English</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot remember vocabulary</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is worthless, not important</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class content is not practical, worthless</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough chances to speak</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot get good score</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too easy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much homework</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the number of comments is quite low, it is interesting to note that for these unsuccessful students the teacher or teacher’s way of teaching such as class progression, speed, explanation, class content, degree of understandability, and ability were called into question. Students also suggested that they were poor at English leading them to give up, not try, or to believe that they cannot get scores on tests, while studying English or English class content is worthless or lacks practical application with an insufficient time to speak in class while 26 comments concerned grammar, memorization and vocabulary practice.

The degree of effort shown by students in English class

Table 16.4 shows the results of a question asking the students to reflect on how much effort they made in English class in SHS. The results appear encouraging in that 111 students, or 51.1%, said that they always or usually made an effort. The question did not, however, ask either the degree of effort or for how long this effort was maintained. It may well be that, as Birney, Burdick and Teevan (1969) reported in their pioneering study, the students are setting their aspirations so low that they are certain to achieve them as a way of avoiding negative (self) evaluation.
Table 16.4: Q.5 Looking back, did you make an effort to do well in English class?  n=217

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I always</th>
<th>I usually</th>
<th>I sometimes</th>
<th>I rarely</th>
<th>I never</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made an</td>
<td>made an</td>
<td>made an</td>
<td>made an</td>
<td>made an</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amount of teacher praise received

Deci (1995, p.92) refers to teachers as “socialising agents” whose job is to encourage or facilitate students to persistently perform classroom activities through feelings of accomplishment and enjoyment. Therefore, one aspect of success is reward- or motivation as drive- through praise, applause and grades. The results of Table 16.5 reveal that 91 students or 41.9% of students were rarely or never praised, and it should be again remembered that students may have upwards of five classes a week.

Table 16.5: Q.6 Looking back, how often were you praised by your teacher in class?  n=217

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I was</th>
<th>I was</th>
<th>I was</th>
<th>I was</th>
<th>I was</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>always</td>
<td>usually</td>
<td>often</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>praised</td>
<td>praised</td>
<td>praised</td>
<td>praised</td>
<td>praised</td>
<td>praised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results also show that 36.9% or 80 out of 217 students said they were sometimes praised but it may be that there are many students who gain little reaction from the teacher.

How often the students experienced testing in SHS

Subsequently, students were asked to recall the degree of testing in SHS as success is often defined in terms of passing tests which could have a major impact on motivation. If we look at the results of this study, we can see that 68.2% or 148 out of 217 students had tests either often or very often, and only 1.4% or 3 out of 217 students had tests rarely or never.

How the students felt after the test

The next question on the survey asked how students felt after the test. The results indicate that five students, or 2.3%, felt that they got a good score because they were good at English, while 28.1% or 61 students got a good score because they studied hard. Twenty-three students attributed a good score to luck, and 28 to the test being easy, but a far larger percentage, 30.9% or 67 students got a poor score because they perceive
themselves as not being good at English. Twenty-eight students or 12.9% got a poor score because they did not try.

Arguably, we can suggest that the 67 students (30.9%) who failed because they are not good at English feel they lack ability and may have reconciled any passing or fleeting success with feelings of luck (47.3%). While the most clear-cut technique of avoiding failure is success, many learners in classrooms wish to avoid any further “testing” of their abilities and so did not try.

**Whether the students liked or disliked English in SHS**

Another question asked students to reflect on the degree of their liking and disliking English. While only 5.1% or 11 learners out of 217 recalled liking English, 103 students, or 47.6%, stated that they either disliked or really disliked English during high school - an important consideration as 54.8% of students had at least five classes a week.

**When the students started to dislike English**

The 103 students who either ‘disliked’ or ‘really disliked’ English were asked to suggest from when these negative feelings appeared. Twenty-one students, or over 20% stated that they disliked it from when they started, 36.9% from junior high school, while 43 students or 42.7% disliked English from SHS which may again demonstrate the growing negative influence of exam centered university exams on English education.

**How students felt before going to English class in SHS**

In the subsequent open-ended question, all 217 respondents were asked to reflect and choose three words or phrases to describe how they used to feel prior to attending SHS English classes and responses are shown in Table 16.6 below. The weekly class frequency should again be remembered here. The content analysis shows that of the 498 words or phrases chosen, feelings were overwhelmingly negative and portray quite an indictment of English education, especially in the light of the class frequency.

Table 16.6: Three words or phrases to describe how students felt before English class in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student comments about how they felt prior to English class</th>
<th>Number of participants mentioning item (n = 217)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going to class is bothersome</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepy, tired</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear, depression, unease, panic, vomit, diarrhea, hell,</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not want to be called upon or picked by the teacher</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike or unpleasant</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try hard</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preparation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot reply or do well</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perplexed or confused 17
Want the class to finish early or want to go home 17
Next class is English 17
That teacher again 17
Dull, languid 14
Fun 10
Dislike or poor at, or feel unease about tests 9
Teacher frightening, scary, not good mood 9
Whether the student can do the class 9
Expectation, hope the class is interesting 8
Sighing, melancholy, heavy hearted, spirits drop 25
Other 498
Total

*Studying English outside of class*

Success-oriented students attribute success to a combination of high ability and high effort. One way of gaining insight into effort and how students prioritize effort was gleaned from a question which looks at the amount of outside class voluntary learning which excluded assigned homework.

While the results may be encouraging as 57 students voluntarily often studied English or studied every day, 24%, or 52 students only study English rarely, while 14.3% or 31 students claim to never study outside of class at all.

*What outside of class, voluntary study entailed*

The last question asks the 134 students who “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” studied English outside of class what kind of studying they did. Of the 270 comments received from learners in Table 16.7, nearly all referred to a pattern of remembering or memorizing vocabulary or grammar, making word lists and previewing and reviewing class materials which probably encompassed mechanical aspects of English in preparation for future testing.
Table 16.7: Voluntary study of English outside the class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student comments about what they did outside of class</th>
<th>Number of participants mentioning item (n = 134)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering or memorizing vocabulary</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previewing, preparing or reviewing class material</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorizing grammar</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making vocabulary or word lists</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading composition or long passages</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test strategies</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening activities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice test or problem solving</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the textbook</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Failure-threatened learners point to a lack of ability in ascribing failure. If students feel their ability is low as shown in Table 16.2, they have not faced much achievement in class and if they have some kind of success, they tend to attribute this to factors external to the self, such as luck or that tests were easy on the day. Therefore, students with low feelings of achievement may strive to protect self-esteem through being over-motivated expressed through the desire to avoid negative self-evaluation by engaging in the protective strategy of setting their aspirations so low that they are assured of attaining them.

The results of this study suggest a problem with the “value” students attached to the English class in terms of intrinsic value so that lesson content is seen as lacking interest, while causing lethargy and boredom. Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009, p.404) similarly pointed to the largest demotivating factor being the teaching style of a “boring” teacher due to monotonous instruction with a “heavy focus on translation, grammar, rote memorization, and a lack of practical application.” This view accords with those dissatisfied students who see the teacher as being unsuitable or lacking talent or ability.

Findings may also support the idea that when non-participation is not feasible, students may engage in the task in such a manner as to receive as little information as possible by not trying so the skill cannot be evaluated and thus the reigning self-evaluation is maintained. As Covington (1998, p.16) reminds us, the absence of behavior should be viewed as just as motivated as “a lively, abundance of behavior” (Covington, 1998, p.16). Failure-oriented students, however, attribute failure to a lack of ability, and we see here a picture of students who may suffer from a lack of self-worth due to persistent feelings of lack of ability - a direct threat to feelings of competence.

Another finding in this study may be an indication of a self-fulfilling prophesy (Covington, 1998) whereby teachers tend to anticipate that certain students will succeed and these expectations influence the ways in
which teachers relate to students. Teachers become impatient with, and give less time to reply to students perceived to be less likely to succeed so that students of whom little is expected fall further behind and are then presumably ignored by the teacher. Dörnyei (2001, p.175) talks of “negative expectancy-driven teacher behavior” expressed through lower attention paid by teacher to those students perceived as possessing low-expectation of success. For many students who rely on external rewards as the drive behind learning the effects of teacher praise can be very influential.

Respondents in this study also support the idea that schooling is heavily influenced by testing as an “ability game” (Covington & Teel, 1999, p.6) which encourages students to “outperform others” and “promote invidious comparisons” so that learning “becomes abrasive” and is “often based on fear” (Covington, 1998, p.17). Learners tend to dwell on their L2 learning experience and performance and the greater the perceived likelihood of goal attainment, the greater the incentive value. But failure-threatened learners tend to disassociate themselves from events such as testing that cause disapproval or rejection so we can see a large number of students who either did not try (12.9%) or have given up because they are poor at English (30.9%).

The negative feelings students hold about learning English show that the educational system is still preparing them for examinations, exacerbated by the “methodological status quo” Lamie (2000, p.33) whereby teachers teach by “imitating the class [they] had been given” and thus have little experience of communicative language teaching which learners want. This may account for the feelings of antipathy towards the teacher and the teacher method shown above and illustrates how teachers bear much responsibility for learner demotivation. In SHS, the tension between communicative and traditional teaching approaches where grammar instruction is “central, and more foregrounded” (Sakui, 2004, p. 157) means that students have very little exposure to even focused activities in controlled practice. This exposure is further reduced as exam time approaches as getting through the syllabus at a rigid pace is expedient, further denuding both the allotted time for, and the status of, CLT. Results also seem to support O’Donnell’s (2003) findings that the washback effect of entrance exams influences not only teaching methods of teachers but inevitably the study patterns of the students.

Looking back at the questions which highlighted learner’s perception of ability, and those which examined the degree of effort learners made in their English study, and questions which looked at teacher reaction to learner effort, it is possible to see some worrying trends. In achievement settings such as high school in Japan where many students have many classes in which they are also frequently tested, perceptions of low ability would have a damaging effect on motivation over time. Teachers should be aware that some students underestimate ability through negative expectations which in turn lead to success being attributed to external factors such as luck or degree of ease, or decreased effort. In testing, ability and effort are the dominant cause of performance often striving for achievement based on fear of losing or being seen as incompetent. As the tables show, students become satisfied with mediocre performance.

**Classroom Implications**

Dunegan and Hrivnak (2003, p.282) suggest that in SETs use students “draw on scripts and schema in the past to define the present.” The probability of students using schema to stereotype instead of evaluating new classes independently needs to be recognized and addressed. As students with greater subject interest prior to the course tend to give higher ratings, controlling for prior interest is imperative where SETs are used summatively, as this influence could be a “source of unfairness in that it is a function of the course and not the teacher” (Wachtel, 1998, p.201).

Learners who experience some kind of success are more likely to continue and enjoy learning. Successful learners may be more disposed towards the target language because of their positive experience with the language leading to an increase in self-perception of ability. If teachers remember that students are often trying to conceal concerns about academic or performance inadequacy, students’ motivation will increase if teachers can show that they “care more about them [students] that about what they do” (Mendler, 2000, p.9). It was noticed by students in Burden (2009) that learners perceived teacher favoritism towards good learners and perhaps teachers do indeed shower attention on those more willing to try or show effort. Teachers should
provide rapport, psychological closeness, appropriate modeling and, crucially, feedback and rewards, so that learners may attribute feelings of success or to “create mountains that students think they can climb” (Mendler, 2000, p.21).

Similarly, remotivating learners “through a process of affirmation, resourcefulness, goal setting, initiative and engagement in rewarding L2 activities” (Ushioda (2001, p.119) emphasizes personal control and discourages passive learning. If students are encouraged to show effort and receive appropriate stimuli for learning through creative expression using novel and engaging activities with less emphasis on grades and incentives, motivation for learning will increase. Learners’ self-efficacy can be raised by teaching learning and communicative strategies, and helping them to develop realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Low goal-setting eventually leads to low performance as students only do as much or as little as they expect to achieve which may account for the low TOEIC scores despite six years of English. Students have experienced little personal challenge, and feel little pride in accomplishment. While the ultimate purpose of mastering a foreign language may be too distant a goal, learners need to set “proximal subgoals” (Dörnyei, 2001, p.26) to provide advanced organizers and feedback. Also, the students will be aroused to achieve if the goal is both attractive and attainable.

As noted, self-perceptions of incompetency trigger humiliation. By using cooperative rather than competitive goal structures and creating positive interdependence through which all parties have certain information, students must collaborate equally if the task is to be completed successfully and no one student can withdraw from the responsibility to the collective group. “Near peer modelling” (Yashima, 2009, p.153) helps attitudes become more positive, encouraging learners to function as one another’s future self in terms of ability.

**Conclusion**

It is hoped that the results offer a useful gauge of current affective influences on motivation to continue learning English. This study has argued that continued attributions of failure, or low feelings of achievement on testing, accompanied by a lack of teacher praise can result in students who ascribe failure in SHS English to low ability, to feelings of humiliation that may persist and influence motivation and receptivity to university classes. This has led to a downward spiral in effort, learning receptiveness and a dislike of English. The study suggests how teachers can water the roots of motivation and encourage students through a non-threatening, collaborative classroom where motivational equity is encouraged to remotivate learners jaded after abrasive, often competitive learning experiences.
References


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Chapter 17

Exploring, Teaching, and Assessing Pragmatics: Pragmatics Activities in Three Courses

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Introduction

Pragmatic competence is an aspect of language ability that is crucial for English language learners to be successful in socially appropriate interaction. Kasper and Roever (2005) describe pragmatic competence as the “ability to act and interact by means of language” (p. 317). McNamara and Roever (2006) further explain that “‘sociopragmatic’ knowledge describes knowledge of the target language community’s social rules,” while “‘pragmalinguistic’ knowledge encompasses the linguistic tools necessary to ‘do things with words’ (Austin, 1962, p.55)” In practical terms, pragmatic competence goes beyond learners’ knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and involves them in using language appropriately according to community rules of acceptable social interaction.

An example of the importance of pragmatic competence is seen in an incident described by Lanteigne and Crompton (2011) in which a native speaker of Arabic used thanks to you inappropriately, causing confusion and awkwardness for the hearers. Although this individual intended to communicate gratitude, his word-for-word translation of a polite expression in Arabic (شكرا لكم) [shukran lakum], literally “thanks to you,” instead caused the hearers to wonder if he was being sarcastic.

Language learners need to be made aware of such problematic communication, and language classes are an excellent setting for instruction in pragmatic competence. Bardovi-Harlig (2001), Rose (2005), and Eslami-Rasekh (2005) point out the value of direct instruction in pragmatics. As children in their first language are explicitly taught about socially appropriate language use (see discussion in Schmidt, 1993), it is even more crucial for second language learners to have direct instruction in pragmatically appropriate communication. Instruction in pragmatics can involve raising conscious awareness (knowledge about an aspect of pragmatics) and/or presenting how a pragmatic function or speech act occurs in context (use of an aspect of pragmatics).

This chapter presents instructional/assessment activities about pragmatics which I used in three courses: a master’s teacher training course, and undergraduate courses in pragmatics and research writing. In these courses I focused on presenting knowledge of language use in context (consciousness raising), as well as using pragmatics material to teach classification skills. Also discussed is exploration of pragmatics in English through the use of language corpora (Hunston, 2002; Keck, 2004) and field observations (LoCastro, 2012) in obtaining authentic language samples as the basis for development of instructional/assessment materials.

Three Pragmatics Activities in a Master’s Level Teacher Training Course

The first class, Pragmatics in the ESL Classroom, is a teacher training course in pragmatics in which I taught student teachers how to use field observations and language corpora in linguistic research as the basis for instructional/assessment materials development. The master’s students included five female and one male native speakers of Arabic and two native speakers of English (and learners of Arabic). Presented here are three instructional/assessment activities used in the pragmatics teacher training course.

The first activity involved teaching the student teachers how to carry out field observations in pragmatics. There were two purposes for this activity: 1) to raise their conscious awareness of pragmatic issues in real-world communication (LoCastro, 2012) and 2) to give them experience in field observation so that they could in turn use such observations to raise their future students’ awareness of pragmatic concerns. Over a
period of six weeks, these teachers in training observed people communicating in English, focusing on aspects of pragmatics such as compliments/gratitude response, complaints, and unstated meaning. They were instructed to observe and record in charts information about the speakers/hearers, their relationship(s), the contexts, what was said, and observations about the targeted aspects of pragmatics. Practical issues in implementing these field observations included the need to record (inconspicuously) what was said as soon as possible, adding the contextual details later, so that the exact wording of each speaker’s utterance was obtained and so that people were not distracted by the observer. A suggestion that the students mentioned was to use their mobiles, as in texting, which people are quite used to seeing and would not be bothered by their use.

One example is the compliment/response field observation assignment, in which the student teachers were to observe and record differences in complimenting behavior depending on the relationships of the speakers as well as their gender. They analyzed the compliment responses, which could have included showing appreciation, downgrading the compliment, returning the compliment, and/or not responding. An example of one student’s field observation, Chart 17.1, demonstrates reporting compliment/response field observations.

### Chart 17.1 Field Observation of Compliment/Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Receiver</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Compliment</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Context and explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female sales</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Seller/buyer</td>
<td>“I really like your bag.”</td>
<td>“Oh, thank you.”</td>
<td>This was a straightforward compliment and response, and the receiver showed appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistant</td>
<td>buyer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class discussion of the observed compliments/responses centered around similarities to/differences from Arabic, and it was noted that showing appreciation, downgrading compliments, returning compliments, and/or not responding were all possible responses in Arabic, although how these were expressed could differ from such responses in English.

The second pragmatics activity in the teacher training course presented use of the freely available Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2008) to identify and analyze uses of a specific expression, *thanks to you*. (Because of the way language corpora are designed, it is easier if the corpus search is for a specific word or expression such as *thanks to you* and not a general pragmatic function such as expressing gratitude.) The student teachers accessed the COCA website (http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/), first selected Key Word in Context (KWIC) to show the sentences containing *thanks to you*, and then selected spoken and fiction sources as well as the date range (1994-2012). The expression *thanks to you* was then entered in the search box (See Figure 17.2).
Upon running the search, over 300 uses of thanks to you were obtained, which the student teachers categorized by speaker meaning into four categories: positive because of you, sarcastic because of you, formal gratitude, and a gratitude formula used by television/radio show hosts. Once the categories were determined, the student teachers analyzed how thanks to you was used in each setting, developing patterns of use for the four different meanings of this expression (See Appendix A).

The third activity in the teacher training course demonstrated the development of instructional materials and test items from COCA texts. I showed the students how to access the targeted expression with fuller context (like a paragraph), and based upon two instances of thanks to you, developed instructional activities and assessment items, which the student teachers used as models to develop their own materials.

Class activities and homework assignments do not have the same time constraints as do test items, and so it is possible to include more extended context from the corpus and put it in dialogue form, indicating the setting, speakers, their relationships, and the purpose of communication. For example, the following conversation is an interview with Kent who was a coach for Marilyn Monroe, taken from the extended context in COCA for one example of use of thanks to you, with instructions added for a class activity or homework assignment.

**Instructional Activity**

Instructions: Read the following conversation and determine if the person is grateful or sarcastic. What is the meaning of “thanks to you”?

Conversation: Interview about teaching dancing (from COCA)

**Interviewer**: Did you teach a lot of people how to dance at MGM and other places?

**KENT**: I had to coach the… Jack Cole was the choreographer, and after he would design the dance number, then it was up to me to teach Lana Turner, Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell.

**Interviewer**: And this was Marilyn dancing in -- I'm guessing -- *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* or... ?

**KENT**: That's correct.

**Interviewer**: Well, she did a credible job, thanks to you.

**KENT**: She did wonderful.
One observation about this example concerns the final comment by Kent where he says, “She did wonderful.” This statement is an example of language use by a native speaker which English teachers may not want their students to follow. “Wonderful” is an adjective, although it is being used in this sentence as an adverb. Following formal English grammar rules, this sentence could be changed to “she did wonderfully” or “she was wonderful.”

In contrast to homework assignments and class activities, test or quiz items need to be short and therefore must concisely present sufficient detail to contextualize the interaction. Following is an example of a test/quiz item asking students to identify the meaning of thanks to you in this particular context, based on the interview above, in abbreviated form.

Test Item

Instructions: The following is from an interview with Kent about coaching a dancer. What is the meaning of thanks to you in this dialogue?

Interviewer: Well, she did a credible job, thankstoyou.
Kent: She was wonderful.
Meaning: __________________________

In addition to being able to recognize the meaning of thanks to you in conversation, language learners need to be able to know what to say when using this expression in communication. After having presented how thanks to you is used (the four types identified), learners would then practice producing it. One way of doing so is by developing contextualized open-ended discourse completion tasks (Roever, 2011) indicating the setting, the speakers, their relationships, and the overall purpose of communication. Following is an example of an extended example of thanks to you taken from COCA, which is then altered to make a discourse completion test task:

COCA Dialogue

Dialogue: Drivers talking after an accident (from Accidental Hero as cited in COCA)

Still reeling from the shock of the impact, Cammi stepped shakily onto the pavement. She didn't seem to be hurt, and prayed whoever was in the other car had been as fortunate. Not much hope of that, though - the vehicle reminded her more of a modern-art sculpture than a pickup. The truck's side window had shattered on impact, making it impossible to see the driver.

Gently, she rapped on the crystallized glass. “Hello... hello? Are you all right in there?”

“I'm fine, notthankstoyou,” came the gruff reply. The door slowly opened with a loud, groan. One pointy-toed cowboy boot thumped to the ground, immediately followed by the other. "Are you crazy?” the driver demanded as he stood and faced her.

Pedestrians had gathered on the street corners as the drivers of other vehicles leaned out of their car windows: "Anyone hurt?” one woman asked.

"Doesn't appear so,” a male voice answered.
Dialogue Completion Test Task

Instructions: Complete the following dialogue about a car accident, using *thanks to you* appropriately. (You may need to add words other than *thanks to you.*) Indicate the meaning of *thanks to you*.

Driver at fault: “Hello... hello? Are you all right in there?”
Other driver: “I’m fine, ______________________, ” came the gruff reply. "Are you crazy?"
Meaning of *thanks to you*: ______________________

As is evident, the test item is much simpler than the dialogue in the full context provided by COCA, yet still, the sociolinguistic parameters are clear, including the domain (car driving), setting (a car accident), interlocutors (two drivers, one of whom is at fault), and purpose of communication (checking to see if anyone is injured/response).

These teacher training activities were effective in raising student teacher awareness of pragmatics, which is of value to these future teachers’ own use of socially appropriate English, but their understanding of how to present pragmatics to their future students was also enhanced. This was seen in how they successfully developed and used pragmatics materials in mini-lessons with follow-up quizzes over the presented material.

**Pragmatics Activities in Two Undergraduate Courses**

However, the question comes to mind: What does pragmatics instruction look like in actual classes and not just teacher training activities? How can pragmatics be explored, taught, and assessed in classes of English-as-a-second-language learners? To demonstrate this, I present here pragmatics activities which I have used in two undergraduate courses at an English-medium university with male and female students 17 years of age and older, of diverse nationalities and language backgrounds, who had met the admissions requirement of 530 on the paper-based TOEFL or 6.0 on the IELTS.

**An Undergraduate Course in Pragmatics**

One class in which I, as the class teacher, used pragmatics activities was an undergraduate pragmatics class. This course was taught in English, with the primary focus being pragmatics in English, with cross-cultural comparisons with the students’ first language cultures (Pakistani, Chinese, and various Arab nationalities). In this class I used the pragmatics activities to teach awareness of pragmatic implications of language use and classification of open-ended data.

The first activity was field observation, similar to that in the graduate class, seeking to raise student awareness of pragmatic issues in social interaction. These undergraduate students recorded observations of implicature, speech acts, jumbled sentences, forms of address, and pragmatic markers. In the implicature observation, the students watched for instances where there was an unstated, implied meaning and recorded the situation, the speakers/hearers (interlocutors), what was said (locutionary act), the speaker’s intended meaning (illocutionary force), and the effect on the hearers (perlocutionary effect) (Archer, Aijmer, & Wichmann, 2012). The type of implicature could be general (not requiring knowledge of the specific context) or particularized (requiring knowledge of the particular context) (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983).
Similar to discussion of the compliment/response activity in the graduate class, discussion of implicature in the pragmatics class highlighted the fact that this pragmatic function of implying unstated meaning occurs in all of the students’ first language cultures. Once they were made aware of implicature, they commented that they were more alert to it in both their first languages and in English.

The second activity in the pragmatics course had two purposes: to raise awareness of different meanings of pragmatic markers (filler words such as really, actually, you see, etc.) depending on context, and to teach the students classification of open-ended data, a skill they would need for their pragmatic research project. To highlight pragmatic differences in American English and British English, we used COCA and the BNC – British National Corpus (2010). The assignment was for the students to look up their assigned pragmatic marker in the assigned corpus, identify patterns, and post five examples of each pattern type (COCA-actually, anyway, basically, really, uh huh; BNC - mind you, right, say, you see). Chart 17.3, below, shows excerpts from one student’s classification of really found in COCA.

Chart 17.3 A Student’s Pragmatic Marker (really) Classification in the Undergraduate Pragmatics Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>questioning to what extent [sic] the utterance can be truthful</td>
<td>“Is there really a teacher shortage?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a substitute for the word “very”</td>
<td>“But here’s the really good news.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>something unquestionable and in the speakers [sic] perspective very true and real</td>
<td>“An important consideration is to determine what you really care about.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This activity resulted in raising students’ conscious awareness of the different nuances of meaning communicated with these pragmatic markers. With each individual student investigating a different pragmatic marker, it created excellent opportunities for class discussion. Each student highlighted his/her findings that were unusual or unexpected. The activity also resulted in discussion of differences in use of markers in terms of formality, which, again, is useful for language learners to be aware of since the wrong degree of formality can result in misunderstanding. For example, being too informal in a business conversation with a supervisor could be viewed as being disrespectful.

In terms of developing classification skills, the students quickly caught on to looking at speaker meaning and analyzing it based on what the speaker said and hearer response. They then looked for common meanings and classified the corpus texts into the categories they determined.

An Undergraduate Course in Research Writing

In the third course – research writing – the main use of the pragmatics activity was to teach classification of open-ended data, which the students would be using in analysis of interview responses or open-ended survey questions. An added benefit was to raise awareness of the pragmatic implications of uses of thanks to you for these students who were non-native speakers of English, of diverse language backgrounds.

The main learning object of this academic English course was to teach students how to develop a research focus, identify and collect appropriate sources of information using secondary (and possibly primary sources), culminating in a 10-12-page research paper. In this specific aspect of English for academic purposes – research writing – classification of source material is a fundamental skill in both synthesis of information from secondary sources and in analysis of open-ended data, as in interview responses.
To teach classification to the research class, I used the same COCA data as I did with the teacher training class. However, for these undergraduate students I provided more structure with the activity to help them identify the patterns and build a classification table. See Handout 1, Analysis Activity.

Handout 1 Analysis Activity - Finding a Pattern

In the attached file are samples of results from a COCA search for the expression *thanks to you*. [See Appendix B, Examples of *Thanks to You* from the Corpus of Contemporary American English.]

First, read through the samples and identify patterns of use. Then group them according to these patterns (use different colors of highlighting).

Second, make observations about each group. How is the expression used? What is its meaning? In what context is it used?

