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## SPECIAL ISSUE: 'LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING'

### GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to the special issue of the *International Journal for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education* titled "Language Teaching and Learning". This special issue has been launched to further the study and critical discussion of the fundamental concepts of language teaching and learning. Our aim is to add a new kind of forum for language teachers, researchers and practitioners from all over the world for discussing the concerns, aspirations and issues that have been often ignored in language teaching and learning. We hope this issue will allow for a more sustained and focused investigation of language-related topics, while increasing their visibility in academia and language society.

The special issue dealt with issues that were primarily having a global perspective reflecting the status of language teaching in different contexts such as integrating technology, discourse analysis of e-politeness, teacher education, the effect of teaching techniques on learners' autonomy, English for academic purposes, multimodal teaching, the role of learners' depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, and the importance of language teaching as a social functional activity. The variety of papers submitted for this special issue permitted us to adopt a more global perspective that can attract and intrigue the interest of international readership. I would like to extend my gratitude to those who submitted to their papers for the special issue and our reviewers who kindly reviewed the papers. Out of a large number of papers (53 papers) submitted to our journal, 11 papers were accepted at the end by our board of reviewers for publication.

In the first article, Renau and Garralón have been designed a study to integrate the use of ICT in a high school where traditional approach is the predominant methodology amongst teachers. They indicated that the use of ICT is highly motivating for the students, and students perform better on the tasks which imply the use of computers opposed to the use of traditional materials and that they are willing to work in collaborative groups.

The second article, Zarei and Layeq investigated the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on Iranian adult EFL learners' autonomy. Results showed that competitive and cooperative teaching techniques affected the level of autonomy in EFL learners. The learners in the cooperative group were more autonomous.

Tseng's paper aimed to investigate EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic development through the elicited request emails addressed to the faculty in an institutional setting. The author applied Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) CCSARP framework, and the results revealed that students of both levels adopted more direct strategies as main requestive head acts for clarity and used the most numbers of supportive moves prior to the request in the highest imposition request.

Then, in the next paper, Baleghizadeh and Khaledian tried to investigate the particular role of learners' depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge in their listening comprehension. According to their data analysis, both depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge are determining factors in successful listening comprehension.

Afterwards, Lirola's article analyzed the way in which the subject English Language V of the degree English Studies combined the development of the five skills with the use of multimodal activities and resources in the teaching-learning process.

Rezaee and Ghanbarpour attempted to (a) probe into the way professional expertise is acquired by preservice Iranian EFL teachers, (b) analyze the instructional content of TTC's currently held in

Iran, with a focus on teachings on Dynamic Assessment (DA), and (c) examine preservice teachers' and TTC trainers' opinions about the TTC's.

Next, Zascerinska and her colleagues aimed to analyse scientific literature on the relationship between students' scientific identity and English for Academic Purposes underpinning elaboration of a new research question for further studies.

Bel Abbes Neddar' paper not meant to be a guide for foreign language teachers on how to teach with a list of prescriptive tips to be adequately followed, but meant to highlight the importance of language teaching as a social functional activity.

Krulatz and her colleagues investigated the perceptions of Norwegian primary school teachers in different grades regarding their TL use when teaching EFL using an online survey. Their data analysis indicated that Norwegian teachers may employ the TL to a lesser extent than the existing literature suggests. However, they found no correlation between the amount of TL used and teachers' expertise in and experience teaching the TL.

In Spain, Caffesse and Guasch sought to uncover the nature and extent of FL teachers' use of ICT to contact the target culture, both for instruction and teachers' informal lifelong learning. Finally, in the last paper, Chang and Szanajda's quasi-experimental research examined the effects of the process/genre approach (PGA) with the integration of blogs in EFL university-level students' writing classrooms.

Once again, we would like to sincerely thank those who helped establish this journal and publish this special issue, chief amongst which is the University of Cordoba and the editorial board of the journal that took on the Herculean task of setting up the journal and patiently helped us find our way around it. Moreover, we appreciate the hard work of Dr. M<sup>a</sup> Elena Gómez Parra and Dr. Cristina A. Huertas Abril for providing us with this publication opportunity and communicating with authors. And last but not the least, we express our deepest gratitude to the reviewers for their outstanding work and the writers for their work and fortitude in the face of delays.

Guest Editors,

**Dara Tafazoli & Teri Fowler**

# INTEGRATING ICT IN A DIDACTIC UNIT: LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

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## ABSTRACT

In Spain, the educational system is focused on traditional teacher-centred methods. Nevertheless, this traditional approach does not engage students anymore. Prensky (2001) claims that students have changed and our educational system was not designed to teach today's students. Today's students are digital natives, they were born into the digital world and they have spent their entire lives using technology. Therefore, taking this into account is paramount to capture the students' interest in class. This work has been designed to integrate the use of ICT in a Spanish high school where traditional approach is the predominant methodology amongst teachers. The didactic unit designed and described in this paper has been implemented in a third year of Compulsory Secondary Education with the objective of combining a traditional approach with a task-based approach. This didactic unit includes the use of ICT in a wide variety of activities in order to deal with diversity awareness and to cope with the different learning styles students may have.

Results indicate that the use of ICT is highly motivating for the students, that students perform better on the tasks which imply the use of computers opposed to the use of traditional materials and that they are willing to work in collaborative groups.

**Key words:** ICT in Secondary Education, collaborative groups, didactic unit implementation.

## Introduction

We live in the so called knowledge society, where innovation of information technologies has led to an outstanding increase in data creation and information dissemination (Vallima and Hoffman, 2008). Trenchs (2001) claims that introducing information and communications technology in the classroom may involve the integration of educational institutions in the real world. This integration would be achieved when students are capable of using the same tools that are being used in the modern world of work. Moreover, ICT can foster real communication and increase the student's exposition to real input. Having access to a wide variety of real input facilitates personalized learning, since the learner may identify with the information presented and the activities proposed. Therefore, the learner will assimilate information more easily and produce comprehensible output (Swain, 1985). This paper contains the description and analysis of a didactic unit designed to integrate the use of information and communications technology in Compulsory Secondary Education.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1. *Digital competence and digital natives*

In the last 20 years, the world, and especially the Western culture, has experienced an information and telecommunications revolution. We live in a society where technology plays a paramount role in almost every aspect of our daily lives. The European Commission is aware of the importance of developing the digital competence in this technological era and defends the integration of digital competence in the educational curricula. Before commenting on embedding digital competence in the educational system, we will define the concept of *digital competence* and *digital native*. According to Ala-Mutka *et al.* (2008), "digital

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literacy consists of the ability to access digital media and ICT, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of digital media and media contents and to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts". Luzón *et al.* (2010) quote Leu *et al.* (2004)'s definition of digital literacy:

The new literacies of the Internet and other information and communication technologies include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of the information, and synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answer to others.

The European Parliament and the Council (2006) defined digital competence in the EC Recommendation on Key Competences as a competence which "involves the confident and critical use of ICT for employment, learning, self-development and participation in society". As we can see, the definitions provided by Luzón *et al.* (2010) and by the European Parliament focus on the importance of developing a critical attitude in evaluating and using digital content. We should take into account the fact that "digital competence is an evolving concept related to the development of technology as well as the political aims and expectations for citizenship in a knowledge society" (Ilomäki *et al.*, 2011). When examining the use of internet in Spain, evidence provided by the INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) shows that 71.6% of 16-74 year-olds in Spain have undertaken an internet-related activity in the last three months. That percentage rises up to 97.4% if we centre our attention on the 16-24 year-olds. It is irrefutable that there is a digital divide when the figures obtained in the survey are broken down by age groups. It is also clear that young people are immersed in the digital world. Prensky (2001) was one of the first scholars to study this digital divide within age groups. He coined and popularized the terms *digital native* and *digital immigrant* to define this digital conflict between generations. Prensky (2001) argues that the students of today are digital natives because they "are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet", and that involves a change in their thinking patterns. On the other hand, those people "who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in their lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology are, and always will be compared to them, digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001). This generates one of the biggest problems facing education today, since "our digital immigrant instructors, who speak an out-dated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (Prensky, 2001).

## 1.2. ICT and the educational paradigm shift

According to Robinson (2008) "the problem is that the current system education was designed and conceived and structured for a different age. It was conceived in the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment and in the economic circumstances of the Industrial Revolution".

Robinson's view on this matter follows the same train of thought as Prensky (2001), who believes that "our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach". In contrast to the traditional teaching-learning approach, a new teaching paradigm is emerging. Resta (2002) argues that the new paradigm encompasses the following views of the learning process:

- Learning is a natural process. It is important to take into account that not every student learns in the same way. ICT is useful to create a variety of stimulating activities suiting the different perceptual and personality styles students may have.
- Learning is a social process.

As Vygotsky (1978) noted, students learn best in collaboration with other people and when they perform meaningful tasks. ICTs provide new tools to support this collaborative learning.

- Learning is an active and not a passive process. In life, people usually are asked to produce knowledge, rather than simply reproducing knowledge. Therefore, the educational curricula should

ask students to think critically and to solve real problems, rather than asking them only to recall what others have accomplished. Learning may either be linear or non-linear.

- Learning is integrative and contextualized. Learners assimilate information more easily when they are asked to make connections within the information provided by the teacher.
- Learning is based on a strength model of student abilities, interest, and culture. In the new educational paradigm, diversity and individual differences are valued.
- Learning is assessed through task completion, products, and real problem solving of both individual and group efforts. Traditional assessment by paper tests is being complemented by collaborative and individual learning tasks.

Ala-Mutka *et al.* (2008) believe that the educational curricula should be adapted to the society we live in and argue "lifelong learning strategies need to answer to the growing need for advanced digital competence for all jobs and for all learners. Learning digital skills not only needs to be addressed as a separate subject but also embedded within teaching in all subjects".

In order to enable pedagogical innovation with digital competence, Ala-Mutka *et al.* (2008) give three main recommendations:

- Teachers need to be trained in the digital competence in order to use ICT as a tool used for teaching and also for creating learning activities for their students.
- Students should be encouraged to use ICT for their learning and information searching. This will make students learn how to use digital tools in different fields and with different purposes.
- The use of ICT has the potential to put learners at the centre of the learning process and to promote collaborative work.

Newby *et al.* (2000) defined the changes in student and teacher roles in learner-centred environments. Table 1 contains a table adapted by Resta (2002) from the one developed by Newby *et al.* (2000).

Table 1: Changes in Student and Teacher Roles in Learner-Centred Environments

<b>Changes in Teacher Role</b>	
A shift from:	A shift to:
Knowledge transmitter, primary source of information, content expert, and source of all answers.	Learning facilitator, collaborator, coach, mentor, knowledge navigator, and co-learner.
Teacher controls and directs all aspects of learning.	Teacher gives students more options and responsibilities for their own learning.
<b>Changes in Student Role</b>	
A shift from:	A shift to:
Passive recipient of information.	Active participant in the learning process.
Reproducing knowledge.	Producing and sharing knowledge, participating at times as expert.
Learning as a solitary activity.	Learning collaboratively with others.

### 1.3. Internet: Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0

The Internet is a system interconnecting computer networks globally by using the standard Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP). Its origins date back to 1969, when a connection known as Arpanet was established

between three American universities (Wikipedia). One of the most successful services provided by the Internet is the World Wide Web, also known as WWW or Web. This service has evolved in the last four decades, thus becoming more immediate and dynamic. The term Web 2.0 was created by Darcy DiNucci in his article "Fragmented future" published in 1999 and was popularized by Tim O'Reilly in 2004. Nowadays, experts differentiate between three main types of World Wide Web: Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0. The main characteristic of a Web 1.0 site is that it is a static page where users have a passive role. In Web 1.0 there are only a few content creators, whereas the majority of the Internet users simply consume that content (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008). On the other hand, a Web 2.0 site invites internet users to contribute to the site content and to comment on the information published on the website. Web 2.0 includes blogs, wikis, social networks and media sharing sites. Flew (2008) explains the main differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0: "move from personal websites to blogs and blog site aggregation, from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up-front investment to an ongoing and interactive process, and from content management systems to links based on tagging (folksonomy)". Santiago and Navaridas (2012) claim that the Web 2.0 means a further development of the "traditional" web implying a deeper collaboration, cooperation and interaction amongst cybernauts. Web 3.0 is a term coined by John Markoff (2006) to define a third generation of Internet. Some experts refer to this new generation of World Wide Web as "semantic web" and its definition is object of discussion amongst experts. The main objective of the Web 3.0 is creating content accessible throughout a variety of non-browser applications by creating common formats for integration of data drawn from diverse sources.

#### 1.4. ICT in education

The current scenario offers a wide range of technological tools and possibilities which forces teachers to make an adequate selection of the aforementioned tools depending on the activity they want to perform (Palomo *et al.*, 2008). De la Torre (2006) states four essential aspects teachers should consider when creating contents using ICT:

- Access to the content should be universal and easy to find.
- The content created should be interactive.
- Content compilation should be standardized.
- Establishing connections between the content available in the World Wide Web and our previous knowledge.

Moreover, ICT seems to promote the implementation of a learner-centred methodology, which is crucial to foster the learner autonomy (Oster *et al.*, 2006). Thus, students are better prepared to live and work in a society dominated by new technologies, a society that encourages workers towards autonomous training and life long learning. Nevertheless, we should take into account that using ICT does not always imply a better learning. Teachers and students must learn how to use the media; otherwise ICT may become a confusing tool (Alesón and Palazón, 2006)

The following is a brief description of the ICT integrated in the didactic unit analysed in this paper.

##### 1.4.1. Scavenger Hunt

A Scavenger Hunt, Treasure Hunt or Knowledge Hunt is essentially a worksheet or a web page containing a series of questions and a list of web pages where the students may find the answers. In the end, the Scavenger Hunt includes a final question, which does not have a direct answer. In order to provide the final answer, the students should reflect upon all the information learnt throughout the Scavenger Hunt and integrate that knowledge (Adell, 2003).

According to Cabero (2007), Scavenger Hunts present the following advantages:

- They can be adapted to different learning levels by means of a gradation. The students can start performing easy tasks and then move to more complicated tasks.

- They are one of the best ways of presenting the Internet as a learning and information search tool, as well as fostering the learners' autonomy.
- They may be carried out individually or in little groups.
- They may be simple or complicated. The simpler Scavenger Hunts contain fewer questions and fewer links to look for the information required. Older students may work with broader topics and be asked to look for the information in various websites.

#### 1.4.2. Webquest

The model of Webquest was first developed by Bernie Dodge in 1995, who defined it as follows: "A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet" (Dodge, 1995). Unlike the Scavenger Hunt, the WebQuest implies a process of investigation and transformation of the information obtained. Moreover, WebQuests are always carried out by groups. Each group member adopts a different role in order to foster cooperative work (Pérez, 2006).

#### 1.4.3. Bitstrips

Bitstrips is a web and mobile application where users create avatars and comic strips (Wikipedia, 2014). The application has an educational version called *Bitstrips For Schools*. This software version has the same concept as Bitstrip, but includes a teacher panel, which shows the students' activities and includes permission settings to guarantee student safety and privacy (Tran, 2011).

#### 1.4.4. OpenOffice Impress

OpenOffice Impress is an open-source slide show presentation program. The distribution of this program is open, free and accessible, therefore its use with educational purposes is highly recommended. In the didactic unit designed within this project, OpenOffice Impress will be used to create a Teams-games-tournament (DeVries and Edwards, 1973).

#### 1.4.5. Blogs

A blog (a contraction of the expression weblog) is a website where one person or various individuals publish articles, known as "posts" or "entries". Usually, these posts cover a single subject and they are displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs have become very popular because they are easily updateable and facilitate knowledge and opinion sharing. Weblogs are also a powerful tool in an educational setting because writing to the web and interacting with your audience is easy (Richardson, 2006). Fernet and Brock Eide (2005) identified some educational benefits of blogging. They claim that:

- Blogs can promote critical and analytical thinking.
- Blogging can be a powerful promoter of creative, intuitive and associational thinking.
- Blogs promote analogical thinking.
- Blogging is a powerful medium for increasing access and exposure to quality information.
- Blogging combines the best of solidarity reflection and social interaction (Eide Neurolearning Blog, 2005).

#### 1.5. Diversity awareness and collaborative work

As stated in the *Orden de 18 de junio de 1999* published by the Valencian government, Compulsory Secondary Education is one of the most complex stages in the educational system, since it is a multi-faceted

stage. On the one hand, Secondary school students should acquire the basic cultural elements, should learn how to accept their duties and defend their rights. On the other hand, students should also be prepared to join the labour market or to continue with their studies, either in professional studies or in Baccalaureat. The law establishes that Compulsory Secondary Education should foster diversity awareness in order to cope with the diverse interests, motivations and skills each student has. A wide range of methodologies adapted to the needs of each student is a good strategy to foster diversity awareness. That is one of the main reasons why this didactic unit includes a variety of methodologies. Collaborative work has also been used in this didactic unit to encourage diversity awareness and take advantage of the strengths of every student. As Kolb (1984) commented, "by bringing together the immediate experiences of the trainees [...] in an open atmosphere where inputs from each perspective could challenge and stimulate the other, a learning environment occurred with remarkable vitality and creativity". According to Quinn (2013), cooperative learning strategies are useful because they: Maximize output with peers. Promote authentic, natural communication. Encourage positive interdependence because learners must rely on each other. Students work with a positive peer group, which facilitates taking risks and decreases pressure to achieve error-free output. Johnson (2009) claims that the effectiveness of cooperation depends on five variables: Positive interdependence. Face-to-face promoted interaction. Individual and group accountability. Social skills. Group processing. We incorporated cooperative learning in this didactic unit using the Team-Game-Tournament technique, designed by DeVries and Edwards (1973). This technique is used to organize the classroom in teams of four or five members. Each team should be composed by members with a varied command of English. In each turn, one member of each group competes with the other teams by answering questions. The rivals are selected by the teacher to level their skills. All group members have the same opportunities to contribute to their team by winning points for each right answer. Thus, the final reward is collective and the success of each team depends on the achievements of each individual and on the help provided by the teammates.

We also used the Think-Pair-Share technique in one session of this didactic unit. In the Think-Pair-Share technique, the teacher presents a discussion topic. Then, students are given some time to think about that topic on their own. Later, they discuss their ideas with a peer and listen to their partner's ideas. After this pair discussion, students share the outcome with the whole class. This technique, developed by Lyman (1981) is used to make sure that all the students participate in class

## **2. Objective**

The main objective of this project is to design a didactic unit combining the traditional language teaching approach with tasks performed using ICT in order to start a transition from the traditional educational system anchored in the curricula and the use of conventional textbooks to a task-based language learning integrating ICT to attract the students' attention and foster collaborative work. In order to do so, the use of Open Office Impress, Bitstrips and a blog created by the teacher has been incorporated in some of the sessions of this didactic unit. The second objective of the project is to teach students how to work in-group and collaborate with their peers by using cooperative learning techniques such as Team-Game-Tournament or Think-Pair-Share. Finally, the results of this combination of methodologies and the use of ICT in the EFL class will be analysed in order to examine the validity of this didactic proposal.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1. Students and school setting*

This didactic unit has been implemented in the state high school Sos Baynat. This high school is located in Castellón de la Plana. The high school also maintains a close collaboration with the conservatoire Mestre Tàrraga. Thus, about one third of the students enrolled in this high school combine their classes at the high school with the conservatoire lessons. Therefore, most of the students come from a non-problematic family background. They also show high cultural awareness and artistic sensitivity. The human resources of this educative institution gather 53 teachers divided in 18 different departments, and 565 students. The available facilities are 33 classrooms, ten of which are equipped with a computer with access to Internet, a screen projector and speakers. There are also two ICT rooms with 20 computers each. This didactic unit has been implemented in a third year of Compulsory Secondary Education class. There are 15 students participating

in this project. Before implementing this didactic unit, the students have completed a diagnostic test as initial assessment to determine their level of English. Results show that most of the students have an A2 level of English, according to the Common European Framework of Reference. Nevertheless, three students have a B1 level of English and there is one student with behaviour problems who has an A1 level of English. This diagnostic assessment has been used to design the activities carried out in this unit using the students' command of English as a baseline (Mctighe and O'connor, 2005).