Third, present the results in a table, indicating the general pattern categories, number of examples in each category, and a representative example for each category.

Although this activity is easier when done on computers using copy/pasting and highlighting, it can also be done on hard copy. To speed up the process, I told the students that there were four categories. The students worked in pairs, initially just reading through the 20 texts, looking for similar meanings. Then they began to identify recurring patterns. First, they saw that many of the texts were expressing gratitude, and then they noticed some had a different meaning that had nothing to do with gratitude. While discussing this non-gratitude meaning as a class, they concluded that, instead of thanking, it communicated *because of you*. Further examination of the *because of you* texts led the students to realize that some were positive, and others were negative or sarcastic, resulting in an additional two categories. Finding the third and fourth categories was more challenging, so I asked the students to look at the contexts of the gratitude samples and at who the speakers were. They then observed that the texts on news shows and talk shows were different than the texts where the speaker was communicating gratitude very formally. In the broadcast contexts the speaker was the show host or news anchor thanking guests or the broadcast audience for joining them.

To facilitate student understanding of the categories, I displayed on the projector screen the *thanks to you* samples from COCA. During the discussion as we identified the patterns of use of *thanks to you*, I highlighted in the projected document some of the texts in the four categories using different colors for the different categories. Once the students identified the four different categories and saw how to use highlighting to categorize them, it was easy for them to put the texts in the appropriate categories in the table. Chart 17.4, Categorizing in a Table *Thanks to You* Responses from COCA, is one student’s classification of the *thanks to you* data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th># examples</th>
<th>Representative examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal gratitude</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I want to express my <em>thanks to you</em> as a graduate of the Michigan of the East, Harvard University”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast gratitude</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“<em>Thanks to you</em> at home for tuning in. We appreciate it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive <em>because of you</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>We have very well documented reports, <em>thanks to you</em> in the news media, of perhaps a lot of mobilization…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcastic <em>because of you</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>you tricked me, you’re going to, this is, <em>thanks to you</em>, are hell, you murderer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The skill of classifying open-ended data developed through this activity was particularly valuable for the students when it came time for them to analyze survey and interview results. Additionally, one student commented on how it was easier to synthesize information from her secondary sources using the categorization skill she had learned.

Also, this classification exercise raised these students’ awareness of the very different meanings of thanks to you. The sarcastic use of thanks to you was new to all of these students. Similar to the Arabic speaker I observed in America (Lanteigne & Crompton, 2011), they had no idea that such a polite-sounding phrase could be extremely negative.

**Conclusion**

In light of the importance of pragmatic competence for language learners, it is definitely advantageous for teachers to know how to explore aspects of pragmatics that are pertinent for their students, how to develop instructional materials to present the targeted pragmatic function, and then develop assessment items to measure student learning. At the classroom level, teachers have the benefit of knowing the community their students live in and where/how they are likely to use English. Thus, teachers can be alert to potential areas of pragmatic miscommunication, and, acting as pragmatics researchers themselves, can use field observation and/or language corpus analysis to determine socially appropriate use of specific expressions. They then can teach and assess their students using the instructional materials they develop.

Involving the students themselves in pragmatic investigation (field observation or language corpus analysis, as appropriate for their language ability and educational level) allows them to be active learners, drawing on their first language cultural knowledge and raising their conscious awareness as they identify pragmatic functions in English. It also enables them to develop classification skills as they categorize recurring patterns of use of pragmatic expressions.
References


Appendix A: Patterns in Use of Thanks to You

**Group 1 News Broadcast** (Talk show host or news anchor speaking to guests)

Pattern 1: Host/anchor: “[name], thanks to you for ___”

Pattern 2: Host/anchor: “Thanks to you [people/name] for ___”

**Group 2 Formal Gratitude** [Someone wishing to express gratitude formally to another person to whom he/she is extremely grateful (including presenting a gift)]

Pattern 1: “I [want] to express/extend] my thanks to you”

Pattern 2: “I [want] to [present a gift] – my thanks to you”

**Group 3 Positive Because of You** (Two people where one person has done something that has positively affected the second person)

Pattern 1: [statement about something positive], thanks to you.

Pattern 2: Thanks to you, [statement about something positive].

**Group 4 Negative Because of You** (Two people in negative interaction):

Pattern 1 (Speaker 2 has done something negative - or did nothing - that has affected Speaker 1, even though the circumstances eventually worked out to Speaker 1’s benefit):

S1 [statement about something positive that happened].
S2 “No thanks to you.”

S1 [statement about something positive].
S2 “Small thanks to you.”

Pattern 2 (Speaker 2 has done something negative that has affected Speaker 1):

S1 “Thanks to you, [statement about something negative that happened].”
S2 [acknowledgment]
Appendix B: Examples of Thanks to You from the Corpus of Contemporary American English

1. “We appreciate you being here, David Sirota. Terry Holt, thanks to you, too.” (SPOKEN: Fox)
2. …candidate approached the microphone stand. “I want to express my thanks to you as a graduate of the Michigan of the East, Harvard University” (SPOKEN: NPR)
3. “All right, Nicolle, thanks to you. Jeff Greenfield, where does this leave us?” (SPOKEN: CBS)
4. “I also wanted to present you with a gift – my heartfelt thanks to you for being the wonderful parents you have always been.” (FICTION: Here Stand a Man)
5. “…it was you. How’s your dad doing?” “Fine, thanks to you.” (FICTION: Place Belong)
6. “We have very well documented reports, thanks to you in the news media, of perhaps a lot of mobilization…” (SPOKEN: NBC_Today)
7. “By then, thanks to you, I shall be a handsome prince-her handsome prince…” (FICTION: Sci Fi)
8. “Thanks to you at home for tuning in. We appreciate it.” (SPOKEN: MSNBC)
9. “That’s all right, thanks to you. My wife told me last night. Oh, honey…” (SPOKEN: Geraldo)
10. “…are you all right?” Regan asked. “Yeah, sure, thanks to you, Regan,” he said fervently. (FICTION: Snagged)
11. “I’m over it. This is a guy who was elected, thanks to you, with great promise and great opportunities, and hasn’t he squandered…” (SPOKEN: CNN_Event)
12. “We want to thank all our guests tonight for their insights. Thanks to you at home for tracking these cases…” (SPOKEN: CNN)
13. “…understand your bill has cleared the conference committee.” “That’s right, but, thanks to you, I have to wait for another vote.” (SPOKEN: ABC_Special)
14. “Well, I just want to extend my thanks to you for doing this on short notice. Everybody at InGen appreciates it” (FICTION: Jurassic Park)
15. “Thankstoyou and your friends, I, as a parent, would be locked out of that decision…and would be largely helpless, Ann.” (SPOKEN: CNN_King)
16. “…you tricked me, you’re going to, this is, thanks to you, are hell, you murderer, you you incapable of making bloody…” (FICTION: Movie: Munich)
17. “…professor of law at Georgetown Law School. Thanks to you both very much for coming in.” (SPOKEN: NPR)
18. “…Murray, and he hasn’t taken an hour off during the campaign, thanks to you.” “You could’ve at least gotten him a suit.” (FICTION: Movie: Nixon)
19. “The dressing on your knee, is it comfortable?” “No thanks to you. I said you had bound it too tight.” (FICTION: Knights Captive)
20. “…since the divorce.” “Stability never was your strong suit.” “Thanks to you.” “Touché.” (FICTION: Sci Fi)
PART 4

BEST PRACTICE IN THE SKILL AREAS
Chapter 18

Activities for Recycling Vocabulary
Melanie Gobert, Abu Dhabi Men’s College, UAE

Introduction

Words are the building blocks of language learning. When infants connect their first vocabulary word to a concrete object, it is the “Eureka!” moment of language acquisition. Yet, vocabulary seems to have lost its preeminence in the communicative language teaching classroom. Vocabulary learning became “incidental,” a byproduct of comprehensible input, and would “take care of itself” (Read, 2004) and according to Akbari (2012) is usually considered “an impediment that should be overcome quickly so that students can focus on the main teaching point of the lesson, which is usually grammar” (p.10). Teachers, adopting the model in ESL course books, teach vocabulary as a pre-reading task with perhaps a crossword puzzle or vocabulary gap fill for reinforcement at the end of a reading activity. Unfortunately with this methodology, Al-Masrai and Milton’s (2012) research indicates that Saudi students’ vocabulary only increases from 2000-3000 words upon entry to university to 5000 words nearer graduation. However, research shows that vocabulary must be repeated, or recycled, at least 7 times before it is remembered (Nation, 2001). Vocabulary studies reviewed by Nation (1990 as cited in Sökmen, 1997) provided a range of 5-16 encounters with a word before it is acquired. Yet, most course books repeat less than half of the words in the book more than 2-3 times (Sökmen, 1997). Additionally, modern research in the cognitive domain indicates that new information (i.e. vocabulary in a second language) must be revisited, with longer time lags in between in order for it to move from short-term memory to long-term storage (Sökmen, 1997; Nation, 2001, 2008). For example, it is better to study new words when first introduced for 30-40 minutes, followed by 10-12 minutes the next day, then 10-12 minutes three days later, and so on, subsequently revisiting the words one week later, then two weeks later, and so forth, for a few minutes each time. Vocabulary recycling activities not only aid students in acquiring vocabulary which improves their scores on reading proficiency tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Preliminary English Test (PET) (Cobb, 2007), but the activities may also increase the amount of students’ productive vocabulary which can lead to higher scores on standardized speaking and writing tests. The activities described in this chapter illustrate effective vocabulary instruction, which includes building a word-rich learning environment to develop word consciousness, helping students develop as independent learners, and modeling good word-learning behaviors (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2010). In addition, the activities appeal to different learning styles including kinesthetic (or tactile, “haptic”), visual, and aural (Kinsella, 1995). All of the software and websites used to make these activities are free of charge. Some activities are paper-based and some are computer-based. These activities can also be used to teach collocations and word building using prefixes and suffixes. The vocabulary recycling activities described in this chapter are Word Cards, Concentration, Vocabulary Notebooks, Bingo, Sentence Bingo, Crosswords, Jigsaw Crosswords, Word Grids, Word Searches, Scrambled Letters, Timed Talking Charades, Blockbusters, and Connect Four. The first activity, Word Cards, takes from 30-40 minutes the first time it is introduced and the subsequent activities take 12-15 minutes of class time and can be used as warmers, bridges between classroom tasks such as reading and listening, and end-of-class activities. These activities can be used with all ages and all levels.

Vocabulary Selection

Once a teacher has decided to actively include vocabulary in the classroom as an integral part of a course, the question of what vocabulary to include arises. In recent years, many have turned to the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000), or the Oxford 3000 Wordlist which is matched to the Common European Framework (CEFR) levels A2 (breakthrough or beginner) to C2 (mastery or proficiency). However, the
problem with learning vocabulary from these lists is that teachers often end up teaching vocabulary in isolation, perhaps in a sentence context, but not vocabulary in an input-focused meaningful context as it naturally appears in a course book or reading activity. Some specific vocabulary learning course books have also been published that produce units of pre-selected words, that are supposedly related in some thematic way, but which often seem arbitrarily chosen by the author(s). The words are usually practiced in gap-fill sentence contexts. Vocabulary is introduced, but not recycled (each unit contains new items), and very little long-term vocabulary retention takes place.

Just as the acquisition of vocabulary is unique to the individual, the teaching and learning of vocabulary is unique to each class. The best place to select the vocabulary that will be actively recycled by the teacher in the activities described in this chapter is from the current language classroom materials. What book is being used for reading? What book for writing? What course book is being used? What words come up in class? Which of these words are on the Oxford 3000 or the AWL? Teachers need to preselect from 10 to 15 words from these texts per vocabulary cycle. That averages out to learning two words per day in a normal classroom week. Nation and Waring (1997) estimated that native English speakers add approximately 1,000 words a year to their vocabulary size during maximum grown periods such as secondary school and university which is approximately 2.7 words per day. McCarthy et al. (2010) suggested that, according to his and O’Dell’s vocabulary series (McCarthy & O’Dell, 1999, 2001), learners be presented with no more than 15-18 words per one-hour unit of which perhaps 10-12 words will be retained (although he provides no research basis for his estimation). When planning vocabulary learning in the classroom, learners should not be overwhelmed with new words that have little chance of being retained. In my experience teaching and recycling vocabulary, 10 words per cycle is an appropriate number for elementary learners, 12 words per cycle for intermediate learners and 15 words per cycle for advanced learners. A vocabulary learning cycle lasts from 5 to 10 days.

Word Cards

The first activity, Word Cards, was developed by Hoelker (2004). It is used to introduce the vocabulary learning cycle once the 10-15 words have been selected. The Word Cards will also be used in several of the subsequent recycling activities. To make the Word Cards, English has a fortunate system of “synonymity.” For example, words such as scared, afraid, frightened, and terrified all have the same basic meaning. Any difference in the meaning of these words has to do with degree, collocation, and register. Before making the word cards, teachers can download the free dictionary/thesaurus software, WordWeb (www.wordweb.com), to assist in the development of the word cards or use equally accessible dictionary or online resources. The free version of WordWeb software provides short definitions, short example sentences, and a list of synonyms for a particular word. For example, the word toxic from a reading unit on animals and a reading text on the Australian cane toad (Richards & Eckstut-Didier, 2003) returns a list of synonyms including the words deadly, harmful, noxious, poisonous, and venomous. Poisonous was chosen for the matching word card as the closest synonym to toxic in the textual context. Synonym and short definition word cards also build on the learners’ prior knowledge which is fundamental in memory theory (Sökmen, 1997).
Here is a list of vocabulary words and the matching synonym or short definition chosen for a vocabulary learning cycle on a reading course book theme of “work” (Richards & Eckstut-Didier, 2003) as an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Word</th>
<th>Known Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>earnings</td>
<td>salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualifications</td>
<td>education and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperation</td>
<td>teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promotion</td>
<td>advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colleagues</td>
<td>co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefit</td>
<td>advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entry-level job</td>
<td>starting position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words in the first column are the new, target vocabulary words and the words in the second column are the synonyms or short definitions that build on previous knowledge. The word *benefit* had a different meaning in the context of the text from which it was taken rather than its usual work-related meaning of “salary and benefits.” Matching Word Cards can be most easily prepared using Microsoft PowerPoint© with font size 150 pts and printing handouts rather than slides (Hoelker, 2004) on 160 gm card paper as in Figure 18.1. The additional use of coloured 160 gram paper adds to the visual learning style element of the activity and the handy sized cards make the activity tactile. The sturdier 160 gram cards can also be reused again and again. If technology is not available, handwritten 3 x 5 index cards work just as well. Nation (2008) advocates the deliberate learning of vocabulary via word cards as the single most effective strategy found in research.

![Figure 18.1: Handout print view of Microsoft© PowerPoint](image-url)
Once the vocabulary cards have been prepared, the teacher distributes one set of cards to each group of 2-4 students. Students must match the synonyms or short definition to the word. Matching games are a fun way for students to learn (Kripps, 2013). It may be appropriate for them to write the translation in pencil on the card and they should be allowed to use a dictionary or Google translate. Dictionary use can also help learners understand, find, and remember words (Nation, 2008; Sökmen, 1997). While the students are using their dictionaries to find the meanings of words and matching the pairs of words, the teacher moves around the room checking. When each group has finished matching the cards into pairs, students write down the new word and the synonym or short definition, with the translation if desired, in their vocabulary notebooks.

**Vocabulary Notebooks**

Vocabulary notebooks enhance vocabulary learning more than any other single vocabulary learning activity and serve as a cognitive consolidation strategy by offering learners the opportunity to expand their vocabulary learning strategies (Walters & Bozkurt, 2009). McCarthy et al. (2010) advocate the use of vocabulary notebooks as motivating for learners, enhancing memory, and a useful place to store additional new information about words such as meanings, collocations, and colligation patterns. They can also be a private space where learners simply write down new words and their translation. The best way to promote the use of vocabulary notebooks is for the teacher to keep a “class” vocabulary notebook in front of the students for vocabulary that comes up in class and that the teacher includes in a future vocabulary learning cycle. A study by Walters and Bozkurt (2009) indicated that keeping vocabulary notebooks significantly increased the learning of target words in pre and post receptive and controlled productive vocabulary tests.

**Concentration/Memory/Pelmanism**

According to Hoelker (2004) an ideal follow up tactile activity is Concentration or Memory (also called Pelmanism), as some groups of students finish the matching word card activity faster than others. Concentration is a card game in which the cards are turned over face down, and learners take turns turning over two cards at a time to find a pair as in Figure 18.2.

```
salary

________ ________ ________

________ ________ ________

earnings

________ ________ ________
```

*Figure 18.2: Layout for Concentration/Memory activity*
If a player finds a match, s/he retains possession of the cards and has another turn. If the player does not find a match after turning two cards face up, it is the next players turn, and so on, until all of the cards are in the possession of the players. The player with the most cards at the end of the game is the winner.

**Bingo**

Once students have written down the target vocabulary words in their notebooks after matching the Word Cards, and have played Concentration (Memory) in pairs or small groups, the whole class is brought back together to play Word Bingo. It is easy for teachers to develop different bingo cards for a large number of students using the website [www.eslactivities.com](http://www.eslactivities.com) (Eastment, 2006) designed and maintained by Justin Shewell. On the website, teachers build a list of words that contain the text to be written on the card with the “clue,” (synonym or short definition) as in Figure 18.3.

| salary | requirements
|--------|----------------|
| starting | not strict
| position | advancement
| co-worker | teamwork
| and | experience

**Figure 18.3: Example of a bingo card**

After printing, the teacher distributes the bingo cards and markers (dried beans work well and the cards can be re-used many times) in class. This activity is especially good for aural learners. In addition, bingo helps students learn how to pronounce new words.

Once the cards and beans have been distributed, the teacher divides the vocabulary word cards into new target words and synonyms/short definitions. Using the new target words, the teacher calls out each word and the students put a marker on their card if they have the synonym of that word. For example, the teacher says “promotion” and the students place a dry bean on the square “advancement,” on their bingo card (see Figure 18.3). At this stage, it is permissible for students to look at their vocabulary notebooks to retrieve the word and its synonym.

The first time the game is played, the first student who gets three words in a row going down, for example, is the winner. The teacher then hands the new target vocabulary word cards to the “winner” who reshuffles the cards and becomes the bingo “caller.” This time three words in a row going across wins. The next “winner” gets to call the words in the next round. The teacher needs to stand near the bingo word “caller,” (the winning student) the first few rounds of bingo to help the student caller pronounce the new target vocabulary words correctly.

After the first two rounds, games of three-in-a-row diagonal, two diagonal rows to form an “x,” the middle rows vertically and horizontally to form a +-shape, an L-shape, and the whole card can be played. In this manner, playing bingo usually takes 10-25 minutes and the words are repeated and retrieved several times. Bingo is best done after the introduction of the new target words once they have been recorded in the students’ vocabulary notebooks, or at the end of class. Students with aural learning styles specifically ask for bingo to help them remember new vocabulary words.

Another variation of bingo is Sentence Bingo introduced by Hoelker (2004). In this variation, a sentence is used rather than the matching synonym/short definition on the bingo card, for example, “Did you get a ________, or advancement, at your last job?” However, Sentence Bingo increases the cognitive load of the activity because the student must listen to a sentence rather than a word while looking in their vocabulary
notebooks for the matching synonym. Sentence Bingo is appropriate for more advanced learners. Students may look at their vocabulary notebooks in the initial stages of this activity to help them remember the words, but are forbidden to write the word in the space of the synonym on the bingo card. Bingo has the added advantage of being both a tactile and aural learning activity.

**Crossword Puzzle**

The next vocabulary recycling activity is a crossword puzzle. Crossword puzzles have been part of the foreign language teacher’s repertoire since the 1920s, according to Broome (1925) who wrote that crossword puzzles develop accuracy and tenacity. Downloadable free software, such as Hot Potatoes from the University of Victoria and EclipseCrossword and internet sites such as eslactivities.com (Eastment, 2006) and Discovery School’s Puzzle Maker, for making paper-based or online crossword puzzles are freely available. For example, EclipseCrossword offers a free downloadable version that is very easy to use to make paper-based crossword puzzles for classroom use. In making the crossword puzzle, teachers can use the vocabulary synonyms/short definitions from the word cards, but they can also use sentence gap-fills or clues to create awareness of collocations and idioms as well as make the activity more challenging. Students can be given 10-12 minutes at the beginning of the next class or as a bridge between one skill activity and another in the classroom on a subsequent day to review the target vocabulary. Figure 18.4 is an example of a crossword puzzle made using EclipseCrossword.

![Crossword puzzle made with EclipseCrossword](image)

**Figure 18.4: Crossword puzzle made with EclipseCrossword**

**Jigsaw Crossword**

EclipseCrossword has the advantage of the user being able to print only the empty crossword puzzle grid, thus allowing the teacher to prepare almost instantly a jigsaw puzzle activity. In a jigsaw crossword puzzle, or communicative crossword puzzle, invented by Woodeson in 1982 (cited in Nation, 2008), learners exchange oral clues to complete their crosswords in a pair work activity as in Figure 18.5. To complete a jigsaw crossword, students take it in turns asking each other for the missing words in “1-down” or “2-across.” With their vocabulary notebooks open, students can give the synonym rather than the missing word, and their partner supplies the word by looking in their vocabulary notebooks. When their partner guesses the correct word, for example, Student B answers “cooperation” for 1-across after Student A supplies the clue “teamwork.” Student A can spell the word “c-o-o-p-e-r-a-t-i-o-n.” Thus, students can practice spelling and saying the letters that will help them with the listening sections of standardized English tests such as IELTS which often require students to spell proper nouns upon hearing the letters spoken aloud. Students are not allowed to say the missing word or show each other their papers during the jigsaw crossword puzzle activity.
Another activity similar to the jigsaw crossword is the Word Grid activity (Gill & Shaw, 2001). Rather than using a jigsaw puzzle with different missing words for Student A and Student B, this activity uses a grid to orally practice new vocabulary. Each student has different words missing from the grid, and they can ask each other questions such as “What do you have in 2B?” to complete their grid. Students should be encouraged to look at the new target vocabulary list in their vocabulary notebooks and say the synonym or give clues for the word rather than just saying the word on their grid. Their partner can then supply the word and ask how to spell it. This makes the Word Grid activity an aural learning activity as well as a visual learning activity. Figure 18.6 is an example of the worksheets for the Word Grid activity. Communicative activities such as Word Grid and Jigsaw Crossword have been shown to increase students’ retention of vocabulary due most probably to the negotiation time involved in the activity (Nation & Newton, 1997).

**Figure 18.6: Word Grid activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student A</th>
<th>Student B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 demands</td>
<td>salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 qualifications</td>
<td>2 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 teamwork</td>
<td>promotion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Grid**

Figure 18.5: Jigsaw Crossword
Word Search

Another activity for recycling vocabulary is a Word Search puzzle with synonyms or clues given to find the word in the letter grid rather than the actual missing word. A free easy to use software for making a Word Search puzzle is Word Search Factory Lite© from Schoolhouse Technologies (Eastment, 2006). What makes Word Search Factory Lite different from other word search puzzle software is that the maker can select to show “clues,” synonyms/short definitions, for the hidden words, rather than the words themselves. In the free lite version, the words can only be found vertically or horizontally which is pedagogically sound for language learners who may be struggling with letter order in English words. Figure 18.7 shows an example of a Word Search puzzle with clues to the words found hidden in the puzzle at the bottom of the search grid.

A word search puzzle with the missing words written at the bottom is just a letter matching exercise and has little cognitive value, whereas in doing a word search puzzle with clues rather than words that are actually hidden in the puzzle, the learner must go through the cognitive process of matching the clues or synonyms to the vocabulary words which are hidden in the search grid.
co-worker  promotion

demands  advantage

not strict  present

work and experience  entry-level

teamwork  earnings

*Figure 18.7: Word Search puzzle with clues or synonyms rather than the hidden words*

**Scrambled Letters**

The next activity for recycling vocabulary in the vocabulary learning cycle is Scrambled Letters.

Discovery School’s Puzzle Maker at [http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com](http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com) offers a range of free puzzle worksheets for the classroom including Word Search, Criss-Cross, Letter Tiles, and Cryptograms, but my favourite is Double Puzzle. Double Puzzles contain a list of target vocabulary words with the letter order mixed up, or “scrambled.” The students must put the letters into the correct order to identify the vocabulary word. On completion of the list of vocabulary words, the students must find the letters that go in the corresponding numerical boxes at the bottom of the puzzle to decode a “secret” message, such as “Have a nice weekend!” input by the teacher as in *Figure 18.8*. Scrambled Letter activities are particularly good for learners from alphabetic backgrounds that are different from English because they require students to spell the words out in the correct letter order. In the vocabulary learning cycle, I usually ask students to try to complete the Scrambled Letter activity without looking at their vocabulary notebooks if they can, having already done the proceeding activities, Word Cards, Bingo, Crossword Puzzle, Word Grid, and Word Search, over a period of 3-4 days. By now, students will have recycled the target vocabulary words 4-5 times and the words should be moving to long-term storage.

*Figure 18.8: Scrambled Letters made with Double Puzzle at Discovery School.com*
Double Puzzles made by Discovery School’s Puzzle Maker are paper-based worksheets teachers can take in the classroom, but an alternative is to use esactivities.com to make an online version (select “Games” and “Word Scramble” that can be done in front of the entire class using an interactive whiteboard or individually on student computers. Puzzle Maker worksheets can be saved as Portable Network Graphic (png) files. Hot Potatoes software from the University of Victory can also be used to make scrambled letter activities. Double Puzzles also keep students after the bell as they race to find the secret message.

Timed Talking Charades

Timed Talking Charades is a game whereby students write down vocabulary words on a small piece of paper and fold it up. Then students select a word and act it out. The other students attempt to guess the word.

To play Timed Talking Charades, you need a timer, such as a sand hourglass of 30 or 60 seconds or an electronic timer. In this variation, the Word Cards from the first activity in the vocabulary learning cycle are used. Divide the students up into teams of 3-4 students. One student from each team goes through the word cards the word written on the card s/he is holding. The other students in the group must respond with the synonym or short definition of the word. The first few times students can look in their vocabulary notebooks, but by the third or fourth time, they should be able to do it without looking in their vocabulary notebooks. The student does not show the word on the card to the students, but places it face down on the table when the other students in the group have correctly called out the synonym. The student caller goes through all the Word Cards, both synonyms and target vocabulary words, and the students must respond with the matching word. The winning team is the group who goes through the most cards in the time limit of 60 seconds. Then, the Word Cards are passed to another student in the same group of 3-4 students and the game is repeated until each student has a chance to be the caller. At the end of a round, students tally up the total amount of cards that the group was able to get through in 60 seconds. The amount of time allowed can be reduced from 60 seconds to 45 seconds to 30 seconds to make the game more challenging.

Students love this game and will easily play it for 10-12 minutes. However, care should be taken that after 2-3 rounds the vocabulary notebooks are closed or put away. The teacher also needs to walk between the groups to make sure that no cheating, turning over Word Cards that have not been correctly called out, is going on. This activity particularly appeals to aural and tactile learners.