### 3.2. Methodology

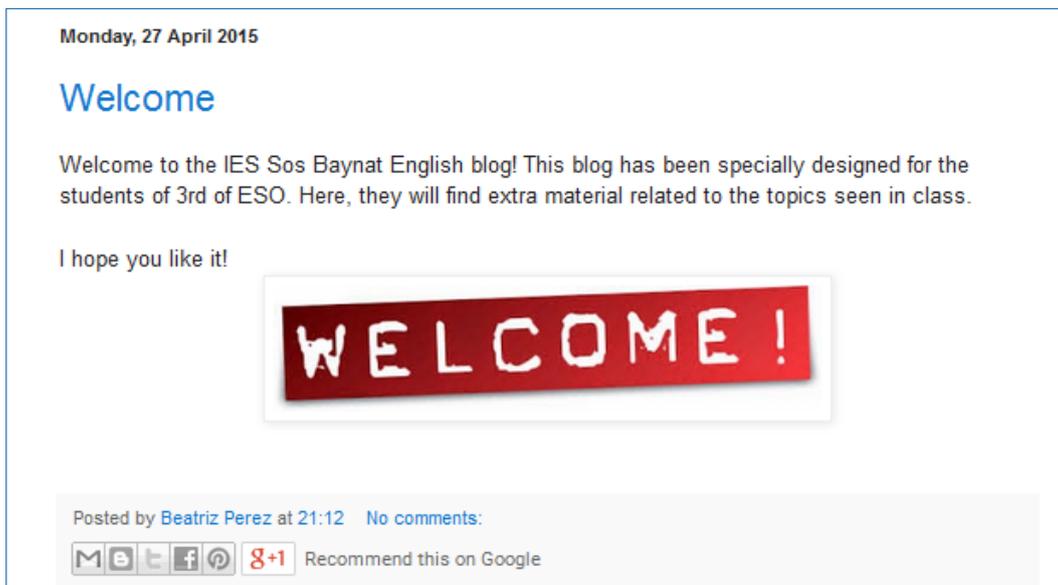
This didactic unit includes a variety of teaching methods. In some sessions, a traditional pedagogy is used. For instance, in session 4, students perform a traditional listening comprehension. Nevertheless, most of the sessions have been designed following a task-based approach, according to the definition of task provided by Nunan (2004):

"A piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form". (Nunan, 2004). The grammar in this unit was introduced by means of a consciousness-raising task. Ellis (1997) defines CR tasks as "a pedagogic activity where the learners are provided with L2 data in some form and required to perform some operation on or with it, the purpose of which is to arrive at an explicit understanding of some linguistic properties of the target language". In the third session of this didactic unit, students read a comic strip where the passive is used. They are asked to reproduce a similar dialogue and deduce the use of the passive. Inquiry-based learning is implemented in the Scavenger Hunt session. In this session, students gather information on the Internet and make meaning of it. This methodology is related to constructivism and the learning theories developed by Piaget, Bruner (1961) and Vygotsky (1962) among others. These theories claim that scaffolding and having initiative are crucial to build knowledge. Teachers' role is helping students to construct knowledge. Communicative approach also plays an important role in this didactic unit. Some sessions include pair-work, class discussion and collaborative work. This approach makes students develop their communication skills in English and acquire communicative competence (Richards, 2006). Communicative language teaching focuses on the students, unlike traditional approaches that focus on the teacher. This learner-centred approach allows the teacher to focus on the specific needs of every student. And in this particular case, by using the CLT in a class with only fifteen students, I was aware of the learning difficulties that they faced and helped them tackle those problems by performing oral consolidation activities.

### 3.3. Materials

This didactic unit requires the use of a computer with Internet connection, a screen and a projector. It would be advisable to provide students with computers with Internet connection during the in-site sessions. If that is not possible, the didactic unit can be adapted and the students can use computers with Internet connection during off-site sessions. This didactic unit has been designed to complement the textbook *English in motion 3* used in this school year. Before implementing this didactic unit, the students were asked to complete an English level test and a pre-questionnaire about the use of ICT with educational purposes. The level test contained 25 multiple-choice questions and was used to determine the students' level of English and to design the tasks and activities of this didactic unit adapted to the students' command of English. The pre-questionnaire about the use of ICT contains six questions and was used to determine how often students use ICT in their free time and also with educational purposes. The results of this questionnaire were used to design activities and tasks to catch the students' attention and motivate them. After the implementation of this didactic unit, students completed a post-questionnaire where they had to express their opinion about the tasks and activities that they performed during the eight sessions of this didactic unit. The ICT materials used in this didactic unit are two slide show presentations, two Bitstrips presentation and a blog created by the teacher to post some of the material used in this didactic unit, such as the Scavenger Hunt or the film review model. This blog is available at <http://sosbaynatenglish.blogspot.com.es/>. Figure 1 shows the first entry of the blog.

Figure 1: Welcome entry of the blog IES Sos Baynat English



### 3.4. Schedule

#### Session 1: Discussing about film genres

Table 2: Session 1

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Speaking about films students have seen	Learning the film genres	Communicative approach	10 minutes
Matching films posters with their film genres	Learning the film genres	Communicative approach	5 minutes
Matching films genres with characters from films	Learning the film genres	Communicative approach	5 minutes
Discussion in pairs about cinema	Interacting orally	Communicative approach	15 minutes
Brainstorming: People involve in a film and parts of a film	Learning vocabulary related to films	Communicative approach	10 minutes
Matching pictures with jobs related to the cinema	Learning vocabulary related to films	Traditional approach	5 minutes
Replacing words in sentences with the new vocabulary acquired	Learning vocabulary related to films	Traditional approach	5 minutes

**Session 2: Reading *Films of the Century****Table 3: Session 2*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Pre-Reading	Learning vocabulary related to films.	Traditional approach	5 minutes
Reading	Learning vocabulary related to films. Differentiating between active and passive.	Consciousness-raising task	20 minutes
Post-reading	Learning vocabulary related to films. Differentiating between active and passive.	Consciousness-raising task Communicative approach	30 minutes

**Session 3: The passive***Table 4: Session 3*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Reading a comic strip about the passive	Differentiating between active and passive	Consciousness-raising task	25 minutes
Filling in a comic strip about the passive	Using the present and past passive	Consciousness-raising task	10 minutes
Reinforcement passive exercises	Using the present and past passive	Fill in the gaps	20 minutes

**Session 4: World Book Day and Listening***Table 5: Session 4*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Slide show presentation about reading	Interacting orally	Communicative approach	15 minutes
Matching quotations with book titles	Interacting orally	Communicative approach	15 minutes
Listening activity	Learning vocabulary related to films	Traditional listening comprehension	15 minutes
Speaking about film industry jobs	Interacting orally	Communicative approach	10 minutes

**Sessions 5 and 6: Cinema Quiz**

*Table 6: Sessions 5 and 6*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Cinema Quiz: Pre-task	Using the present and past passive Working in groups Creating a film quiz Interacting in writing	Task-based approach Collaborative work	20 minutes
Cinema Quiz: While-task	Using the present and past passive Working in groups Creating a film quiz Interacting orally and in writing	Task-based approach Collaborative work	35 minutes
Cinema Quiz: Post-task	Using the present and past passive Working in groups Interacting orally	Task-based approach Collaborative work	55 minutes

**Session 7: Film review**

*Table 7: Session 7*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Film review	Using the present and past passive Learning linking words Writing a film review Interacting orally and in writing	Process writing	55 minutes

**Session 8: Scavenger Hunt**

*Table 8: Session 8*

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY	TIMING
Scavenger Hunt	Completing a Scavenger Hunt about films	Inquiry-based learning	55 minutes

**Film review assessment rubric***Table 9: Film review assessment rubric*

	<b>OUTSTANDING</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>POOR</b>
<b>Structure</b>	The text is divided in three paragraphs following the model text	The text is divided in paragraphs but does not follow the model text	The text is not divided in paragraphs and does not follow the model text
<b>Connectors</b>	Uses linking words, including those learnt in this didactic unit	Uses linking words but does not include any of the linkers learnt in this unit	There are very few connectors (0 to 2)
<b>Grammatical correctness</b>	The text does not contain any serious grammar mistake	The text contains 3 to 5 serious mistakes such as: -Subject omission -Wrong word order -Irregular verbs errors -Adjectives written in plural -3rd person verb without -s.	The text contains more than 5 of the mistakes described in the previous cell
<b>Lexical variety and accuracy</b>	Uses a wide range of vocabulary and includes the vocabulary learnt in this didactic unit.	Uses a wide range of vocabulary but does not include the vocabulary learnt in this didactic unit.	The vocabulary is not varied. It repeats the same words constantly. Does not include the vocabulary learnt in this unit.
<b>Content</b>	The text contains all the information required (favourite film, location, plot, actors and reasons why they like it)	The text contains most of the information required	The text does not contain the information required

We also designed a rubric to evaluate the performance of each student during the completion of the Scavenger Hunt:

**Scavenger Hunt Assessment Rubric***Table 10: Scavenger Hunt assessment rubric*

	<b>OUTSTANDING</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>POOR</b>
<b>Use of ICT</b>	The student knows how to use the blog and access to the links provided without problems	The student knows how to use the blog and access to the links provided with little difficulty	The student uses the blog and accesses to the links provided with high difficulty
<b>Focus on the task</b>	The student is focused on performing the task during class	The student attempts to use the computer to do other activities, but focuses on the task when the teacher tells him/her to do so	The student uses the computer to do other activities instead of completing the Scavenger Hunt

<b>Answers</b>	Answers correctly to all the answers in the Scavenger Hunt	Answers correctly to three of the answers in the Scavenger Hunt	Answers correctly to 1-2 answers in the Scavenger Hunt
<b>Final answer</b>	The final answer contains a well-argued idea result of a profound reflection	The final answer contains a well-argued idea but the answer is not result of a profound reflection	The student has not reflected about this Scavenger Hunt before answering.

Furthermore, the students were asked to reflect upon their learning process and their participation in class by filling the following self-assessment chart:

Table 11: Self-assessment chart on participation

<b>Self-assessment chart on participation</b>			
Name:			
<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Hardly ever or never</b>
I listened attentively whenever the teacher or my classmates were speaking.			
I completed the homework assignments.			
I voluntarily answered a question or made a contribution.			
I participated actively in the group activities.			
I let the teacher know if I needed an explanation or help.			
I tried my best to pay attention during class.			
I let the teacher know if I needed an explanation or help			

Adapted from: <http://goo.gl/PgQQt9>

#### 4. Results

This section contains the results of the initial questionnaire about the use of ICT. The results of this questionnaire have been analysed to determine the importance of ICT in the students' daily lives.

The student's performances in the film review composition and the Scavenger Hunt have also been analysed to determine the results of the implementation of this didactic unit. Their performances have been assessed according to the rubrics shown in tables 10 and 11.

The students were also asked to fill in a final questionnaire reflecting their opinion about this didactic unit.

##### 4.1. Results of the pre-questionnaire

The questionnaire about the use of ICT contains six questions and was designed to determine how students use ICT in their free time and in school. The questionnaire contains five multiple-choice questions and one open question.

##### 4.1.1. Frequency of use of ICT

The first question asked students *how often they used the ICT*. The results are shown in table 12.

Table 12: Students' answer to question 1

Daily	At least once a week	At least once a month	Never or hardly ever
100%	-	-	-

According to these results, all the students use the computer, the mobile phone and surf the web on a daily basis.

#### 4.1.2. ICT skills

In the second question, students were asked *how they would define their ICT skills*. The results are shown in table 13.

Table 13: Students' answer to question 2

I come across really well with ICT	I come across well with ICT	I only use ICT to surf the net	I use ICT with great difficulty
53.33%	46.66%	-	-

The results of this question show that all the students feel confident with their ICT skills. They consider that they come across well (46.66%) or really well (53.33%) with the use of Internet and different software such as Office.

#### 4.1.3. Use of ICT by teachers

In the third question, students were asked about *the use of computers that their teachers do in class*. The results are shown in table 14.

Table 14: Students' answer to question 3

Most of the teachers use computers in class, with	Only some teachers use computers in class frequently	Only some teachers use computers in class, but rarely	Only the Computing teacher uses computers in class
-	26.66%	66.66%	6.66%

Two thirds of the students said that only some teachers use computers in class, but they do not use them very often. They use them only in some lessons. 26.66% of the students answered that only some teachers use computers in class frequently.

#### 4.1.4. Use of Virtual Classroom

In the fourth question, students were asked *if they use any virtual platform, such as Moodle, and in which subjects they use it*.

All students answered that the high school provides access to Moodle, but only the English, Valencian, Spanish and Biology teacher use them. They use this virtual platform mainly to download study texts and to submit compositions.

#### 4.1.5. Use of ICT with educational purposes

In the fifth question, students were asked *if they have ever used ICT with educational purposes*. The results are shown in table 15.

Table 15: Students' answer to question 5

I use the Internet to look for academic information and I'm in educational groups in the social networks	I use Internet to look for academic information	I seldom use the computer with educational purposes	I have never used the computer with educational purposes
46.66%	46.66%	6.66%	-

Taking into account these results, 93.33% of the students use the Internet to look for academic information. Moreover, 46.66% of the students participate in educational groups in social networks such as Facebook or Tuenti.

#### 4.1.6. Using computers in class

In the sixth question, students were asked *if they would like to use computers in class more often*. The results are shown in table 16.

Table 16: Students' answer to question 6

Yes, because their use is interesting and motivates me to learn more	I would like to use them in class, but not always	I don't mind	No, the use of computers hinders my learning
66.66%	13.33%	20%	-

According to these results, 66.66% of the students would like to use computers in class more often in order to render the class more interesting and to motivate them to learn. Nevertheless, 20% of the students declared that they did not mind the use of computers in class.

#### 4.2. Results of the film review rubric

Table 17: Results of the film review

	OUTSTANDING	GOOD	POOR
Structure	78.57%	14.29%	7.14%
Connectors	78.57%	14.29%	7.14%
Grammatical correctness	35.71%	50%	14.29%

<b>Lexical variety and accuracy</b>	64.29%	28.57%	7.14%
<b>Content</b>	50%	35.71%	14.29%

Table 17 reflects the students' writing skills when writing a film review. It can be observed that 78.57% of the students had an outstanding performance regarding the structure of the composition and the use of connectors.

The points which students found more problematic were the grammatical correctness and the content of the review. In both criteria 14.29% of the students did a poor performance.

It is worth mentioning that one student did not write her film review. Therefore, the percentages of Table 19 have been calculated with a total of 14 students instead of 15.

#### 4.3. Results of the Scavenger Hunt rubric

Table 18: Results of the Scavenger Hunt

	<b>OUTSTANDING</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>POOR</b>
<b>Use of ICT</b>	66.66%	33.33%	0%
<b>Focus on the task</b>	33.33%	46.66%	20%
<b>Answers</b>	60%	26.66%	13.33%
<b>Final answer</b>	40%	33.33%	26.66%

Table 18 reflects the students' skills when completing the Scavenger Hunt. It can be observed that none of the students used the ICT poorly. Only 13.33% of the students had difficulties when answering the questions in the Scavenger Hunt. That percentage rises to 26.66% when answering the final question.

#### 4.4. Results of the post-questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections. In the first section, students grade their agreement with five questions regarding the materials used in class and group work.

The second section contains three open questions, where students explain what they have learned and the activities of this didactic unit that they have enjoyed the most and the least.

##### 4.4.1. Working with computers

The students were asked to express their opinion about the sentence: *I enjoyed working with computers*. The results are shown in table 19.

Table 19: Students' answer to question 1

<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
-	-	6.66%	60%	33.33%

93.33% of the class enjoyed working with computers and one student said that he had no opinion about this matter.

##### 4.4.2. Working only with the textbook

The students were asked to express their opinion about the sentence: *I prefer working only with the textbook*. The results are shown in table 20.

Table 20: Students' answer to question 2

Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
20%	40%	40%	-	-

60% of the class consider that the textbook should not be the only material used in class and 40% of the students declared that they had no opinion about this matter.

#### 4.4.3. Working in group

The students were asked to express their opinion about the sentence: I enjoyed working in group. The results are shown in table 21.

Table 21: Students' answer to question 3

Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
-	-	-	66.66%	33.33%

According to these results, it is clear that all the students enjoyed working in group during this didactic unit.

#### 4.4.4. Working alone

The students were asked to express their opinion about the sentence: I prefer working alone. The results are shown in table 22.

Table 22: Students' answer to question 4

Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
13.33%	40%	20%	26.66%	-

This question obtained mixed results: 53.33% of the students declared that they do not like working alone and 26.66% stated that they prefer working alone.

#### 4.4.5. Motivation and use of ICT

The students were asked to express their opinion about the sentence: I am more motivated with the use of ICT than with traditional materials. The results are shown in table 23.

Table 23: Students' answer to question 5

Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
-	6.66%	13.33%	46.66%	33.33%

A total of 80% of the class enjoyed working with computers and consider that the use of ICT instead of traditional teaching material such as textbooks or writing in the blackboard motivates their learning.

#### 4.4.6. Knowledge acquired

The open question *What have you learned?* was included in this questionnaire to make students reflect upon what they had learned during the implementation of this didactic unit. The answers were very varied, but most of the students commented on the grammar and vocabulary learned. 40% of the students also said that they enjoyed this didactic unit because they learned many facts and curiosities about the cinema.

#### 4.4.7. Favourite activity

In this question, students answered to the question *What activity did you enjoy most? Why?* 66.66% of the students declared that their favourite activity was the cinema quiz because they enjoyed working in groups and they also discovered many new things about the film industry. 26.66% of the students declared that their favourite activity was the Scavenger Hunt because they enjoyed working with the computer and reading texts and watching videos in the computer. One student answered that he did not have any favourite activity.

#### 4.4.8. Activity least enjoyed

In this question, students answered to the question *What activity did you enjoy least? Why?* The answers to this question were very varied. 46.66% of the students declared that they enjoyed all activities of this didactic unit. 26.66% of the students declared that they did not like copying things from the blackboard or writing in the notebook and 13.33% said that they did not enjoy working with the textbook. One student said that he did not enjoy learning grammar and another student declared that the activity he enjoyed the least was the cinema quiz.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. Analysis of the pre-questionnaire

Results of this questionnaire about the use of ICT amongst students prove that we are dealing with digital learners who use ICT daily and feel confident about their ICT skills. This means that students are willing to use ICT in every context of their daily lives, including the academic context. The students' relation with new technologies contrasts with the use that most teachers make of ICT in class, since two thirds of the students declared that only some teachers use computers in class and on rare occasions. Furthermore, despite being subscribed to the Moodle platform, a small percentage of teachers use this virtual platform to support their classes. Definitely, we can see a technology gap between teenage students and the majority of teachers. The consequences of this gap are evident: Some teachers are afraid of using ICT in class because their technological knowledge is lower than the students' computer skills. Therefore, teachers feel that they may lose control of the class if they introduce ICT in their lessons. However, by leaving new technologies out of the classroom teachers fail to connect with students. In this questionnaire, students declared that they would like to use computers in class more often because ICT motivates them to learn more. In fact, most of the students declared that they already used ICT with educational purposes and 46.66% of the students stated that they were even participating in educational groups in the social networks such as Facebook.