Blockbusters

Blockbusters is a television game show in which contestants choose letters to connect a line of blue or white hexagons going horizontally or vertically on a game board. The letter on the hexagon is the first letter of the answer. If teachers are not familiar with the game, video clips are available on YouTube. An electronic version of the game board for use with a computer and a digital projector is freely downloadable from http://getwordwall.com/VisualSimulations. To play this game, the teacher divides the class into a blue team (horizontal) and a white team (vertical). The teacher selects letters for the game board and shuffles them. Teams take it in turns saying which letter they would like to answer. The teacher gives them a clue (synonym or short definition) or a sentence with the target vocabulary word missing. The teams get to “color” their hexagon by answering the question correctly, that is, calling out the correct target vocabulary word. The winner is the team that connects hexagons all the way across horizontally or vertically (see Figure 18.9).
Examples of prepared questions are:

What “A” is another word for promotion? advancement
What “B” is another word for advantage? benefit
What “C” is another word for colleagues? co-workers

Another strategy game from Word Wall (previously Visual Simulations) is Connect Four. In this game, the object is to get four discs of the same colour in a row. The teacher again divides the class into two teams, a red team and a yellow team. Teams take it in turns to answer questions about vocabulary items set by the teacher. If the question is answered correctly, the students get to choose where they would like the red or yellow disc to be dropped (see Figure 18.10).
Two other excellent web apps for teaching and learning vocabulary are Quizlet and Spelling City.

**Conclusion**

Learning vocabulary in another language need not be another tedious gap-filling exercise in language learning. The above activities, Word Cards, Concentration, Vocabulary Notebooks, Bingo, Sentence Bingo, Crosswords, Jigsaw Crosswords, Word Grids, Word Searches, Scrambled Letters, Timed Talking Charades, Blockbusters, and Connect Four, motivate students, are fun, and, therefore, memorable (Sökmen, 1997), and model lifelong independent vocabulary learning habits. A total of fourteen different activities means that teachers will be able to pick and choose different activities during a vocabulary learning cycle to maintain high levels of interest while recycling the target vocabulary words. Teachers can focus their classrooms on vocabulary learning if they incorporate a regular cycle of planned vocabulary activities. These activities also have the advantage of appealing to different learning styles, visual, aural, and tactile. They are also easy and quick for teachers to prepare using free downloadable software.
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Chapter 19

Best Practices: Intensive Reading

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Introduction

Outsiders may see intensive reading as a singular skill or an academic requirement. Instead, this will look at the set of practices involved while examining a text. As the previous statement suggests, there is no one single strategy to deploy; rather, there are many, each of which to be used in accordance with a reader's purpose. Further, these multiple strategies will usually be employed in various combinations. This chapter will look at intensive reading. It will examine the skills that students need to be efficient readers, and then it will try and spotlight some best practices, ones not just for readers or ELLs in general but ones that are useful for students in this region.

Indicators show there is a definite need for review of these best practices. Simply put, reading scores on formal assessments in the U.A.E. are falling. In a presentation last June at Zayed University, Gobert (2014) stated that the average IELTS score on the reading part of the academic exam fell from 5.10 in 2006 to 4.6 in 2012. At a time when support for foundation English program seems to be waning, these numbers are cause for concern. The data indicate students are not getting the reading support they need despite the best efforts of local, pre-tertiary, programs. Most students - 9 in 10 - arrive at university unable to deal with the kind of texts one sees in a typical academic course. This leaves instructors in foundation programs to teach strategies to enhance overall reading skills. The task also falls on content instructors, who often have minimal training in teaching these skills to non-native speakers. These teachers must now try and tackle this skill deficiency in the classroom.

Intensive Reading Texts

What, then, is considered an "intensive text"? Waring (2009) provides a loose definition by stating some of its qualities. Intensive texts may have a language focus. They may be shorter and more difficult than other texts due to the grammar, cohesive devices, and level of vocabulary within the text. The texts may also focus on language. They are usually chosen by an instructor, who will then support or guide the students during the reading process. Other times, a specific task will help direct the students to a particular part of the text. Seymour and Walsh (2006) say intensive reading is "essential for helping students acquire the skills and strategies they need" for their content classes.

EAP Texts and content-based texts

Many instructors see the reading texts in an EAP textbook as an effective way to develop reading skills. However, there are some important differences between EAP reading texts and those found in a content course. Miller (2011) found that:

- content-based texts gave more information in noun phrases and layers (embedded clauses like it is clear that... or hedges such as it might be the case that...)  
- the vocabulary from the Academic Word appeared more frequently in texts focused on content 
- EAP textbooks tended to use more narratives, news articles, and biographies

One clear recommendation, then, is to push for more texts that contain these more "academic" structures. However, students may struggle to deal with all the features of a more authentic, academic text. Challenging texts prepare students for what they will see at higher levels. Yet these texts need not be long.
It may be best to use short texts or excerpts at foundation level. A longer text can be divided into manageable chunks of language. If more authentic texts are taught and not tested, students may be gradually exposed to the features of academic texts in a low-stakes situation with a teacher as a guide.

**Student attitudes toward reading**

A recent survey by Gobert (2014) revealed that most students own fewer than 25 books, while 41% admitted not reading at all. Thus, students may not see the value in intensive reading - or reading of any kind. Certainly many students have never done the kind of reading that is expected of them in a university course.

It may help both students and instructors to raise awareness of the importance of reading. A few basic questions that could get students to talk about their experiences are in Appendix A. In addition, then cite examples from both other ELLs and native speakers on the amount of reading they had to do in university courses.

**Reflection, need and interest**

Much has been made of *gamification* in the classroom - an idea loosely defined as reducing the rigors of learning through the fun of play. However, whether on an iPad screen or a gameboard, two major aspects of “gamifying” an activity are choice and interest. These aspects can be brought into reading as well. One technique is to assemble a group of readings that serve your purpose, then let students choose from amongst them. You may also let the students find their own readings. Of course, you will have to monitor to be sure the readings are appropriate for the theme and level, but this is one way to get students more involved in both reading and the course.

To both motivate students and direct your class, it is a good idea to have some knowledge of your students’ backgrounds. A short form handed out early in the course can let you know of your students' educational goals as well as the topics that interest them. You also could have students make lists of topics that relate to the themes in each part of the course. In the past, some teachers have printed these thematic lists and had students check or circle interesting topics. This kind of feedback can inform you later as you select materials for intensive reading in the classroom.

In addition, you might want to get an idea of what strategies that students use - or don't use - while reading. An inventory of these thought processes can help you as you plan your lesson. One way is to simply ask your students what they do. There are a variety of surveys available that are related to reading. A yet-to-be published survey by Jones (2014) focuses on the usage of vocabulary strategies while reading. Other published surveys that could be used to discover what your students actually do as they read a text have been written by Oxford and Crookall (1989). Sheorey and Mokharti (2001) offer suggestions of three types of strategy - cognitive, metacognitive, and support. Their Survey of Reading Strategies, or SORS, can aid you in setting up your own survey.

A more practical approach comes from the use of reading journals that pose questions after the completion of an assignment. This can provide insight as to which parts of a reading assignment were achievable, and which ones caused difficulty. Reading journals can also, over time, raise student self-awareness. They can let the teacher know which strategies need to be highlighted, and students begin to realize which strategies they need to master.

**Setting a purpose**

Research shows that students need to know they are reading for a reason (de Chazal, 2014). Nuttall (2005) says “the first requirement for efficient reading is to know what you want.” With a purpose students are able to focus more effectively on linguistic features and find meaning within a text as a whole. Here, intensive reading differs from extensive reading. While extensive readers are reading more for pleasure and interest,
intensive readers read to gain knowledge and enhance skills. Many students hardly realize the kind of effort required to handle the smallest block of text. Awareness is important so that students can work on reading strategies in a controlled situation, discuss them, and understand them enough to use them again. Setting a task for readers will provide a purpose; teaching strategies will enable students to achieve it.

The purpose also has to be tied to a real-life situation. As much as possible, "it is important not to work on a skill unless you can demonstrate that problems occur" (Nuttall, 2005). Students need to see the problems in front of them within a text they have to tackle. This leads to timely guidance - and students will get a chance to use reading strategies that overcome a difficulty that is in front of them within the text.

It is often a good idea to have students 'think aloud' as they prepare for a particular reading task. First of all, it raises awareness. In addition, these kinds of small activities make the unconscious conscious. For example, in a pre-reading activity, the purpose can be to discover the main themes of a text. Students may be instructed to read the headings, look at the pictures, and examine their captions, and so on. This kind of quick strategy instruction will often help students who are weaker readers. They will gradually begin to associate this setting of purpose with the strategies they will need to meet that purpose.

The Canvas and the brushstrokes: Top-Down or Bottom-Up?

The answer to this question, of course, is both. "Canvas" is a metaphor for "top-down." A reader connects any background knowledge they have to the information within a text. This is schema theory, which Carrell (1983) separates in two main aspects - the students' background knowledge of the world (content schemata) and what the student knows about the form of the text (formal schemata). Students will also bring previous knowledge of the content and their cultural background to the text (Pritchard, 1990). The brushstrokes represent "bottom-up" processing. It is atomic, as a reader perceives and decodes the individual letters and words to understand a text. Just as the two approaches work in tandem to enable comprehension, the canvas and the brushstrokes form a painting - only the painting of a text comes to life in the reader's mind.

For ELLs whose native tongue is Arabic, there is an added consideration. Swan (2008) stated that reading strategies may transfer from L1 to L2 without any specific guidance or instruction. This, however, is not necessarily true. There is strong indication that such automaticity depends on four factors. Oxford (2011) noted that transfer of strategies occurs when:

(a) learners' L1 literacy is high
(b) their metalinguistic awareness - ability to notice and understand linguistic details and make connections across languages - is strong
(c) background knowledge is high
(d) the L1 and the L2 are in the same or a very close language family.

For our students - who often do not meet one or more of these conditions - more direct guidance is needed in order to aid in comprehensive while intensive reading. Setting a purpose for each activity and walking students through a text via thinkaloud activities are two ways to make the act of reading easier to understand.

Best practices: Pre-reading

One aspect of reading that sets a good reader apart is the ability to predict. This involves looking at the text to find its linear features (title, headings, topic sentences, etc.) and its non-linear ones (pictures, charts, arrangement on a page). This kind of skimming helps a student understand the information on the page. Goodman's (1967) reading process is a cycle of recognize - predict - confirm / correct that happens at all levels of a piece of reading. In the initial stages, students can skim to form either a hypothesis or ideas about the text as a whole.

Equally important is connecting to the information within the text in a personal way. Thus, the ability of a student to activate his or her own knowledge and then link it to the text (Hudson, 2007) enables them to fit
the world in the text into their own. A best practice, then, can take only a few moments - have your students activate their knowledge of the topic of the text in front of them.

A higher-level pre-reading skill connects one text to others like it is based on genre. This is not easy for our students due to their inexperience with reading. In part, Bean (2011) says the students "get either lost or bored partly from their unfamiliarity with the text's genre and the function of that genre". The boredom may be terminal in some cases, but the unfamiliarity is something that we as instructors can overcome. It is good to point out the features of the genre of the text. This includes noting structural elements as well as elements that show formality and audience. Over time, the students will start to notice texts in a different way - one that enables them to compare texts to each other.

Best practices: While-reading

De Chazal (2014) states a reader should "match your reading technique to your purpose." This interior process is fairly easy to conceptualize. When we read for gist, we read one way. When we read for specific information, we use different strategies. Still other strategies are used as we examine the argument within a text. Experienced readers can do this; yet, with guidance, inexperienced readers, too, can raise their skill and awareness to that of an experienced reader.

Perhaps the most practiced strategies are skimming and scanning. Skimming is the act of reading quickly to determine gist, while scanning is reading to locate specific information within the text. These strategies do not substitute for careful, detailed reading (Nuttall, 2005). Rather they enable the reader to quickly find a general idea or ideas related to a specific part of the text.

Students who can skim and scan can get a gloss of a part of a text or a whole one. Yet our students will often rely on these strategies in situations when other ones would be more useful. For sure, Arabic-speaking students in a university-level course will need to re-read content until an idea is understood. "Research has indicated that less skilled readers frequently read in a linear fashion without rereading problematic sections of the text" (Garner & Reis, 1981). In the section on texts, I mentioned how authentic texts, though challenging, can help students improve their skills. However, it is equally important to encourage students to re-read those challenging passages. Reading academic texts is often more recursive than linear. Texts need to be understood. Ideas need to be followed. I think of my own university classes when re-reading (more than I'd like to admit) enabled me to understand a line of thinking in Aristotle's *Poetics* or the writings of Paolo Friere. Reading research has also shown that getting the students to re-read is a vital component of intensive reading. One recommendation, then, is to give students difficult but short authentic passages. This can be to answer a question or a few questions posed by the instructor. As stated before the passage need not be long, nor tested. The hope is that students learn the value of re-reading, and as they come upon an answer they will also have gained a skill.

Making notes is another skill our students need as they read intensively. If the goal is to help students read efficiently and locate ideas, then notetaking is a natural skill to teach. However, many of our students do not take notes, preferring to rely on memory alone. Students at the university level will need to take notes on the text and the questions posed within it. There are several components to academic notetaking, but teaching the basic can be done without taking too much time or focus away from the content of a course. It is recommended that students learn general symbols and abbreviations; this can be done via short activities from an EAP textbook. Moreover, students will need a system that will enable them to arrange this information in an efficient way.

Some students will resist, saying "but the instructor will give us slides". This doesn't change the need for notetaking. Each slide represents pieces of information as the instructor would arrange it. This alone, however, will probably not be enough for a student. The slides still need to be encountered, grappled with, and annotated. It is this kind of engagement that enables students to learn. Students, then, will need some kind of overarching system of notetaking that will enable them to dialogue with the text, capture the main
points, and summarize these ideas. In Appendix B I list a few systems (ones my colleagues at the university level also use) that can enable students to take notes for efficiency and recall.

Another reading strategy to aid comprehension is to teach your students to self-generate questions while reading. As Nuttall (2005) puts it, "ask yourself questions you want the text to answer . . . this is intended to make you think about your purpose--what you want to get out of the text. It also involves prediction: what help do you expect the text to supply?" Using the text to generate questions is active. It moves the reader beyond rote learning and into an arena where a student has to tangle with the text. As an instructor, it is essential to demonstrate, for along with teaching a strategy you are showing how reading is an active process. The questions show students how they can make meaning of the text, to connect with its ideas and ask for more.

Any close reading of a text will also have students summarizing the main ideas of a paragraph or section. The Cornell System in Appendix B features this kind of summarization as a key element in its system. Summarizing sections of text makes the reader put the ideas into words they can understand. In itself, summarizing ideas aids general understanding. These section-by-section summaries should be a key part of reading. Short summary sentences can be written in the margin, typed to E-Post-Its within an electronic file, or scribbled on a separate piece of notepaper. A reader who can identify the main ideas of a text will be ready for any number of output tasks. Moreover, the info within the text has much more of a chance to stay with the reader, in the short term and for later use.

In the end, we need to show our students how to grapple with a text. As an instructor, I feel like I need to invent ways to take my students further than skimming and scanning. Students must re-read, annotate the text, ask questions of it, and come up with their own questions. Moreover, it's best to show these strategies in context. That way, they will see the value of doing so.

These strategies all lead toward comprehension. Comprehension involves identifying main ideas and separating main ideas from supporting details. Close reading and thorough note taking will help students identify important ideas and see how they relate to each other. One recommendation would be to give both modified and more authentic paragraphs to students in order to examine how the ideas flow together. Along with this, the students will need to see how paragraphs are structured (the most common paragraph structures are ones that lead with a question to be explored, or ones where the topic sentence is at the beginning or the end). Thus, it is good to show these structures in a controlled setting so that they can be studied. Later, students can recognize these paragraph styles more efficiently. To help students, it is recommended to give some time to studying referents (such as it, those, and one) and transition words that point to how ideas are organized (first, last of all) or related (however, although). It is worth pointing out that corpus research has shown the usage of these linking words "has been steadily declining over the last two centuries" (de Chazal, 2014). Still, in academic reading, knowing these cohesive devices enables students to figure out how ideas relate to one another.

There is one thing to note that gives Arabic-speaking learners special problems: lexical substitution. Al Jarf (2001) found that "in terms of cohesion, advanced Arabic-speaking English learners had most difficulty with (lexical) substitution", in sections of text like this one:

*John saw a snake in the playroom last night. The serpent slithered across the hardwood then went through a crack in the floor.*

Al Jarf's survey indicated that native speakers of Arabic tend to have more difficulty identifying that the snake and the serpent are in fact the same thing. Thus, it's recommended that extra attention be given in this area.
Last of all, emerging readers of academic prose have another area of concern. What does a reader do when he or she encounters an unknown word? At the academic level, just skipping the word won't do - students need to be taught word attack skills. Initially, this involves the use of a paper or electronic dictionary.

Often, readers encounter a particular word and, for whatever reason, may not want to figure out the word without a dictionary. At times, this involves knowing what unknown words to skip over - an ability that will come as the skills of the reader increase.  It is both important and recommended that the instructor provide a range of situations that work on word attack skills. Teaching affixes in context will help students sort out a word's part of speech as well as its meaning. Teaching sentence structure will enable students to figure out the function of a word in a sentence.

Last of all, students will need to understand inference. This includes inference on the main ideas of the text or inference about a particular word based on the words around it. Academic readers infer more than just basic meaning; they also infer based on the attitude of the writer, the acceptability of the idea to the reader, and other factors. At minimum, words or phrases that show a writer's attitude toward the topic are good to point out. It is the beginning of separating the message in the text from a writer's attitude toward it.

**Best practices: After reading**

"Technically, no one can score like Messi."
"Actually, no one can score like Messi."

These two sentences were overheard in a conversation during the recent World Cup. Both give examples of stance. The first speaker asserts a contrast with reality with the word technically. The second speaker, correcting the first, is asserting a definite reality with the word actually. Both show examples of attitude toward the topic, which Hinkel (2004) and others call hedging. Corpus research on academic texts shows this kind of attitudinal language to be a frequent component in both academic reading and writing. Thus, the words that indicate a writer's stance should be pointed out and noted. A list of words or phrases that show attitude can be found in many places, notably Quirk and Greenbaum (1985: 242-246). Not only should readers learn these words and phrases and mark these words while reading, they should scan for them as they re-read a text. These hedges can give a reader an overall idea of how the writer of the text regards the topics involved. A good reader of academic text can separate information from opinion, the message from its slant. It is recommended at higher levels that short, authentic passages be used to show the author's stance. Later, they will become familiar with the language of stance in longer pieces of writing.

Along with this, intensive readers have other considerations - namely, purpose and audience. After finishing a text and noting its ideas, a reader might want to confirm some of those original, pre-reading predictions. An instructor will need to guide students through this process. Some questions to ask readers upon finishing a text might be:

*Is this writing narrative? Expository? Does it take a position?*
*Who is this piece written for? What parts of the text make you think this?*

The first questions deal with purpose; the second with audience. In both cases the reader has to go back to the text to figure out, or discover, why a writer sat down to write and to whom the words are addressed. A few minutes of re-reading can clarify these things. Getting students to re-read a text encourages further exploration. Often they will pick up aspects of the text they may have missed or glossed over during the first reading. It also will help them to develop not just a reader's mind but a writer's as well. By realizing the intentions and audience of another writer, this increased awareness will help the students as they write their own pieces.
Finally, students who are being trained for academic reading at the tertiary level have a daunting task. The Internet has democratized the flow of information. Anyone with the intention to make a piece of writing available can do so. Increasingly, the problem becomes a question: *is this information reliable?* Students who can identify purpose and audience will also need to know whether the information is reliable. This has become a particular problem at many universities in the U.A.E. The need to evaluate text has never been so urgent.

There are many ways to evaluate the reliability of a text. In particular, a majority of research in our classes is done online. The question isn't just one of finding sources - it is also one of whether those sources are valid. Perhaps one of the most memorable systems that you can teach your students is the C.R.A.P. test. These series of questions (given in Appendix C), or an abbreviated version of them, can help students figure out whether an online source is a reliable one. The challenge of moving students from cut-and-paste and Wikipedia into more in-depth research can be-- as anyone who has tried knows -- a rather difficult task. As students progress into their major, however, this becomes more and more important. At the foundation level, students will need to be guided through the process of testing the reliability of a website. Even if doing so is simply planting a seed, that seed will blossom later.

Re-reading for stance, purpose, audience - along with examining a source for reliability -- are all upper-level skills that will help clarify the message in a text. Part of intensive reading is figuring out the message as you read. Simultaneously, you are figuring out the value of that message. University level students can do both.
References


APPENDIX A

Seymour and Walsh (2006) have a list of simple questions that are designed to elicit student attitudes toward reading. These can be discussed aloud or students may give written answers. They are:

- How many of you think reading is important?
- Why is reading important?
- What kind of things do you read?
- What kind of reading do you need to do for school? For work?
- How much time do you spend reading something in English every day?
- Is fifteen minutes a day a long time to spend reading?
- How many minutes a day do you think you might need to spend on reading this semester?
APPENDIX B

A few websites for notetaking systems:

The Cornell Method: http://tipsinterviews.blogspot.ae/2013/12/cornell-note-taking-system.html
Two-column notes: http://www.slideshare.net/Pye5/two-column-notes-made-easy
APPENDIX C

This is one version of the C.R.A.P. test mentioned in the chapter. Here are a series of questions to help students evaluate a website as a source:

Ask yourself the following questions about each website you're considering:

CURRENCY

- How recent is the information?
- Can you locate a date when the page(s) were written/created/updated?
- Does the website appear to update automatically (this could mean no one is actually looking at it)?
- Based in your topic, is it current enough?

RELIABILITY

- What kind of information is included in the website?
- Based on your other research, is it accurate? ...complete?
- Is the content primarily fact, or opinion?
- Is the information balanced, or biased?
- Does the author provide references for quotations and data?
- If there are links, do they work?

AUTHORITY

- Can you determine who the author/creator is?
- Is there a way to contact them?
- What are their credentials (education, affiliation, experience, etc.)?
- Is there evidence they're experts on the subject?
- Who is the publisher or sponsor of the site?
- Is this publisher/sponsor reputable?

PURPOSE / POINT OF VIEW

- What's the intent of the website (to persuade, to sell you something, etc.)?
- What is the domain (.edu, .org, .com, etc.)? How might that influence the purpose/point of view?
- Are there ads on the website? How do they relate to the topic being covered (e.g., an ad for ammunition next to an article about firearms legislation)?
- Is the author presenting fact, or opinion?
- Who might benefit from a reader believing this website?
- Based on the writing style, who is the intended audience?
Exploring the Factors Affecting Bangladeshi Tertiary Level Students’ Attitudes towards L2 Writing

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Introduction

For investigating the advantages of collaborative writing on social networking websites we had set up Facebook as the platform with freshman students’ from Dhaka University (DU henceforth) English Department, Bangladesh. At the beginning of the project we had asked these students’ to brainstorm on the topic ‘L2 (Second language-English) writing’. Students responded with strong negative words like ‘suicide’, 'boring', 'waste of time' etc. This incident made us think about our students’ attitudes towards L2 writing. We realized it was essential for us as teachers to identify possible factors which might have a relationship with positive/negative attitude. It was more important, we felt, not only to identify the factors but try to understand the relationship between the factor and the attitude. That is, if for instance collaboration is leading to positive attitude, then why might the case be so? In this research therefore, we set to find out what probable factors may be affecting student attitudes towards L2 writing at Dhaka University and also why may these factors may be leading to positive/negative attitudes. The two part research question for this paper is

What factors may be affecting Dhaka University English department students’ positive and negative attitudes towards L2 writing? And why?

Literature Review

Most research dealing with attitude towards second language writing has been focused on developing attitude scales, the relationship between factors and writers’ attitude (e.g. whether feedback produces positive/negative attitude) and more recently causes of negative/positive attitude towards EFL writing. However, there have been no previous studies in Bangladesh to identify either student attitude towards L2 writing or the causes of negative/positive attitude towards L2 writing.

Attitude defined

Attitude is an affective factor discussed under the area of individual learner differences in Second Language Acquisition. In L2 writing literature the terms attitude, perception, personal theories (Johns 1997) have been used in similar ways. However, we feel like Petric (2002, p.11) that “attitudes are more affective” [related to feelings] and also “more subject to change ”than the other terms. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p.6) define attitude as ‘a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object’. This predisposition, we believe like Ajzen (1975) is ‘learned’, that is, it is formed as a result of various factors over a time rather than being an immediate response to a situation. Throughout literature another noticeable feature of this construct is that it has been conceptualized as being measurable along a continuum of positive and negative extremes (Kear, et al., 2000; Daly and Miller, 1975). In this research study, we use the term attitude in the sense of “an affective disposition involving how the act of writing makes the author feel, ranging from happy to unhappy” (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007, p.11).
L2 Writing at DU

In a research study on 160 freshman students (HEQEP, 2010) of the DU English department it was found that the highest number of students perceived (146) L2 writing to be the most difficult skill amongst all four skills. The interesting fact was both high achievers and low achievers perceived writing to be difficult. In a recent focus group discussion with second semester students under a British Council funded project named INSPIRE DEWS (2014) students also expressed feelings of being perplexed and confused regarding writing. However, there has been no study at Dhaka University to see what factors might be shaping students’ attitudes towards L2 writing and the reasons behind this influence.

Factors affecting attitudes towards writing

For the purpose of this study we decided on seven common factors used in research around writers’ affect to be investigated as the possible reasons influencing students’ positive/negative attitudes in L2 writing: Formal/informal/digital environment, evaluation, collaboration, perceived value, feedback, past experience and self-efficacy.

Formal/Informal/Digital Environment

The environment may or may not have an influence on writing attitude. Daly and Miller (1975, p.245) while developing their scale to measure writing apprehension included items on letter writing and writing environment (home/class) as they perceived the environment may be a source of writing apprehension (general tendency to avoid writing situation). Therefore, the environment itself may have an effect on student attitude towards writing. Knudson (1995) and Kear et al (2000) both while developing their writing attitude scales included items on writing at different places and different purposes (i.e., home and school, letter writing etc.). Recent studies have shown students’ attitude towards writing to improve in technology enhanced environments like blogs, wikis, Facebook etc. (Franco, 2008; Said et. Al, 2013; Hall & Davison, 2007; Chao & Hung, 2007; Shih, 2011; Godwin-Jones, 2007; Yunus et al, 2012). In these studies, the predominant reasons for the positive attitudes stemmed from the fact that this software had an interactive element enabling students to comment on each other’s work as well as to see what others were doing. Added to interactivity student positive attitude also was enhanced by the fact that students could further enhance and explain their thoughts in writing by including media: images, audio files, music, video files etc. The feature of using different fonts and colours was also identified as a feature generating positive attitude towards L2 writing. In the case of particularly ‘Facebook’ for instance, Shih (2011) reported that the use of the ‘like’ icon on Facebook moderately stimulated students’ motivation for writing in English, elevated comfort level while writing, ability to read other compositions and receive comments on their own compositions.

Evaluation

Evaluation may be one of the sources shaping attitudes towards L2 writing. It may contribute to positive attitude as ‘tests and exams function as proximal sub goals and markers of progress that provide immediate incentive, self-inducements, and feedback and that help mobilise and maintain effort.’(Banduraand Schunk 1981 in Dornyei 1994, p.78). On the contrary, Rankin-Brown (2006, p.4) holds the opinion that the source of high level of writing apprehension may be evaluation of writing whether the evaluation source is the student themselves, teachers or even peers. It may be said that evaluation may lead to negative or positive attitude to writing.

Collaboration-group cohesion

Storch (2005) in a study on 23 ESL students found collaboration to be related to predominantly positive attitude in L2 writing although few students were not very positive about it. Peretz (2003) also reports on student reluctance towards L2 collaborative writing. Storch (2005, p.155) is of the opinion that the research base concerning attitude towards collaborative writing is divided between both positive attitude (Mishra & Oliver, 1998) and student negative attitude (Kinsella, 1996). However, most research has been based on surveys rather than interviews which might have shed more light on student feelings.
**Perceived value**

This comes under the motivational factor termed ‘relevance’ by Dornyei (1994). He defines it as ‘the extent to which the student feels that the instruction is connected to important personal needs, values, or goals.’ (p. 277). This in L2 writing may translate into how students perceive the course to be contributing to their academic needs and in the long run how they see it contributing to their professional goals. Theoretically then, if the perceived value is higher it may lead to positive attitude towards writing. No specific research dealing with perceived value and attitude towards L2 writing was found.

**Feedback**

Research shows that students usually have a positive attitude towards teacher feedback (Leki, 1991; Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006). However, Latif (2007) in his study has shown that lack of feedback given by the teachers and overuse of criticism when commenting on English essays was a source of negative writing affect. Aydin (2008) in a study on 112 Turkish students found that the reason for the fear of negative evaluation in writing stemmed from mainly the apprehension of being negatively judged by others or leaving unfavourable impressions on others.

**Past experience**

Dornyei (1994, 276) discusses the attribution theory according to which ‘failure that is ascribed to low ability or to the difficulty of a task decreases the expectation of future success.’ This may lead to demotivation and hence negative attitudes. However, no specific research focusing on student past writing experience and student negative/positive attitude towards L2 writing was found.

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's judgment of his or her ability to perform a specific action concept proposed by Bandura (1977). Studies on L2 writing and self-efficacy have mainly found that high self-efficacy is related to positive attitude (whereas low self-efficacy relates to anxiety about writing. For instance, Latif (2007) found that students’ with high self-efficacy had positive writing affect, while those with low self-efficacy had a negative writing affect.

**General studies**

Latif (2007) in his study on Egyptian University students’ L2 writing apprehension reported quite similar factors shaping second language writers’ affect by comparing a group of students with positive writing attitude with a group with negative writing attitude. The factors Latif (2007) found influencing students’ affect were:

a) Past writing achievement (p. 68)-if past experience was negative it lead to negative feelings whereas past high achievements lead to positive feelings.

b) Satisfaction or dissatisfaction of writing instruction consequently lead to positive and negative feelings (p.71).

c) High and low self-efficacy lead to positive and negative feelings respectively (p. 70).

d) High or low fear of criticism by teachers (p.72) generated positive/negative feelings respectively.
In Alnufaie and Grenfell’s (2013) study on 121 Saudi students the reason for negative student attitude towards L2 writing was found to be the lack of ability to generate ideas, focus on accuracy and the pressure to fulfil teacher expectation. These factors are quite different from the one’s Latif (2007) had identified.

Therefore, we can see the relationship between L2 writing attitude and different triggers have been identified so far. But there is little study incorporating student views on why these triggers may be producing positive/negative attitudes, especially in Asian contexts and no studies in the context of Bangladesh.

**Methodology**

**Data gathering tool**

At the beginning, we were determined that the best way to find out about students’ ‘true views’ (Brown, 2001, p.5) was through semi structured interviews with the students. But, in Bangladeshi culture students feel inhibited expressing negative feelings about classes to teachers. In an interview then, we understood students would certainly not express any negative feelings to our face. An anonymous questionnaire we concluded would have a distancing effect and therefore, be more effective to gather data about attitudes than interviews. Among different kinds of questionnaires, an attitude scale seemed fit for the purpose of trying to find out students’ attitudes towards writing. However, we came across Gillham’s point that (2000, p. 32) one of the main weaknesses of a scaled response is, “whatever response they tick, you don’t know why” and although the scale produces descriptive data it does not “elucidate the basis for these judgements” (Gillham, 2000, p.56). Punch (2005, p.242) suggests that in these cases “A qualitative study can be used to help explain the factors underlying the relationships that are established.” As, we had the aim of ‘exploring the reasons for those relationships’ between factors and attitudes we decided to generate data with the same questionnaire by adding a ‘why’ with most questions. We felt this would overcome the limitations of the attitude scale to some extent.

Therefore, we constructed a Likert type questionnaire containing both ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions, to explore factors affecting students’ attitudes towards L2 writing for the purpose of this study (Appendix 1).

**Instrument development**

One particular important design decision was the use of an image based questionnaire. We felt that the use of pictures would put students at ease, relax them and lower student hesitation of expressing opinions.

We adapted the image-based writing attitude scale developed by Kear, et al. (2000). Their questionnaire used the cartoon character Garfield to represent four attitudes ranging from very unhappy to very happy. However, in place of the images of Garfield we had chosen characters from a Bangladeshi popular cartoon series ‘Meena’ to represent four points of the attitude scale to make the questionnaire more contextual and relevant.

Facial expressions in cartoons may be difficult to perceive correctly so, we focused on postures and added small texts to indicate feelings together with facial expressions. In place of Garfield with a ‘thumbs up’ for the very happy state, we used Meena in a dancing position which represented the concept of ‘very happy’ more accurately for our context. The Okay (Meena sitting with hand on face), not okay (Meena with hands on the hips) and very upset (Dipu absolutely wet or Dipu with a horrified posture) states were also cultural stereotyped postures of the emotions. The text ‘someone help me’ is a common phrase in Bengali expressing apprehension.

Reynolds- Keefer and Johnson (2011) state that, in the case of children, respondents may choose images on the basis of attractiveness rather than true responses. As we used the questionnaire with tertiary level students, we hoped that image attractiveness would not be an influencing factor. In fact, some comments from some of the students, if not all, showed that they did consider the expressions on the images very carefully:
“I’ll feel good, which means yeah, ‘happy’ but not with that smile on the picture that makes my teeth come out, like: D”

Kear, et al. (2000) had used four responses (Very unhappy, unhappy, happy, and very happy) in their scale. For our scale we added a fifth option as a type of ‘catch-all’ (Gillham 2000, p. 30) which stated “none of these. I feel…….” We wanted to create an opportunity for students to express any other feeling they may have. Gillham’s (2000, p. 2) quote in this connection seemed very pertinent to us

“It is obvious that if all the questions and all the possible answers are determined in advance, the element of discovery is much reduced. You don’t know what lies beyond the responses selected, or more importantly answers the respondents might have given had they been free to respond as they wished.”

As we also aimed to understand the relationships between attitudes and factors, we added an additional ‘why’ to every question (Figure 20.1). These answers we expected would provide us with the explanatory data about why these factors may be causing positive/negative attitudes.

We took Question 11 (the self-efficacy measuring table) from Latif (2007) to measure student confidence in particular areas of writing. Latif (2007) has repeated a few items in the table (grammatical structure, punctuation) to achieve a higher reliability of results. We felt this to be an effective technique and therefore have left the repetitions as they are.

Question 14 and 15 (How do you wish your writing class was like? and do you have a memorable past experience in L2 writing to share) were constructed as open ended questions by us to better understand student likes and dislikes and past experiences about writing which may in turn be influencing their attitudes.

Balanced statement

Gillham (2000, p. 26) suggests that opinion questions work best when the key statement is phrased in a neutral way rather than giving the indication of a good answer which may lead to respondent bias. The questions used by Kear, et al. (2000) seemed to be balanced where respondents had to answer questions like “how do you feel when you write homework?” rather than agree or disagree with a biased statement like “I feel good when I write my homework.” Therefore, we adopted this strategy for our questionnaire.
The factors

We constructed items around common theoretical concepts found in the writers’ affect literature. We chose seven factors, environment (formal/informal/digital), evaluation, feedback, perceived value, collaboration, self-efficacy and past experience. The rationale for adapting some items was rooted in our cultural understanding. For instance, we added writing on Facebook (question 4) as an item representing the factor digital environment. This was due to our insider observation that university students in Bangladesh nowadays, are very actively using Facebook and their use is rarely limited to one line posts. This platform is mainly used to express their political and ideological opinions and hold discussions/debates about these issues which are most of the time in L2 (English). Similarly, to know about attitude towards feedback we asked how students felt when they see corrections on midterm scripts as, students do not usually receive feedback for classwork and homework. Final examination marks are posted with no commentary.

Besides the Likert-type items we also added two open ended questions about expectancy of classroom environment, past experience as we felt, these questions were required to understand attitude but did not lend themselves to Likert type questions. Rather, it seemed reasonable to design them as open ended questions to let students’ voices out (Question 14, 15).

Implementation

We sent out 25 questionnaires to ten male and fifteen female students across four undergraduate years of Dhaka University, English department as an email attachment and requested students to fill out the questionnaires. 20 questionnaires were completed. Among the received questionnaires, ten were from male students and ten from females. Five students were from the first year, five from the second year, four from the third year and six from the fourth year. One student although answered all open ended questions, did not answer all close-ended ones. We therefore, calculated some quantitative answers with 19 respondents.

Processing data

Quantitative data

We assigned a numerical value to each response:

- Very happy-4
- Happy-3
- Not Okay-2
- Someone help me-1

The Likert scale is an ordinal scale (not an interval scale) that is, the intervals between the numbers is not equal. Therefore, we calculated the central tendency not by mean of responses but by the median. Again, the median alone did not represent the dispersion of responses. To understand the distribution of both positive and negative feelings we used a horizontal bar. Each bar represented one of the seven factors which gave us an overall impression of the dispersion of attitudes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Someone help me (1)</th>
<th>Not okay (1)</th>
<th>Okay (6)</th>
<th>V. happy (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 20.2: Processing quantitative data

For instance, for question 1, we created a table with 9 columns, each column representing one of the 9 respondents. As there was one response in the ‘Someone help me’ category it was placed across one column.
There was one response for ‘not okay’ category so this was again placed across one column. There were seven responses in the ‘okay’ category therefore; this was placed along seven columns. Again, there was one response for the very happy category and this was placed along one column.

**Qualitative data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1:</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel when asked to write in class</td>
<td>R1: I want to try, R2: It is part and parcel of class</td>
<td>Okay, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark</td>
<td>R3: Let’s take the challenge, I am not bored</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>as I would like to get comment whether my writing is good, satisfactory, excellent or non satisfactory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>R4: Classes are time bound</td>
<td>Not Okay, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>R5: Writing often seems difficult or time consuming task, R6: It helps my idea to be clear</td>
<td>Okay, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>R7: Writing is not my habit actually, I’m still told to write things by my elder brother and mom before During any class if I’m told to write anything, I find it OK, because of two reasons Firstly, we need to practice writing in certain</td>
<td>Okay, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 20.3:** processed qualitative data

For the qualitative data, we put responses for each question horizontally together in an excel sheet. We colour coded all responses for negative (Yellow), Positive (green) and neutral (blue) attitudes to get an impression of attitudes across the data. In the second step we identified and formatted relevant information in bold. This enabled an easy way to work with relevant data without decontextualizing it.

Then, we started coding the information with a set of proto-codes as suggested by Fay and Stelma (2013, p.7) (See Appendix B for defined proto-codes). Initially we used the seven factors themselves as proto codes. For instance the proto-code ‘feedback’ was a category that I could apply not only in responses to the feedback question (question 6) but also in response to questions concerning evaluation, homework and classwork. After a few readings in the second step we fine-tuned these proto-codes into inductive codes based on recurring perceptions within and across all questions. We then looked more closely at the codes and categorized all meaning units into a set of workable codes. (See Appendix B for codes within/ across data). We interpreted the most common codes within a question related to a factor to indicate possible reasons behind why the factors may be influencing attitudes. For instance, from the data for the question of collaboration the inductive code of ‘Generating ideas’ and ‘Accuracy’ emerged most frequently across all respondents. So, we concluded that the reason for positive attitude towards collaboration maybe that these students found collaboration to produce less pressure and help generate ideas in L2.
Common codes across questions represented recurring themes connected to attitudes. We interpreted these common themes to be factors other than the seven pre-specified ones that may have a relationship to students’ attitudes. Three codes across categories were:

a. Feedback
b. Enjoyment
c. Accuracy

In a second excel sheet we copied all data relating to these factors. In a horizontal mode of analysis we compared these data sets to form a deeper understanding.

**Analysis and interpretation**

We looked at the central tendency and dispersion at first as “a means, but not an end” (Spencer, Ritchie & O’Conner, 2003, p.251) to gain an understanding of positivity or negativity of attitudes. Secondly we focused on the qualitative answers. We used codes because these codes helped us identify possible reasons for positive/negative attitudes and identify important factors shaping student attitude. For instance, we interpreted accuracy and lack of enjoyment to be related to student attitude because these two codes appeared across all factors.

An important part of our qualitative data analysis was to focus on the adjectives, emoticons, multiple exclamatory marks used by the students in their answers because we believe these to be an expression of strong attitudes besides the positive and negative phrases.

Patton (2002 in Spencer, Ritchie & O’Conner, 2003, p. 216), suggests that while developing causal explanations the term cause should be used in a loose sense to refer to “conjecture, rather than narrowly deterministic laws.” Therefore, we did not directly interpret the data as causality but interpreted the reasons as a ‘perceived influence’ on the attitudes or as to have a relationship (e.g. collaboration is related to positive attitude). We have deliberately avoided the word ‘cause’ and have used words like ‘related’, ‘influence’ etc as perceived from the data to denote this loose sense.

**Findings and Discussion**

While the median and ranges did reflect the average attitude, the reasons students had given behind both positive and negative affect towards each factor were quite interesting and revealed an in-depth picture about their feelings. The factors that were found to be most influential in shaping student affect are discussed below:

Factors affecting positive attitudes

*Digital environment*

How do you feel when you write notes, comments and posts on Facebook (in L2) about your opinion or something you have seen/heard?(n=20)

| Okay (2) | Very happy (18) |

Negative  Positive

Figure 20.4: Writing on Facebook
Digital environment (Facebook) was a factor shaping positive attitudes towards L2 writing. The median for writing on Facebook in L2 was ‘4’ (corresponding to very happy) indicating a very positive attitude. The data from the open ended questions also used positive expressions (i.e. ‘I can write all day on Facebook.’) and a good amount of smilies to support the qualitative findings.

This finding is the same as Shih (2011) and Yunuset et al. (2012). On a study on Taiwanese and Malaysian tertiary level students respectively both found high positive attitude towards use of Facebook as an L2 writing platform.

We found two main reasons as to why the digital environment was related to positive attitude: less pressure of accuracy and immediate response. Half of the students (10) had stated that they felt they could express themselves freely without pressure of writing correct English.

“I do not have the tension of being right or wrong”

The rest of the respondents reported (10) they enjoyed writing on Facebook because of the immediate response they received. My students seldom receive feedback to their homework/classwork due to large class sizes and hence, feedback maybe something they value a lot and wait for eagerly:

“I love to write on Facebook…then comes the most enjoyable part checking again and again and again for responses☺☺☺”

Another reason for positive attitude towards the Facebook platform maybe the digital nature- it represents the world students are submerged in. In an opinion on writing letters one student responded:

“What!!!...who is going to write a letter?? Not me certainly. Why are phones and laptops invented for if letters are still to be written????”

Collaboration

How do you feel writing on a topic together with classmates? (n= 20)

| Very Uncomfortable (2) | Okay (2) | Very Happy! (16) |

As the bar shows, collaboration was a factor strongly related to positive attitude. The median for collaboration was ‘4’ indicating a very positive affect. The qualitative data also indicated students’ positive orientation through adjectives like ‘fun’, ‘absolutely love’, ‘extremely like’ etc. This finding is similar to that of Sarwar (2010) who also reported DU English department students’ high positive attitude towards collaborative writing.

The possible main reasons for positive attitude towards collaborative writing were found to be less pressure of accuracy (as pressure was distributed across the group) and ease of generating ideas.

“We can jot down thousands of ideas together and easily organize them with fun!”

“I don’t feel the pressure to be right and have fun brainstorming”

This finding is similar to Richards and Renandya (2002) who also show that most L2 students find generating and organizing ideas in L2 a daunting task.
Although, collaboration was found to be a factor fostering positive feelings about L2 writing, some of the reasons provided by students do point to problems of collaboration:

“I like collaboration very much because he does all the work and I sleep. Honest.”

Students were found to have predominantly positive past experience of L2 writing and this may be therefore, another factor leading to positive attitudes. It is held that positive past experiences in Second Language Acquisition promotes motivation and therefore, positive attitude.

Factors affecting negative attitude

*Feedback*

How do you feel when you see the corrections made by teachers in your midterm script? (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone help me!</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20.6: Feedback

As evident from the bar above, the factor feedback was found to be mostly shaping negative attitude (median 2). The main reason cited behind negative feeling towards feedback was that students’ perceived it to be harsh – using strong adjectives like ‘frustrated’, ‘horrified’ and ‘ashamed’ to describe their experience. Only two students acknowledged the constructive role of feedback by stating they learn from feedback. Due to large classes students seldom receive feedback except midterms. The frustration due to this lack of feedback was also apparent in responses to the items of homework, classwork, perceived value and expectation about classes:

“I do not like homework because I never get feedback”

“I feel okay about L2 writing. But the only thing I never like is the harsh comments by the experienced teachers as I wrote before. And also I get even these harsh comments very rarely.”

Latif’s (2007) study has similarly shown that lack of feedback given by the teachers and overuse of criticism when commenting on English essays was a source of negative writing affect.
The median for evaluation was 2, corresponding to ‘not okay’, pointing towards a negative attitude among students in relation to L2 writing when it is done for evaluation.

How do you feel while writing for something to be evaluated? (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Someone Help Me!</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20.7: Evaluation

Even students who responded with okay used quite negative wordings in their reasoning:

“I feel okay but **I do not like the harsh comments** by teachers afterwards”

“It’s okay if I know before and have a lot of preparation or else I’ll **have a mini heart attack followed by a major one**”

“The assignment for evaluation is okay than the examination—at least I get time to be perfect”

The reason for negative feelings towards L2 writing for evaluation was stated to be lack of self-confidence by most students. Most of the students felt they were not going to do well while writing and therefore reported a negative attitude towards L2 writing for evaluation.

Low Perceived value

How much do you think your writing courses prepare you for writing you need to do for your professional life? (n=19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not that much</th>
<th>Quite</th>
<th>Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20.8: Perceived Value

How much do you think your writing courses prepare you for writing you need to do for your academic life? (Essays/ Exam answers/ Assignments) (n=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not that much</th>
<th>Quite</th>
<th>Totally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20.9: Perceived academic value
Although the quantitative scale is showing the range to be distributed quite evenly amongst positive and negative feelings; the analysis of the qualitative data revealed students did not highly value the courses for neither professional nor academic purposes. The reasons for this attitude were mainly the task types in the courses. Nearly all of the students perceived the tasks to be ‘not practical’, have ‘no variation’, ‘not enough formats’ and of no value as there was ‘not enough practice’ and ‘not enough feedback.’ This low perceived value of the writing courses may also be contributing to negative attitudes towards L2 writing.

*Lack of enjoyment*

Lack of enjoyment was found to be a factor related to negative affect emerging from the data. This concept was found minimum once in every respondent’s qualitative answers. Specifically in answer to the question “how would you like your writing classes to be like?” All responses centred on the want for ‘fun’, ‘enjoyment’ and ‘informality’. A particularly interesting metaphor was:

“I wish my writing class was like my best friend: fun, informal, no pressure to be right no problem if I was wrong”

*Accuracy*

The other factor contributing to student negative attitude emerging from data was stress on accuracy (as this appeared across most categories/factors).

From the qualitative data a factor was apparent that there was too much stress on accuracy in class, homework, exams and assignments. The emphasis was found to be on the product rather than the process. This emphasis on accuracy the students found to be pressurizing and hence may be leading to a negative feeling.

The effect this emphasis on accuracy was seen in the responses provided when asked to describe memorable experiences about L2 writing. 16 out of 20 respondents reported positive experiences in different periods of their lives when they had received the ‘highest marks’ in class. Only two of the students’ positive experience related to publishing in English newspapers. However, none of the students reported any negative experience related to L2 writing. Therefore, past negative experiences was ruled out as a factor which may be influencing student negative affect in a considerable way.

*Time*

Half of the students felt ‘time’ to be a factor hindering their abilities to write. In stating reasons about negative feelings about classroom writing one student stated ‘writing takes a lot of time and classes are time bound’ and again another student pointed out it is problematic in a 50 minute class to get an idea and express oneself ‘I do not get an idea in such a short time and write’. This is the reason why some students felt ‘okay’ about homework than classroom writing was again that it was not time bound.

‘Homework is my favourite part because I can do it in my desk without any time limitation’

Therefore, it may be said that the pressure of writing within a time limit may also be related to students’ negative feelings about L2 writing.
The data however, also left some unresolved questions:

Unresolved: Self efficacy

The result concerning self-efficacy was unresolved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Very weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correctly spell all words in a one page essay</td>
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<td>2. Correctly punctuate a one page essay</td>
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<td>3. Correctly use all parts of speech (Nouns, verbs, adjectives etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Write sentences with proper punctuation and grammatical structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Correctly use plurals, verb tenses, prefixes and suffixes</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Clearly express ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Find good ideas</td>
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<td>8. Write an essay with good overall organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Write a good essay</td>
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</table>

Figure 20.10: Self-efficacy table

The findings of the self-efficacy table show that most students perceive themselves to have a “good” (84 responses) command in all of the mentioned areas of L2 writing. There are no responses in the ‘very weak’ area and the second highest numbers of responses (34) are in the area of ‘average’. It may have been concluded that students were quite confident, at least most of them do not have low confidence.

However, the result of question 10 was, (how do you view yourself as an L2 writer, n=18)

| I’m weak (12) | I’m Okay (4) | I’m good (2) |

Figure 20.11: Student perception of writing ability
In response to the question above most students responded with low confidence as opposed to the confidence shown in the self-efficacy table (median 2). Question 10 was close ended as we designed it to accompany the table so there was no qualitative data to explain the findings. This attitude may be due to the fact that, students perceive good writing to be much more related with cultural rhetoric (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) than the mechanical areas in the table. Hence, even though they have confidence in structural areas of L2 writing they may still suffer from low self-efficacy.

A study by Rahman (2005) on Bangladeshi tertiary level students’ attitudes and motivation for studying English also resonates this finding. This study revealed that Bangladeshi students study English mainly for instrumental purposes (Communicating with foreigners, going abroad for higher study, high ranking job etc.). All respondents in his study reported that although they had learned grammatical rules for the previous 12 years they did not perceive themselves to be competent L2 users as they perceived it to not serve the discourse competence needed for utilitarian use.

As the data for self-efficacy factor in the study was self-contradictory we concluded this to be an unresolved issue.

Factors not affecting attitude strongly

Formal/Informal environment (homework/class/letter writing) was a factor where the median was neutral (3-okay) for all three. The qualitative data was a mix of positive, negative and neutral attitudes. Nor was there noticeable use of adjectives/emoticons/positive-negative phrases among most students. I concluded that, digital/non-digital environments were the factor influencing students’ attitude (as high positive attitude for Facebook) more strongly than formal/informal environments. Perceived value of the course was found to be a neutral factor.

Summary of results

To summarize we can see that the positive attitude towards writing was coming from the factor of digital environment and collaboration. The negative vibe was mainly coming from the factor of feedback, evaluation and low perceived value of writing courses. In addition lack of enjoyment, pressure for accuracy and lack of time for writing emerged as factors that students repeatedly mentioned as the negative side of writing classes. The reasons for different factors to be connected to positive/negative attitude towards writing were quite interesting. The Digital environment produced positive attitude because students felt there was no pressure of accuracy and they received immediate response to their posts.

On the other hand, students had a positive attitude towards collaboration because it was easy to generate ideas and the pressure for accuracy was shared among the group members. Feedback produced negative attitude because of the lack of feedback as well as because students perceived the teacher comments to be negative probably hurting their self-esteem. Students felt afraid of evaluation because they felt they were going to perform poorly. Students also perceived the writing courses to have little value because the task types were perceived to have no variation and were not up to date. The results concerning self-efficacy was unresolved as students according to the table ticked themselves to be quite good at writing but in question 11 when asked if they perceive themselves to be good writers they mostly answered that they were weak.

Conclusion

We have identified some factors strongly affecting positive and negative attitudes based on data from the study. Although we designed the questionnaire to allow for both positive/negative attitudes to arise we hardly expected any positive feelings. Positive feelings regarding Facebook, collaboration and predominantly positive past experience regarding L2 writing came as a surprise. This may be due to the fact that the research study in the first place, stemmed from the negative vibe we had experienced as L2 writing
teachers in classes. The reason behind the positive and negative attitudes as discussed above may help to arrive at solutions for fostering positive feelings towards writing courses. For instance, the value of the courses may be perceived to be high if task variety is increased. Additionally, as immediate response triggered liking towards writing on Facebook, such practices in class, maybe through peer feedback, may also help develop positive attitude towards writing. Conversely, some students liked collaboration because of the chance to not do work and make others do it, showing positive attitude may also stem from not so good an intention. However, as stated before, more research needs to be done on the causes of negative/positive attitude stemming from different factors related to the L2 writers affect at Dhaka University. Understanding these causes will enable teachers to modify teaching techniques and writing courses to develop a more positive attitude towards writing among students.
References


Appendix A: Sample questionnaire items

How do you feel when the teacher asks you to write in your L2 writing class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very happy: D</th>
<th>Okay!</th>
<th>Not Okay!</th>
<th>Someone HELP me!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of these.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel</td>
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</table>

Why?

How do you feel when you are given a piece to write as homework for your L2 writing?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Happy :D</th>
<th>Okay!</th>
<th>Not Okay!</th>
<th>Someone HELP me!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of these.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel</td>
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</table>

Why?
How do you feel when you write notes, comments and posts on Facebook (in L2) about your opinion or something you have seen /heard?

Very Happy :D  Okay!  Not Okay!  Someone HELP me

Why?

How much do you think your L2 writing courses prepare you for the writing you need to do for your professional life? (Letters, Applications?)

Totally  Quite!  Not that much  Not at all

How do you view yourself as a writer?

I’m good  I’m okay  I’m weak  I’m horrible
When writing in English how confident do you think you are in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Very weak</th>
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<tr>
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Appendix B: Codes

Proto-codes:

Environment: Referring to formality/informality in the writing environment, digital writing platform.
Collaboration: Referring to writing together, peer evaluation, reading own writing to peers
Evaluation: Referring to tests, assignments, evaluated classwork
Feedback: Referring to formative/summative feedback, lack of feedback
Perceived Value: Referring to how students view the functionality of the course
Self-Efficacy: Referring to how students’ own perception of themselves as a writer, confidence, self esteem
Past Experience: Referring to past positive/negative events related to writing or writing evaluation.