#### 5.2. Analysis of the film review rubric

Results show that students did particularly well regarding the structure of the composition and the use of connectors. This may be due to the fact that the model text was provided by means of a blog and students read it with more attention than when a model text is presented to them in plain paper. Moreover, students knew that their film reviews were going to be posted on the IES Sos Baynat English blog. All these factors resulted in the students paying more attention to the structure of the writing composition. Nevertheless, the use of the blog did not show any impact on the grammatical correctness and the content of the review. The students' performance in these two points was similar to the outcome obtained in previous compositions written by these students.

#### 5.3. Analysis of the Scavenger Hunt rubric

Results indicate that using ICT to perform this task did not pose any problems for students. Most of the students were focused on the task they were performing and they were able to answer correctly most of the questions of the Scavenger Hunt. This means that they were able to surf the net and find the information they needed to give the right answers. This reinforces the results of the first questionnaire, where students declared that using ICT in class would motivate them in their learning process. The most difficult part for the

students was giving a well-reasoned final answer. This may be related to the fact that students are not used to think critically in class and not to the use of ICT.

#### 5.4. Analysis of the post-questionnaire

According to the results of this questionnaire, students enjoyed working with computers. In fact, they preferred working with ICT rather than using traditional teaching materials such as the blackboard and the textbook. Certainly, during the implementation of this didactic unit, students were really participative and focused on the tasks they were asked to complete, especially when that implied the use of ICT. Regarding collaborative work, although some students declared that they preferred working alone (26.66%), all the students said that they enjoyed working in group. Since students were only 15 years old, they still needed guidance to know how to work in group and distribute the work in a meaningful way. But they were eager to follow the teacher's instructions and to work in the groups created by the teacher. According to this questionnaire, the activities that they enjoyed the most were the cinema quiz, the Scavenger Hunt and sharing their film reviews on the English blog. The students explained that they enjoyed particularly the cinema quiz because they liked working in group and they had fun while learning some new vocabulary about films. It is worth mentioning that the level of English of the members of each team was balanced. As a result of this balance between teams, the score was tight during the whole game and that helped in keeping the students' interest during the whole session. Students also enjoyed the Scavenger Hunt because they hardly ever go to the computer room and thanks to this task; they had the chance to change the classroom atmosphere for one day and to work with computers. They said that the activity they enjoyed the least was whenever they had to write in their notebook. Obviously, they need to write in order to improve their writing skills but perhaps we should have designed some tasks to make writing more appealing to them.

## 6. Conclusions

With this paper we implemented a didactic unit combining traditional methodologies with collaborative work and the use of ICT. The use of a blog to create a Scavenger Hunt was a good task to learn how students interact with oral and written texts presented in a virtual format. As stated before, technology is highly present in our society and we need to integrate ICT in education in order to prepare students to live and work in the real world (Trenchs, 2001). The inclusion of ICT in this didactic unit had a positive outcome, since students were proficient in its use and knew how to use the available technological resources in their benefit. Introducing collaborative work in education is also crucial to teach students how to interact in a changing society, which demands teamwork in order to adapt better to those changes. In this case, students reacted positively to collaborative work and were eager to learn how to work with their classmates in a well-structured and meaningful way in order to take advantage of their own strengths. As a conclusion, the analysis of the results obtained suggests that: Using Information and Communication Technologies is highly motivating for the students. Students perform better on tasks that imply the use of computers because they are more focused than when the work implies the use of traditional materials such as the textbook or the blackboard. Students are willing to work in collaborative groups and to learn how to share the responsibilities of the tasks they are asked to perform with their peers.

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# COOPERATIVE AND COMPETITIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUES AFFECTING IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' AUTONOMY LEVEL

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on Iranian adult EFL learners' autonomy. To this end, a sample of 88 non-English major university students at Sohrevardi Nonprofit College in Qazvin were assigned to two groups, and each group received instruction under one of the treatment conditions including cooperative and competitive teaching techniques. To collect data, the Persian translation of an autonomy questionnaire was administered before and after the treatment. The obtained data were analyzed using an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) procedure. The result of data analysis showed that competitive and cooperative teaching techniques affected the level of autonomy in EFL learners. The learners in the cooperative group were more autonomous. The findings of the present study may have implications for learners, teachers, and syllabus designers.

**Keywords:** Competitive teaching techniques, cooperative teaching techniques, learner autonomy

## Introduction

The need to learn a foreign language is almost as old as human history itself (Wikipedia). Recently, this need has been felt more seriously due to increasing globalization as well as the need for using a common language in areas such as trade, international relations, technology, media, and science. As English is the international language, many researchers have focused on different methods of teaching to find optimal methods and techniques to implement in language classrooms. The history of language teaching methodology has experienced substantial changes from the period of grammar–translation method to the communicative language teaching, task-based approach, learning strategy training and cooperative learning (Brown, 2000). According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), experiential learning and student-centered learning, introduced by philosopher Dewey, and social psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky, is a base for collaborative learning.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) hold that researchers such as Sexton began to criticize competition in late 1960s, and social scientists (Hartup, 1976; Johnson, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Ladd, 1999; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1975) pointed out the necessity of peer interaction. Then, cooperative learning became popular from 1980s, with the advent of communicative language teaching approach, which gave emphasis to the communicative aspects of language, and the task-based approach, which created the context for cooperative learning.

The concepts of autonomy and independence play an increasingly important role in language education. The major concerns here are issues such as learners' responsibility for their own learning, and their right to determine the direction of their own learning, the skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning, the capacity for independent learning and the extent to which this can be suppressed by institutional education (Little, 1991). According to Cooke (2013), autonomous practices might allow students greater opportunity to reflect upon their own and their classmates' performance and begin to incorporate more collaborative elements, such as inviting others to share their opinion or to demonstrate misunderstanding of their speech.

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Many researchers have given attention to learner autonomy and autonomous learning as an important factor in successful learning, and many studies have been carried out on different factors that make learners more autonomous. However, few studies have considered the effect of teaching techniques on the level of learner autonomy. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on learner autonomy. With regard to what was mentioned above, by considering the significance of creating learning contexts to develop communicative competence and self-directed learners, this study aims to compare the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on the extent to which these contexts lead to more autonomous learning. More specifically, this study aims to find answers for the following research question:

Is there any significant difference between the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on Iranian adult EFL learners' autonomy?

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1 Cooperative learning

Gokhale (1995) defines cooperative learning as grouping and pairing of students at various performance levels to work together in small groups to monitor themselves and evaluate their own and others to achieve an academic goal. Zhang (2010) implies that more participation will inevitably increase self-confidence and self-esteem. Therefore, learners in cooperative learning environments are more active participators and more autonomous learners.

More than 1300 research studies have been conducted in the past 2 decades on cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts. The findings of these studies have validated, modified, refined, and extended the social interdependence theory which is a base for cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Cooperative or collaborative learning is based on the work of the philosopher Dewey, and social psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky about experiential learning and student-centered learning.

Hung, Mehl and Holen (2013), in a study on the relationship between problem design and learning process in a problem-based environment, found that problem-based learning is a kind of cooperative technique which improves critical thinking and makes learners ready to undertake tasks in the real world. They concluded that the kind of problems in this environment affects learners' cognitive level and influences learners' perception psychologically.

Kim and McDonough (2011) aimed to find the impact of pre-task modeling on the collaborative opportunities that occurred during three types of task performance of 44 adolescent Korean EFL learners including: dictogloss, decision-making, and information-gap. Half of the learners viewed videotaped models of collaborative interaction prior to carrying out the tasks, while others did not receive pre-task modeling. The interaction between the learners was analyzed in terms of the type and resolution of language related episodes (LREs) and learners' pair dynamics. The authors concluded that in terms of the total number of LREs, the pre-task modeling group produced a larger number of both grammatical and lexical LREs than the control group. In terms of lexical LERs, the pre-task modeling group produced more LREs for all three types of tasks. However, in terms of grammatical LREs, the pre-task modeling group produced more grammatical LREs than the control group in dictogloss task and information-gap task. Nevertheless, they had a similar number of grammatical LREs for decision-making task. Kim and McDonough also showed that the students in the pre-task modeling group had more collaborative interaction for all three types of tasks.

Furthermore, Hanz and Berger (2007) compared the effects of jigsaw and traditional direct instruction and found no significant difference in academic achievement of learners. However, there were strong positive effects of cooperative learning in the experience of three basic needs: autonomy, social relatedness and competence, which is central in explaining the benefits of cooperative learning. Furthermore, motivation and activation of deeper level of processing were improved in cooperative learning environment.

In another study, Sachs, Candlin and Rose (2003) studied the effect of cooperative learning on EFL/ESL secondary students' learning in Hong Kong. The results showed no significant difference in the oral performance of

the experimental and control groups, but the authors concluded that the students engaged in discussions in cooperative learning environment felt more relaxed and more motivated.

Gaith (2003) studied the impact of cooperative learning on reading improvement, academic self-esteem and decreasing the feeling of school alienation of 56 Lebanese high school ESL learners. Gaith found a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group in reading achievement. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in variables including academic self-esteem and feeling of school alienation.

## 1.2. Learner autonomy

Autonomy has been defined by many educators in different ways based on different factors such as the writer, the context, etc. It has been considered as a personal trait, a political measure, or an educational move. This is due to the fact that autonomy is seen either (or both) as a means or as an end in education. Dickinson (1995, p.167) believes that "autonomy can be seen as an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take responsibility for his own learning." Bruce's (1995) definition is quite similar to Dickinson's definition. Cortes and Lujan (2005, p.134) define autonomy as "moving away from conventional and restrictive context and moving towards self-direction and self-regulation." Smith (2008) refers to Holec, the father of learner autonomy, defining autonomous language learners as learners who take responsibility for the totality of their learning situation. The learners do this by determining their own objectives, defining the content to be learned, progression of the course, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring this procedure, and evaluating what they have acquired. The operational definition given by Little (1991) is that practice of learner autonomy requires insight, positive attitude, capacity for reflection, and readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others. According to Benson (2011, p. 124), autonomy and autonomous learning is "learning in which autonomous learners demonstrate a capacity to control their learning". Autonomous behavior is developed through practice in such a way that helps to promote self-direction.

Several studies have been conducted on various aspects of learner autonomy. Cooke (2013) investigated the effect of transcription and reflective practice on learners' autonomy. The results of the study showed that transcription and reflective practice could help the development of noticing, arguably a key element in autonomous acquisition of new language and language development. Moreover, collaborative techniques encouraged peer evaluation and feedback.

Ma and Gao (2010) investigated the effect of the provision of contexts for language learning on autonomous learning through ongoing process of negotiations. They concluded that negotiations of purpose, contents, and evaluation make students highly motivated and more responsible for their own learning.

Yahong (2009) investigated the effects of instruction, goal definition, and encouragement on learner autonomy and concluded that the above variables had positive effect on learners' autonomy level.

Murphy (2008) investigated how distance language course materials support the development of critical reflection and autonomy. The author referred to critical reflection, metacognitive strategies, self-assessment, interaction and collaboration as the key criteria in automatization. She concluded that distance course materials make learners more autonomous.

Po-Ying (2007) investigated how students react to assuming responsibility for their own learning by understanding their experience, encouraging self and peer evaluation, brainstorming, and focusing on areas of strength. The results showed that the students become decision-makers and actively engaged in learning.

Chang (2007) investigated the impact of group processes on Taiwanese EFL learners' autonomy, their autonomous beliefs and behaviors. The results showed a moderate correlation between group processes (both cohesiveness and group norms) and individual learners' autonomous behaviors. However, there was no significant correlation between group processes and individual learners' autonomous beliefs. As learner autonomy plays an important role in long life English learning and teaching, Duan (2005) suggested four effective ways including

changing the beliefs of teachers and learners, teaching learning strategies, using cooperative learning, and taking advantage of computer resources to foster it.

Garrett and Shortall (2002) investigated the relationships among enjoyment, anxiety, and learning value of 103 Brazilian EFL students at different proficiency levels: beginners, elementary, and intermediate with different types of classroom interaction: pair work and small group work and learning activities: teacher-fronted grammar (TFG), student-centered grammar (SCG), teacher-fronted fluency (TFG), and student-centered fluency (SCF). They concluded that there were significant differences among the students at different levels. Beginners found TFG better than SCF. Intermediate learners saw TFG as less fun, however they indicated that SCF is more fun and more relaxing than TFF. Though neither of them perceived any difference between types of learning activities in their relaxation and enjoyment, for learning they preferred TFF.

Furthermore, Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002) investigated the relationship between autonomy and motivation, and proposed a more complex relationship in contrast to those who consider motivation as a product of autonomy by assessing students' readiness for learner autonomy in language learning and their level of motivation to learn English. The results revealed that motivation played a key role in determining the level of learners' autonomy.

Cotterall (2000) proposed principles to foster learner autonomy including 1) learner goal, 2) the language learning process, 3) tasks, 4) learner strategies, and 5) reflection on learning. She concluded that the inclusion of tasks related to learners' goal (principles 1 & 3) resulted in unprecedented levels of motivation. Moreover, learners improved their ability to assess their own performance. With regard to principles 2 and 4, learners reported that the incorporation of materials on language learning process and learner strategies provided the learners with a model for solving their own learning problems and proved an efficient solution to the problem of limited time.

Based on what was mentioned above, it may be concluded that there are differences in competitive and cooperative learning contexts with regard to the teaching techniques, the kinds of feedback, and the learners' dependence on teachers and other classmates. The aim of this study is to compare the effects of these contexts on learner autonomy.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Participants*

The participants of the present study were a sample of 88 adult, male and female, EFL learners studying English for general purposes in Sohrevardi Nonprofit College in Qazvin. 44 students were in the competitive learning group and 44 in the cooperative learning group.

### *2.2. Instrument*

To answer the research question of the study, the Persian translation of an autonomy questionnaire including 21 items which was scored on a five-point scale and coded as (A. never, B. rarely, C. sometimes, D. often, E. always) taken from Zarei and Elekai (2012) and translated by the researcher was used. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, and it turned out to be 0.83.

### *2.3. Procedure*

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following procedure was followed:

First, in order to encourage the participants to answer the questions honestly and without anxiety, the participants were informed about the aims and the purposes of the study. Then, the questionnaire was given to the participants in two stages.

In the first stage, the autonomy questionnaire was given to all of the participants to capture their initial differences. In this stage, the participants had 45 minutes to answer the questions. If the participants had any questions, their questions were answered in Persian.

Then the participants were assigned to two groups. In the cooperative group, the participants were divided into groups of four or five members. They were given instructions through cooperative techniques including discussion, reciprocal teaching techniques, graphic-organizer and problem-solving. The participants of the other group were engaged in traditional, competitive activities in which the teacher explained the grammar and presented the new words of the passage. Each student worked individually and answered the questions on the grammar section of the passage, and the teacher made corrections on their mistakes.

At the end of the instructional period, the autonomy questionnaire was administered again to measure the gain of the learners after the use of the competitive and cooperative teaching techniques. In this stage, 30 minutes were allocated for the questionnaires, and the researchers answered possible questions in Persian. The obtained data were then summarized and submitted to statistical analysis.

#### 2.4. Data analysis

To analyze the data and to answer the research questions about the effects of competitive and cooperative learning techniques on learner autonomy, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) procedure was used.

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1. Results

This study sought to find out the difference between the effects of the competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on Iranian EFL Learners' autonomy. To this end, an ANCOVA procedure was used. Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics and Table 2 shows the results of the ANCOVA procedure.

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the ANCOVA on learners' autonomy*

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Competitive group	60.68	14.746	44
Cooperative group	72.93	7.908	44
Total	66.81	13.279	88

Table 2. ANCOVA results on learners' autonomy

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	9605.92 <sup>a</sup>	2	4802.96	71.201	.00	.626	1.000
Intercept	4038.95	1	4038.95	59.875	.00	.413	1.000
Pre-autonomy	6304.55	1	6304.55	93.461	.00	.524	1.000
Group	5183.61	1	5183.61	76.844	.00	.475	1.000
Error	5733.78	85	67.45				
Total	408097.00	88					
Corrected Total	15339.71	87					

a. R Squared = .626 (Adjusted R Squared = .617)  
b. Computed using alpha = .05

As Table 2 shows, there is a significant difference between the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on the level of learner autonomy ( $F_{(1, 87)} = 76.84, P < .01$ ). Meanwhile, the index of the strength of association ( $\eta^2=.47$ ) indicates that about 47% of the observed differences between the groups is attributable to the independent variable (cooperative versus competitive presentation techniques). This means that the remaining 53% of the variance is left unaccountable for. However, since the F-ratio and the significant level ( $F_{(1, 87)} = 93.461, P < .01$ ) are also indicative of a significant difference between the two groups prior to the treatment, the result of the posttest is somewhat overshadowed. This means that care must be exercised in interpreting the result.

#### 4.2. Discussion

The present study attempted to investigate the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on learner autonomy.

The finding of the present study showed that there was a significant difference between the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on learners' autonomy and showed that learners in the cooperative context are more autonomous. This finding is compatible with that of Ma and Gao (2010), who found that collaborative learning was a foundation of autonomy, and reported that collaborative learning makes students more responsible and more open-minded to others' ideas. Moreover, the finding of the present study is in line with the findings of Murphy (2008), who showed that cooperative and collaborative learning make learners more autonomous.

The finding of the present study may have been affected by several variables including the following:

According to Radwan (2011), Rao (2006) and Sheory (1999), social and cultural factors affect learner autonomy. So, these factors may also have influenced autonomy level. In addition, Radwan (2011) suggests that gender affects learners' autonomy level. As this study did not consider gender as a variable, the findings may have been affected by the gender of the learners. Furthermore, the level of learners' autonomy at different age levels is different. This study did not consider age as a variable. Therefore, the findings of the study may have been affected by the age of the participants. Moreover, while there were differences between the participants' performance on the post test, there were also significant differences in their pretest results. This implies that one cannot safely claim that the differences in the posttests were necessarily because of the effect of the treatment. Due to the uncertainties about the obtained result more replication studies are needed to shed light on the issue addressed in this study.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The present study attempted to investigate the effects of competitive and cooperative teaching techniques on learners' autonomy. The finding of the study indicated that cooperative teaching techniques affect and learners' autonomy positively. The result revealed that cooperative teaching techniques improve learner autonomy. Based on

the finding of this study, it could be concluded that, contrary to learners' natural intuition that learner autonomy requires working independently from others, learners may actually attain a higher level of autonomy when they are engaged in cooperative learning activities. This might be partly due to higher levels of self-confidence they may attain in cooperative contexts. Nonetheless, it is concluded that learners need to be encouraged to work together to achieve higher levels of autonomy. Since nowadays, in many educational contexts, there are calls for learner autonomy, it may also be concluded that there is a need to change the competitive teaching techniques to cooperative teaching techniques. This means that teachers need to become more familiar with cooperative teaching techniques. One may also conclude that syllabus designers and those involved in materials preparation need to take care to change the nature of the activities in books and to include more cooperative activities in course books to encourage learners to work cooperatively. If this happens, course books can also act as agents of change, pushing teachers – naturally resistant to change – to adopt teaching techniques requiring cooperative work.