Working Codes within categories:

Environment:

-Facebook: **Accuracy**, Response, Digital, **Enjoyment**
Evaluation: Self-confidence, **Accuracy**, **Feedback**
Feedback: Harsh Feedback, Lack of Feedback
Perceived value: Task type, **Feedback**
Collaboration: **Accuracy**, Generate ideas, **Enjoyment**
Past experience: Neutral
Expectation about class: **Enjoyment**, **Feedback**, **Accuracy**

Working Codes across categories: (bold codes above)

**Feedback**: Referring to formative/summative feedback, lack of feedback
**Enjoyment**: referring to enjoyment or lack of enjoyment, fun, informality
**Accuracy**: Referring to emphasis on marks/accuracy and final product rather than ideas and process
PART 5

TECHNOLOGY AND BEST PRACTICE
Chapter 21

Review of Computer-Assisted Language Learning: History, Merits & Barriers
Dara Tafazoli, Iran

Introduction

Shifting from a pedagogical paradigm is not always necessarily successful. Language teaching and learning have the same position. With the widespread development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in our daily lives, technology provides lots of opportunities for language teachers and learners to benefit or suffer from. Learning a foreign language, such as English, French, etc., has increased in popularity, and has also become a necessity in our communicative world. The literate, communicative, and technology-based world has to accept the initiatives of applying new challenges in education both positive and negative. Several e-learning technologies are available for use in educational contexts. Although its forms differ in varying contexts based on the economical situations of that context, almost all of the settings are trying to apply technologies in education to meet the demands of teachers and learners. The purpose of this paper is to review the history, typology and three phases of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in language courses, mainly English. Moreover, the merits and barriers of applying technology in language classes are presented based on a review of the literature.

CALL Definition

Levy (1997) defined Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p.1). Although the name includes “computer”, the term CALL embraces any application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to teaching and learning foreign languages. Two different terms such as CALI (Computer-Assisted Language Instruction) and CAI (Computer-Assisted Instruction) were used before CALL in the early 1980s (Davies & Higgins, 1982). Around the early 1990s, alternative terms such as TELL (Technology-Enhanced Language Learning) also emerged.

History, Typology & Phases of CALL

Applications of technology in education are not a recent phenomenon, but applying technology in language learning is relatively new for language learners, teachers and scholars. Computer-assisted instruction was first used in the 1950s for purposes other than language teaching. Learning from a colleague in physics, Collett (1980) used the university’s mainframe computer for computer-assisted instruction in a French program. A computer-based diagnostic French test was reported by Boyle, Smith and Eckert in 1976. Individual language teachers such as Rex Last and Graham Davies started to use technology for language learning purposes in the UK (Chapelle, 2001). Richard Atkinson and Patrick Suppes initiated the best-known early CALL project at Stanford University. This project, in collaboration with IBM, was based on Atkinson’s mathematical learning theory rather than language learning theories (Atkinson, 1972). The importance of this project came from the fact that Atkinson and Suppes formed the Computer Curriculum Corporation in 1967, which continued to provide instruction in English as a Second Language (Saettler, 1990; as cited in Chapelle, 2001).

The Computer-Assisted Learning Exercises for French (CLEF) project began through the cooperation of three universities in Canada to teach basic French grammar (Paramskas, 1983). The Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations (PLATO) and the Time-Shared, Interactive, Computer-Controlled
Information Television (TICCIT) projects were developed to teach different languages. The former system was used for English, French, German, Spanish and Italian in 1980 (Hendricks, Bennion & Larson, 1983); and the latter for those languages in addition to many others such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Hebrew and Swedish. The courseware developed on the PLATO system supported audio, graphics and flexible response analysis which was found to be very successful (Hart, 1981).

The 1983 annual TESOL convention in Canada was a milestone in CALL from two aspects. First of all, it was agreed upon that CALL was the expression to be used to refer to this field. In addition, a suggestion was made to establish a professional organization titled “CALICO” (Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium). By that time, CALL was flourishing in education and in market settings. This was exemplified by the development of a course on CALL at Lancaster University, a professional organization named EuroCALL had been established, and the development and production of introductory materials was underway, and a large number of books on CALL had been published or were in press. Chapelle (2001) stated:

“The following books are among those based on work of the early 1980s that were produced for teacher education: Ahmad, Corbett, Rogers, & Sussex, 1985; Brumfit, Phillips, & Skehan, 1986; Cameron, Dodd, & Rahtz, 1986; Davies, 1985; Hainline, 1987; Higgins & Johns, 1984; Hope, Taylor, & Pusack, 1984; Jones & Fortescue, 1987; Kenning & Kenning, 1983; Last, 1984; Leech & Candlin, 1986; Underwood, 1984; Wyatt, 1984” (Chapelle, 2001, p. 8)

Computer assisted language learning and teaching provides students and teachers with lots of opportunities. The gradual development of the role of the technology in language courses has known a few different phases. Each phase relates to a certain level of technology and pedagogical awareness. These phases are called: behaviouralistic CALL, communicative CALL, integrative CALL (cf. Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Each phase has its own advantages and disadvantages.

**Behaviouristic CALL**

This phase was conceived in the 1950s and implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, three main factors affected the use of CALL: (a) the use of programmed instruction based on behaviorism, (b) the enhanced sophistication of data processing, and (c) the use of time sharing system for CALL purposes (Atkinson & Wilson, 1969). As the psychological basis of this phase declared, behaviorism theory, activities should entail “drill and practice”. At that time the role of the computer was a vehicle to deliver instructional materials to learners. Taylor (1980) stated that the role of the computer was the same as the tutor, and the delivered materials were repetitive language drills, vocabulary, grammar and translation tests. The most famous tutorial system was PLATO which was based on a behavioristic learning pattern. Dina and Cironei (2013) offered a series of advantages for repetitive language drills and practice:

- providing whenever necessary access to the same learning material is essential to acquiring a language;
- allowing students to access the same material over and over again and offering immediate and non judgmental feedback every time is ideal for mastering a language;
- presenting such language materials on an individualized basis, without time keeping and deadlines, offering students the choice to study in their own rhythm is beneficial for language learning (Dina & Cironei, 2013, p. 249).
Communicative CALL

The second phase of CALL was based on communication. The communicative approach to teaching, as a reaction to the behaviorist approach, was the prominent approach in the 1970s and 1980s. The advocates of this approach argued that “all CALL courseware and activities should build on intrinsic motivation and should foster interactivity—both learner-computer and learner-learner” (Han, 2009, p. 41). They also put the focus on using forms rather than on the forms themselves. Among different types of programs developed during these years, computer games were the dominant and significant programs. Taylor and Perez (1989) defined the role of the computer as stimulus. This CALL approach was used for activities that involved communication such as conversations, written tasks, and critical thinking. Some activities such as spelling, grammar checks and text reconstruction programs were another model of computers in the communicative phase which view the computer as a tool. They helped learners to learn and use the language easier. But how is it possible to evaluate an activity as communicative? Higgins and Johns (1984) declared that the courseware, which were based on text reconstruction and consisted of variations on cloze exercises, were communicative. Chapelle (2001) added that:

“... variations included: "words deleted on a fixed-ratio basis, words deleted on the basis of some criteria, or all words deleted, texts that the teacher entered into the program, texts that came with the program, or texts other learners constructed; with help options and scoring, or with simple yes/no judgments concerning the correctness of the learners’ entries; with the end result begin the completed text, or the end result responses to comprehension questions about the text” (Chapelle, 2001, p. 10).

Another significant development in the early 1980s was borrowed from corpus linguistics – computer-assisted concordance activity. Concordancing software is used to identify words or expressions requested by the user and display them with reference to the lines in which they occurred in a text. This courseware allowed the learner to find questions of vocabulary use and grammatical collocation on their own (Chapelle, 2001).

Integrative CALL

Moving from the cognitive view of communicative language learning and teaching to the socio-cognitive, educators integrated different language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – into language learning. This goal was made possible by incorporating technology into language teaching and learning. The aim of the last phase of CALL was to overcome the obstacles of language learning and teaching, and therefore to optimize the opportunities for integrating new technologies in language classrooms. Different educators and scholars tried to find more integrative ways of teaching instead of structure-based ones. Therefore, task-based approaches came into vogue which attempted to integrate leaners in more authentic environments. Fortunately, developments and advances in technology provided these opportunities. In the mid-1990s, multimedia computers and the World Wide Web (WWW) were the basis of integrative CALL. Nowadays, it is very easy for all of the learners to click a mouse to access a plethora of multimedia resources on the Internet. Network-based technology has made the greatest contribution in that people can share whatever and communicate with each other whenever and wherever.

In 2000 Mark Warschauer changed the name of the first phase from behavioristic CALL to structural CALL. Moreover, he revised the dates as followings:

- Structural CALL: 1970s to 1980s
- Communicative CALL: 1980s to 1990s
- Integrative CALL: 2000 onwards (Warschauer, 2000)
In 2003, Bax proposed three similar phases:

- Restricted CALL - mainly behaviouristic: 1960s to 1980s.
- Open CALL: 1980s to 2003
- Integrated CALL - still to be achieved (Bax, 2003)

For further readings on Bax’s proposed phases, see Bax, 2003; Bax and Chambers, 2006; and Bax, 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Structural CALL</th>
<th>Communicative CALL</th>
<th>Integrative CALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Mainframe</td>
<td>PCs</td>
<td>Multimedia and Internet</td>
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<tr>
<td>English-teaching paradigm</td>
<td>Grammar Translation &amp; Audio-Lingual</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
<td>Content-Based, ESP/EAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of language</td>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Socio-cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal use of computers</td>
<td>Drill and practice</td>
<td>Communicative Exercises</td>
<td>Authentic discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal objective</td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Accuracy &amp; Fluency</td>
<td>Accuracy, Fluency &amp; Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21.1. Phases of CALL based on Warschauer, 2000, p.65.

**Merits and Barriers of CALL**

Nowadays, CALL is gaining more popularity in language teaching and learning. Different scholars have considered several merits and barriers for applying CALL. This section looks at the advantages and disadvantages of using CALL from the perspectives of several key players in the field.

Warschauer and Healey (1998) mentioned different beneficial aspects of CALL: 1) multimodal practice with feedback, 2) individualization in a large class, 3) pair or small group work on projects, 4) the fun factor, 5) a variety in the resources available and learning styles used, 6) exploratory learning with large amounts of language data, and 7) real-life skill building in computer use.

On the one hand, Cabrini Simões (2007) mentioned some advantages of applying the technology, mostly the Internet, in language education. According to this paper, teachers have the opportunity to get students’ attention by using sounds, images, colors, different types of letters etc. Thus, it helps the students to visualize the contents in a better and more efficient way. Also, technology allows learners to participate in the culture of the target language, which in turn can enable them to further learn how cultural background influences one’s view of the world (Singhal, 1997). Moreover, students not only have access to other people’s work, but they may also generate their own work to be published (Singhal, 1997). Furthermore, students may use the Internet to search for additional language activities (Singhal, 1997). It also mentioned that the use of the Internet has been shown to promote higher order thinking skills. The Internet may increase student’s motivation (Lee, 2000); and the Internet provides greater interaction (Lee, 2000). There are some activities on the Internet that give students positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their online
exercises (Lee, 2000). From the larger perspective, the Internet provides global understanding (Lee, 2000). He also noted that, exchanging e-mail provides students with an excellent opportunity for real, natural communication (Warschauer, 1995). Finally, the Internet allows students around the world to interact with one another cheaply, quickly and reliably (Cabrini Simões, 2007, pp.31-33). On the other hand, sometimes it may take time to access information (Singhal, 1997). Also, the lack of training on the part of the teachers to implement the Internet in the language classroom is another negative factor (Singhal, 1997). Moreover, the Internet offers access to all types of issues and topics, some of which are unsuitable for children, and this lack of limits in itself may result in various problems (Singhal, 1997). The lack of infrastructure/ facilities is a barrier for implementing technology in language classes (Corrêa, 2001). Finally, surfing the net can be fun and/or time consuming (Corrêa, 2001; Cabrini Simões, 2007, p.33).

In another research paper, Han (2008) stated that: a) CALL programs could offer second language learners more independence from classrooms; b) Language learners have the option to study at any time anywhere; c) CALL programs can be wonderful stimuli for second language learning; d) Computers can promote learning interaction between learners and teachers; and e) Computers can help classroom teaching with a variety of materials and approaches (Han, 2008, p. 41-42). The above-mentioned author also declared several negative points, they are: a) financial barriers; b) the inability of computers to handle unexpected situations due to technological barriers; and c) the need for both teachers and students to receive training on how to learn to use computers (Han, 2008, p. 42-43).

More recently, AbuSeileek and Abu Sa’aleek in 2012 further mentioned that computers can facilitate a variety of learning tasks, and have enormous potency as teaching tools. In addition, they can help both the students and the teachers because of their special properties (Wang, 2006). Yet another advantage is that software vendors (and language teachers) no longer feel bound to grammar practice as the main goal of computer use in the language classroom (Gündüz, 2005). Further advantages include that computers are good to motivate students and students’ learning becomes more individualized and autonomous. The computer also provides a platform for communication between teachers and students, one where teaching resources can be stored for a longer time and shared by other teachers and students.

Other advantages have been cited from a number of stakeholder perspectives. From the perspective of the language learner, they have the ability to study anytime and anywhere. For teachers CALL programs can be wonderful stimuli for second language learning. In addition, the random access to Web pages would break the linear flow of instructions (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

Amongst the disadvantages which have been cited, CALL requires computers and software as well as other equipment all of which are expensive (Gündüz, 2005). Moreover, computers can only do what they are programmed to do so both teachers and students need training to learn to use computers. A further disadvantage is that some students can never really adjust to using computers. A final negative point is that computers cannot handle unexpected situations due to technological barriers (AbuSeileek & Abu Sa’aleek, 2012, pp.30-32).

Wang (2012) mentioned three advantages for network English teaching. In this study, creating a better communicative English environment for students, improving the efficiency of classroom teaching, and improving the teaching mode are the main benefits for network English teaching (Wang, 2012, p.155-156). The researcher also mentioned disadvantages of this mode of teaching like financial barriers, students’ difficulty in adapting to this new teaching mode, and some English teachers’ vexation (Wang, 2012, 156-157).

Based on Shyamlee and Phil’s (2012) study, language teachers should use technology to: 1) cultivate students’ interest in study; 2) promote students’ communication capacity; 3) widen students’ knowledge to gain an insightful understanding of Western culture; 4) improve teaching effects; 5) improve interaction between the teacher and student; 6) create a context for language teaching; and 7) provide flexibility to course content (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012, p. 151-153).
In another review on the advantages and disadvantages of technology in language education, Riasati, Allahyar and Tan (2012, pp. 25-27) have put forth the following based on other studies:

**Advantages**

a) Technology increases students’ motivation (Galavis, 1998; Warschauer & Healey, 1998; Dunken, 1990; Lee, 2000; DEECD, 2010);

b) Technology improves language learners’ academic ability (Galavis, 1998; Dunken, 1990; Lee, 2000);

c) Technology makes a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches in language learning and teaching (DEECD, 2010);

d) Technology enables learners to assess their own work in a more meaningful way, become better aware of the quality of their work and accept feedback more willingly (DEECD, 2010);

e) Technology provides the encouragement of collaboration and communication in learning activities (Gillespie, 2006; Murphy, 2006);

f) Technology has the potential to lower anxiety among learners (Levy, 1997; Chapelle, 2001; Braul, 2006; Ozerol, 2009; Riasati, Allahyar & Tan, 2012, p. 25-26).

**Disadvantages**

a) Lack of access to technology resources due to the fact that it requires an Internet connection (Coghlan, 2004);

b) Financial barriers (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000; Gips et al., 2004; Lai & Kritsonis, 2006);

c) Lack of teacher training, lack of knowledge and practice (Baylor & Ritchie, 2002; Romano, 2003);

d) Teachers’ and students’ [negative] attitude (Hodas, 1993; Beggs, 2000; Dawes, 2001; Fang & Warschauer, 2004; McGrail, 2005);

e) Lack of time and technical support (King, 2003; Jacobsen & Lock, 2005; Ismail & Almekhlafi, 2010).

**Conclusion**

CALL may be a vital supplementary tool for English language teaching and learning. However, we have to consider all the aspects of using CALL in our classes. Considering technology’s double face is the key factor in applying CALL (Saeedi, 2013:41). We have to pay attention to technocentrism and the lack of experimentation in applying CALL (Plana & Ballester, 2009; as cited in Saeedi, 2013, p.46). Warschauer and Whittaker (1997) gave some suggestions for successful planning and implementing technology in language courses. They believed that teachers should carefully consider their goals, since little is gained by adding random online activities into the classroom. Clarifying course goals acts as an important first step toward the successful use of technology in classrooms. The next vital aspect of technology-based instruction is integration, and the teacher should think about how to integrate technology-based activities into the syllabus. Also, the teacher should be aware of all the complexities of using technology in the learning environment, such as cultural, infrastructural, and structural, etc. Despite the many advantages of using CALL in our classrooms, it is not logical to judge CALL as a substitute for language teachers, but we have to consider technology as the vital supplementary tool in language classes. Technology offers learners opportunities for much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than what was ever possible in the traditional language classroom (Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2013). We would urge language teachers to make use of technology in their language classrooms. Having such projects are good ways of motivating students to use technology outside the classroom and to make learning a part of their daily lives. Although it is to some extent impossible to present all CALL advantages and disadvantages, this paper has reviewed a range of projects, papers and studies on CALL. The researchers believe that choosing, planning and applying CALL courseware will provide a wide range of opportunities for language teachers and learners.
References


Chapter 22

Do Teachers Find the Use of Laptops More Beneficial and Enjoyable than Students Do?

Tracy Munteanu, Fujairah Men’s College, UAE

Introduction

Teaching Foundations-level Emirati male learners can be very challenging as they can be a little difficult to control at times and their attention span may often waver. Giving them endless photocopies or asking them to complete exercises or reading texts from a book does little to motivate or interest them. Many of the students find it difficult to concentrate in class. They also seem to lack the skills needed to organise their workload. Therefore, some new and innovative ways of teaching them that would both increase their motivation and interest are needed.

In this chapter I will describe a way that all four language skills are used during the lesson. As mentioned earlier, teaching students with a standard textbook is distracting and tedious. Also, it is a problem if some students finish before others. For these reasons, I decided to implement technology into the lesson in order to get their attention, get them to work as a group and focus on the same thing. I believed that at the same time this would help students use their own information to encourage trust in their peers and aid memory. The objectives of the project were to raise awareness of how laptops can create interest and increase motivation through their usage in the classroom.

Literature Review

Mobile devices for learning, such as the iPod or iPad, can be easily carried around and are used to read books, connect to the internet, listen to podcasts and learn lessons. Students use them as a library, a teacher, an organizer and a communicator. They have more books than any library and can be accessed at once. They can teach on almost any topic but can’t evaluate and correct. They can organize schedules and contacts. Another thing these devices allow is interactive teaching (Felix, 1998) where students and teacher needn’t actually be in the same classroom. Finally, ideas found on them can then be used to communicate to others as slide shows or notes, for example. Podcasting enables the student to listen to authentic pieces of conversation and reproduce real life experiences. Online journals allow students to post and also receive feedback at a much faster pace than through traditional paper and pencil. These journals provide students with an opportunity to produce writing without the usual worry and stress that was connected with paper tasks which affected performance (Goleman, 1995). It has also been stated by educators in all contexts that online journals also help create rapport and enhance motivation.

It is becoming important for teachers to be up to date and try to use the latest technologies in class. It not only adds some spark to the lesson but it also holds the students’ attention for longer as they are seen to be more motivated by technology than by books. It should be noted though that while technology is a lot of things, it shouldn’t take the place of well-polished, traditional methods of teaching and learning. It is meant to enhance teaching, not replace it. Teachers need to show their students that the use of technology in the class is a valued addition which will allow them to self-monitor and create their own learning pathways (Varela, 2009). So who will find this more beneficial and interesting, the teachers or the students?

The textbook used to be the only reference for the teacher and learner but has now become quite dull in comparison with new technology (Al-Maini, 2006). “Whereas most ‘new technologies’ (radio, television, VCR, computers) may have been revolutionary in the overall context of human interaction, it is not clear that they have achieved equal degrees of pedagogical benefit in the realm of second language teaching” (Salaberry, 2001). Salaberry goes on to question the correlation between increased sophistication of technology and increased pedagogical effectiveness, which technologies can be exploited for pedagogical
reasons and how to integrate these technologies into the curriculum. Salaberry (2001) has also questioned whether these new technologies are suitable replacements of human and material resources.

The communicative approach to teaching recommends that learners use the target language in order to internalise it. ‘The notion of direct rather than delayed practice of communicative acts is central to most CLT interpretations’ (Richards & Rodgers 1986: 68). According to Little et al (1994), the learning and acquisition of rules ‘arises from the constant practice in communication’ (pg. 460). These activities can include speaking and listening together. Understanding this approach makes it clear that technology could have great worth as a source of what Krashen and Terrell (1983) call ‘comprehensible input’ and can be used to shape and interpret output promoting fluency and encouraging syntactic language processing which gives learners the opportunity to receive feedback from others (Swain, 1985).

New technology has been proven to stimulate students’ learning and increase their power of reasoning and problem-solving abilities (US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1995). It can develop their interest and encourage them to do more work in and out of the classroom. Brophy (1998) claimed that “students are likely to show improved achievement outcomes when they engage in the forms of co-operative learning as an alternative to completing assignments on their own”.

Most literature tends to focus on the teacher and how they can motivate the students. However, much research has now looked into how teachers can help learners motivate themselves (Ushioda, 1996). Could technology be the motivator for both parties and make lessons more enjoyable? If so, how? Raffini (1996) stated that the word ‘enjoyable’ has a bad reputation in school and many teachers and students think that learning can only happen in a hard-working and stressful environment.

Method

The study was carried out in Fujairah Men’s College, HCT in the UAE. The sample was 20 Foundation students (undergraduates, male aged 18 to 21) and 20 teachers (different ages and nationalities). The study focused on research into learning styles and classroom management. Hopkins (1993) noted that any research has to be discrete and viable. It must also be related to any concerns of the educational department. The university had been using laptops for the last 3 years and is now starting to use iPads. There has been a lot of negative and positive feedback from both teachers and students about this new addition to the classroom but no documented evidence was available. Therefore, it was decided to carry out a study first, on the benefits and interest generated on the use of laptops in the classroom and to later conduct a similar study about the use of the iPad in the classroom and compare the two of them.

The research involved the use of a questionnaire which provided both qualitative and quantitative data. This method was chosen as the collection of the data would be more accurate. The questionnaire was administered in person but then left at the respondent’s discretion to leave anonymously in a box by the researcher’s desk. The only distinction was that the teachers wrote a T and the students wrote an S in the top right hand corner. The first 5 questions were of the multiple choice variety where respondents had to choose from a number of alternatives whereas the last 5 questions were neutral open ended items and allowed the respondents more freedom in their choice of answers. However, as I had chosen the respondents and they were all from the same University, the final analyses were expected to be a function of whom we had selected our data from. This also affected the external validity of the study. The questionnaire was short as people are more likely to respond to shorter instruments. Also, as the questions had been based primarily on observations and statements previously witnessed, no big surprises in the data were expected. We were, however, interested more in finding out the differences between the teachers’ and students’ opinions. That is not to say that I was not entirely predicting the answers which is why I included qualitative style questions to allow for any other possible new theories that could arise from the data.

The fact that all of the students and teachers knew the researcher affected the internal validity of the research as they were all aware of the fact that they were being tested and could possibly have said different things to
please or pacify. In addition, the questionnaire was only administered in English which could have affected the internal validity. The questions were in simple language yet I am not sure as to how limited the Arabic students were in terms of L2 literacy when answering the open ended questions.

McDonough et al (1997) noted possible problems which occur in question phrasing and so the questions were simplified to avoid too much memory reliance or ambiguity. They were not complex and the open ended questions were at the end to avoid confusion.

The research did not interfere with or disrupt the lessons as questionnaires were handed out at break times. The research also fit into the University’s vision as they are interested in the attitudes of students and teachers to the use of laptops in the classroom as they are now going to include the use of iPads.

**Results**

Figure 22.1: How long the respondents had been using a laptop to study/teach English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>&gt;1 year</th>
<th>&gt;3 years</th>
<th>&gt;5 years</th>
<th>&gt;10 years</th>
<th>&lt;10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 3 figures illustrate the results from the quantitative research completed in the form of 5 multiple choice questions. It can be clearly seen that both teachers and students were not new users of laptops as they had all used one for more than 5 years and that the only factor showing a difference in years of use was the fact that the teachers were older than the students (18 of the teachers had been using a laptop for more than 10 years whereas 16 of the students had not).

Figure 22.2: What the laptop is used for. They all used it for work/study, research and email which are all necessary requirements of the University. The students played computer games significantly more than the teachers whereas the teachers used the laptop a lot more for reading and downloading.

Figure 22.3: How often the laptop is used out of the class. All of the respondents used the laptops out of the University, the students a lot more than the teachers.

There were also 5 open ended questions to provide qualitative results. These questions provided more relevant information to the experiences and feelings of the respondents towards the use of laptops in their
studies/work. Teachers liked using the laptops for delivering lessons, creating interest and convenience of use, (e.g. no books to carry around). Students liked the fact that everything was together on the laptop and so it was easier to organize things. They enjoyed playing games in their breaks (and during lessons!) and chatting with friends. Teachers didn’t like the use of laptops for this very reason as students would not concentrate in class. In these cases, teachers found the laptop to be a distraction. Students disliked having to learn to type quickly in English. Both groups found the laptops useful for organization and an excellent resource for information. However, for English language learning, neither group could point out obvious advantages for learning a language apart from YouTube and podcasts for listening.

**Interpretation of Findings**

The purpose of the research was to identify if students find the use of laptops on a Foundation course at a UAE University more beneficial and enjoyable than teachers do. When using the laptop at home, teachers and students had different interests. However, at college, the findings showed that they shared some similarities. They both appreciated the fact that the laptop was easier to carry around and to organise assessments and so on. The fact that students liked to play games and chat in class supported the teachers’ dislike and annoyance of the laptop in class. Both parties seemed to agree on the fact that as regards to pedagogy, the laptop didn’t seem to make that much of a difference to the English language learning process and speed of learning and acquisition. However, as Al-Maini (2006) pointed out, the use of the text book is now seen as outdated and the students and teachers seem to prefer and interact better with computers and mobile devices than in the past when people were afraid of new technology.

**Implications**

The study was limited as there were just 20 students and 20 teachers from the same college. This was not a serious problem however as the study was intended to find results specifically for this educational establishment.

No research was done to examine any correlations between student success in language learning and the use of the laptop in the classroom. Also, the use of the words beneficial and enjoyable could be viewed in entirely different ways from one respondent to the next so there needs to be more clarification on these terms in future research.

Finally, as mentioned before, Ushioda (1996) noted that there hadn’t been much research done about how teachers can actually help and teach students how to actually motivate themselves instead of waiting for the teacher to do it for them. Maybe these latest technological devices are the answers to some of these questions and perhaps they will resolve the problem of students non-engagement in learning.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Overall, the findings from this research suggest that both students and teachers are satisfied and comfortable with the use of laptops in the classroom. Not only do they use them for work/study but they also use them outside of the educational environment. They are useful for research and organisation, are easy to carry and provide social networking opportunities in addition to easy communication through email. Both students and teachers recognize the importance of the use of laptops in the educational environment and yet they do not particularly think that they are beneficial in language learning.