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# E-POLITENESS: AN ANALYSIS OF TAIWANESE EFL LEARNERS' EMAIL DISCOURSE ON REQUEST STRATEGIES

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate EFL learners' interlanguage pragmatic development through the elicited request emails addressed to the faculty in an institutional setting. Sixty Taiwanese students of two linguistic levels (i.e., high-intermediate, and low-intermediate) were included and different email tasks with varied imposition levels were designed to examine if and how students' use of request strategies and politeness features would vary accordingly. In total, 180 emails were composed for qualitative and quantitative analysis. By applying Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) CCSARP framework, the results revealed that students of both levels adopted more direct strategies as main requestive head acts for clarity and used the most numbers of supportive moves prior to the request in the highest imposition request. Different combinations of supportive moves were also adopted for different request tasks by the two groups, indicating students' awareness of different imposition levels inherited in different tasks. In addition, the high-intermediate proficiency group displayed more varieties of internal and external modifiers in their request than their less proficient counterparts. Some developmental sequences in the use of politeness features can thus be identified. However, certain syntactic and lexical downgraders never appeared in both groups' email messages, suggesting the need for explicit instruction. From the preferred use of direct strategies, supportive moves, as well as a pre-posed request sequences, L1 pragmatic transfer can be observed in the email messages of both groups. The possible perlocutionary effect of this transfer will be further explored in this study. The findings in this study can provide practical suggestions for classroom intervention, particularly in the area of pragmatic instruction in EFL classrooms.

**Key words:** Interlanguage, Requestive Head Act, Supportive Moves, Internal/ External Modification, Perlocutionary Effect.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, researchers have become interested in examining the usage of e-mail by second language learners. Studies have investigated how L2 learners compose e-mail messages in terms of communication strategies and discourse styles (Biesenback-Lucas, 2005, 2006a, 2007; Chapman, 1997;

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Chen, 2001, 2006; Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998; Hartford & Bradovi-Harlig, 1996; Siu, 2008). Hartford & Bradovi-Harlig's (1996) study particularly focused on e-mail requests written by college students (native and nonnative speakers of English) to faculty and analyzed the perlocutionary effects of these e-mails on the faculty and professors. They discovered that nonnative speakers used fewer politeness strategies and thus, their requests were considered less effective than those written by native speakers. In comparing native and nonnative students' email requests to faculty, Biesenback-Lucas (2007) found that although native and nonnative students tended to use the same general strategies, nonnative students' use of politeness strategies was characterized by a mix of "lack of linguistic flexibility and idiomatic expressions, unawareness of letter conventions transferrable to email, and inability to select appropriate lexical modification" (p.74).

It is apparent that writing emails to professors requires sophisticated use of language on the part of L2 learners since it is a type of FTA. The difficulty can be further complicated by the issue of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences between the addresser (i.e., the nonnative student) and the addressee (i.e., the English professor) (Chen, 2001). As most of the previous research effort were made in the target language environment, the research result obtained may have its limited implication in the EFL context. In addition, the results of previous research were mainly interpreted from the professor's perspective and hence, the more fundamental causes as why non-native students chose to use certain politeness strategies for their requests were still not fully understood. Furthermore, most studies conducted in the L2 environment were of comparative nature, in comparing how nonnative speakers differed from native speakers in their realization of request strategies. Kasper (1992) pointed out that most interlanguage pragmatic research were comparative rather than acquisitional in nature and thus, little has been known about how L2 learners develop their pragmatic competence over time. By conducting interlanguage pragmatics research cross-sectionally or longitudinally, the result obtained would be more acquisitionally oriented, and thus, shed more light on the developmental aspects of pragmatic acquisition.

Finally, research specifically looking at the EFL learners' pragmatic competence in writing e-mail request to faculty in the Chinese EFL context is relatively scarce, and thus, the current study aims to explore Taiwanese EFL Learners' pragmatic competence in their email request to professors. Specifically, it sets to find out EFL learners' use of requestive head act, the internal and external modifications, and the information sequencing in their emails. In order to gain more insights on the acquisitional aspect of interlanguage pragmatics, students with varied proficiency levels, from lower- intermediate to higher- intermediate, were included in the current study. To see how imposition level would impact on students' request strategies, different writing tasks varied in imposition levels were designed to examine if students' request strategies would vary with increasing imposition of the request. Finally, to understand further why these EFL students chose certain politeness strategies in their emails, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were administered to see what factors influenced their choices of linguistic politeness strategies and what difficulties they encountered in the process of composing these email requests.

With designed writing tasks, two groups of students varied in linguistic proficiencies were required to write request emails to their English professors in order to find answers for the following research questions:

- (1) For the higher-intermediate level students, do their emails to their English professor promote more direct or indirect request strategies? Do their use of request strategies and politeness features vary with increasing imposition of requests?
- (2) For the lower-intermediate level students, do their emails to their English professor promote more direct or indirect request strategies? Do their use of request strategies and politeness features vary with increasing imposition of requests?
- (3) Are there preferred linguistic realizations by students of different linguistic levels for different request types? How do they differ in terms of the realization of request strategies and politeness features in their email requests?
- (4) For these EFL learners, what are the factors which might influence their choices of linguistic politeness strategies used and what difficulties do they encounter in the process of composing these email requests?

## **2. Review of related literature**

### *2.1 Interlanguage Pragmatics*

With the notion of communicative competence introduced by Hymes (1979), the study of interlanguage has been expanded from the grammatical to the functional and communicative aspects of learner language. Thus, much research effort has been devoted to the study of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), the “nonnative speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2-related speech act knowledge is acquired” (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 216). To date, most ILP studies have been conducted by comparing whether NNSs differ from NSs in the range, contextual distribution of strategies and linguistic forms used to convey illocutionary meaning and politeness. Kasper (1992) pointed out that these issues are mainly “sociolinguistic” in nature and “to a much lesser extent a psycholinguistic [or acquisitional] study of NNS’ linguistic action (p.205). Likewise, Tahahashi (1996) and Bardovi-Harlig (2001) pointed out that many interlanguage studies are comparative rather than acquisitional in nature, as subjects in these studies are often grouped by their first language as nonnative speakers instead of their level of language proficiency as learners. Thus, to gain a clearer picture of how learners’ ILP develop over time, a cross-sectional study, which looks at language features displayed by learners of different linguistic proficiency could be employed to further our understanding of the developmental aspect of ILP.

### *2.2 Pragmatic Transfer*

Previous research has shown that when interacting with native speakers of target language, L2 learners tend to realize different speech acts by transferring the sociolinguistic and/ or sociocultural norms of their own native languages. According to Thomas (1983), when L2 learners pragmatically transfer their L1 sociocultural

rules to the target language and when they fail to understand or to be understood the intended force of the utterance, “pragmatic failure” would occur. In fact, many negative stereotyping of different ethnic groups is also the result of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

As for the role of linguistic proficiency in relation to pragmatic transfer, consensus has not been reached. Some pragmatic studies suggest both lower level and more advanced learners transfer their L1 pragmatics to L2, yet advanced learners engage in more negative transfer because they are equipped with more linguistic tools to do so (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Tanaka, 1988; Trosborg, 1987). Other studies did not find any effect of proficiency on pragmatic transfer, as Takahashi (1996) indicated both lower and higher proficiency learners in his study equally relied on their L1 request strategies.

### 2.3 Research on E-mail Request

By using the authentic data based on naturally-occurring requests, the available studies on actual email messages, due to the privacy and ethical reasons, have been mostly based on limited number of messages sent to the researchers themselves (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006a, 2007; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Warschaur, 1999). Analyzing from professors' perspective, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) investigated how native and nonnative students composed email messages in terms of communication strategies and discourse styles. They found that in comparison, nonnative students used fewer downgraders in their requests, mentioned personal time needs more often, and acknowledged imposition on faculty less often, which lead to negative perlocutionary effect on the faculty.

Chen's study (2001) compared the request emails to professors by Taiwanese overseas students and American students to identify the preferred request strategies by these two particular cultural groups. She discovered that both groups preferred to use 'query preparatory' (e.g., *can you..*) and 'want statements' (e.g., *I want/ would like to..*) to realize their requests, but they differed in the amount of lexical or syntactic mitigating features (e.g., *please, possibly, I was wondering if, etc.*), which made native speakers' requests more indirect and polite. Chen (2006) later conducted a longitudinal case study to investigate how two Taiwanese graduate students' email request to their professors changed over two and a half year stay in US. She discovered that students' request strategies changed from primarily 'want statements' to 'query preparatory strategies' and the email messages contained more lexical and syntactic modifications. She also pointed out that a nonnative student chose to adopt direct over indirect forms was their false belief that by making their messages sound urgent, their professors would more likely to attend their messages.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examined the email requests sent by native and nonnative English graduate students to faculty. By varying the level of imposition and holding the other two factors constant (i.e., distance and power), she discovered that both groups selected more direct strategies for the lower imposition requests, but not for the highest imposition requests, an indication of students' awareness of situational factors (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). In addition, she found that nonnative students used less syntactic modifications, but more lexical modifications (particularly *please*) than native speakers. Biesenbach-Lucas concluded that

nonnative speakers' request strategies showed "a lack of the linguistic flexibility and idiomatic expressions and an inability to select appropriate lexical modifications" (2007, p. 74).

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Participants*

In total, sixty sophomore students enrolled in the general English courses participated in this study. Based on students' Toieic scores (or the equivalent TOEFL or GEPT scores), they were grouped as higher-intermediate level group and lower-intermediate level group.

Higher-intermediate level group were students with Toieic scores ranged between 680 to 850, and lower-intermediate level group were those with scores ranged between 350 to 520.

Students' mother tongue was mostly Mandarin Chinese, and on average, they have studied English for 12 years. Most of them (93.3%) have never studied in English-speaking countries and the relatively few (6.7%) who did, had studied there for less than a month. In addition, the female and male ratio (27:3) was also identical to ensure the homogeneity of the two groups.

#### *3.2 Instruments*

The data for the present study were collected from four types of instruments: (1) a written background questionnaire, (2) three experimental email writing tasks, (3) a retrospective open-ended questionnaire, and (4) the semi-structured interview. A background questionnaire was used to gather the demographic information about the participants. As for the three writing email tasks, they are varied in the levels of imposition on the professor. The three writing tasks are: the first topic (i.e., requesting for bending rules) with the highest imposition, the second topic (i.e., requesting for feedback on a research paper) with intermediate imposition, and the third topic (i.e., requesting for an appointment for getting advice on course matters) with the relatively lower imposition on the professor. Table 3.1 listed the makeup of the scripts collected from two groups of students. 90 email scripts across three topics were collected from two groups of students and in total, 180 email scripts were collected.

*Table 1. The makeup of the scripts collected from two groups of students*

	Higher-intermediate level students (30)	Lower-intermediate level students (30)
Topic: Request for Bending rules	30	30
Topic: Request for feedback	30	30
Topic: Request for appointment	30	30
Total emails	90	90

Finally, a retrospective open-ended questionnaire was also designed to identify the factors which might influence students' choices of linguistic politeness strategies and to find out the difficulties they encountered in composing these email requests. The questions included their perceptions of the imposition levels on each email task, the relative ranking on the proper degree of politeness and directness for each task, and the difficulties they encountered in the process of writing each email task. With the participants' permission, some participants were also interviewed to elaborate or clarify their answers to the questions.

### 3.3 Coding Scheme and Data Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Data coding

Analysis of the email requests was based on the CCSARP framework developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). Some modifications regarding the coding categories were made since some email messages included in the current study did not exist in the original CCSARP coding framework. Table 3.2, Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 listed the coding categories for main request strategies, syntactic and lexical modifiers, and supportive moves adjusted for the current study. The corresponding examples were also provided.

Table 2. Coding categories for request strategies in the current study

CCSARP	Request strategies	Examples
directness levels		
Direct (least ambiguous)	(1) Imperatives	<i>Please take a look at my paper.</i>
	(2) performative	<i>I request to have special consideration to let me pass the course.</i>
		<i>I am asking you for your help to proofread my term paper.</i>
	(3) Direct questions	<i>When do you have time?</i>
	(4) Want statements	<i>I want to set up a meeting with you.</i>
		<i>I would like to hear your comments about my paper.</i>
(5) Need statements	<i>I will need your advice in taking this course.</i>	
Conventionally indirect	Query preparatory	<i>I hope you can understand and let me pass the course.</i>
		<i>I hope I can have this appointment with you in talking about this course.</i>
		<i>Would you please read my paper in your free time?</i>
Non-convention al indirect ( Hints)	Strong hint	<i>I was wondering if you would give me some comments on my paper.</i>
		<i>Attached is my research paper.</i>
(most ambiguous)	Mild hint	<i>I am having a hard time in deciding whether I should take this course or not.</i>

Table 3. Coding categories for syntactic and lexical modifiers in the current study

Internal modifiers	Sub-categories	Examples
Syntactic modifiers	1) Past tense	<i>I was wondering...</i>
	2) Progressive aspect	<i>I'm hoping...</i>
	3) Embedding	<i>I would appreciate it if you could..</i> <i>Can you take a look at my paper if you have time?</i>
Lexical modifiers	1) Polite marker	<i>please</i>
	2) Subjectiviser	<i>I'm afraid..; I suggest..; I think...</i>
	3) Consultative device	<i>Do you think you will; do you mind if;</i>
	4) Downtoner	<i>Would it be possible..</i>
	5) Understater	<i>possibly; perhaps; maybe</i>
	6) Hedges	<i>a little; a bit; just</i> <i>somewhat; sort of; kind of</i>

Table 4. Coding categories for supportive moves in the current study

Supportive moves	Examples
1) Preparator	<i>May I ask you question?</i>
2) Precommitment	<i>Could you do me a favor?</i>
3) Grounder	<i>The reason that I missed so many classes was that I have to take care of my grandmother in the hospital.</i>
4) Acknowledge the imposition of the request	<i>I know it violates the rules to miss so many classes, but could you make an exception this time?</i>
5) Promise	<i>I promise that I will not miss any class any more.</i>
6) Expectation	<i>I look forward to hearing from you soon.</i> <i>I hope I can see your reply as soon as possible.</i>
7) Sweetener	<i>You are the expert in the field so I think you are the most appropriate person to give me advice.</i>
8) Apology	<i>I am really sorry for my poor attendance.</i>
9) Thanking	<i>Thank you for taking your time reading my mail.</i>
10) Direct appeal	<i>I really hope you can understand.</i> <i>Please understand my situation.</i>
11) Imposition minimizer	<i>Please give me some feedback on my paper, under the circumstances that it won't take too much of your time.</i>
12) Importance	<i>This paper is really important for me.</i>
13) Showing the effort	<i>I have handed in all the assignments and have got good grades on the tests.</i>
14) Giving options to the addressee	<i>Please let me know your available time so I can remove my schedule.</i>

### 3.3.2 Data analysis

For the comparison of different request strategies and internal and external modification used for different imposition level tasks within groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Once the significant differences were found among different imposition tasks, a post hoc analysis was performed to locate the differences. Significant differences found would be an indication that students were aware of different levels of imposition inherent from different writing tasks and would project that awareness to the use of different politeness strategies and internal and external modifications. For comparison between two groups, independent t-tests were carried out to see if there were significant differences in their use of request strategies, syntactic and lexical modifiers and supportive moves. In addition, qualitative analysis was also performed to tap into the specific linguistic request realization patterns preferred by the two participating groups in varied imposition scenarios.

#### 4. Results and discussions

The results of both quantitative and qualitative data are presented and discussed in accordance with the research questions posed.

##### 4.1 Higher-intermediate Level Group: Directness Levels across Request Types and the Use of Politeness Features

###### 4.1.1 Directness levels in students' e-mail messages across request types

Table 5 displayed the comparison of the mean numbers of the different request strategies-direct, conventionally indirect (i.e. query preparatory) and non-conventionally indirect (i.e. hint) in the formulation of different request types by higher level students. As seen on Table 4.1, only the use of query preparatory was significantly different across different request types. The result of post hoc analysis indicated that students used significantly less query preparatory for the highest imposition request (M= 0.27) in comparison with the medium level imposition request (M=0.63).

Table 5. Comparison of frequency usages of main request strategies across request types by higher level group

Request strategies	Req. (high)		Req.(medium)		Req. (low)		ANOVA	
	rule-bending	feedback	Appt.					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
direct	0.67	0.479	0.37	0.490	0.50	0.509	2.790	ns
query pre.	0.27 <sup>a</sup>	0.450	0.63 <sup>b</sup>	0.490	0.50	0.509	4.421	.015*
hint	0.07	0.254	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.071	ns

Note. Means with different alphabet letters within the same category differ significantly (\*p< .05) by the post hoc Tukey test. ns= not significantly different

For the directness level of main strategies used for different request types, Table 5 showed that for the highest imposition request, higher linguistic proficiency students used most direct strategies (67%). As for the medium level imposition request, students adopted more query preparatory (63%) as their main request strategy. For the lowest level imposition request, students resorted to direct strategies (50.00%) as much as to query preparatory (50.00%) as their main request strategies.

As for the types of direct strategies used, Table 6 showed the subcategories of direct strategies adopted by higher level group across three request types. The totals in Table 6 indicated that for higher level students, they resorted largely to 'expectation statements' (76.67%) (i.e., *I hope you can understand and let me pass the*

course) across all request types and the second most adopted direct strategy was 'want statements' (43.33%) (i.e., *I want/ would like to set up a meeting with you*).

Table 6. Subcategories of direct strategies adopted by higher level group across request types

Request types	Imperatives	Performative	Direct questions	Want statements	Need statements	Expectation statements	Total direct strategies
Rule-bending	6.67%	13.33%	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%	36.67%	66.67%
Feedback	0.00%	6.67%	0.00%	13.33%	0.00%	16.67%	36.67%
Appointment	0.00%	6.67%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	23.33%	50.00%
Total	6.67%	26.67%	0%	43.33%	0%	76.67%	

Note: (1) The total includes all emails with different subcategories of direct strategies across three different request types. (2) Total direct strategies used include all emails contained each request type varied by levels of imposition.

#### 4.1.2 Politeness features in higher level students' email requests

For the use of internal modifications, Table 7 showed that both syntactic and lexical downgraders were not used significantly different across different request types. Subjects tended to use slightly more syntactic downgraders ( $M=0.83$ ) and lexical downgraders for requesting for feedback ( $M= 0.63$ ).

Table 7. Comparison of frequency usages of internal modifications across request types by higher level group

Internal modifica.	Req.rule-bending		Req. feedback		Req. Appt.		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
syntactic	0.53	0.730	0.83	0.747	0.80	0.805	1.399	ns
<b>Lexical</b>	0.53	0.629	0.63	0.809	0.37	0.615	1.144	ns

Note: (\* $p < .05$ ), ns= not significantly different

Table 8 showed the types of syntactic downgraders used across three different request types by higher linguistic level group. It could be observed that students used more syntactic downgraders for medium imposition request (63.33%). Within the subcategories of syntactic downgraders, 'progressive aspect' (i.e., *I'm hoping...*) was least used in comparison with other downgraders across request types.

Table 8. Syntactic downgraders used across request types by higher level group

Syntactic downgraders	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
	Req. rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
past tense	23.33%	40.00%	40.00%
progressive aspect	6.67%	10.00%	10.00%
embedding	23.33%	33.33%	30.00%
Total	40.00%	63.33%	56.67%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of modification indicated. (2) The total includes all emails with syntactic modifications.

Table 9 showed the types of lexical downgraders used across three request types by higher level group. It could be observed that fewer than half of the students used lexical modifiers to mitigate the force of their requestive acts across all request types. Within the subcategories of lexical downgraders, ‘hedges’ (i.e., *somewhat, somehow, sort of, etc.*) and ‘understater’ (i.e., *a little, a bit, etc.*) were not employed by any subject in any request type. ‘Politeness marker’ (i.e., *please*) was used the most in the high imposition request (23.33%). ‘Consultative device’ (i.e., *Do you think you can..?*) was used the most in medium imposition request (23.33%). In short, the relatively fewer use of lexical downgraders than syntactic downgraders, and particularly, the non-use of certain subcategories such as ‘hedges’ and ‘understater’ may imply students’ lack of experience or knowledge in their linguistic repertoire of some of these lexical modifiers.

Table 9. Lexical downgraders used across request types by higher level group

Lexical downgraders	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
	Req. rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
politeness marker	23.33%	13.33%	6.67%
subjectivizer	3.33%	3.33%	0.00%
consultative device	6.67%	23.33%	13.33%
downtoner	20.00%	10.00%	6.67%
understater	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
hedges	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
others	0.00%	13.33%	10.00%
Total	46.67%	43.33%	30.00%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of modification indicated. (2) The total includes all emails with lexical modifications.

The use of external modifications across different request types could be observed from Table 10. Significant difference was found in the frequency usages of supportive moves used across different request types by higher level group. The result of post hoc analysis further indicated that students used significantly

more supportive moves for the highest imposition request (M= 4.90) than for the lowest imposition request (M=3.93).

Table 10. Comparison of frequency usages of external modifications across request types by higher level group

External modifica-tio ns	Req. rule-bending		Req. feedback		Req. Appt.		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
	4.90 <sup>a</sup>	1.27	4.23	1.65	3.93 <sup>b</sup>	1.26	3.716	.028*

Note: (\*p< .05) , Means with different alphabet letters differ significantly (\*p< .05) by the post hoc Tukey test.

Table 11 showed the types of supportive moves used across request types by higher level group. It could be observed that all subjects used external modifiers to soften the requestive acts across different request types. Within the subcategories, the use of 'grounder' (i.e., *reasons, explanations, justifications*) could be found across different request types by nearly all participants. Most participants also applied 'acknowledge imposition' (80.00%) for highest level imposition (i.e., request for bending rules). But the percentage of this move dropped drastically to 10% for medium imposition request and to 6.67% for the lowest imposition request. In short, students applied different types of supportive moves for different imposition levels of e-mail tasks. Among all, the relative low use of 'imposition minimizer' across request types may imply that students were unfamiliar with or did not know how to use this move.

Table 11. Types of supportive moves used across request types by higher level group

Supportive Moves	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
	Req. rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
preparator	16.67%	6.67%	13.33%
precommitment	23.33%	23.33%	6.67%
grounder	110.00%	96.67%	103.33%
acknow.imposition	80.00%	10.00%	6.67%
promise	46.67%	0.00%	16.67%
expectation	13.33%	30.00%	23.33%
sweetener	13.33%	60.00%	100.00%
apology	66.67%	30.00%	30.00%
thanking	56.67%	93.33%	53.33%
direct appeal	26.67%	30.00%	20.00%
imposition minimi.	0.00%	10.00%	3.33%
importance	13.33%	10.00%	0.00%
effort	20.00%	10.00%	0.00%
giving options	3.33%	13.33%	16.67%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of

supportive moves indicated; percentages add up to more than 100% since supportive moves are not mutually exclusive but can occur together. (2) The total includes all emails with supportive moves.

Apparently, the higher linguistic proficiency students in the current study used the most direct strategies in the highest imposition request. Particularly, they adopted most ‘expectation statements’ (i.e., *I hope that...*) as their main requestive act. Query preparatory was used significantly more for medium imposition request, and the same amount of both query preparatory and direct strategies were used for the lowest imposition request. From the questionnaires, students pointed out that direct strategies, particularly ‘expectation statements’, did not signify impoliteness but allowed for more explicitness and sincerity since its direct Chinese translation resembled humbleness and respectfulness, and their intention could be conveyed more clearly. As for the significantly more use of query preparatory for medium level imposition, the finding suggested that when the compliance of the request was not as critical, students would resort to the conventional indirect strategy modified by internal downgraders to express their requestive intention. More direct strategy use for the highest imposition request found in the current study thus conflicts with the many previous findings in which more query preparatory was used for high imposition request (see Biesenback-Lucas, 2007; Chen, 2000, 2001).

Regarding the use of politeness features, higher proficiency students used more external than internal downgraders, particularly for the highest imposition request. By using lengthy supportive moves prior to the main requestive acts, students believed that they were being more indirect, and thus showing more politeness and respect to their addressee.

#### 4.2 Lower-intermediate Level Group: Directness Levels across Request Types and the Use of Politeness Features

##### 4.2.1 Directness Levels in students’ e-mail messages across request types

In comparing the mean numbers of different request strategies in the formulation of different request types by lower level students, the results of ANOVA test were shown on Table 4.8. As indicated, no significantly different uses of request strategies were found across different request types by lower level group students.

Table 12. Comparison of frequency usages of main request strategies across request types by lower level group

Request strategies	Req.rule-bending		Req. feedback		Req. Appt.		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
direct	0.63	0.490	0.53	0.507	0.47	0.507	1.78	ns
query pre.	0.30	0.466	0.47	0.507	0.53	0.507	0.84	ns
hint	0.07	0.254	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.071	ns

Note. \*p< .05, ns= not significantly different

From Table 12, it showed that for highest imposition request, students used most direct strategies (63%) and least query preparatory (30.00%). For medium and low level imposition request, students' choices of direct and query strategies, although not varied significantly, showed that as the imposition level increased, more direct strategies and fewer query preparatories were used as their main request strategies.

Table 13 shows the percentage of different subcategories of direct strategies used for different request types. Among all, 'want statements' were the most preferred direct strategy (53.33%), closely followed by 'expectation statements' (50.00%).

*Table 13. Subcategories of direct strategies adopted by lower level group across request types*

Request types	Imperatives	Performative	Direct questions	Want statements	Need statements	Expectation statements	Total direct strategies
rule-bending	16.67%	6.67%	0.00%	13.33%	3.33%	23.33%	63.33%
Feedback	6.67%	3.33%	0.00%	10.00%	6.67%	26.67%	53.33%
Appointment	6.67%	6.67%	3.33%	30.00%	0.00%	0.00%	46.67%
Total	30.01%	16.67%	3.33%	53.33%	10.00%	50.00%	

Note: (1) The total includes all emails with different subcategories of direct strategies across three different request types. (2) Total direct strategies used include all emails contained each request type varied by levels of imposition.

#### 4.2.2 Politeness features in higher level students' email requests

##### (1) Internal modifications: syntactic and lexical downgraders

Table 14 showed the comparison of frequency usages of both syntactic and lexical downgraders used across different request types by lower proficiency level group. As indicated in Table 14, frequency usages of syntactic downgraders were significantly different across different request types. Both Tukey and LSD post-hoc tests were performed to locate the significance, yet only LSD post-hoc test was able to locate the difference since the  $p$  value was just slightly smaller than 0.05 ( $p = 0.047$ ). Specifically, the statistical result showed that the use of syntactic downgraders was significantly less for high imposition request ( $M = 0.27$ ) and more for low imposition request ( $M = 0.67$ ). As for lexical downgraders, Table 4.10 showed that they were not used significantly differently across different request types. The result revealed a relative low use of lexical downgraders across different request types by lower level group.

Table 14. Comparison of frequency usages of internal modifications across request types by lower level group

Internal modifica.	Req.rule-bending		Req. feedback		Req. Appt.		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
syntactic.	0.27 <sup>a</sup>	0.521	0.60	0.675	0.67 <sup>b</sup>	0.758	3.177	0.047*
<b>Lexical.</b>	0.37	0.490	0.23	0.430	0.17	0.379	1.640	ns

Note: (\*p< .05), Means with different alphabet letters within the same category differ significantly (\*p< .05) by the post hoc LSD test., ns= not significantly different

Table 15 showed the types of syntactic downgraders used across three different request types by lower proficiency group. It showed that students used significantly more syntactic downgraders for low imposition request (66.67%) than high imposition request (23.33%). Within the subcategories, ‘progressive aspect’ was least used in comparison with other downgraders across request types.

Table 15. Syntactic downgraders used across request types by lower level group

Syntactic downgraders	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
	Req.rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
past tense	10.00%	40.00%	40.00%
progressive aspect	3.33%	3.33%	3.33%
embedding	13.33%	16.67%	23.33%
Total	23.33%	50.00%	66.67%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of modification indicated. (2) The total includes all emails with syntactic modifications.

Table 16. showed the types of lexical downgraders used across three request types by lower level group. In general, very few lexical modifiers were used except for the ‘politeness marker’-*please*. Specifically, ‘downtoner’ (i.e., *possibly, perhaps*), ‘understater’ (i.e., *a little, a bit*), ‘hedges’ (i.e., *somewhat, somehow, sort of*), and other mitigating device (i.e., *honor, pleasure*) were not used in any request types.

Table 16. Lexical downgraders used across request types by lower level group

Lexical	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
downgraders	Req.rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
politeness marker	33.33%	13.33%	6.67%
subjectivizer	3.33%	0.00%	3.33%
consultative device	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%
downtoner	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
understater	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
hedges	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
others	0.00%	10.00%	3.33%
Total	36.67%	23.33%	16.67%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of modification indicated. (2) The total includes all emails with lexical modifications.

#### (2) External modifications:

The use of external modifications across different request types could be observed in Table 4.13. Significant difference was found in the frequency usages of supportive moves across different request types. The result of post hoc analysis further indicated that students used significantly more supportive moves in requesting for bending rule ( $M = 4.15$ ) than in requesting for feedback ( $M = 3.10$ ) and requesting for appointment ( $M = 3.37$ ).

Table 17. Comparison of frequency usages of external modifications across request types by lower level group

External modifica-tio	Req.rule-bending		Req. feedback		Req. Appt.		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p
ns	4.15 <sup>a</sup>	1.14	3.10 <sup>b</sup>	1.09	3.37 <sup>b</sup>	1.00	14.256	.00*

Note: (\* $p < .05$ ), Means with different alphabet letters differ significantly (\* $p < .05$ ) by the post hoc Tukey test.

Table 18 showed the types of supportive moves used across request types by lower level group students. It could be observed that all subjects used supportive moves to soften the requestive acts across different request types. Within the subcategories, the use of 'grounders' could be found across different request types by all participants. 'Acknowledge imposition' and 'promise' were used by more than half of the participants (63.33%) in the highest imposition request, but were not used at all in the lower level imposition requests. The statistical results revealed that as the levels of imposition increased, lower level students used more supportive moves to externally mitigate the illocutionary force of their requestive act, and they also used different types of supportive moves with different request tasks.

Table 18. Types of supportive moves used across request types by lower level group

Supportive Moves	(High)	(Medium)	(Low)
	Req. rule-bending	Req. feedback	Req. appointment
preparator	6.67%	6.67%	3.33%
precommitment	13.33%	23.33%	6.67%
grounder	90.00%	96.67%	93.33%
acknow.imposition	63.33%	0.00%	0.00%
promise	63.33%	0.00%	0.00%
expectation	16.67%	13.33%	16.67%
sweetener	3.33%	26.67%	80.00%
apology	86.67%	13.33%	6.67%
thanking	76.67%	100.00%	80.00%
direct appeal	16.67%	10.00%	23.33%
imposition minimi.	0.00%	6.67%	3.33%
impotence	10.00%	6.67%	3.33%
effort	3.33%	0.00%	0.00%
giving options	0.00%	6.67%	20.00%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Note: (1) % indicates the percentage of messages within each request type that contained the type of supportive moves indicated; percentages add up to more than 100% since supportive moves are not mutually exclusive but can occur together. (2) The total includes all emails with supportive moves.

Apparently, for lower linguistic proficiency students in this study, the use of request strategies across request types did not vary significantly, although they tended to use more direct strategies for the highest imposition request, and as the imposition level decreased, more query preparatory was used. Among all direct strategies, 'want statements', 'expectation statements' and 'Please + impositives' were often adopted as requestive head acts. Students pointed out these strategies would sound less ambiguous yet polite, and thus were adopted more frequently for highest imposition request.

As for the use of politeness features, the lower level students used significantly more external than internal downgraders, particularly for the highest imposition request. Similar to the higher level groups, students pointed out the need to be indirect by showing more supportive moves such as 'apology', 'sweeteners', and 'grounders' before making the core request. Regarding the relative low use of syntactic and lexical downgraders, the lower proficiency students showed very limited ability in using lexical modifiers, except for 'please', and only 'past tense' in syntactic downgraders was sometimes adopted. This could be explained by the developmental continuum pointed out by Barron (2003) in that lower level students overuse 'please' and underuse other lexical modifiers such as 'downtoners', 'hedges', 'understaters', etc.

### 4.3 Higher-intermediate vs. Lower-intermediate Proficiency Level students

#### 4.3.1 Comparison of the directness levels in the realization of request strategies

As shown in the previous section, both higher-intermediate and lower-intermediate groups used more direct strategies for high imposition request. Table 4.15 displayed the comparison of the mean numbers of the three main request strategies used in all request types between the two groups. As the results of independent t-tests indicated, the two groups did not differ in the realization of main request strategies used in all request types. In general, subjects of both linguistic proficiency levels tended to use more direct strategies and fewer query preparatory as their main request strategies. Hint was indiscriminately rarely used by both groups.

Table 19. Comparison of higher and lower level groups' frequency usages of different request strategies in all request types

Request strategies	Higher level group		Lower level group		t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Direct strategy	0.51	0.503	0.54	0.501	0.447	ns
Query Preparatory	0.47	0.502	0.43	0.498	0.446	ns
<b>Hint</b>	0.02	0.148	0.02	0.148	0.00	ns

Note: (\*p < .05)

#### 4.3.2 Comparison of Politeness Features Used

##### (1) Internal modifications

Table 20 showed the comparison of two groups' frequency usages of syntactic and lexical downgraders in all request types. As indicated, the results of independent t-tests showed that higher proficiency group used more syntactic downgraders and significantly more lexical downgraders in comparison with the lower proficiency group in all request types.

Table 20. Comparison of higher and lower level groups' frequency usages of different internal modifications in all request types

Internal modifications	Higher level group		Lower level group		t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Syntactic downgraders	0.72	0.765	0.52	0.674	1.964	0.051#
<b>Lexical downgraders</b>	0.51	0.691	0.26	0.439	2.962	0.003*

Note: (\*p < .05), #Marginally significant

##### (2) External modifications

Table 21 showed the comparison of higher and lower level groups' frequency usages of supportive moves in all request types. As indicated, the result of the independent t-test showed that higher level group used

significantly more supportive moves than the lower level group as the politeness devices to soften the requestive force in their requests.

Table 21. Comparison of higher and lower level groups' frequency usages of supportive moves in all request types

<i>External modifications</i>	<i>Higher level group</i>				<b>t-test</b>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Supportive moves</b>	4.36	1.448	3.66	1.229	3.497	0.001*

Note: (\*p< .05)

In comparing the use of direct strategies and politeness features across different request types by the two participating groups, the results showed that their choice of using direct strategies in making high imposition request was the same. As revealed in the interview and questionnaire, this phenomenon had to do with students' insecurity with their linguistic ability, which enforced them to use more explicit and concise, thus more direct requestive acts for the highest imposition request to avoid ambiguity on the addressee, since the consequence of failing or passing was at stake. In addition, both groups did not equate "explicitness and conciseness" with "directness and impoliteness" since the Chinese equivalents of these "direct strategies" were considered humble, indirect, and polite. However, qualitative differences did exist, since higher level group used more politeness devices such as 'past tense' and 'embedding' to internally mitigate the illocutionary force in their request.

As for the politeness features used, in terms of internal downgraders, higher proficiency group used more syntactic modifiers, and significantly more lexical modifiers than lower proficiency group. Thus, as students' linguistic level increased, their adoption of internal modifications would also increase. However, cautions should be made in that some of the internal modifiers such as 'progressive aspect', 'hedges', and 'understaters' were rarely or never used by higher level students. This suggested some of the internal modifiers may not be acquired by mere exposure; explicit teaching might be the key for students to effectively learn these internal devices in making e-polite requests. For the use of external modifications, both groups used most of the supportive moves for the highest imposition request. Higher proficiency level group, with more linguistic repertoires, used significantly more numbers and more types of supportive moves than their less proficient counterparts.

#### 4.4 Qualitative Results

Qualitative findings could be observed from closer examination of the actual realization of main request strategies, internal and external modifications and how the email discourses were sequenced by the two groups of participants.

#### 4.4.1 Comparison of main request strategies used by the two groups

While looking closely at the actual realization of direct strategies and query preparatory used by the two groups, it could be observed that qualitative differences did exist within the same type of request strategies. For the comparison of requestive head acts, examples of most preferred direct strategy-'expectation statements' and the less adopted strategy 'query preparatory' were listed as follows:

(1) expectation statement:

- *If it is possible, I wish Professor Black can take this into account to consider letting me pass the course.* (higher proficiency student: embedding, downtoner)
- *I hope you can let me pass, please.* (lower proficiency student, politeness marker)

(2) query preparatory:

- *If there was any possibility, would you please give me one more chance to make up for my absence and pass the course?* (higher proficiency student: embedding, past tense)
- *Can you let me pass this class?* (lower proficiency student)

As examples provided above, the differences in the use of internal modifications such as syntactic downgrader (i.e., 'past tense', 'embedding') and the lexical downgraders (i.e., 'downtoner', 'politeness marker') have made the higher proficiency students' requestive head acts sound less direct and thus, more polite in their perlocutionary effects. In addition, the formulaic expressions such as "if it is possible...", "if there is any possibility", "Would you please...", and "Would it be possible", although not used extensively, started to appear in some higher level students' email request messages, whereas very few of which were used by their less proficient counterparts. Previous research indicated that learners use lower rate of formulas than native speakers (Edmondson & House, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig, 2006; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986). In combining previous findings with the result of the current study in which lower level EFL learners displayed much fewer conventional expressions than the higher level learners, a developmental sequence in the acquisition of formulaic expressions could thus be established.

#### 4.4.2 Comparison of actual linguistic realization of syntactic and lexical downgraders by two groups

Quantitative results showed that higher proficiency level students used more syntactic modifiers and significantly more lexical modifiers than lower level group. For the comparison of actual realization of internal modifications used by the two groups, examples are provided below.

##### 1. Past tense:

- *Could you please give me a few minutes to talk about this course?*  
(higher proficiency student)
- *Can you arrange an appointment in getting some advice for me, please?*  
(lower proficiency student)

##### 2. Embedding:

- *I'm writing to ask if it is possible for me to see you in your office hour....*  
(higher proficiency student)

- *I want to ask you if I can request for an appointment in your office hour...*  
(lower proficiency student)

### 3. Politeness marker- please:

- *Would you please give me one more chance?*  
(higher proficiency student)
- *Please give me one more chance to pass this course.*  
(lower proficiency student)

As shown in first examples provided above, although the use of ‘politeness marker’-*please*, was the mostly adopted lexical modifier by both groups, it was realized differently by the two groups. From the examples, although the same type of lexical device (i.e., *please*) was used, the higher proficiency students used it in the embedded position of the sentence while the lower proficiency students used it as the most direct strategy- “Please + imperative”. As indicated by Blum-Kulk (1991) and Barron (2003), the use of *please* in the embedded position of the sentence reflected the native speakers’ preference. The higher level students thus demonstrated their expanded pragmalinguistic repertoire in using this device in a more native like manner.