As Salaberry (2001) previously questioned, ‘How can the development and use of new technologies be correlated to increased pedagogical effectiveness?’ When applying the results from the research, it is evident that more expanded research needs to be done before the results of this study can be generalized to the wider ELT community.
References


PART 6

RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICE
Perceptions and the Use of Question Types by Omani EFL Teachers’

Moosa Ali Sulaiman, Dhofar University, Oman &
Salma Al-Humaidi, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Introduction

Helping learners to improve their comprehension abilities is widely recognized as a significant aim of education. If learners are to contribute positively and confidently in the labor market society, they must be equipped with permanent abilities and thinking skills required to perceive and use knowledge and abilities in the demanding work atmosphere. Also, the importance of cognitive learning is regarded as a significant condition for learners to develop their manners and skills of effective thinking. Teacher questions are considered as an approach that instructors apply to encourage learners’ critical thinking (CT) abilities. Researchers believe that teacher questions can inspire learners' thoughts and develop thinking abilities. However, studies indicate that only 29% of teachers’ questions in basic education required CT. The current educational reform projects in Oman (Basic Education Project) indicate the need for English teachers to have effective questioning skills and techniques while teaching. While public education plans such as the recent “Cognitive Knowledge Development Project” encourages parents to update their view of the nature of English learning, a similar effort needs to be made on the teaching front. Teacher training programs are well connected to teacher questions, and should not only be encouraged, but needed. If English teachers are to successfully teach English through inquiry learning, it is extremely important for those teachers to practice it firsthand.

Questioning in Omani Classrooms

The Sultanate of Oman is facing the challenge of preparing its children for life and work in the new conditions created by the modern global economy. These conditions will require a high degree of adaptability and strong backgrounds in school subjects especially the English language in order to deal with rapidly changing technologies and developing international business opportunities.

One of the general objectives of the new education system is: “pupils will acquire knowledge and skills in all areas of the curriculum including skills in questioning, investigating, critical thinking, problems solving, and decision making” (Oman, MOE, 1999). In addition, the following specific oral language objectives for higher grades are considered as fundamental productive skills.

1. To initiate and take part in longer conversations and interactions.
2. To recognize and produce common idiomatic and conversational expressions.
3. To use English to carry out practical transactions in everyday life, using a largely predictable and restricted set of language and functions.
4. To use English as a means for communication.

Although it is stated in the national Curriculum Specifications that “the new English Language Curriculum (Basic Education/English for Me) is being designed to provide pupils with higher cognitive skills, and attitudes that Omani students will need to succeed in this rapidly changing society (pp. 7)”, teachers’
techniques of questioning may prevent students from achieving this. Teachers perceived knowledge and actual use of questions influence the way they implement national education policies in their teaching that in turn may affect the use of classroom questions, which is arguably in contradiction with the stated national goals.

Related literature

**Teacher’s Knowledge and Classroom Research**

The constructivist researchers conclude that knowledge is considered as a constructed content rather than received information (Von Glasersfeld, 1991), and explored rather than memorized as an identical set of thoughts (Rorty, 1979). Influenced by Dewey's line of thought, Schon (1987) explains that by “questioning, discussing, and checking beliefs and practices with others, teachers make their own understanding and develop their abilities and skills to manage their teaching” (pp 21). Within this approach, educational research is no longer applied only as a tool to describe teaching performance. However, teacher education plans contain opportunities for teachers to have the ability to assess and evaluate themselves and monitor their own practices and beliefs, and they are supported to build up their knowledge and have positive attempts in classroom research (Tom, 1985; Zeichner, 1994).

Recently, applied linguistics and educationists have changed their focus from educational research, based on students’ achievements and test results, to classroom practices and the learning process. Chaudron (1988) believes that Second/Foreign language classroom research is a classroom-based research that answers significant questions about teaching and learning acts in the Foreign/Second language classrooms. Lytle and Cochran (1990) broadly define teacher research as “systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers” (p. 83).

**Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Questioning**

Many educationists believe that psychological learning theories have made a clear impact on some interactionist theories. They have developed their thoughts basically within second language acquisition. Pica (1994) and Long (1983) have argued that conversational interaction is a strong factor in SLA achievement. They believe it is comparable to first language acquisition theory that considers child-direct speech to be a significant factor in language acquisition.

Long’s (1983) conclusion is based on his observation results of interaction between learners and native speakers. He argues with Krashen (1982) that SLA needs simplified and clear input, and this is what he calls “comprehensible input”. In addition, he is more concerned with language acquisition of “how” input is made comprehensible. He believes that modified interaction is an important tool for this to take place. In this view, what learners require is not essentially “simplification” of the “linguistic forms” but rather situations to communicate and interact with other speakers, in ways which drive learners to customize what they are saying until the learner shows signs of understanding.

Long (1983) has summarized the relationship between interactional modification and comprehensible input as follows:

1. Interactional modification makes input comprehensible;
2. Comprehensible input promotes acquisition. Therefore;
3. Interactional modification promotes acquisition.
4. Lightbown & Spada (1999) believe that modified interaction not only involves linguistic simplification, but also include elaboration, slower speech rate, gestures, or the provision of additional contextual cues. According to Lightbown & Spada (1999), some examples of these conversational modifications are:
a. **Comprehension checks**: efforts by the native speaker to ensure that the learner has understood (for example, 'The bus leaves at 6:30. Do you understand?').

b. **Clarification requests**: effort by the learner to get the native speaker to clarify something which has not been understood (for example, ‘Could you repeat that please?’)

c. **Self-repetition or paraphrase**: the native speaker repeats his or her sentence either partially or in its entirety (for example, ‘She got lost on her way home from school. She was walking home from school. She got lost.’).

**Classifying Teacher Questions**

A broad review of related literature on teachers’ classroom questions indicates that there are many different and complex taxonomies and classifications. However, in the present study, the focus will be on the following four categories of questions: cognitive questions, affective questions, display versus referential questions, and interactional modifications. These categories were used as the conceptual structure for this study.

- **Cognitive Questions**
  The first category is cognitive questions. In this study the researcher used Bloom’s (1956) classification of cognitive questions. This classification is based on two major levels; lower-order level and higher-order level. Lower-order questions include recall, comprehension and application; higher-order questions, by contrast, involve analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

- **Affective Questions**
  The second category is affective questions. The affective domain is concerned with emotions, interests, feelings, beliefs, values, and appreciations (Daines, 1982). Questions in this domain require pupils to express their feelings about things that affect them and to describe how their beliefs affect their actions. Daines (1982) believes that, though the affective domain is not used as often as the cognitive domain it is equally important in instructions. Most attention in education is given to developing cognitive abilities; but to develop cognitive abilities it requires individuals who have a positive belief in themselves, a desire for learning, a willingness to work and self-confidence.

- **Display versus Referential Questions**
  The third category is Display/Referential questions. Long and Sato (1983) classified these two types of questions as display and referential questions. Doughty and Pica (1986) believe that referential questions are genuine questions; those for which the teachers does not know the answer, rather than display questions, whose primary purpose is to allow the students to display their knowledge of language.

- **Interactional Modifications**
  The fourth category is the “interactional modifications” (Tsui, 1995). In this category questions are classified in the degree to which they support the idea of classroom interaction. Studies in the modification of interactional structure in native speaker (NS) and nonnative speaker (NNS) conversations have noted that there are a number of devices that native speakers use both to avoid and repair breakdowns in communication.

**Related Studies**

Redfield and Rousseau (in Samson et al, 2001) carried out a meta-analytic synthesis of 14 studies gathered in the Winne review. Their estimation of an overall result indicates that the frequent application of higher cognitive questions while teaching has a great positive result on student attainment. Therefore, the two studies to investigate in the literature disagree in that Winne judged the results inconclusive. Winne concluded that he could recommend no strong results about the relative effectiveness of higher cognitive questions because of a common lack of experimental rigor in the studies under review. Of the 18 studies under review, 11 failed to meet significant standards for internal validity. Redfield and Rousseau found that there was a positive effect on students' achievement (Samson et al, 2001).
Marian (2003) investigated the effects of affective strategy instruction on measures of second language proficiency and of self-efficacy. There were 31 participants in this study. They were selected from ESL institutions in Canada. The participants were organized into two groups. The first group received 12 hours of affective strategy training. The second group was a comparison group. The data from the self-report questionnaires and from the transcripts of the audio-tapes were used to analyze students’ perceptions of self-efficacy and their second language performance. Marian (2003) found that learners perceived the affective strategy instruction to be most beneficial in classroom activities and for real life purposes.

Yamazaki (1998) investigated teachers’ questions and feedback. The study questions were “What type of questions does the teacher use? “Is there a preponderance of any particular type?” Data was collected at an English class of a private high school in Western Japan which was entrance-examination oriented. The findings of the study indicate that there was very little time spent on students’ production compared to the amount of time which was used for teachers’ asking questions. Most questions were referential questions which were intentionally asked to elicit students’ production, but they did not generate as many students’ answers in spite of the effort made by the teacher. In cases where students answered the questions, their answers were one-word answers.

Shomoossi (2004) investigated the distribution of display and referential questions in EFL classrooms and their interactive effects. The hypothesis was there are no significant differences between the distribution of teachers’ use of display and referential questions. The subjects of the study were five non-native speaking (NNS) English instructors at Allamah Tabatabaee University and Tehran University, three holding Masters and two PhDs ranging from 30 to 52 years of age. All, having several years of teaching experience in teaching EFL courses. Their only behavior to be observed was teaching and using questions. It was found that the observed teachers had used display questions 4.4 times more than the number of referential questions. In other words, out of overall 1628 questions, 1335 were display (about 82%) and only 293 were referential (about 18%).

**Method**

**Subjects**

The population of this study was all EFL teachers in Omani general and basic education schools in the Dhofar region who taught grades 5 to 12. The sample comprising 120 teachers were randomly selected representing a percentage of 40% of the total population of all EFL male and female teachers in the Dhofar region. Of the 120 subjects, 60 were males and 60 were females. Those teachers came from 42 different government schools. The researcher also selected a smaller group (32) from the sample of EFL teachers to examine the actual use of question types inside the classroom by using classroom observation checklist. The researcher organized grades (classes) into 2 levels; level 1 includes grades (5 to 8), and level 2 includes grades (9 to 12). The researcher also classified the subjects in different groups according to their nationality, gender, and the grade level they teach (see Tables 23.1 & 23.2).

**Table 23.1: Distribution of the Teachers’ Sample According to Grade Level and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

250
The researcher developed two instruments to collect the data:

1- A questionnaire to identify the perceived knowledge of question types that teachers have.
2- A structured observation using a checklist to determine the actual use of question types inside classroom.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire in this study was designed to find out teachers’ perceived knowledge of different question types at different school levels in the Dhofar region. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items that were classified into 4 categories. The items were selected from the related literature. The categories and the items included were the same as the ones used in the checklist. Thus, the categories for the questionnaire were as follows:

1- Cognitive Questions
2- Affective Questions
3- Display questions versus Referential
4- Interactional Modifications

The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix A). The teachers were asked to rate the items in the questionnaire in terms of how often they ask each of the question types using the following scale: 5= Always, 4= Usually, 3= Sometimes, 2= Rarely,1= Never

**Observation Checklist**

The observation checklist was used to collect data on teachers’ actual use of different question types inside the classroom. This instrument required the systematic observation of teachers’ use of questions in actual teaching situation. It was adapted from Al-Belushi (1996) and Yamazaki (1998). They followed Barrett’s (as cited in Tollefson, 1989) classification of cognitive questions. However, the researcher of the present study used Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of cognitive questions, because the researcher believes Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy levels are more organized and sequenced. In addition to that, it includes the affective domain which is strongly related to teacher questions. The checklist was developed on the basis of the related literature and the nature of this study (see Appendix B). The items in the checklist were classified into four major categories and consisted of twenty five items. The observation checklist consisted of 25 items classified into four categories. Similarly, the questionnaire consisted of 25 items which were classified into...
four categories. The items for the questionnaire were constructed by the researcher based on a large number of studies of the different types of teacher questions. However, the observation checklist was adapted from Al-Belushi (1996) and Yamazaki (1998). The checklist follows frequencies and tallies of question types.

The purpose of using this response mode was to facilitate the subsequent tabulation and analysis of data. Each teacher was observed two times and the lessons were audiotaped, which gave quick access to clarifying the ambiguous questions inside the classroom. Each lesson lasted from 35 to 40 minutes.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The observation checklist and the questionnaire were shown to a group of 19 referees, five Professors from the College of Education (SQU) – English section, seven Professors from the Language Center (SQU), three Professors from the Arts & Social Science College (SQU) – English Section, and four English language supervisors from the English Supervision Department at the Ministry of Education to check the content and construct validity. These referees were asked to comment on both instruments and to indicate any suggestions for improvement. The aim of this was to ensure the maximum validity for these instruments. The two documents were subjected to several modifications, following the feedback obtained from the referees.

Before conducting classroom observations, the researcher and another English supervisor had three trial observations followed by detailed discussions, in order to identify any ambiguous items in the checklist and familiarize the other supervisor with the observation context. The researcher proceeded to pilot the observation checklist and the questionnaire. The researcher and the English supervisor visited 11 teachers in their classrooms together. The aim behind this was to establish the inter-rater reliability of the checklist. The two observers sat through the same lesson, at the same time and utilized the same observation checklist that had been developed by the researcher. The reliability coefficient for the observers was \( r = .90 \). In terms of the questionnaire, 34 copies were also distributed to English teachers, 17 males and 17 females in order to establish reliability coefficient. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was used and the reliability coefficient was \( 0.90 \). The observation checklist and the questionnaire were reviewed and made ready for administration.

Procedures for Data Collection

The sample for this study was drawn from 42 government schools in the Dhofar region. Since the sample was drawn randomly, the subjects were placed in far mountain schools, near mountain schools, and Salalah schools. Permission to conduct the study in the region was obtained from the Ministry of Education. In addition, the researcher obtained a letter for the schools to be visited from the Directorate General of Education in the region. One hundred twenty copies of the questionnaire were handed to the English language regional supervisors. The regional supervisors were responsible for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires from the schools. In February 2007, the researcher started observing teachers in their classrooms. He visited 32 teachers in different schools in the Dhofar region. When all observations had been completed, the researcher started collecting the questionnaires from the supervisors and the return rate was 100 %.

Data analysis and discussion

This section presents and discusses the statistical analysis of the collected data in light of the research questions of the study. The present study aimed at identifying teachers’ perceived knowledge of question types and how they related this knowledge to their classroom practice and actual use in different grade levels in Omani schools. In addition, the study investigated the differences between teachers in using questions which could be attributed to gender, nationality, and grade level. There are four questions in this study. Each will be dealt with separately.
Question One: To what extent do EFL teachers have sufficient knowledge of question types?

There were twenty five items in the questionnaire grouped into four categories of questions (Cognitive, Affective, Display vs Referential, and Interactional modifications). The participants were asked to respond to them using a Likert-type five-point scale ranging from never to always.

The results (i.e. means) are interpreted with reference to the criterion employed by Oxford (1990, p. 17) which is based on the following three levels:

- High-knowledge of question types means in the range (3.50-5.00)
- Medium-knowledge of question types means in the range (2.50-3.40)
- Low-knowledge of question types means in the range (2.50)

To answer the first question, descriptive statistics were used, means and standard deviations of all items were calculated. These means and standard deviations for each category are shown in Table 23.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Display</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EFL teachers in Oman claim that they have a high-knowledge level of question types with an overall mean value of (3.70). Display questions were the most known question type with a mean value of (3.88), while referential questions were the least known question type with a mean value of (3.49). Table 23.3 presents teachers’ knowledge of question types as perceived by EFL teachers in Oman. It appears from the table that the most known (question type) categories by the teachers are display with a mean of (3.88), and cognitive questions with mean value of (3.75). Interactional modifications follow with a mean of (3.74), respectively. Affective and referential questions are less commonly known categories with a mean of (3.53) and (3.49).
Table 23.4: Mean scores and standard deviations of cognitive questions arranged in descending order (N =120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Cognitive Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Questions that help students to recall what they have learned.</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Questions that help students comprehend and interpret information.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Questions that can help students to apply the rules and techniques to solve problems that have one correct answer.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Questions that help students to evaluate and define the reasons for judgments, and justify the answer by revealing their thought process.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Questions that can encourage students to synthesize the language input and pieces of discrete knowledge within the task.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Questions that can help students to analyze and break the subject down into parts and reflect on the nature of those parts in order to study the inter-relations between the parts.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.4 shows that EFL teachers in Oman have a high-knowledge level of cognitive questions with an overall mean value of (3.75). Questions that help students to recall what they have learned were the most known questions with mean values of (4.16), while questions that can help students to analyze and break the subject down into parts were the least known question type with a mean value of (3.40).
Table 23.5: Mean scores and standard deviations of interactional modifications arranged in descending order  
(N =120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Interactional Modifications</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Questions that ensure the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Questions by the teacher to check that the learner has understood the previous utterance.</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Questions that teachers use when students show no sign of comprehension.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Questions that attempt to confirm that the listener has comprehended what the speaker had said.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Questions that seek further information to clarify the meaning.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Questions that confirm what the previous speaker has said.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Questions that seek to confirm that the language input in teacher’s previous utterance has been heard.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Questions that repeat or rephrase what the teacher said.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Questions that request more information from the teacher about a previous utterance.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Questions from the learner that lead to further modifications by the teacher.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from Table 23.5 that EFL teachers in Oman have a high-knowledge level of interactional modifications with an overall mean value of (3.74). Comprehension checks (Questions that ensure the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said) were the most known questions with a mean value of (4.25), while clarification requests were the least known questions with a mean value of (3.26).
Table 23.6: Mean scores and standard deviations of display questions arranged in descending order
(N =120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Display Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Questions that help the teacher to check if the students know the answer.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Questions that encourage students to display known answers to the teacher.</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Questions that form an appropriate answer usually predetermined by the teacher.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.6 shows that EFL teachers in Oman have a high-knowledge level of display questions with an overall mean value of (3.88). Questions that help the teacher to check if the students know the answer were the most known question type with mean values of (4.33), while questions that form an appropriate answer usually predetermined by the teacher were the least known questions with mean value (3.46).

Table 23.7: Mean scores and standard deviations of referential questions arranged in descending order
(N =120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referential Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 Questions that carry on language interaction between the teacher and the students.</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Questions that help the students to negotiate the meaning with the teacher.</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Questions to which the teacher does not have the information and the students answer them in order to inform the teacher.</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 23.7 that Omani EFL teachers possess high levels of knowledge of referential questions with an overall mean value of (3.49). Questions that focus on language interaction between the teacher and the students were the most known questions with a (4.19) mean value, whereas questions to
which the teacher does not have the information and the students answer them in order to inform the teacher were the least known questions with mean values of (2.59).

Table 23.8: Mean scores and standard deviations of affective questions arranged in descending order
(N =120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Affective Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Questions that help students to express their interests.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Questions that deal with students’ feelings and emotions.</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questions that deal with students’ values and beliefs.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.8 reveals that EFL teachers in Oman have high levels of knowledge of affective questions with an overall mean value of (3.58). Questions that help students to express their interests were the most known questions with mean values of (3.93), while questions that dealt with students’ values and beliefs were the least known questions with a mean value of (3.32).

Looking at the results in detail, it is clear that there are only two patterns (levels) of teachers’ knowledge of question types. The first pattern is that, seventeen out of the twenty five items in the questionnaire received a mean ranging from 3.51-4.33 which shows a high knowledge level of question types for the Omani EFL teachers. The second pattern indicates that the rest of items (eight out of twenty five) received a mean ranging from 2.59-3.46 which shows a medium knowledge level of question types for the Omani EFL teachers.

In addition, apart from items 7, 8, and 9, if we look at the highest seventeen items in tables (23.4), (23.5), (23.6), (23.7), and (23.8) that received a mean ranging from 3.51-4.33 which is considered a high knowledge level of question types. We can find that these items were centered around the recall and comprehension questions, display questions, and questions that aim at ensuring that the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said. This is clear from items 1, 2, 11, 10, 19, 23, 24, 25, 20, which have the highest mean values.

Tables (23.4), (23.5), (23.6), (23.7), and (23.8) display the means and standard deviations of the individual items in a descending order. Looking at the results in detail, it is clear that there are only two patterns (levels) of teachers’ knowledge of question types. The first pattern is that, seventeen out of the twenty five items in the questionnaire received a mean ranging from 3.51-4.33 which shows a high knowledge level of question types for the Omani EFL teachers. The second pattern indicates that the rest of items (eight out of twenty five) received a mean ranging from 2.59-3.46 which shows a medium knowledge level of question types for the Omani EFL teachers.

In addition, apart from items 7, 8, and 9, if we look at the highest seventeen items in tables (23.4), (23.5), (23.6), and (23.7) that received a mean ranging from 3.51-4.33 which is considered a high knowledge level of question types. We can find that these items were centered around the recall and comprehension questions, display questions, and questions that aim at ensuring that the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said. This is clear from items 1, 2, 11, 10, 19, 23, 24, 25, 20, which have the highest mean values.

It is evident that EFL teachers in Oman believe that they have a medium to high knowledge level of different question types. These results are supportive to the teaching methods in the national curriculum specifications. The key emphasis in the national curriculum is an inductive approach to language learning. Students are asked key questions to lead them to discover language patterns and grammatical rules for themselves. By doing this, they become active participants in the learning process, not passive receivers of knowledge (Oman, MOE, 1999).

The results of teachers’ perceived knowledge of question types showed that EFL teachers in Oman are aware of the different types of questions. This can be explained in two ways. The first explanation has to do with university programs of study. These programs tackle the issue of questioning as an important part of
classroom discourse, classroom interaction, and cognitive theories. Therefore, the EFL teachers enter the real teaching practice in schools with sufficient exposure to the different question types.

The second explanation can be related to the Educational Reform Project. To the best knowledge of the researcher, one of the most important aims of the Educational Reform Project is to improve teachers’ skills, knowledge, and performance. As a result, teachers will be able to cope with the new system and the demands of the new syllabus. One way to do this is through in-service training programs. From the researcher’s experience as a supervisor, every EFL teacher in Oman must complete the in-service Basic Education Training programs. The Basic Education Textbooks use different question types, therefore those teachers who complete the in-service training programs at least will be aware of the different question types.

**Question Two: To what extent do EFL teachers use different question types?**

The classroom observation checklist contained twenty five items grouped into four categories (Cognitive questions, Affective questions, Display questions, Referential questions, and Interactional modifications). Those items are based on teacher question types. To answer the second question, descriptive statistics were used, and the mean of the total number of frequencies for each category was calculated. Means and standard deviations for each category are shown in Table 23.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Display</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35.94</td>
<td>16.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>29.25</td>
<td>13.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>7.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interactional modifications</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.9 shows that the most frequently used question type by the EFL teachers in Oman is display questions (mean 36); cognitive questions follow with an average of (29). Referential questions are less commonly used questions with an average of (3). Affective questions and interactional modifications are found to be the least popular of all question types with an average use of only (.25), less than (1) question, respectively.

The EFL teachers in this study extensively used display questions. This result lends support to those of previous studies on the same issue. Shomoossi (2004) found that out of a total of 1628 questions, 1335 have been display (about 82%) and only 293 referential (about 18%). Also, Long and Sato (1983) found that teachers asked a total of 141 questions, only 24 of which were referential and 117 of which were display.

The researcher believes that EFL teachers’ heavy reliance on the use of display questions may reflect the realities that the classroom context follows traditional roles. In other words, the teacher will be the provider of the information and the student will be the receiver of the information. Therefore, students will be geared primarily to tests and learn English in an environment where they hardly find opportunities for real interaction and communicative learning. It is clearly noticed in Table 23.9 that EFL teachers in Oman use all types of questions included in the classroom observation checklist, but in different degrees. Tables 23.10-12 show the means of individual items in each category in descending order.
Table 23.10: Total average of frequencies for each cognitive question

(N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Cognitive Qs</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.28</td>
<td>11.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>5.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.10 shows the mean total of frequencies for individual cognitive questions (i.e. mean over all teachers). It appears from the table that the most frequently used question type is recall questions with a total average of (24). Comprehension questions are less commonly used questions with an average of (3). However, the other question types (Application, Evaluation, Synthesis, and Analysis questions) were the least frequently used with total averages of less than (1), in each case.

This result is consistent with previous studies in this area. The literature presented evidence on the types of questions most often used by teachers. Daines (1986) found that teachers ask questions that focus on memory level thinking. Wragg and Brown (2001) conclude that the overall 187 questions that were used by teachers consisted of 10 managerial (questions that teachers ask for classroom discipline and control), 65 higher order and 112 lower order questions.

It is obvious that recall questions proceed over the list of question types in the cognitive category. Although this type has some disadvantages as assessing only literal understanding, it is the most frequent type of all. Teachers tend to overuse this type because examinations often focus on factual texts.

Another reason for overusing this type of questions is that teachers often stress recitation and remembering factual information previously learned. The reason behind this may be that the recall of specific information requires less high cognitive operations than do higher level types (evaluation, synthesis, and analysis). The teachers’ purpose in this situation is to check the accuracy of the students’ knowledge of what is being recalled. On the other hand, this result indicates a mismatch between what is set by the national curriculum and how teachers actually teach in terms of asking questions. Policy makers aim at providing learners with a holistic education, and prepare them to meet the challenges of the real world by focusing on language use in society and everyday life (Oman, MOE, 1999). Education administrators expect teachers to stick closely to the curriculum in their teaching. Teachers, however, are concerned with short term goals and exam results.
Table 23.11: Total average of frequencies for each affective question

(N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Affective Qs</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.11 presents the frequency use of affective questions. It is clear that the three types of affective questions were rarely used with a total average use of less than (1). This finding indicates that the majority of teachers did not use affective questions at all. This could be due to the fact that teachers believe that the cognitive domain is more important than the affective domain in the classroom. Therefore, teachers use cognitive questions more than affective questions. In other words, various cognitive and affective processes play an important and integral role in the language-learning context, (Horwitz, 2001). Marian (2003) found that learners perceived the affective factors to be most helpful in classroom activities and for real life purposes. In other words, learners need to be secure and confident in order to answer and interact in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Table 23.12: Total average of frequencies for each display versus referential question

(N = 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Display versus Referential Qs</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Display</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35.94</td>
<td>16.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>7.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.12 shows the total average of frequencies for display and referential questions. Results indicate that display questions are more frequently used with a total average of (36) than referential questions with an average of less than (3).

This finding is consistent with Long and Sato (1983) and Pica and Long (1986). They conclude that teachers in ESL classes ask more display questions than referential questions. However, Yamazaki (1998) investigated teachers’ questions and feedback. He found that most questions were referential questions that were purposely raised to elicit students’ answers, but they did not generate as many students’ answers in spite of the effort made by the teacher. The researchers believe that the findings of Yamazaki's study were related to the nature of classroom communication habits. It seemed that the subjects (students) in this study were not used to exchange sustained interaction patterns and teachers asked referential questions for research purposes, however, most EFL teachers tend to ask display questions more than referential questions.