For the syntactic device- ‘embedding’, higher proficiency students showed their embedded sentence as a formulaic expression (i.e., *I’m writing to ask if it is possible...*), whereas lower level student filled their embedded sentence with more trace of direct L1 transfer (i.e., *I want to ask you if I can request for an appointment in your office hour...*). Although analysis of perspective was not the focus of the current study, Ellis (1997) and Trosborg (1995) identified the developmental patterns in which beginning learners often adopted a “hearer perspective” ( i.e., *Can you...*) in making request and as their level of linguistic proficiency advanced, more “speaker perspective” requests were formulated (i.e., *Can I...*). As for the “impersonal perspective” (i.e., *Is it possible...*), native speakers in their study had significantly greater use of ‘impersonative perspective’ (Ellis, 1997; Trosborg, 1995). The example provided above thus mirrored the developmental patterns identified from previous research.

#### 4.4.3 Comparison of positions of external modifiers

Supportive moves are external to the head act, occurring either before or after it, and serve the function of mitigating the requested act (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Quantitative findings earlier revealed that the higher level group employed significantly more numbers and more types of supportive moves than the lower level group, while most supportive moves were used for the highest imposition request for both groups. Qualitative result here focused on the position of supportive moves employed by the participating students. Table 22 showed the position of supportive moves used in all the emails by the two groups.

Table 22. Position of supportive moves by two groups

<i>Position of supportive moves</i>	<i>Higher level group</i> (90 email messages)	<b>Lower level group</b> <b>(90 email messages)</b>
Pre-request move	34 (37.8%)	47 (52.2%)
Post-request move	7 (7.8%)	3 (3.3%)
<b>Both pre-and post-moves</b>	49 (54.4%)	40 (44.4%)

For the position of supportive moves, Table 4.26 indicated that both groups preferred the use of both pre-request, and pre- and post- supportive moves. A closer look at the comparison between the two mostly used moves, the higher level group used more pre- and post- supportive moves (54.4%) than pre- request moves (37.8%); whereas the lower level group used more pre- request moves (52.2%) than pre- and post- request moves (44.4%). From the interview, higher level students revealed that the use of both pre- and post- moves as an even more polite strategy than using pre- request moves alone since they could elaborate more to express their politeness through external devices in their requests. It's not hard to understand that lower level students were limited by their linguistic resources, and thus adopted more pre- moves to avoid making language mistakes.

From these preferred position of moves, both pre- and pre- and post- supportive moves, it should be noted that 'grounders' were always used before the requestive acts. In other words, the reasons or justifications were always stated first before the actual requestive act was made. Kirkpatrick (1991) analyzed the structure of 40 Chinese letters of requests written to the China Section of Radio Australia, and found that Chinese indirectness and politeness was established by "because--- therefore" sequence rather than "therefore-- because" structure. The use of pre- grounders by subjects in the current study also followed the "because--therefore" sequence and thus the result echoed with the previous study.

#### 4.4.4 Factors which influence students' choice of linguistic politeness strategies in emails

Based on the findings from the questionnaires and interviews, factors which influence students' choice of linguistic politeness strategies could be approached from the following perspectives: (1) situational factor; (2) linguistic proficiency; and (3) transfer of L1 pragmatic knowledge. They were discussed as follows:

##### (1) Situational factor: imposition level of the request

From the questionnaire and retrospective interview, the majority of students' perceived levels of imposition on three email tasks corresponded to the imposition levels originally designed. Most students specified that the most indirect strategy should be used for the highest imposition email request. However, from the actual realization of their request, the direct strategies were most frequently used for the highest level imposition request by both groups. Particularly, 'expectation statements' (i.e., *I hope that...*) were used extensively by both groups, and 'want statements' (i.e., *I would like to/ want to...*) were the other greatly used direct strategy by the

lower level group. Students pointed out in the interview that these two strategies were polite ways to address their requests. The Chinese equivalents of “I hope ...”, “Wo-Xiwang...” and “I want/ would like to”, “Wo-Xiang”, were perceived as very polite strategies for them since the same realizations of both strategies were very modest and humble in Chinese. In addition, the most adopted ‘expectation statements’ (e.g., *I hope that you...*) often combined both direct and indirect elements, “in which the hope expressed is itself a conventionally indirect request that refers to the hearer’s ability or willingness” (Yu, 1999, p. 300). Students thus considered these strategies as being indirect, rather than direct strategies as they appeared on the CCSARP scale.

## (2) Linguistic proficiency

Both groups addressed their difficulties in making e-mail request in the writing tasks. Most students specified their worry about improper word use which might lead to misunderstanding or negative perception on their professors. Some higher proficiency students pointed out that they found it difficult to make their email requests clear and at the same time polite. As for the lower level students, their perceived difficulties mainly came from their limited knowledge of English grammar and word usages. In general, higher level students concerned more about the pragmatic appropriateness, whereas lower level students worried about their linguistic problems in writing a proper email request. To overcome the limited capability in related pragmatic norms, the higher level students, with relatively more linguistic resources, tended to elaborate more by using more supportive moves, which might lead to verbosity and cause negative perlocution on their addressee. As for the lower level students, their limited capacity in both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge had hindered their attempts in using some English structures or expressions they were unsure of in order to “play safe” in avoiding making too many mistakes.

## (3) Transfer of L1 pragmatic knowledge

Students from both groups indicated that they would resort to their existed L1 pragmatic knowledge of politeness in composing these emails since they were not familiar with the norm and context of making English request to professors. Most of the students also mentioned that they were using the “Chinese way” in composing these email requests by giving reasons prior to requests and by using different types of supportive moves to show their sincerity and respect. Zhang (1995b) pointed out that “to define indirectness in Chinese and to realize it in interaction, external modification of utterances is mandatory, internal modification is not” (p.82). The result of the current study thus echoed Zhang’s findings.

## 5. Conclusions and discussions

This study intends to explore Taiwanese EFL Learners’ pragmatic competence in the production of email request to professors in the institutional setting. It sets to find out the preferred use of request strategies, the internal and external modifications, and the information sequencing of the email messages by the two linguistic level groups while writing email requests to their professors with varied degrees of imposition. The findings pointed out that both higher and lower linguistic groups preferred to use direct strategies in making high

imposition email request. This phenomenon revealed that students' preference in making their requestive head acts more explicit and concise, and seemingly more direct (according to CCSARP scale) in order to avoid ambiguity on the addressee, since the consequence of failing or passing the course was at stake. It should be noted that students' perceptions regarding 'expectation statements' (i.e., *I hope that you...*) were neither direct nor impolite since such request statements showed concerns for the hearer's ability or willingness and were thus regarded a conventionally indirect request (Yu, 1999). It could also be inferred that at this stage of the interpragmatic development, both groups were still strongly influenced by their L1 pragmatics since the conventional request strategies were not their main choices for the highest imposition task in making proper email requests in the target language.

As for the politeness features used, the result pointed out that as students' linguistic level increased, their adoption of internal and external modifiers also increased accordingly, indicating the developmental sequences in the acquisition of the politeness features. However, since some of the internal modifiers were never used by even higher proficiency groups, it revealed that these devices may not be acquired by mere exposure; explicit teaching might be the key for students to learn these politeness features effectively. Regarding the use of supportive moves, both groups preferred the inductive move pattern ("justification-request") which may not agree with the deductive move pattern ("request-justification") preferred by the native Anglo-American culture (Kong, 1998). Since this may thus cause confusion or negative perception on the recipients of the target language, explicit instruction would be useful in clarifying the different writing rhetoric across different cultures.

As revealed by the questionnaire and interviews, students believed that being indirect was considered as the most respectful way of showing politeness and it was manifested largely via the use of "expectation statement" and pre-posed supportive moves. In addition, students were also aware that they were using Chinese rhetoric particularly in the patterns of supportive moves. However, when lacking contextual knowledge in making proper English email request to professors, they could only resort to their existing L1 pragmatics. Thus, what constitutes the polite head act and the proper use of diverse internal and external strategies should be made explicit in the language classroom, so students could be equipped with effective means to make effective upward email request.

This paper has its limitations in several aspects. First, the subjects were limited to Taiwanese EFL students, and hence, conclusions drawn upon may have its limited application. Secondly, since the subjects participated in this study were of only two linguistic levels, the developmental features of their interlanguage pragmatics could only reflect the partial developmental continuum in this regard. Thus, future research which involves subjects from different linguistic levels is suggested. Being able to write polite as well as appropriate request emails to professors would equip students with another effective medium to interact with professors (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005). When EFL students are made aware of which request types and politeness devices are proper to use when interacting with professors via e-mail, and are explicitly taught the possible perlocutionary effect of their request strategies, their chances to gain positive feedback will thus increase, leading to better chances for to succeed in academic settings.

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# INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEPTH AND BREADTH OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION ACROSS DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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## ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to investigate the particular role of learners' depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge in their listening comprehension. Moreover, it also sought to find out whether there is any difference between high and low listening proficiency groups in performance on depth and breadth dimensions of vocabulary knowledge. To this end, a total of 117 junior university students majoring in English language and literature participated in the study. In order to assess the learners' listening comprehension, the listening section of a paper-based version of the TOEFL was administered. Their depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge were measured through performance on Word Associate Test and Vocabulary Levels Test, respectively. The results of data analysis indicated that both depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge are determining factors in successful listening comprehension. However, it was found out that breadth or size of vocabulary knowledge provides a more significant contribution than depth to listening comprehension. Furthermore, the results of the study indicated that depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge are not significant predictors of listening comprehension in the low listening ability group.

**Key words:** Vocabulary, depth of vocabulary knowledge, breadth of vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension

## 1. Introduction

Learning a new language is not possible without having some knowledge of its lexis. Decarrico (2001) states that no matter language is the first, second, or foreign language of the learners, vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition. Traditionally, language proficiency has been conceptualized as performance in the four main language skills, i.e. speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Thus, to understand the role of vocabulary knowledge in language learning, it is reasonable to study it with regard to each of these skills. Reading, among these skills, has enjoyed the greatest attention (Qian, 2002; Rashidi & Khosravi, 2010; Shen, 2008); however, speaking and listening have attracted less attention. One possible explanation for the paucity of research in this area is their elusive nature and difficulties in their measurement. This argument is approved by Brown (2001), who maintains that listening comprehension is compounded by factors of permanence and processing time.

## 2. Depth and breadth of vocabulary and listening comprehension

In studying the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension, it is important to consider which one is the precursor to the other. One possibility is to view the potential power of listening practice in building learners' vocabulary. According to Nation (2002), vocabulary acquisition is possible through focusing on the meaning focused input in which learners engage in meaningful written and spoken

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texts. Nation believes that even though relying on spoken and written input alone is leaving too much to chance and that vocabulary learning in this way is fragile, this is not intended to mean that such learning is not worthwhile. In line with this claim, Elley (1989) conducted a study in which the role of listening to short stories in vocabulary learning was investigated. As for the results of her study, she found that listening to short stories when read out aloud is a significant source of vocabulary acquisition.

Another perspective on the interrelation between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension is to view vocabulary knowledge as leading to better listening comprehension. This approach is best manifested in listening classes which involve a pre-listening stage in which teachers embark on a great deal of pre-teaching of unfamiliar vocabulary expected to be heard in the spoken text. Field (2002) recommends that teachers present three or four critical words prior to listening comprehension. There are also a number of studies in which researchers have rightly recognized the significant role of learning particular words before listening comprehension tests. Ching-shyang Chang (2007), for instance, compared three groups of learners with differing length of preparation time before listening comprehension and found that the more preparation time the participants had, the higher scores they achieved.

Vocabulary knowledge is no longer thought of as a one-dimensional relationship between meaning and form and includes various types of knowledge. Nation (2001) presented a framework in which knowledge of words is perceived as knowledge of form, meaning, and use. Qian (2002) offered four interrelated dimensions of vocabulary knowledge: 1) breadth of vocabulary, which refers to the number of words, of which learners have some superficial knowledge; 2) depth of vocabulary knowledge, which refers to a higher level of knowledge including all aspects and associations of words; 3) lexical organization, which is related to storage and representations of words in the mind; and 4) automaticity of receptive and productive processes through which words are accessed for receptive and productive purposes. There is a general agreement on the existence of the two main aspects of vocabulary knowledge, i.e. depth and breadth of vocabulary in almost all classifications and categorizations offered for identifying the dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.

### **3. The differential role of proficiency**

Several research findings confirm that learners with different proficiency levels do not function the same across various language-based skills. According to Vandergrift (2003), more skilled listeners maintain attention or redirect it when distracted, process larger chunks, infer the unknown words from the context using the top-down approach, and use more metacognitive strategies. However, less skilled listeners are easily “thrown-off” when encountered with unknown words. They segment the spoken text on a word-by-word basis and use a bottom-up approach to process a text. Another important issue is the assumption that vocabulary knowledge is one, among the few factors, which differentiates proficient listeners from non-proficient ones. Meara (1996) confirms that all other things being equal, learners with large vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills and that vocabulary skills make a significant contribution to almost all aspects of L2 proficiency. Working within the three-phase comprehension framework proposed by Anderson (1995), i.e., perceptual, parsing, and utilization, Goh (2000) found that low ability listeners had difficulty in the perceptual and parsing stages, which are related to word recognition and association with mental lexicon, respectively. Nevertheless, for high ability listeners the problematic stage was the utilization stage which is associated with the learners' schema. In the light of the fact that vocabulary knowledge contributes to the bottom-up processing of the text, and that the differences mentioned above can be summarized into differences in either bottom-up or top-down approaches, and that learners with a range of proficiency levels draw on these approaches differently, it can be hypothesized that there is some sort of association between learners' vocabulary knowledge and their listening comprehension across different proficiency levels.

Researchers typically have been increasingly attracted to doing research on breadth of vocabulary knowledge in spite of the fact that depth of knowledge can be equally significant in language learning. As Stahr (2008) rightly argues, it is the in-depth knowledge of the words that assists learners in accessing and activating vocabulary in their mental lexicon with higher speed and automaticity for receptive and productive purposes. In fact, while listening to a piece of spoken text, students need more than mere literal or superficial

meaning of the words. They have to make an association – which is the key feature of in-depth vocabulary knowledge – between what they hear as a mere phonological form and its connection to other aspects of words such as collocation, orthography, synonymy, etc. This distinction between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge is important as it will determine which aspects of vocabulary knowledge provide a better contribution to listening comprehension.

The present research was targeted on the relationship between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, as two main dimensions of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. It also attempted to determine the extent to which scores on depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge would predict learners' listening comprehension scores. Additionally, the study aimed at comparing the performances of two groups on depth and breadth vocabulary tests, as assigned to high and low listening proficiency groups. Considering these objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent is listening comprehension related to vocabulary knowledge dimensions of depth and breadth?
2. To what extent do depth and breadth dimensions of vocabulary knowledge contribute to performance in listening comprehension?
3. To what extent are depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension interrelated across high and low listening ability groups?
4. To what extent do depth and breadth dimensions of vocabulary knowledge contribute to performance in listening comprehension across high and low listening ability groups?

#### **4. Method**

##### *4.1 Participants*

The participants were a total of 117 university students randomly sampled from junior students majoring in English language and literature. All of the participants had already passed the first conversation course and they were in the middle of the second conversation course at the time of administering the TOEFL test. In order to divide them into two groups of high and low proficient listeners, the mean score and standard deviation from the TOEFL listening comprehension test scores were used as the criteria. For this purpose, those students whose scores were a standard deviation above the mean were considered as high proficiency students and those with one standard deviation below the mean were considered as low proficiency students. Therefore, those students whose score on listening comprehension test was a standard deviation below 33.97 (the mean score) were assigned to the low group and the rest of the students were considered as the high group (one standard deviation below the mean equals the raw score of 24 on the listening comprehension test).

##### *4.2 Instruments*

The instruments used for data collection are as follows:

Listening section of the TOEFL. In order to measure the participants' listening proficiency, the researchers administered the listening section of a paper-based version of the TOEFL. The listening section consists of three sub-sections including short conversations (one short conversation for each item) and longer conversations (one long conversation for four or five items), measuring students' abilities in comprehending spoken English for interpersonal, instructional, and academic purposes. Overall, the test consists of 50 items with about 35 minutes allotted time. The rationale for selecting the TOEFL test was that such tests are verified as standardized tests with acknowledged high validity and reliability, and they are quite suitable for measuring the overall proficiency of language learners. Additionally, there has been a close relationship between the measures of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and TOEFL scores. For instance, Beglar and Hunt (1999) reported that scores on the Levels sections of Vocabulary Levels Test are highly correlated with TOEFL scores.

Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT). Vocabulary Levels Test is designed based on the frequency levels of words or frequency word lists. It has been used to make inferences about the test takers' vocabulary size by measuring single meanings of content words at four frequency levels (2000, 3000, 5000, 10000) and one academic level. The test has undergone a number of validation studies thenceforth (e.g., Beglar and Hunt, 1999; Read, 1988; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). Schmitt et al. (2001) revised and expanded two versions of Vocabulary Levels Test. They used Rasch analysis, item analysis, factor analysis, and interviews with participants to validate those versions. They found both versions of the test highly reliable (alpha 0.92 for frequency levels and 0.96 for academic level). Version 2 of the test was used to measure the size or breadth of vocabulary knowledge in the present study.

Word Associate Test (WAT). Read (1993) developed Word Associate Test (WAT) at Victoria University of Wellington to measure the receptive aspects of depth of vocabulary knowledge. The test is designed based on the concept of word association. According to Read (1993), the relationship between the stimulus word and associates were of the three types: 1) paradigmatic: the words are synonymous or at least similar in meaning, oftentimes with one being more general than the other (e.g., conform-comply; illuminate-brighten); 2) syntagmatic: the two words are collocates that often occur together in a sentence (e.g., navy-sailor; restore-health); and 3) analytic: the associates represent one aspect, or component, of the meaning of the stimulus word, and are likely to form part of its dictionary definition (e.g., cycle-series; friction-surfaces). In this study, version 3.1 (form B) of WAT was administered. It is composed of 50 items, each of which consisting of one stimulus word followed by a group of eight words, four of which are semantically associated with the target word while the other four are distracters.

#### 4.3 Procedure

As mentioned earlier, the junior students of three universities participated in the present research. They agreed to participate in the study after coordinating with their concerned English Departments. Since the presence of the same participants was necessary for all the three testing sessions, it was more likely that a number of students be absent in one of the sessions. However, after conducting the first test, they were asked to be present in all of the sessions and they were informed about the time of the next test administration. Additionally, they were asked to write the same name or code in their answer sheets for the three tests. As for the order of administration of the tests, the listening test was administered first, and then tests of depth and breadth of vocabulary were conducted in time intervals of two weeks.

### 5. Results

The collected data were analyzed using such statistical procedure as calculating mean and standard deviation of scores from WAT, VLT, and TOEFL tests, Pearson Product moment, multiple regression analysis, and an independent t-test for determining the significance of differences between participants as assigned to high and low ability learners.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistic for raw scores from WAT, VLT, and listening section of TOEFL test.<sup>1</sup>

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics of raw scores (N= 117)*

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	MPS
Depth	142.5	31.4	62	195	200
Breadth	108.9	19.9	59	148	150
Listening	33.9	9.2	12	49	50

*Note:* MPS= maximum possible score; SD= standard deviation

As the descriptive results of Table 1 shows, the mean score for both vocabulary breadth and depth are fairly high, amounting to about 72% and 71% of the maximum possible score, respectively. However, the standard deviation figures indicate that the standard deviation scores for depth are larger than those of the breadth test, meaning that the depth scores show more spread from the mean compared with the breadth test. Also, the mean score for listening comprehension test is 33.9, which amounts to about 68% of the maximum possible score for this test.

In order to answer the first research question and determine the relationship between the two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, i.e. depth and breadth and also the relationship between these two and listening comprehension, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated among the scores from each test. The results are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2. Pearson correlations among the variables of the study in participants as a whole*

Variable	Listening	Breadth
Depth	0.74**	0.84**
Breadth	0.79**	-

*Note.* \*\* means that the correlation is significant at  $p < 0.001$  level

As can be seen from Table 2, the students' listening comprehension performance is significantly correlated with their depth of vocabulary knowledge ( $r = 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that an in-depth knowledge of vocabulary may enable learners to do well on listening proficiency test. A larger correlation was obtained between breadth (size) of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension ( $r = 0.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), implying that larger vocabulary in students' repertoire may play a vital role in comprehending spoken text as well. All in all, as far as the results of the above statistical analysis reveals, the two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge can be considered as having almost equally strong relationship with listening comprehension. As for the relationship between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, the results indicate a highly significant correlation between the scores from depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge test ( $r = 0.84$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that these two dimensions of vocabulary knowledge are closely associated in such a way that those learners who possess a large vocabulary size are more likely to possess an in-depth knowledge of vocabularies, too.

In order to answer the second research question and determine the extent to which the independent variables of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge predict the performance in the dependent variable, i.e. listening comprehension, a multiple regression analysis was run. Table 3 illustrates the results of this analysis.

*Table 3. The results of multiple regression analysis for variable in participants as whole*

Predictive variables	MR	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Non-standard values		$\beta$	T	P
				B	SE			
Cons	-	-	-	5.88	2.82	-	-2.08	0.039
Breadth	0.796	0.63	199.05*	0.26	0.04	0.57	5.53	.001
Depth	0.808	0.65	107.52*	0.07	0.03	0.26	2.54	.01

As indicated in Table 3, the observed F value is significant (at the  $P < 0.001$  level). Also, the T values for depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge indicate that the independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variable of listening comprehension. The independent variables of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, taken together, account for about 65% of variance in listening comprehension of the participants as a whole. Considering the unique contribution of the two variables to predicting listening

comprehension, it can be observed that breadth of vocabulary knowledge is a stronger predictor of listening comprehension and, standing alone, predicts 63% of listening comprehension. Depth of vocabulary knowledge adds only 2.5% to the variance already afforded by breadth.

So far the focus has been on the participants as a whole without considering any division across different proficiencies. However, as a part of the study, the performance of two language ability groups with regard to their listening comprehension performance has been investigated. As mentioned, overall 117 university students participated in the study. Out of this number, 94 students were chosen as the high group and the 23 remaining students were assigned to the low group. The criteria for selection was based on the participants' mean score and standard deviation on TOEFL listening comprehension test. In order to make sure the participants were assigned to the right groups and, therefore, to determine the validity of the classification, an independent t-test was run between two groups, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The results of independent t-test for proficiency classification

Variables	Level	N	Mean	SD	t	P
Depth	high	94	151.52	26.41	1.94	0.01
	low	23	106.00	23.19		
Breadth	high	94	114.96	15.69	2.23	0.01
	low	23	84.43	16.72		
Listening	high	94	37.44	6.43	1.56	0.01
	low	23	19.78	3.46		

Note: N = number of participants in each group, SD= standard deviation.

As indicated in Table 4, the t values for students' performance on depth, breadth, and listening comprehension tests reveal a significant difference between high and low groups ( $p < 0.01$ ). This difference can be clearly observed from the differences in the mean scores calculated for each group, separately. In all of the three variables of the study the students in the high group outperformed low ability students. Therefore, it can be confidently concluded that dividing participants into high and low was quite valid. In order to find out whether there is a significant relationship among the variables of the study in low and high proficiency groups, a Pearson product moment correlation was calculated (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5. Pearson correlations among variables of the study in low proficiency group

Variable	Listening	Breadth
Depth	0.52*	0.77*
Breadth	0.52*	-

Note.\* means that the correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level

As can be seen in Table 5, a similar significant correlation was found between both depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension in low proficiency students ( $r = 0.52$ ). In the same group, a highly significant relationship was also found between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge ( $r = 0.77$ ).

Table 6. Pearson correlations among variables of the study in high proficiency group

Variable	Listening	Breadth
Depth	0.59*	0.76*
Breadth	0.68*	-

Note.\* means that the correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level

As illustrated in Table 6, there was a significant correlation between depth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension ( $r= 0.59$ ), and as well, between the breadth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension ( $r= 0.68$ ). As expected, depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge were also significantly correlated ( $r= 0.76$ ) in high proficiency group.

By comparison of correlation values among the variables of the study between high and low proficiency groups, it could be concluded that the value of correlation between depth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension in the high group is about 0.07, larger than the same for low proficiency group. Similarly, the correlation between breadth of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension in high proficiency group is 0.68, which is about 0.16 larger than the obtained correlation between the two variables in low proficiency group. It could be understood that there is a stronger relationship among variables of the study in high proficiency group than the low proficiency group. This relationship is even stronger between size of vocabulary and listening comprehension than it is between depth of vocabulary and listening comprehension.

In order to find out the extent to which the independent variables of depth and breadth predict the performance on listening comprehension in high and low listening proficiency groups, and to see whether these predictions are significant for each variable, two multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results are presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

*Table 7. The results of multiple regression analysis for variable in low proficiency group*

Predictive variables	MR	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Non-standard values		$\beta$	T	P
				B	SE			
Cons	-	-	-	9.95	3.38	-	2.94	0.039
Breadth	0.523	0.27	7.90	0.062	0.06	0.299	1.02	0.31
Depth	0.555	0.30	4.44	0.043	0.04	0.291	0.99	0.33

The results of Table 7 illustrate that about 30% of the variance in listening comprehension in low proficiency group is predicted by independent variables of depth and breadth. However, none of these variables were significant predictors of listening comprehension as the p value for both depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge was higher than 0.05. Consequently, no multiple regression model can be drawn from the analysis to explain the predictions. At the opposite side, the regression analysis conducted for high proficiency students, however, reveals that the observed F value is significant at  $p < 0.001$  and about 47% of listening comprehension variance is predicted by independent variables of vocabulary depth and breadth (see Table 8).

*Table 8. The results of multiple regression analysis for variable in high proficiency group*

Predictive variables	MR	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Non-standard values		$\beta$	T	P
				B	SE			
Cons	-	-	-	5.20	3.60	-	1.44	0.039
Breadth	0.68	0.46	79.44	0.22	0.04	0.53	4.57	0.001
Depth	0.69	0.47	41.63	0.04	0.02	0.18	1.58	0.11

As can be seen from Table 8, the p value for breadth of vocabulary knowledge is 0.001, which is way smaller than the significance level (0.05). This means that the prediction of listening comprehension variance afforded by breadth of vocabulary knowledge is quite significant. However, the obtained p value for depth of vocabulary knowledge is larger than 0.05 ( $0.11 > 0.05$ ) and it cannot be a significant predictor of listening comprehension in high proficiency group. This means that depth of vocabulary knowledge contributes very little to successful listening comprehension.

As mentioned earlier in the study, the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), developed by Schmitt et al., (2001), measures learners' size of vocabulary knowledge on four vocabulary frequency levels, namely 2000, 3000, 5000, 1000, and one academic level. The data from the participants' performance on each of these frequency levels helps to take an analytic look on the role of vocabulary in optimal comprehension of spoken language. Therefore, the purpose of this descriptive analysis was twofold: first, to present a profile of students' mastery of vocabulary at each frequency level, and second to narrowly determine the approximate number of words needed for a particular level of listening comprehension.

The cutoff score for mastering each level of frequency determined by Schmitt et al. (2001) is 26 out of possible 30. Therefore, those students who scored 26 and above at each of the five frequency levels were counted as the master of that level. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of participants who mastered each frequency level.

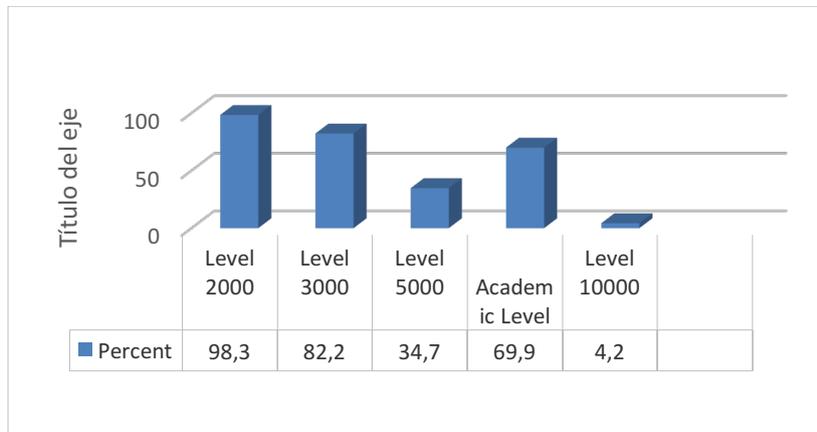


Figure 1. Percentage of students who mastered each frequency levels in the VLT

As expected, the greatest mastery percentage belongs to 2000 frequency level and the lowest percentage belongs to 10000 frequency level. This means over 98% of the participants were able to master the words at 2000 level, while only 4% of them managed to reach the mastery of words at 10000 level. The position of academic level in the diagram is a bit conspicuous. This is because of the nature of words at this level. Unlike other levels, words at the academic level are not chosen from lexical frequency lists. They are sampled from separate academic corpus called Academic Word List developed by Coxhead (2000) and words at this level range from 2000 band to the 10000 band, resulting in a varying difficulty levels.

As another part of this analysis, it was attempted to determine the gain of listening comprehension through mastering each of the frequency bands in VLT. For the reasons discussed above, it was decided to exclude academic level from the analysis. The analysis proceeded by converting the raw listening scores of participants into percentages. The next step was to identify those participants who mastered only one of the frequency bands and were not able to master the larger bands. Logically the starting point was the 2000 frequency band. After that the masters of the 3000 frequency band were detected and so forth. Following a natural trend, the participants who master a larger frequency band are expected to master the smaller bands, too. For instance, it is quite unacceptable for a participant to obtain the cutoff score for mastery of words at 5000 level without reaching the criteria at 3000 level. Then, the listening mean score of participants who mastered a particular level was calculated. The results are summarized in Figure 2.

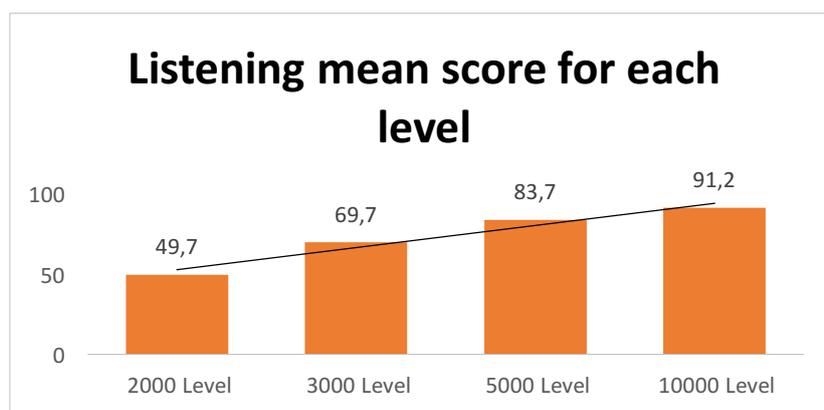


Figure 2. The degree of listening comprehension in VLT frequency levels

As can be seen from Figure 2, the degree of listening comprehension in participants who were able to master words in 2000, 3000, 5000 and 10000 levels is 49.7, 69.7, 83.7, and 91.2, respectively. The results illuminate how one's listening comprehension is increased by broadening one's lexical repertoire. These incidental findings corroborate other inferential findings, confirming that there is a linear relationship between vocabulary knowledge, particularly breadth of vocabulary knowledge, and listening comprehension.

## 6. Discussion

Not surprisingly, the results accentuate the importance of vocabulary knowledge in listening comprehension. Specifically, it was found that the two major dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, i.e. depth and breadth were closely associated with listening comprehension ability. Concerning the interrelatedness of dimensions of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension, the results revealed positively a significant correlation in all cases. Of the independent variables of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, breadth or size was found to be slightly more correlated with listening comprehension than was depth and listening comprehension. Similarly, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge were significant predictors of listening comprehension. However, their prediction powers were not equal. As shown in Table 3, vocabulary breadth alone accounted for a considerable portion of variance in listening comprehension and vocabulary depth added very little to the prediction already accounted for by breadth. This suggests that vocabulary breadth is a better predictor of performance in listening comprehension.

As the results of the multiple regression analysis for high and low students indicates, despite the significant correlation, neither depth nor breadth of vocabulary knowledge were significant predictors of listening comprehension in low proficient students. In high proficient students, on the other hand, the prediction afforded by breadth was significant and, quite interestingly, it was found that depth of vocabulary knowledge was not a significant predictor of listening comprehension in the high group. In explanation, it is necessary to refer to manifold notes of and positions taken by vocabulary researchers on the relationship between breadth and depth dimensions of vocabulary knowledge. Vemeer (2001, p. 230), for instance, argues that 'deeper knowledge of words is the consequence of knowing more words, or that, conversely, the more words someone knows, the finer the network and the deeper the word knowledge'. Similarly, Milton (2009: 169) emphasizes the close affinity between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and states that '... qualities of depth really seem to appear only after a sizeable vocabulary breadth has been attained'. Milton (2013) even goes further and claims that breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge are essential components of the same dimension. Drawing on the above theoretical stances, it can be assumed that higher proficiency students have developed a larger vocabulary repertoire and, consequently, deepened their word knowledge. In this group of students, the demarcating boundaries between depth and breadth have vanished with growth in language proficiency level. Thus, as long as there is a high correlation between depth and breadth, considering these two variables separately in high proficiency students is meaningless and contribution of breadth equals to the

contribution of depth. With regard to the differences in participants performance assigned to high and low proficiency groups, the results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between depth and breadth scores of the two groups as being in high and low listening comprehension abilities. The learners with higher listening scores scored higher in depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, too and vice versa. These results confirm that learners with larger vocabulary at their disposal perform better in a range of language skills than those of poorer vocabulary knowledge. They further reveal that the deficiencies in learners' vocabulary knowledge can hinder their listening comprehension.

The results are consistent with Stahr' (2009) study in which he examined how vocabulary knowledge is associated with successful listening comprehension. He also found a significant positive correlation between depth and breadth of vocabulary and listening comprehension. However, the correlation values obtained from his study was slightly lower than those of the present research. Also, the depth and size of vocabulary knowledge as independent variables of the study had less predictive power than this study. These differences can be attributed to different listening instrument measure used in Stahr's study and, as well to the level of participants listening proficiency. Stahr administered the listening section of Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) which is designed for highly proficient participants' while the participants of the current research were from a wide range of language abilities. In both studies the significant role of breadth and depth dimensions of vocabulary knowledge in listening comprehension has been emphasized; however, there is a special place for breadth of vocabulary knowledge.

The results are also in line with a host of other studies on the role of breadth and depth dimensions of vocabulary in reading comprehension (e.g., Moinzadeh & Moslehpour, 2012; Qian, 1999; Rashidi & Khosravi, 2010). Additionally, lexical inferencing success which is an important process in receptive skills of listening and reading (Parel, 2004), was found to be closely associated with performance on these two aspects of vocabulary knowledge (e.g. Hatami & Tavakoli, 2013; Nassaji, 2004). The results of the above studies suggest that vocabulary knowledge is an important factor in receptive skills of listening and reading. However, it seems that there is a stronger relationship between vocabulary and reading than listening (Mecarty, 2000; Stahr, 2008). Stahr (2008), for instance, examined the relationship between vocabulary size and skills of listening, reading, and writing and found that the correlation of vocabulary size with all the three language skills was significant. However, stronger relationship was observed between vocabulary size and reading. A similar phenomenon is also evident in a study by Mecarty (2000) where she investigated the relationship between lexical and grammatical knowledge on the one hand and reading and listening on the other. Results of her study revealed that lexical knowledge was the only significant predictor of both reading and listening performance, although this 'knowledge source' appeared to be more crucial for reading than it was for listening.

There are good reasons to justify why oral skills of listening and speaking are related differently to vocabulary knowledge than written skills of reading and writing. In explanation, it is necessary to point to two separate issues: first, the number and nature of lexis embedded in each category; second, the nature of instruments which measure these skills. As for the first issue, a reference to the range of word coverage demanded by each category is warranted. Milton (2009) compared and analyzed the word coverage required for spoken and written text using British National Corpus and found out that written text is lexically more sophisticated than spoken text. This means that, by nature, a written skill such as reading demands more vocabulary range than an oral skill such as listening. Therefore, it displays more reliance on vocabulary. In discussing the second issue, it can be argued that since the vocabulary tests are invariably written based, the orthographic aspects of words are usually tapped into rather than their phonological features. Therefore, even if words are recognized orthographically, their phonological recognition may still be problematic. Not surprisingly, such tests correlate more strongly with written skills than oral ones. However, the receptive versions of vocabulary tests have been used in this study which are valid and unanimously agreed upon tests of vocabulary and are closest to what we think of as standardized test, at the absence of suitable phonological vocabulary tests.

An interesting part of the results of this research is the step by step increase of listening comprehension in accordance with participants' mastery of each frequency bands in Vocabulary Levels Test. As indicated in Figure 2, this linear relationship clearly corroborates other findings regarding the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. These results contribute to lexical threshold theories for performance in language skills. Drawing on the data obtained from British National Corpus, Nation (2006) concluded that in case of 98% of coverage, about 8000-9000 word families are required for reading

comprehension and about 6000-7000 word families are needed for listening comprehension. Similarly, Stahr's (2009) study indicated that for advanced listeners a vocabulary size of 5000 word families, as matched with 5000 frequency band in Vocabulary Levels Test, will be required. In a similar vein, in the present research average comprehension increased from 49% at 2000 vocabulary level to 91% at 10000 vocabulary level. Also those participants who mastered 5000 vocabulary level reached about average 83% of listening comprehension which is reasonably an optimal level of comprehension. Thus, it can be concluded that in order to reach this point, learners may invest on increasing their vocabulary repertoire up to 5000 word families.

## 7. Conclusions

The results of the present research empirically confirmed the link between two well-known dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, i.e. depth and breadth and listening comprehension. Although it was found that both dimensions are closely associated with listening comprehension, breadth or size of vocabulary and listening comprehension displayed stronger tie with each other. Furthermore, comparison of high and low listening proficiency groups revealed a significant difference in their performances. These results calls for the recognition of critical role that vocabulary knowledge plays in listening comprehension. Extended exposure to receptive input such as extensive listening and reading can do a lot in improving learners' vocabulary size. However, this have to be coupled with a host of other activities designed for building in-depth vocabulary knowledge. Curits (2006) introduced various activities for this purpose such as semantic analysis, graphic representation, and graphic representations of the relationships that exist among the various meanings of the words, semantic mapping, semantic feature, concept anchoring, word sorts, and raising the word consciousness, etc. Less frequent words are less likely to occur in every text and they constitute a very low percentage of the words in any text; thus, they do not require focused teaching. The results, therefore, draw attentions to the fact that teaching high frequency vocabularies should be high in the agenda of each teacher and institute's course syllabus.