The explanation to teachers’ heavy reliance on the use of display questions is clearly connected with the teachers’ policy on asking questions, which is the avoidance of referential questions. Teachers provided students with opportunities of asking display questions to confirm their knowledge and facts, at the same time; they decreased opportunities for students to use English for real communicative purposes. Their attitude shows an attempt to make the classroom a place for the students to get correct answers, to get good marks on the test, rather than to use English for communication and interactio
Table 23.13 shows the frequencies of each interactional modification. It is clear from the table that interactional modifications were rarely used by EFL teachers in Oman. Clarification requests and comprehension checks were less frequent with a total average of less than (1). However, confirmation checks were not used at all with an average of (0).

This finding is consistent with the finding in Foster and Ohta (2005). They believe that the tasks used in their study, that is a one-way information exchange, were not conducive to the negotiation for meaning. Doughty and Pica (1986) found that the two most important variables were task type and teacher participation. More negotiation occurred in two-way tasks in which participants had to exchange information with each other. Interestingly, though the new Omani English language syllabus is designed communicatively and tasks are structured in order to encourage classroom interaction and communication, EFL teachers in Oman are still using more display questions than referential questions. Further research should consider the effect of the task nature on classroom negotiation.

Long and Sato (1983) concluded that if classroom input is to become optimally comprehensible, it should no longer be the teacher’s choice to ask questions; the scope and purpose of questions should extend beyond mere student display and teacher evaluation. All participants in classroom interaction should ask questions, and those questions should serve to clarify and confirm input, thereby making it comprehensible.

Similarly, the heavy use of display questions in this study prevented students from classroom interaction and negotiation for meaning. Learners’ responses would differ not only quantitatively, but also in terms of their quality (i.e. the level of cognitive operations required), depending on the type of question. Referential questions, which seek information unknown to the speaker, were thought more likely to elicit longer, more communicatively authentic responses than display questions, for which responses are predetermined by lesson content. It is very important that teachers have conscious knowledge of question types that would help them to use question types purposefully and effectively. The following question discusses the correlation between teachers' perceived knowledge with the actual use of question types.

**Question Three:** How does teacher’s perceived knowledge correlate with the actual use of question types?

As was mentioned previously, the purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between EFL teachers’ perceived knowledge and their actual use of question types in Omani Schools. To answer the third question, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to estimate the relationship between teachers’ perceived knowledge and their actual use of questions types.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Interactional Modifications</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clarification requests</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comprehension checks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Confirmation checks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.13: Total average of frequencies for each interactional modification (N = 32)
1. **Correlation between the perceived knowledge with the actual use of cognitive questions**

Pearson’s correlation was calculated between the perceived knowledge and the actual use of cognitive questions for the total sample (N = 32). The correlation coefficient was (r = .004). Hence, there is no correlation between perceived knowledge with actual use of cognitive questions. This result is not consistent with previous research. For example, Rogers and Davis (1970) found that there is a positive correlation between improving teachers’ knowledge of cognitive questions in training programs and implementing this knowledge inside classrooms. As such, they believed that well-planned cognitive questions can inspire thought and develop thinking skills. Since cognitive questions affect thinking skills, it would be correct to believe that cognitive questions would raise students' level of thinking. This is supported by Martin, (1979, p.154) who stated “…teachers approach the teaching of thinking through teachers’ questions”.

2. **Correlation between the perceived knowledge with the actual use of affective Questions**

Pearson’s correlation was calculated between the sufficient perceived knowledge and the actual use of affective questions for the total sample (N = 32). The correlation coefficient was (r = -.240). Hence, there is a negative, non-significant correlation between perceived knowledge and actual use of affective questions.

The result obtained may be due to teachers’ belief that the affective domain is less important than the cognitive domain. As a result, teachers neglect the use of affective questions and pay more attention to other types of questions (i.e., recall and comprehension questions).

Marian (2003) found that learners perceived the affective strategy instruction to be most beneficial in classroom activities and for real life purposes. In other words, students should be confident and positive in order to learn inside the classroom.

3. **Correlation between the perceived knowledge with the actual use of display/referential questions**

Pearson’s correlation was calculated between the sufficient perceived knowledge and the actual use of display/referential questions for the total sample (N=32). The correlation coefficient was (r = -.357*). There is a negative correlation between perceived knowledge with actual use of display/referential questions which is significant at the 0.05 level.

This finding is not consistent with the results of previous research. Long and Sato (1983) found that the control group teachers (with no training) asked 141 questions, 117 were display questions and only 24 referential questions were asked. However, the treatment group (with training) asked 194 questions, only 21 questions were display and 173 were referential. According to Long and Sato the two variables (knowledge and use) are increasing together.

Our finding may be related to the lack of training programs. In-service training programs BETPs (Basic Education Training Programs) do not tackle such important teaching concerns. The main purpose of those programs is to introduce the basic education syllabus to the new EFL teachers. As a result, teachers join their schools with only surface knowledge of different teaching issues. Therefore, this is the right time to train our teachers on how to conduct classroom research in order to help them identify their teaching philosophy and pedagogical needs. Classroom research looks at features of the kinds of questions that teachers ask, therefore, they can research and improve the quality of question types. Kumar (1994: p, 31) stated that “any pedagogic framework must emerge from classroom experience and experimentation and is also motivated by the fact that a solid body of classroom research findings are available for consideration and application”.

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4. Correlation between the perceived knowledge with the actual use of interactional modifications

Pearson’s correlation was calculated between the sufficient perceived knowledge and the actual use of interactional modifications for the total sample (N=32). The correlation coefficient was (r = .391*). There is a positive correlation between perceived knowledge and actual use of interactional modifications which is significant at the 0.05 level.

The positive Pearson Correlation (r = .391*) indicates that the two variables are increasing and decreasing together. So whenever the teachers’ perceived knowledge of interactional modifications increase, the teachers’ actual use of interactional modifications also increases and vice versa. This means that there is a direct proportional correlation between the teachers’ perceived knowledge and the teachers’ actual use of interactional modifications. However, this finding might be due to the small amount of teachers’ perceived knowledge and teachers’ actual use of interactional modifications that have been used in this study. If a larger amount had been used, results might have been entirely different.

Question Four: Are there differences among teachers in using questions which can be attributed to their, gender, nationality, and grade level?

To examine the differences in teachers’ use of question types attributed to their gender, nationality, and grade level, t-tests were performed to determine if statistically significant differences existed in EFL teachers’ use of question types in Omani schools. With regard to determining the effect gender has on EFL teachers’ use of question types, a t-test was conducted to find out if statistically significant differences existed between males and females in their use of question types. The results of the t–tests are presented in Table 23.14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. D</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29.75</td>
<td>18.05</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28.75</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display / Referential</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43.25</td>
<td>17.78</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33.87</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional modifications</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.14 shows that no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups (female and male teachers) in using teacher question types. This means that both female and male teachers equally use teacher question types. It appears from the table that the t–test results and the significance levels were
greater than the (2-tailed) values at the level of 0.05 which indicate that there were no differences in the way that both female and male teachers use the different question types.

This result might be attributed to the fact that both female and male teachers were teaching under similar circumstances. Another reason could be due to the quality of training programs. As mentioned previously, the type of training programs those teachers are exposed to are general and form an introduction to the Basic Education system.

Table 23.15: T – Test results for the use of question types with regard to teachers’ nationality
(N = 32) Omani = 16, Non-Omani = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. D</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Omani</td>
<td>29.63</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Omani</td>
<td>28.88</td>
<td>14.55</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Omani</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Omani</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display / Referential</td>
<td>Omani</td>
<td>35.43</td>
<td>15.77</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Omani</td>
<td>41.68</td>
<td>17.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Omani</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifications</td>
<td>Non-Omani</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.15 reveals no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups (Omani and non-Omani teachers) in using teacher question types. This result might be related to the fact that both Omani and non-Omani teachers were working under similar situations, were exposed to the same administrative rules, have almost the same environment and the same number of teaching periods. Another reason could be the teacher preparation programs. It seems that the teacher preparation programs for all nationalities focus on the same teaching style, which is a one-way flow of information from teacher to students. From experience as a supervisor, the researcher believes that teacher-talking time in Omani classroom is a dominant pattern in classroom discourse. Therefore, focused training is very important at this level. Courses should be designed according to teachers' need and according to classroom indicators.
Table 23.16: Test results for teachers’ use of question types with regard to grade level (N = 32) Level 1 = 16, Level 2 = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. D</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>32.75</td>
<td>13.94</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>25.75</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display / Referential</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>38.50</td>
<td>20.77</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>38.62</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modifications</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.16 shows that no statistically significant differences were found between the two grade levels (level 1 grades 5-8 and level 2 grades 9-12) in using teacher question types. This means that both level 1 and level 2 teachers equally use teacher question types. Although one expects that such variables may influence the use of question types, the results of this study do not support this. These results indicate that neither level 1 nor level 2 has any effect on the use of question types and that teachers in both levels use them with the same frequency. This could be explained by the way the teachers treat students in the classroom. It seems that teachers use the same question types in both levels without considering the cognitive differences between the two levels, (i.e. questions that are appropriate for grade five will not automatically be good for grade eleven or twelve). As a result, teachers might not help students to improve cognitively, emotionally, and psychologically. Students need to develop the knowledge of language and learn language skills, therefore, they need teachers who value this development and help them to learn.

Summary and Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that EFL teachers in Oman claim that they have a high-knowledge level of question types with a mean value of (3.679). In terms of EFL teachers’ actual use of question types, teachers rely on and heavily use display questions. With this in mind, the impact on classroom practice was clear. We found that though teachers claimed knowledge of question types, their classroom practice followed one pattern which was teacher domination. Teachers provide knowledge, confirm understanding and recall information. There were no opportunities for real communication, because teachers used only closed display questions without awareness of the purpose of questioning behavior. The descending order of question types used was as follows: display questions (35.94), cognitive questions (29.25), referential questions (2.63), affective questions (1.13) and interactional modifications (.25). In terms of the correlation between teachers’ perceived knowledge and actual use of question types, Pearson’s correlation of data displayed the following findings:

- There is no correlation between perceived knowledge with actual use of cognitive questions.
- There is a negative correlation between perceived knowledge and actual use of affective questions.
- There is a negative correlation between perceived knowledge with actual use of display/referential questions which is significant at the 0.05 level.
- There is a positive correlation between perceived knowledge and actual use of interactional modifications which is significant at the 0.05 level.

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When examining the differences in EFL teachers’ use of question types in Oman, three variables were considered: gender, nationality, and grade level. The t-tests results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between teachers in using questions which can be attributed to, gender, nationality, and grade level.

The present study has a number of important implications. The first of these implications is related to the teaching/learning context. In order to make teachers interact and use real language with their students, they need to create a rich environment in the classroom. For instance, not only should they teach in English, but they should also engage their students in a variety of communicative activities, such as information gap tasks or playing games in pairs or small groups. Thus, the role of a teacher as an authoritarian figure, which is usual in Oman, should be changed to that of a facilitator.

The second implication is related to the workload and work conditions. Our results indicated that the work conditions for teachers need to be improved, if using question types is to achieve any significant importance in EFL classes. These conditions, especially the heavy teaching load and the large classes, make it difficult for teachers to provide the kind of questions that they believe to be effective. An effort can perhaps be made to improve these conditions so that teachers could improve the use of questioning types inside the classroom.

The third implication is related to training programs. As previously mentioned, training programs are just an introduction to Basic Education classes. As a result, teachers join schools with only a surface knowledge of teaching principles. Nowadays, it is widely believed that classroom research helps teachers to construct their teaching principles and form their beliefs through reflection and daily classroom experience. Therefore in-service training programs should include at least the basics of classroom research. When teachers are trained and become familiar with the functions of classroom research, they will investigate their own classroom priorities and start to form their teaching philosophy.
References


Appendix A

The Questionnaire of EFL Teachers’ Knowledge of Question types

Sultan Qaboos University
College of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
MA in Education (ELT Curriculum Instruction)
CUTM 7501/10
ELT Curriculum and Methodology

A questionnaire that examines teachers’ knowledge of question types

Please circle the appropriate information

Gender: (Female) (Male)
Nationality: (Omani) (Non-Omani)
Class level: (5, 6, 7, 8) (9, 10, 11, 12)

Dear English language teachers,

The aim of this questionnaire is to examine EFL teachers’ perceived knowledge of question types in Dhofar region. The data will be used only for research purposes. There is no need to mention your name or the name of your school. Please answer the following statements. Thank you for your cooperation.
How often do you ask each of the following questions? Circle the appropriate number opposite to each statement. 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually, 5 = always

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Questions that help students to recall what they have learned.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Questions that help students comprehend and interpret information.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Questions that can help students to apply the rules and techniques to solve problems that have one correct answer.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Questions that can help students to analyze and break the subject down into parts and reflect on the nature of those parts in order to study the inter-relations between the parts.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Questions that can encourage students to synthesize the language input and pieces of discrete knowledge within the task.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Questions that help students to evaluate and define the reasons for judgments, and justify the answer by revealing their thought process.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Questions that deal with students’ feelings and emotions.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Questions that deal with students’ values and beliefs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Questions that help students to express their interests.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Display versus Referential Questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Questions that encourage students to display known answers to the teacher.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Questions that help the teacher to check if the students know the answer.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Questions that form an appropriate answer usually predetermined by the teacher.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Questions that carry on language interaction between the teacher and the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Questions that help the students to negotiate the meaning with the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Questions to which the teacher does not have the information and the students answer them in order to inform the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Questions that repeat or rephrase what the teacher said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Questions that seek to confirm that the language input in teacher’s previous utterance has been heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Questions that confirm what the previous speaker has said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Questions that ensure the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Questions that seek further information to clarify the meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Questions that request more information from the teacher about a previous utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Questions from the learner that lead to further modifications by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Questions by the teacher to check that the learner has understood the previous utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Questions that teachers use when students show no sign of comprehension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Questions that attempt to confirm that the listener has comprehended what the speaker had said.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Sultan Qaboos University
College of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
MA in Education (ELT Curriculum Instruction)
CUTM 7501/10
ELT Curriculum and Methodology

Classroom Observation Checklist on Teachers’ use of Question Types

Teacher:                               School:                                          Grade level: 1 / 2
Gender:  M / F            Observation:  1  2  3
Nationality: Omani / Non-Omani Date:

The Checklist of EFL Teachers’ Use of Question types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question type</th>
<th>Tallies</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Recall : a. Recalling of details.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Recalling of main ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Recalling of a sequence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Inferring the main idea.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Interpreting meaning of words in context.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Application :</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applying the new material in different context.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Analysis:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Breaking the subject down into parts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Studying the inter-relation between the parts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Synthesis:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building bridges between subjects and pieces of discrete knowledge within subjects.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Evaluation:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Evaluating fact / opinion.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Evaluating appropriateness</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Affective Questions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Questions that deal with pupils’ feelings and emotions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questions that deal with students’ values and beliefs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Questions that help students to express their interests.</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Display / Referential</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Questions that confirm what the previous speaker said.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Questions that ensure the student has correctly understood what the teacher had said.</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Questions that attempt to confirm that the listener has comprehended what the speaker had said.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 24

The Perceptions of Saudi Female Preparatory Year Students of the Challenges in EFL Vocabulary Learning

Rana Rida Obaid, King Abdulaziz University Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Developing L2 lexis through the learning of vocabulary is an essential part of second language learning especially in tertiary education. As Vermeer (1992:147), puts it, "Knowing words is the key to understanding and being understood." As Perry and MacDonald, 2001, stress, "One of the main concerns for those of us working in an ESP context, is how to help our students deal with (i.e. understand, extract information, assimilate, evaluate, summarize) authentic academic texts which, by their nature, require a fairly advanced level of proficiency in order to be understood; by 'advanced level of proficiency' we mean 'a good vocabulary size.' It is a fact that EFL students learning English for higher education experience difficulties in vocabulary learning.

In the Saudi context, the perceptions of college level students on the difficulties they encounter in learning vocabulary have received very little attention despite the extensive research and growing interest in vocabulary teaching and learning, concerning strategies and various methods and strategies in acquiring vocabulary. Saudi female students studying in the preparatory year program (PYP) face great challenges in studying vocabulary at the college level. Students are expected to do lots of reading in textbooks and in exams, and they must have a satisfactory knowledge of L2 lexis to comprehend reading. Also, listening is an essential part of their curriculum, and understanding vocabulary is very essential in understanding dialogues and scripts. Not only is vocabulary important in reading and listening, but it is also important in writing and speaking. Female students write a number of essays in different genres throughout the PYP. They are also required to talk about a variety of topics and situations through multiple speaking tasks. However, these students struggle with learning vocabulary. Whatever they have learned in their school years does not necessarily meet their needs because they "must deal with highly technical infrequently used terms and lexes encountered in academic subject matter at the college level" (Johnson & Steele, 1996, pp. 348-357).

Research Questions

To address the above problem, three research questions were posited:

1. What are the difficulties that Saudi female level-one university preparatory students face when learning new vocabulary?

2. In terms of learning vocabulary, what specific feature/features in a word do these students find difficult to learn?

3. What are the skills in English where vocabulary creates a major obstacle for these students? Why?

Definition of the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) in Saudi Arabia

The preparatory year in Saudi Arabia is designed to improve students’ proficiency in English before they undertake undergraduate study. Once the students are accepted in the PYP, they must take the Online Oxford Placement Test. Students receive 18 hours of English Language learning per week for a full academic year. The duration of the PYP is one year, divided into two regular semesters. Each semester is 18 weeks each and is further divided into two more semesters, making up four quarter semesters or modules which are 9 weeks each. Each module constitutes four levels of English. They are labeled as follows: level one- the beginner...
level (A1), level two- the elementary (A2), level three- the pre-intermediate (B1), and level four- the intermediate level (B1) according to CEFR.

**Review of the Literature**

Current views on vocabulary knowledge "posit this knowledge as multi-componential, including knowledge of a word's spelling, meaning, collocations, register traits, and grammatical and morphological characteristics" (Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 145-171). The main problem with vocabulary teaching as Nation (1990) stated is that "only a few words… can be dealt with at any one time." In fact, word knowledge is an essential part of communicative competence, and it is very important for production and comprehension in second language learning.

Many L2 learners are concerned with the heavy burden of learning vocabulary, through their journey of L2 education especially in the college level. Many scholars and researchers tackled this issue in a number of studies. Ellis and Beaton (1993) reviewed the psycholinguistic determinants of foreign language vocabulary learning. Also, Saigh and Schmitt (2012) explored the problems of learning L2 vocabulary word form by focusing on Arabic-speaking ESL learners. Another study done by Nurweni and Read (1999) reported on a research study conducted in an Indonesian university to estimate the English vocabulary knowledge of a large sample of first-year students. Also, Laufer (1990) in her paper discussed the relationship between ease/difficulty in learning particular words and some issues in the teaching of vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning strategies have also been tackled by many researchers (Nation, 1990; O'Dell, 2009) who have written a lot about strategies for vocabulary teaching. Also, many scholars have undertaken the issue of vocabulary learning strategies through the perceptions of students (Dang, 2013; Chien, 2013; Asgari & Mustafa, 2011; Miller, 2011).

In reference to adult Saudi college L2 students, numerous studies have been done by Saudi scholars on this issue from several perspectives. There are numerous studies that have been carried out on vocabulary acquisition for college students such as Zaid (2009), Almasrai & Milton, (2012), Alhmoud and Alsaloum (2012), Aljarf (2006), and Alsalamah, (2011). Further studies done on incidental vocabulary learning at the college level have been conducted by Ahmad (2011) and Aljabry (2009). Additionally, there are a wide variety of studies that were done on vocabulary learning strategies by Alabbassi (2009), Alasmari (2007), Alhysouny (2012), Aljarf (2007), Aljuaid (2010), Alshowaileh (2001), Alshuwiah (2010), and Fageeh & Mekheimer, (2011).

**Methodology and Procedures**

This small-scale mixed methods study was conducted with 11 Saudi female students ranging in age from 18-20 years old. All participants were studying in the PYP. The sample chosen for this research is purposive sampling. The participants are homogeneous in respect to nationality, mother tongue, and both cultural and educational background. They had all studied in public schools and completed a six-year study of English as a foreign language prior to their admission to college. All students had taken the Oxford Online Placement Test and were grouped in level one. The study took two weeks to complete. The students were informed about the research procedures, purpose of the study, and the time they would need to devote to data collection. Moreover, they signed a consent form to guarantee the ethics of the research, and they were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality.

**Instruments for Data Collection**

**Interview Questions**

The six semi-structured interview questions in this study were designed by the researcher and inspired by the participants at the same time. The questions were structured to fulfill the research questions in the study. Thus, the researcher took broad lines from the research questions and narrowed them further into more specific questions that highlighted the issues of the study and fulfilled its objectives. Also, the questions included a mix of closed-ended questions (answering yes or no) and open-ended questions (explaining and
elaborating). Finally, due to the weak level of the students in the English language, the questions were conducted in the native language of the students, Arabic, and then the researcher translated the interviews into English.

**Ranking Exercise**

The quantitative ranking exercise is a schedule that the participants were asked to complete, to rank the features more specifically. As Nation (1990) states, "Word features can affect the learning burden of that word." The purpose of it was to elaborate more on the difficulties, and to make students aware of features in a word that they could have missed or forgotten to state in the interviews. These features were ranked according to their difficulty level, assigning 6 to the most difficult feature and 1 to the least difficult. Also, the ranking exercise was stated as question 5 in the interview design and was related to the second research question. Finally, the ranking exercise was easy to fill out, comprehensive, and practical for the students; it helped them state the level of difficulty of features of learning vocabulary in a more organized systematic way.

**Pilot Studies**

The instruments and procedures of the study were tested in an initial pilot study. The interview questions were piloted to check the clarity of the questions, eliminate ambiguous ones, gain feedback on leading questions, order questions, classify easy and difficult questions, and check the time for interviewing. The researcher chose three participants for her pilot study and made some modifications and reordering of her questions after piloting. Also, when the ranking exercise was piloted, the researcher eliminated some features like idiomacy, morphology, and register since all of the students didn't know what these features meant. To ensure clarity, the researcher conducted the piloted tools on another group of three. When the results turned out to be satisfying, the researcher decided to include the data collected from the pilot studies in the main data collection process. The researcher believed that the responses of the students in the pilot studies would give more depth and insight into the matter and enrich the study. Data analysis of the interviews would be carried out manually.

**Results and Findings**

The results of the interviews are discussed in relation to the research questions of the study. Each research question will be handled and debated individually.

**Research question 1:** What are the difficulties that Saudi female level-one university preparatory students face when learning new vocabulary?

Three threads were identified in the interview data in response to this research question. These threads are: the challenges and difficulties faced by the participants, the factors leading to these difficulties and making them persist, and the strategies students suggested in overcoming these difficulties.

Firstly, the difficulties faced by these participants could be summed up in two major points: the pronunciation of newly-learned L2 words and the inability to retain them. These difficulties were expressed by many students even with different GPAs: Manal, an A student, expressed her problem with learning new L2 words as being major since she couldn't recall all the new words she studied, and that she was very forgetful. Laufer (1997), for example, states that "Easy words can be introduced in larger numbers than the more difficult ones as they require less practice and less effort in memorization." Laufer (1997) has also stressed that more practice and exercise should be devoted to difficult vocabulary than to the easy ones to achieve positive learning outcomes.

Also, students were conscious of one major problem which was pronunciation. Five students confessed to the fact that the pronunciation of words was a big obstacle they encountered when learning new L2 words. Ghadeer said: "I wish I could pronounce words correctly; it would make my vocabulary learning much easier."
Noura and Bayan shared the exact comment with Ghadeer, as their pronunciation is also poor. However, Rania stated that her pronunciation difficulty reaches its peak when the letters in the word are silent or pronounced differently. And that can be related to two issues: firstly, Lenneberg's (1967, as cited in Birdsong, 2009) critical period hypothesis in which he argued that due to a loss of neural plasticity, languages could no longer be completely successfully acquired after the close of that period. However, Scovel (1969, 1988, as cited in Birdsong, 2009) singled out pronunciation as the one area of language performance that was subject to the constraints of a critical period. Secondly, the major discrepancies between the English and the Arabic phonological systems pose great difficulties in pronunciation for Saudi students. An English written word may provide no clues to its pronunciation (Laufer, 1997, p. 144).

Secondly, as for the reasons for these difficulties from the students' experience and background, it was not surprising that all eleven students stated that their lack of practicing words which they have learned inside and outside the classroom was the number one reason for their difficulties. All eleven students complained that there was no one to talk to, converse with, or even revise the new words with.

Finally, the strategies the students suggested to follow to overcome these challenges were somehow varied and similar at the same time. When asked if these difficulties still persist, the students all said that the problems had lessened. One reason could be that that these PYP students are exposed to a minimum of 18 hours of EFL per week during their university studies, which maximizes their intake compared to high school studies which didn't exceed 5 hours of EFL per week. Another reason could be that in PYP, students are required to study only a certain number of vocabulary items that are related to each unit or chapter in their textbooks and that makes it easier on students to focus on target words and learn them. Fortunately, all students were positive and sure that they could overcome the difficulties they had when learning vocabulary by following strategies of their own. Some of them stated that practicing the new L2 words they learn with friends and peers is the best way to overcome the obstacle of learning new words, for peers would revise and correct for each other in a friendly atmosphere. Others like Noura, Bayan, Samar, Rania, and Ghadeer said that translating each new word they learn into the L1 and learning the meaning of it are the best ways to learn new words. As for the rest, their answers varied between listening to English-talking programs, watching English movies, You Tube, and reading. They believed that these activities were good strategies to enhance their L2 vocabulary learning. Shereen believed that studying at an English institute is very helpful for her in her vocabulary learning.

Research question 2: In terms of learning vocabulary, what specific feature/features in a word do these students find difficult to learn?

In response to this research question, the students were asked to rank their answers from 6 to 1, giving the most difficult value to number 6 and the least difficult to number 1. Interestingly enough, there was a tie between pronunciation, length, multiple meaning, and orthography as the most difficult features in learning a new word. By contrast, five students, which composed about half of the participants, ranked pronunciation as the least difficult feature in learning a new word. Amal confessed that not understanding the meaning of a word was among her major challenges in learning it. Noura and Rania shared the same comment as Amal. Moreover, Samar said: "Usually when I do not know the meaning of a word, I cannot use or retain that word." Rama and Shereen stated that multiple meanings of a word was one of their major difficulties in learning that word because using it would completely depend on its meaning, and that is supported by what Laufer (1990, p. 152) says: "Empirical evidence is available to illustrate the difficulty learners have with polysemy and homonymy." Also, in her article about ease and difficulty in vocabulary learning, Laufer (1990) states that some of the factors that affect learning a word are the partial overlap in meaning and the multiplicity of meaning.

By filling out the quantitative ranking schedule, the students stated that words being long mark a serious difficulty for them; as Laufer, (1997) states: "Intuitively, it would seem that longer words should be more difficult simply because there is more to learn and remember (p. 144). Also, the multiple meaning of a word creates a major obstacle for these students. Finally, pronunciation posits a major difficulty in learning words...
for these students because orthography and pronunciation of words in Arabic are consistent whereas in English they are not. In a study done by Ellis and Beaton (2006), they review the psycholinguistic factors that affect ease of learning of foreign language (FL) vocabulary and their findings indicate that native-to-foreign learning is shown to be easier the more the FL words conform to the phonological and orthographic patterns of the native language.

However, in the ranking exercise almost half of the participants stated pronunciation as the least difficult feature in learning a new L2 word (they actually ranked it 1); while in the interviews, pronunciation came as a major difficulty. A reason to this could be that having other features present in front of the participants in the ranking exercise made the students aware of other problems they encounter in vocabulary learning that they didn't think about before. Nevertheless, having 50 percent of the participants stating that pronounceability is a chief struggle for them in learning new L2 words does not make the problem any smaller; pronounceability does pose a major difficulty in learning vocabulary for those students just as they stated earlier in the interviews.

Research question 3: What are the skills in English where vocabulary creates a major obstacle for these students? Why?

The skills specified for this question were the four skills students study in English during school and college: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In response to this research question, eight out of the eleven students said that speaking was the major skill that new L2 vocabulary learning created a major challenge for them. When those students were asked about the reasons for this difficulty, most of them attributed their obstacles in speaking to lack of practice and not finding somebody to converse with. Ghadeer and Manal stated that they always found speaking very difficult because they do not have enough words. Noura and Maha said that they found it difficult to put the very few words they know into meaningful sentences and express themselves. Bayan added that she couldn't pronounce words correctly, so that hinders her from practicing speaking. One reason for the concern of these students is the fact that speaking is a skill that is tested and assessed as a part of their curriculum in the PYP level where it carries up to 20 percent of the whole grade. Students are required to speak fluently and correctly for a few minutes on a specific topic chosen by the assessor. On the other hand, some students said that writing was the major skill that new L2 vocabulary learning created a major challenge for them. Samar stated: "I have very limited words to use; I cannot spell correctly, and I do not know how to put these words together to make meaningful sentences." Shereen and Bayan stated that spelling is a major problem for them when they have to express something in writing. Spelling English words has been a major problem for Saudi students because, as mentioned before, Arabic words are spelled just as they are pronounced whereas English words are not, and not all students are aware of this fact. Swan (1997:178) states, "The more aware learners are of the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and the target language, the easier they will find it to adopt effective learning and production strategies."

Interestingly, when these students were asked about the skill/skills in English that vocabulary makes a very important component, ten students stated with confidence that it was speaking. This finding led the researcher to look in the literature for productive and receptive vocabulary learning. Although the researcher did not pursue the question further with her participants, it was an indication that 90 percent of the students have more problems in the productive skills than the receptive ones. This has been undertaken in the literature by many scholars. In a study by Webb in 2008, which investigated the relationship between receptive and productive vocabulary size, the results showed that the total receptive vocabulary size was larger than productive vocabulary. When responses were scored for fuller knowledge, receptive vocabulary size was also found to be greater than productive vocabulary size. Furthermore, Ellis (1994) states that the distinction between incidental and intentional learning is of particular significance to the acquisition of vocabulary. Hulstijn (2001) stresses that in the literature on L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition it has become customary to say that most vocabulary items are acquired incidentally; he further adds, "Some educationalists have therefore advocated the use of activities conducive to incidental vocabulary learning (i.e. massive reading and listening activities) (Hulstijn, 2001, pp 258-286)."
However, when the participants were asked for the reason for choosing this skill in particular to be a vital part of vocabulary learning, all ten confirmed that it was for communication purposes, which shows how eager these students are to be connected to the world.

Conclusion

In this study, the researcher explored the difficulties of 11 EFL female students learning L2 vocabulary in level one in the preparatory year. Students stated the difficulties and challenges they faced in learning vocabulary, and they also expressed the reasons which contributed to these difficulties. Among the major difficulties students faced were the pronunciation of newly-learned L2 words and the inability to retain those words. As for the reasons and factors that contribute to such challenges, students stated that their lack of practicing words and pronunciation were the main reasons. Additionally, the students suggested strategies that they could follow to improve their new L2 vocabulary learning. Among these strategies was practicing the new words they learned with friends and peers. The participants stressed how practicing new learned words would enhance and improve their L2 vocabulary learning. Other strategies included learning the meaning of new L2 words, listening to programs in English, watching English movies, and enrolling in English language institutes.

Implications for Pedagogy

Having over sixteen years of teaching experience with EFL Saudi female students at the college level, I believe that weekly and biweekly quizzes and tests on newly-learned L2 vocabulary should be given to students to maintain and preserve what they have studied in class. This will help them retain the new L2 words they studied in class chunk by chunk and make it easier for them to build a large lexical reservoir. The latter is in line with what Read, (2011) states:” Discrete, selective, context-independent vocabulary tests have been an important part of the educational measurement scene for almost the whole of the twentieth century” (p.115).

Moreover, the repetition of words in quizzes and exams would guarantee that the students retain those words such as what Kachroo (1962, as cited in Nation, 1990) asserts, ”If words were repeated seven or more times in a course book, then students learnt them.” Thus, if words are repeated in exams, quizzes, and practices, students can definitely learn them better.

Finally, pronunciation was the main difficulty experienced by students in acquiring a new L2 word. Thus, this research study recommends that immediate attention and intervention is required. For example, teachers in the PYP should take advantage of the speaking task and presentation and try to model the pronunciation of words for them. Students should be individually trained on saying newly-learned L2 words repeatedly until they master the pronunciation of these words. When students give short oral presentations in class on topics related to their lives, context, culture, or even textbooks, it can help them in practicing pronunciation of new L2 words and build their self-confidence in speaking and pronunciation. The speaking assessment in PYP is done throughout the year which gives the students a very good chance of improving their word pronunciation and fluency through the short presentations they conduct in class. Also, teachers should encourage and motivate students by choosing the competent students and letting them present in front of a larger audience of students and teachers; this would break the ice and make the students more outspoken. Finally, teachers can direct the students to online dictionaries which gives users an option to hear the words’ pronunciation. This can train students and improve their pronunciation as well as provide students with an interesting self-learning experience.

Further Research

Further research should be done on exploring the difficulties students encounter in learning new L2 vocabulary from the early years of school in Saudi Arabia, particularly from grade seven onward. That would give more depth and a wider scope to the problem of learning vocabulary and consequently provide better solutions.
References


Personalizing Language Needs: An Investigation into the Potential Benefits of Individual Diagnostic Feedback in Improving Students’ English

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Setting the scene

Globally higher education is experiencing increasing instances of students who learn in a second or foreign language and this is particularly evident in the UAE, where many universities employ English as a medium of instruction (EMI) to predominantly non-native English speaking students (Krieger, 2008; Lewin, 2008). While strict English language requirements aim to negate the need for extra language tuition, this does not mean that all students will cope. International English proficiency exams used as benchmarks normally recommend a minimum level for entry (IELTS, 2011) so those students with this minimum level may still struggle linguistically. If support is offered, it may be as part of a generic accelerated programme, but I believe that neither group tuition nor a “no tuition” policy serve the best interests of the students concerned.

This study was conducted on a foundation programme (FP) at an off-shore campus of a British university. As a teacher on the programme, I had observed a wide range of English language competence among students. No formal tuition or support was offered at that time so lower level students tended to struggle in assignments. This led me to plan an intervention. As I was not convinced of the value of generic group-based support programmes, I wanted to see if individual diagnostic feedback on errors would lead to improved performance and make students feel more confident in their language ability.

At the time of this study, new students who did not enter undergraduate programmes directly followed the one-year FP. Most of the multi-national FP student body had studied at UAE-based high schools while others came from abroad. Most were direct entrants from high school so were in the Year 12 age range. While some had EMI secondary education, others learned English as a foreign language and entered with a prerequisite international proficiency exam level. The FP student body numbered around 300. Students studied courses that tested students’ readiness for undergraduate study, which did not include formal language support. These students formed the population of this study.

Though the concept of individual language feedback is not new in tertiary settings, it was not formally employed in my institution at that time. Findings from this study are, therefore, internally significant, but may also resonate with practitioners who face similar issues and have not considered such an intervention. This paper first describes the context of the study; then briefly reviews relevant literature which underpins the research. Subsequently, methodology is described and justified before findings are presented and discussed. Finally, a concluding summary leads into context specific recommendations and reflections on both the process and outcomes of the research.

Justifying the study

In this section my personal motivation for conducting this study is supported by a brief review of mainly Gulf-based literature pertaining to key areas of the research. These are: the prevalence of EMI along with its advantages and disadvantages; the determination of suitable language entry requirements for university study; and the best practical and pedagogical approach for supporting new university students who struggle due to their low English language proficiency.
**EMI**

As transnational education develops worldwide, the UAE has developed its own tertiary sector in both the public and private domains. The large number of expatriates in the UAE gives the higher education sector a very international flavour (KHDA, 2012) with an increasing number of students expressly moving to the Emirates to study (UAE, 2010; Al Fardan & Belrehif, 2012). There are many benefits of EMI for both institutions and students alike. In the UAE its use makes sense in institutions where multi-national student bodies use English as their prevalent lingua franca (Wilkins, 2011). Given that the population of the country is predominantly expatriate (Fox, 2007; United Arab Emirates, 2011) there appears to be both a demographic and an economic need to offer this EMI provision (Wilkins, 2011).

A further argument for EMI relates to the increasing mobility of students. Offering EMI facilitates trans-border access to study, and internationally recognised qualifications taught in English can lead to post-study international employment (Kirkpatrick, 2006). English holds an elevated position as the language of the global marketplace and the information-based economy (Rudby & Saraceni, 2006; McKay, 2006), thereby perpetuating its linkage with modernity (Syed, 2003; Ahmed, 2010). Consequently, it would seem unfair to deny students the opportunity to use it to their advantage post-study.

However, sometimes EMI can be used inappropriately. Governments in many countries, including the UAE, have adopted it federally, even though all students share a different mother tongue (Kirkpatrick, 2006, Kennetz, van den Hoven & Parkman, 2011; Ahmed, 2010). In the UAE, federal students tend to struggle due to their low English proficiency (IELTS, n.d.). The need for EMI is more obvious in multilingual private UAE institutions but language competence can still be an issue. Those entrants who went to EMI secondary schools may not be affected, but those who did not are likely to suffer just like their federal counterparts.

**Entry levels**

Those students without an EMI background will usually need to score sufficiently on an international English proficiency exam to enter higher education. These exams are popular among institutions as they are internationally recognized and developed based on expertise and statistical validity (Lloyd & Davidson, 2005a, 2005b; Coombe, 2005; Hardcastle, 2007). Although there is no internationally approved standard for tertiary level, for the IELTS Academic Exam a band 6.0-6.5 is recommended (IELTS, 2011). However, this reflects the minimum coping level and regionally many institutions will accept even lower scores. This may be linked to the fact that in most Gulf states the average IELTS score hovers around a 5.0 (IELTS, n.d.). When considering the cons of EMI and doubts about suitable entry levels, it appears that some kind of language support is needed. The question is: what approach is most appropriate?

**Group tuition vs. individual tuition**

Providing extra language tuition to students who theoretically should be able to cope with the linguistic demands of tertiary study may afford such courses a “necessary evil” moniker (Gvardjancic in Cozens, 2006, p.8) due to their costs and utilization of valuable human and physical resources. In such a scenario, group tuition seems preferable as it is more economically viable. In deciding on course design, it is customary and logical to develop a student needs analysis to ensure that the course leads to outcomes which will benefit learners (Jordan, 1997). However, studies into second language acquisition inform us that each learner has individual learning needs and languages are not necessarily learned in a lock-step fashion. Similarly, fossilized errors which typical tertiary level learners will have developed are not necessarily homogeneous (Brown, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The conclusion to be drawn is that while group tuition has economic advantages, individual tuition may be more desirable (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The issue with individual tuition is, of course, also one of economics. Although learning can be tailored to individuals’ needs, there will probably not be sufficient budget for face-to-face class time. To counter this, universities often opt for writing clinics, where – very much like going to the doctor’s - students visit a teacher with a problem to receive a diagnosis and possible remedy. However, this still ties institution, teacher and student to a physical location and a fixed time. For a solution, one must look to the increasing use of IT.
in learning, where teachers can communicate with learners digitally, thereby foregoing the need to use physical resources and fixed timetables (Stokes, 2006). This would appear to be the ideal scenario for all concerned in providing the individual diagnostic feedback I had planned for my study.

**Methodology**

Action research (AR) focuses on context specific efforts to make positive change via recognising a lack, intervening to address it, and then reflecting on the success of the intervention (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). This reflective procedure, which is cyclical and may lead to further cycles, works well in educational practitioner research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In addition, it encourages reflection *in* action as well as on action so that researchers can adapt their approach during the research process (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). To counteract scientific criticisms of lacking rigour, AR employs a mixed or multi-method approach to allow for triangulation and depth, thereby creating a sense of credibility and trustworthiness (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Wellington, 2000). Within this framework, I focused on the following research questions:

- To what extent can individual diagnostic feedback on language errors lead to improved linguistic performance in tertiary settings?
- To what extent does such individual diagnostic feedback on language errors make students feel more confident in their linguistic ability?

This small scale study took place over a relatively short period so covers just one reflective cycle. Although such a short period was not ideal, I chose to complete it before the summer break rather than letting it run into the next academic year. As I noted in the reflective journal I kept during the course of the study, “The challenge here is one of timing…doing anything with students is tricky as they will soon be thinking of summer and may not be interested to continue after the break”. The project consisted of three phases: a two-week pre-intervention stage, the one-week intervention and the post-intervention stage. In the pre-intervention stage I collected data to test my initial assumptions. I used an open-question questionnaire to seek confirmation from fellow faculty that an issue existed. In addition, my participant students completed a short attitudinal questionnaire on their own English and wrote a reflection on their English learning background. As few struggling FP students wished to participate, the purposive sample included volunteers with better English, thereby widening the range of the potential benefit of the study. In my reflective journal I did consider whether this invalidated the research: “So far, many of the students who have volunteered already have quite good English. I have checked their assignments and I am not sure if they fit into my required sample”. However, as will be seen, faculty feedback confirmed that they were also in need of feedback. In the intervention phase, the sample of ten submitted three assignments and the reflection they had written, which I digitally corrected. I then developed an individual diagnostic feedback sheet where I listed the most common errors made, indicated the correction, gave a rule of thumb and online links to practice (see Figure 25.1 below).

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<th>You wrote:</th>
<th>It should be:</th>
<th>Rule of thumb</th>
<th>You can practice here:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Algeria I have studied twelve years basic study.</td>
<td>In Algeria I studied twelve years basic study.</td>
<td>If the action finished in the past, use simple past.</td>
<td><a href="http://web2.ypacsu.unl.ca/dtc/studyzone/410/grammar/ppoypast.html">http://web2.ypacsu.unl.ca/dtc/studyzone/410/grammar/ppoypast.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreover, I learned the term plagiarism and how can I avoid it.</td>
<td>Moreover, I learned the term plagiarism and how can I avoid it.</td>
<td>Only use the question form when it is a direct question.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.uningenenglish.com/quizzes/312.html">http://www.uningenenglish.com/quizzes/312.html</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 25.1:** Clipping from Diagnostic Feedback Sheet

In the post-intervention phase I corrected the latest FP assignment students had submitted and a final reflection on the benefit of the intervention from their perspective. Three students with varying levels of English were interviewed for ten minutes to get richer data. An overview of the research process is shown in Table 25.1.

The pre-intervention student questionnaire contained a mixture of open and closed questions while the faculty questionnaire was open question-based. Post-intervention interviews were semi-structured to allow
students freedom to elaborate (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Quantitative data were analysed manually for error counts and then digitally for closed-question questionnaire answers. The remaining qualitative data was coded and categorized where appropriate. For interviews, selective transcription was used based on the research questions and any other noteworthy responses.

Table 25.1
Research Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase</td>
<td>PRE-INTERVENTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>WEEKS 1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Activity</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
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</table>

Pre- and post-intervention error counts are given in this study. While accepting that the numerous confounding variables (e.g. writing style, different assessment types, pressures of writing in heavy assessment periods etc) mean that their reliability may be questioned, as they form part of a mixed-methods approach and provide interesting outcomes, their inclusion is justified. All participants volunteered and were not required to submit more written work than non-participating students. Standard ethical consent was sought for all respondents. As an insider researcher, I was aware of the asymmetric relationship between myself and the sample. While recognizing this limitation, I assured students that responses would not affect programme outcomes so they were encouraged to be as open as possible.

Results and discussion

Results are presented and discussed here for the pre-intervention phase, the intervention phase and the post-intervention phase. As data collection was substantial, findings given below represent summaries and highlights of key outcomes.
Pre-intervention

Three out of eight colleagues completed the attitudinal questionnaire on how English level affects performance; the current entry language requirement; and what support struggling students should receive. All agreed that language level affected performance. One respondent shared that “students with weak English have been known to plagiarize (or engage ghost writers)” while another stated that “those who are lacking the skills in language struggle in not only executing the assignment but in understanding the requirement of the task itself”. Other comments on performance included that students with poor English were weak in classroom and group participation. All concurred that the current entry requirement for English was too low. As one faculty member commented: “The current [entry level] is far too low (to be frank) and we are setting students up to fail”. This was supported by a colleague who felt the entry level “does not put students at a level required in an academic career at a university with English instruction”. Regarding support there was a general consensus that if the entry level is too low then support must be given in some format. As one respondent put it: “If [the campus] takes the student, knowing that their level of English is insufficient, then we should be duty bound to help those students”, while a second believed that “without [support] we are setting up the students for failure”. Interestingly, all commented that even strong students were prone to struggle with language. It was felt that they also tended to “struggle initially” and “still make grammatical errors”. This final feedback was important in justifying the inclusion of stronger students in the sample.

All ten students completed the pre-intervention questionnaire. Responses were very varied. In my reflective journal I mused:

What stood out was the fact that many Ss did not feel they were aware of issues with language until they came to university. What was also interesting was their motivation for participating in the study. The students with good language skills seemed to see it as an opportunity to get further feedback on their work to confirm their belief that their language was OK, while the weaker ones, unsurprisingly, saw it as a genuine chance to improve their performance.

Only three felt their English level was below the required standard, yet paradoxically, six became aware of the need to improve their English on starting the FP and half were dissatisfied with their level while another five felt their English level negatively affected their assignment grades. It is possible that they were still in the process of assimilating the realization that their level was not quite as high as they believed. Seven used online study to help them deal with this lack and eight accepted that to some extent it was their responsibility to deal with the issue. However, when asked how aware they were of what they should do, responses varied substantially.

The first reflection task asked students to reflect on past and present English learning. Eight completed the task. Key findings were that all were non-native speakers and most had studied English as a foreign language at school, with one studying no English and another benefitting from EMI at the primary level. School experiences differed with some citing poor teaching as a challenge. Two had learned most of their English in private language schools while two had benefitted from their families using an English only policy at home.
In my reflective journal, as mentioned earlier, I expressed concern that most of the volunteers were already quite strong in English and questioned if I could carry out the project. However, the above findings indicated to me that my colleagues felt all students could benefit. In addition to this, I noted in my journal that “Thankfully, what they all seem to have in common is a genuine interest to learn and improve”. The findings also indicated that students’ English language learning background and current needs were very heterogeneous, and that they were not all sure exactly what they should do about it, which justified the need for individual feedback.

**Intervention phase**

In this phase I corrected student work and developed individual diagnostic feedback sheets for each student. Initial error counts of student work rounded to the nearest percentage of the total are given in Table 25.2. Ratings of the student level is given as high, medium or low primarily based on these error percentages and supported by my subjective analysis of the complexity of students’ writing. All participant names are pseudonyms with the last letter indicating their rating (H, M or L). High reflects native speaker-like writing; medium indicates that reading is a little arduous, while low means that text is often difficult to understand, so although the overall percentage range appears small (2% to 13%), this indicates a very wide range of readability. As can be noted, total words varied according to the number of the requested assignments that students submitted.

**Table 25.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Words total</th>
<th>% mistakes</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MartyH</td>
<td>3425</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RickyH</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZackH</td>
<td>3460</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OllieH</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MitchM</td>
<td>3649</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HarryM</td>
<td>3231</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AllyM</td>
<td>2757</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArtM</td>
<td>3309</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MauryL</td>
<td>2465</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CarrieL</td>
<td>3751</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As I corrected the work before preparing the individual feedback sheets, I started to notice an interesting phenomenon, which I recorded in my journal:

It was fascinating to see that even in this small sample, there was little evidence of students making the same types of mistakes. Apart from run-on sentences, there was a lot of variety in repeated error type, which does suggest that general feedback to a group is maybe not the most effective method to promote improvement.

This was an early sign that individual feedback might be preferable in such a tertiary environment and was an aspect I reflected on as I moved into post-intervention stage.

**Post-intervention stage**

In this stage I corrected the next FP assignment that students had submitted after receiving my feedback and a second task where students reflected on their participation in the project. Error count results are given in Table 25.3 including percentage comparisons with earlier corrected work.

As can be seen seven students managed to reduce their error frequency with lower levels experiencing the greatest reduction. Although five of the seven only reduced the frequency by 1%, one must bear in mind the narrow readability range explained above and the one-week turnaround between their getting individual feedback and having to submit their next assignment. Anecdotally, some participants did say that this submission came at a very busy time of year and they rushed it. Also, the positive result of CarrieL must be qualified as there were various examples of plagiarism. I mused in my journal, “I would be interested to know the extent to which the pressure to pass the programme - when she had been consistently failing assignments - made her take this decision”. Though I advised her to avoid this temptation, I reflected, “Who knows where this comes in her list of priorities. Maybe it comes behind not failing the year, disappointing her family etc. Maybe she does not have time to experiment with her language acquisition…”. These challenges aside, the quantitative results provide a tentatively optimistic outcome to the intervention and this was reflected more emphatically in the second student reflection, which was submitted by eight of the sample.
Table 25.3

% Errors post-intervention with comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Word total</th>
<th>previous %</th>
<th>new %</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>MartyH</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>RickyH</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>ZackH</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>OllieH</td>
<td>1509</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>MitchM</td>
<td>1446</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>HarryM</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>AllyM</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>ArtM</td>
<td>1716</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>MauryL</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>CarrieL</td>
<td>1551</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this reflection all respondents were universally positive about their participation in the research with common reactions referring to it being useful, increasing their confidence and giving them the sense that their level had improved. Seven made specific reference to the value of the diagnostic feedback sheet while four expressed the benefit of being given online practice. The same number alluded specifically to the repeated errors they had been diagnosed, thereby indicating that awareness had been raised, and this sense of consciousness-raising came across strongly in many of the reflections. Many also expressed their satisfaction that someone had taken an interest in trying to assist them. Though error percentages indicated that not all had improved, the affective rise in awareness and confidence was pervasive and can be considered a plus.

The above is exemplified in the case of two student participants: MartyH and OllieH. MartyH shared: “I like the way my lecturer pointed out the mistakes I made while writing essays, while at the same time showing me the positive aspects of my work”. He tended to have issues with spacing after punctuation. On this he commented that “the rule of thumb on that particular mistake was enough to help me avoid making it in future”. Finally, he expressed his pleasure at the feedback: “I was also very proud of myself when [the lecturer] said he found very few errors in my work and that I wrote very well”. OllieH pointed to the need for feedback by stating “as a person, whenever I am not criticized I relent on my work with the impression that I have met the expectation of what is required of me”. He continued, “These feedbacks made me see beyond, by me seeing some mistakes which I had always been repeating in most of my assignments”. Significantly, although OllieH was a high achiever, he recognized that learning is ongoing: “I would not classify myself as being perfect already, but I would say that I am forty percent accurate and I am hundred percent willing to learn more”. It is pertinent to note that even strong students felt the need for feedback and were willing to develop further. It is also of note that the two weaker students, MauryL and CarrieL, chose not to submit this task. Although one can only make assumptions as to why this occurred, as CarrieL did commit to the post-intervention interview, I would not put non-submission down to lack of interest. It was maybe due to a lack of time brought on by a busy assessment period. It is possible that both were overwhelmed by assessments, and this was exacerbated by their own linguistic challenges.
The reflection responses were mirrored to a great extent in the short interviews with ZackH, ArtM and CarrieL, whose views were often similar despite each student having different levels of language competence. For example while CarrieL admitted, “I need more support in my language”, ZackH also opined that “I don’t think my English is that good”. Regarding participation, he shared, “I just thought this is a very good opportunity for me”. All three accentuated their awareness of mistakes. Carrie offered, “Now I can identify some mistakes and correct them” while ArtM, on looking back at his FP reflection tasks over the course noted, “There was a huge difference between the first and the last”. There was general satisfaction from the interviewees with ZackH saying, “I'm very happy I took the research cos it really helped me”, and in general there was a sense that they all improved, although CarrieL qualified this regarding making errors: “I was trying to avoid them. I avoided some but some I didn’t”. ArtM, on the other hand, was more effusive in his evaluation of improvement stating, “…yes, for sure, I can see the difference [because before] I lost so many marks because of my grammar”. When commenting on whether students with a low level should be allowed to enter the FP, ZachH believed they should: “Some people might have some good ideas…just can’t put them down in good sentence structures…everybody should be given a chance”.

Finally all believed that giving individual diagnostic feedback was a good idea. ArtM shared how it was “so beneficial”, while with reference to the limited number of diagnosed items to focus on, ZachH commented, “Even if it is not a lot, it’s worth it because [students] become aware of their mistakes”. The last word goes to CarrieL, who potentially had most to gain from such feedback and explained that when you get individual feedback there is “nobody to mock you”, betraying the possible stress and shame that students might feel once they realize their level is below the mark. She ended by requesting the following: “I encourage the University to do more to help some people in the language structure”.

Conclusion

Returning to my reflective journal, I read back on what I had recorded at the project’s end. It was expressed thus:

As I could see the use, the project proved pleasurable to do; especially in the interactions with the students, who generally were very compliant in meeting my requests and really showed their appreciation of what they saw as my efforts to help them. It was a pity that so few of those who needed it most did not volunteer and I have to admit that of the two who needed it and did volunteer, they were the ones who tended not to submit all the work requested.

Indeed, outcomes from this AR intervention indicate both quantitatively and qualitatively that participants benefitted from receiving individual diagnostic feedback as most reduced their error percentage and all appeared to be more aware of their errors and therefore more confident in their ability to avoid them in the future. While error reduction may be only one challenge faced by FP students, if it is addressed it will be one challenge less so they can focus on others. The affective importance of jumping a hurdle cannot be emphasized enough, as students traverse what is possibly their most vulnerable time in tertiary education.

Internally, there has already been a move to provide some language support in the FP but this is group-based. Findings may convince decision-makers to consider individual diagnostic feedback as a useful option and this would be one that I would strongly recommend both internally and to other EMI tertiary institutions facing similar issues. As the emergence of mainstream EMI is a relatively new phenomenon, especially in the Gulf, it is a very under-researched area and more studies are needed which focus not only on its political and economic relevance but also on how it impacts at the level of teaching and learning.

This short small-scale study was very relevant to my working context. Particularly rewarding were the obvious benefit that the students felt and the feeling that they really appreciated the effort that had been made to treat them as learners who have individual needs. Such intensive feedback is potentially quite time-consuming, but delivered in the right measure to those who need it most could prove more beneficial than group-based support. Although a larger scale study over a longer time frame may have yielded more reliable outcomes, I feel that these findings did point to a relatively successful intervention. It was contextually
relevant and has the potential to affect small change, be it via formal policy or informally via teachers and learners’ attitudes. Education involves many elements but first and foremost it is about people so if AR can help make their lives better, it has to be a worthwhile endeavour.
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