A note of caution is after all necessary here. The difference between high and low groups may be because of the difference in the number of participants when divided into two groups. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the number of participants in the low groups is about one-third of participants in the high group. Thus, weak correlations and insignificant predictions in the low groups may be attributed to the smaller sample in this group. In other studies, with equal sample for different proficiency levels, the difference may disappear.

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING MULTIMODAL TEACHING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM FOR THE ACQUISITION OF SOCIAL COMPETENCES: PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the way in which the subject English Language V of the degree English Studies (English Language and Literature) combines the development of the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and interacting) with the use of multimodal activities and resources in the teaching-learning process so that students increase their motivation and acquire different social competences that will be useful for the labour market such as communication, cooperation, leadership or conflict management.

This study highlights the use of multimodal materials (texts, videos, etc.) on social topics to introduce cultural aspects in a language subject and to deepen into the different social competences university students can acquire when they work with them. The study was guided by the following research questions: how can multimodal texts and resources contribute to the development of the five skills in a foreign language classroom? What are the main social competences that students acquire when the teaching-learning process is multimodal? The results of a survey prepared at the end of the academic year 2015-2016 point out the main competences that university students develop thanks to multimodal teaching.

For its framework of analysis, the study draws on the main principles of visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) where students learn how to analyse the main aspects in multimodal texts. The analysis of the different multimodal activities described in the article and the survey reveal that multimodality is useful for developing critical thinking, for bringing cultural aspects into the classroom and for working on social competences. This article will explain the successes and challenges of using multimodal texts with social content so that students can acquire social competences while learning content. Moreover, the implications of using multimodal resources in a language classroom to develop multiliteracies will be observed.

**Key words:** Multimodality, visual grammar, competences, skills, teaching-learning process.

## 1. Introduction

Technology has been developed in the last decades, which has involved changes in the ways of communication and also in the definition of 'literacy'<sup>2</sup> and its applications in educational contexts in the 21st century (Lemke, 2012; Livingstone, 2008; Merchant, 2009). There are many changes in this new context and consequently, high education requests the development of new tools and techniques in the teaching-learning process such as the use of technology or multimodal resources in the classroom apart from the traditional techniques or materials.

There were many teachers who were already incorporating intuitively multimodal practices and elements to their teaching practices, i.e., they were using texts with more than one mode of communication where images were important, as Knox makes clear (2008, p.140):

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<sup>2</sup> By 'literacy' is understood the capacity of expression using the different skills (listenings, speaking, reading, writing and interaction).

Multimodal perspectives on language and language education have only recently appeared in the literature on L2 teaching and learning. A brief consideration of the classroom practices of teachers and students shows very quickly, though, that multimodality is something that language teachers have understood intuitively for a long time.

The applications of the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the last decade involve a deep reorganization of higher education in general and of teaching at tertiary education in particular. One of the main changes consists on students becoming the protagonists of their learning process and on giving importance to the acquisition of some competences that will be essential for their future as professionals in the labour market (Benito & Cruz, 2005; Bueno González & Nieto García, 2009; López Noguero, 2005; Martínez Lirola, 2007). In this sense, getting used to the new demands of the EHEA becomes a challenge for teachers and students because pedagogy needs to be developed in such a way that multimodal resources and technology can contribute to the significant learning of students and to the effective and real development of skills.

The changes already mentioned in the previous paragraphs have consequences in pedagogy and request pointing out the necessary elements for the production of texts in virtual environments (Healy, 2008). The concepts and applications of 'multiliteracies' have been extended in the last years thanks to the work of Unsworth (2001, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). He concentrates on the way in which multiliteracies are present in the classroom, giving special attention to the relationships between the texts and the image and to the way different meanings are created taking into consideration the different modes of communication that are chosen.

The traditional 'literacy' has concentrated mainly on the written language. The other ways of communication (visual, musical, etc.) were backgrounded (Coffin, 2012; Hestbaek, Maegerø & Tonnessen, 2015). In this era of digital 'literacy' the priority is that students learn through the use of different modes of communication so that they develop and use multimodal texts, *Power Point* presentations, web pages, videos, debates through social networks such as *Facebook*, etc. The era 2.0 offers multiple possibilities that enrich the teaching-learning process because it allows that students write and read in virtual environments and add videos and photographs in the development of their skills. In addition, students are able to analyse, deconstruct and design multimodal texts, which contribute to the development of critical thinking and to the acquisition of social competences such as leadership, conflict solving and cooperation. Following Simpson and Walsh (2010, p. 37): "Now with interactive, multiple authoring and social networking facilities provided by Web 2.0 technologies, new pedagogic possibilities can be utilised in the classrooms".

The ideas presented in the previous paragraphs point out that nowadays, teaching is not only based on the use of written texts to read or write. Consequently, the 21st century society, the changes proposed by the EHEA and the use of new technologies demand new forms of 'literacy'. Thanks to them students will be able to write texts with educational purposes through social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*. Moreover, students will be able to use multimodal texts including videos and images in the classroom so that their learning process is easier, they can acquire competences that are important for the labour market and they can make the most of their learning process.

The main objectives of this article are the following: a) to show the relationship between the use of multimodal texts and resources in the classroom and the acquisition of social competences that will be useful for the labour market such as communication, cooperation, leadership or conflict management and b) to point out that promoting multimodality in the classroom implies that students develop multiliteracies and they are able to create their own way of working based on their own pace and way of learning, which contributes to promote autonomous learning.

Promoting that students learn being autonomous and using different multimodal resources implies that teachers help them to be aware of the different strategies they can use to improve their skills, always taking into consideration their individual characteristics (Benito, Bonson & Icarán, 2005, p. 21). In this sense, we agree with Zabalza (2011: 86) in that methodology is the curricular component having more impact in their learning process.

The creation of the EHEA highlights the importance of an effective teaching-learning process where teachers and students share the responsibility (Pereyra-García, Sevilla & Luzón, 2006; Sánchez, 2006). Learning involves the acquisition of different competences that are necessary for the labour market, i.e., while learning at the University, students have to be able to apply theory to practice and to observe the relationship between what is learned at the University and their future life as professionals. Consequently, learning has to be progressive and it should make explicit the relationships between the different competences being developed with the different topics or activities. In this sense, formative evaluation should be promoted so that evaluation is understood as a whole, following Pérez-Paredes and Rubio (2005, p. 606-607): “Evaluation considers the teaching and learning program as a whole, and seeks to obtain feedback that can serve different purposes for the different agents in education, from teachers to curriculum designers”.

Choosing formative evaluation implies that special importance is given to autonomous learning, i.e., university students are the protagonists of their teaching-learning process so that they can make the most of the acquisition of competences for their integral development so that they become active citizens in the present society (Hernández, 2003; Martínez Lirola, 2012; Teichler, 2006; Zabalza, 2002). As a consequence, when teaching languages, students have to work with real language and with authentic texts so that they can establish relationships between what they learn and life, following O’Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter (2007, p. 26):

Thus, when they (students) are presented with corpus examples, learners encounter real language as it is actually used, and in this sense it is ‘authentic’. [...] Furthermore, one can argue that authentic texts are embedded in particular cultures and may be thus culturally opaque to those outside that (usually western) culture, and that it may, as a result, be next to impossible for learners to ‘authenticate’ such texts for themselves on this basis.

After this introduction, the next section is devoted to multimodality as a theoretical framework of this article because it frames the teaching practices explained in section four. The article has the following sections: section two explains the methodology used in this research. Then, section three describes the main characteristics of the participants and the context of this study. Section four concentrates on the description of some multimodal activities used in the teaching practices used in the subject English Language V of the degree English Studies. Next, section five discusses the different competences and multiliteracies that students develop with the activities proposed. This section also offers the results of a survey with students’ opinions about their experience of multimodal learning. Finally, the conclusions of the study are presented.

## **2. Theoretical framework: Multimodality in the classroom**

The theory of multimodality developed through the work done by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, 2006) and other authors (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Bezemer & Jewett, 2010; Bowcher, 2012; Jewitt, 2009; Royce & Bowcher, 2007, inter alia). Multimodality has contributed to understand how different modes of communication (language, images, graphs, sounds, music, gestures, etc.) create meanings. These modes are different semiotic resources that allow that meanings are created through one of them or through the combination of various ways simultaneously following Kress (2010, p.1):

Each mode does a specific thing: image shows what takes too long to read, and writing names what would be difficult to show. Colour is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message. Without that division of semiotic labour, the sign, quite simply, would not work. Writing names and images shows, while colour frames and highlights; each to maximum effect and benefit.

In this sense, Van Leeuwen (2014, p. 281) offers a very clear definition of multimodality: "The term multimodality refers to the integrated use of different semiotic resources (e.g. language, image, sound and music) in texts and communicative events". The image plays an important role in multimodal communication due to its capacity to capture attention (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010; Unsworth, 2010).

There are extensive texts that use more than one mode to express their meanings. However, the use of multimodal texts is not really extended at tertiary education. These texts can be very useful to introduce cultural aspects into the classroom, to know other social realities and to make students improve their critical capacity. In addition, these types of texts can make students aware of how the said texts are designed and can be analysed, what aspects are explicit and what are implicit, how these texts can be used to integrate the different skills requested when learning foreign languages and what competences students can acquire with them.

To consider the classroom as a multimodal learning environment allows teachers and students to be aware of the potential that the modes of communication different from language have for teaching compared to traditional written texts used for reading and writing (Bearne et al., 2007; Knox, 2008; Walsh, 2009; Yelland, Lee, O'Rourke, & Harrison, 2009), as Baldry and Thibault (2006, p. 21) make clear: "[...] multimodality refers to the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both codeployed and co-contextualised in the making of a text-specific meaning".

Understanding the classroom as a multimodal environment makes that the different modes of communication used contribute so that the teaching-learning process is dynamic and creative, which facilitates students' learning process (Martínez Lirola, 2014). Moreover, if apart from being multimodal the texts deal with social topics such as intercultural aspects, ecology, gender issues, cultural differences, human rights, among others, there are many competences that can be promoted at tertiary education. In addition, students can be aware of their important role in society if they see themselves as active citizens by analysing the texts under analysis from a critical perspective.

The previous paragraphs have shown that multimodality concentrates on different modes of communication whereas the term 'multiliteracies' refers to the concrete practices of 'literacy', which implies that the said practices are necessary for communication in the present society. Simpson and Walsh (2010, p. 26) make clear that this is not a new term: "Evolving from the theorising on the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), the term 'multiliteracies' was concerned with the many types of communication hended in new and different social and cultural contexts, and for both print and electronic texts".

### 3. Methodology

The subject English Language V of the degree English Studies (*Grado en Estudios Ingleses*) is a six-credit subject, which implies that students spend 60 hours in the classroom and are also required to work 90 hours more, i.e., students needed to work individually and in groups inside and outside the classroom in order to acquire the competences established in the subject.

This subject was taught four hours per week, one theoretical and three practical. English Language V is organised so that students can work with the different skills at the same time that they acquire social competences that help them to grow and to use in the labour market. In the theoretical lecture students were introduced to the main aspects of academic writing: cohesive devices, the structure of the academic essay and the main characteristics of different text types and their relationships with the context in which they are used. In the second hour, students were asked to prepare an oral presentation on a topic of their choice using multimodal resources.

Then, the next hour was used to revise grammar. Every lecture started with a brief theoretical explanation of the grammatical topic under study (i.e., the use of articles, reported speech, the passive voice, adverbs, etc.); thereafter some exercises were corrected so that students could put their grammatical knowledge into practice. The teacher always asked students how the grammatical point under analysis could be explained at the high school level so that students could act as teachers in the classroom. Finally, the last hour of the week consisted of a debate organised by the group who had presented the oral presentation in the previous class. The topic of the debate was the same as that of the oral presentation.

Multimodality is promoted in the different modules of the subject so that students establish a connection between what happens in the classroom and real life at the same time that they are motivated to learn due to the variety of resources used in the teaching-learning process. The next section will pay attention to the main characteristics of the students that participate in this study.

#### **4. Participants and context**

The main objectives of this subject are that students develop the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and interaction) for advanced students of English. This subject and English Language VI and VII, taught after this one, will allow students to achieve level C1 in English. Since most of the students wanted to be high school teachers, the lecturer made students think about the methodology and the different pedagogical techniques used in the classroom so that they could apply them in their future career as teachers.

Most of the students are 21 years old. The majority of them want to work as high school teachers but there are also students who would like to work in international companies as interpreters or translators. All these students have studied English in the previous two years of the degree (the level they achieve in the first year is B1 while B2 is the level they reach in the second year).

During the academic year 2015-2016, there were 93 students registered in the said subject. 73 were female and 20 were male. Out of the 93 students, there were 88 that came to class on a regular basis. The other five were Erasmus students who were studying at a different European University; therefore, they had the subject recognised.

#### **5. Introducing multimodality in the subject English Language V: Practical examples**

The following paragraphs offer concrete examples of the way in which the subject English Language V incorporated multimodality to the different activities that were designed so that students could develop the five skills at the same time that they acquired social competences and developed multiliteracies.

- At the beginning of the semester, students learnt to analyse multimodal texts following the principles of visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explained in the classroom. Consequently, students could read the visual and the written text and they could observe that the different linguistic and visual choices are not chosen at random but a determined communicative end. Different texts were analysed in the classroom so that students could put into practice what they have learned. Students could ask their doubts and the teacher provided feedback after the students have shared their analysis. Moreover, the structure of the academic essay was explained with a handout and with a video so that students were able to organise their ideas in the introduction, the body paragraphs and the conclusions in a logical way. At the end of the semester, students had to write an essay based on a multimodal text with social content. For example, some students chose a text about the way women are used in advertising; there were others who chose a text on gender violence, on the climatic change or on healthy lifestyles.

The fact that students had to analyse the written text and the image of a multimodal text as a unity made them aware of the way this type of texts are created and of the importance of the image in the global meaning of the texts. Students and teachers agreed that the essay students had to write in the final exam would be based on some of the topics students wrote about in the essay that had to hand in in the middle of the semester.

- The preparation of a cooperative oral presentation based on a social topic is a very clear example of multimodality. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained the characteristics of effective oral presentations using videos so that students could comment on the main positive aspects of each video and the ways in which they could be improved. Students needed to use different bibliographical references, including electronic ones, and to distinguish relevant from secondary information so that they become critical with the sources they use to prepare the presentation. Moreover, students needed to develop different interpersonal skills that contributed to the effective preparation and presentation of their work. This involved

the balanced distribution of tasks, taking decisions about the organization of the presentation and listening actively to the different opinions, among others. In addition, students took the initiative of choosing a topic of their interest, of deciding the way the presentation was structured and of selecting the different multimodal resources they were going to use to present it in the classroom.

Most students made their oral presentations multimodal by using videos to illustrate some of the theoretical aspects used in the presentation. There were also some oral presentations in which students decided to use background music while they were doing the oral presentation in the classroom. For example, in a presentation about cultural aspects in the United States, the national anthem was used; in a presentation about China, students chose traditional Chinese music. There was also a presentation about tarot and it was accompanied by a mysterious music. One group decided to talk about life in Nepal and while the presentation was being done, a soft music of mantras could be heard.

Students were encouraged to decorate the classroom using multimodal resources such as posters or any visual element connected with the topic of the oral presentation. In this way, the whole classroom became multimodal and just by observing the decoration it was easy to deduce the different social topics that students had talked about.

- The debates that took place every week based on the same topic of the oral presentation also contributed to the use of multimodal resources. For example, some groups chose a video on the topic for discussion in order to introduce some ideas that could be used during the debate. Students shared the video in the *Facebook* of the subject so that students could have access to it before the debate. It is interesting that before the debate took place in the classroom, students had the chance to participate in the same debate writing their opinions in *Facebook*. The debate was started there with some questions prepared by the group in charge of this activity every week. After students had participated in the debate in *Facebook*, the group who has prepared it had to organise some conclusions of the main ideas shared and they needed to refer to them after the debate on the same topic was done in the classroom. Consequently, this is another way of integrating oral and written skills, cooperative work and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (hereafter ICTs) in the teaching-learning process.

This activity contrasts with the previous one because the intention of the presentation is that students use formal English whereas the debate has as its main purpose that students promote interaction with all students in the classroom. In this way, everybody had the opportunity of expressing her/his opinion about the topic presented in the debate. Moreover, the debate gave students the opportunity of learning from the opinions of others, working on classroom management, promoting creativity, organising the classroom in different ways, etc.

## **6. Discussion: On the acquisition of competences and the development of multiliteracies through multimodality**

This section will explain the successes and challenges of using multimodal texts with social content so that students can acquire social competences while learning content. Moreover, the implications of using multimodal resources in a language classroom to develop multiliteracies will be studied.

The different activities presented in section four made students face some challenges when having to analyse the different elements in multimodal texts because traditionally, students were used just to analyse the written language. In this sense, students needed to learn to understand the multimodal text as a whole where the different modes of communication contributed to the meaning of the text. Moreover, writing an academic essay based on a multimodal text was another challenge because students were used just to write about a topic without using a text as a way of developing ideas. This activity was very successful because students were able to deconstruct the meaning of the multimodal texts chosen in order to develop their ideas for the introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion of the essay.

The preparation and participation in the group oral presentations and debates was quite challenging for students because they had to speak in front of an audience on a social topic of their choice. The power point presentation they prepared in order to present their topic was multimodal, which showed that they were able to combine different modes to communicate the meaning they wanted to share. The combination of the said

modes was normally very successful because students were able to choose the right resources to share their message in an effective way.

Both the oral presentations and the debates are activities that contribute to the development of social competences because students have to be leaders whenever they have to take decisions about the topic they choose, the organization of it, the use of different references and resources so that the final result is coherent and gets the audience's attention. Moreover, these activities give students opportunities to solve conflicts whenever students disagree about any aspect during the preparation of the activities. Conflict solving is a skill that is very useful in life in general and in the labour market in particular. Needless to say that all the activities of the subject promote communication, which is an essential competence in a foreign language subject such as English Language V.

In addition, the fact that the different activities had to contribute to the introduction of cultural aspects and of social topics into the classroom was also challenging for students because this requested a relationship between the contents and topics shared in the classroom and real life. Working with cultural aspects and social issues gave students the opportunity of learning vocabulary connected with different semantic fields that would be really useful for their future life as professionals.

All the multimodal resources we have referred to contribute to the development of multiliteracies in the language classroom because students needed to be literate not only to read written language but they also had to deepen into the analysis and meaning of different modes of communication such as the analysis of visuals and music and their effects in their motivation. In fact, the use of multimodal resources and multiliteracies in the teaching-learning process contributed to motivate students to learn because they were free to choose different resources and to decide what topics they wanted to write and talk about in their essays, oral presentations and debates.

After what has been presented in the previous paragraphs, the oral presentations and the debates can be considered the two activities that incorporate more multimodal resources in the subject English Language V. The preparation of both activities requested the supervision of the teacher in group tutorials, where the teacher could pay attention to different aspects such as: the structure and the content of the presentation, the use of ICTs and multimodal resources, the cooperation between the different group members so that the presentation was effective and the acquisition of some social competences such as communication or conflict solving during the preparation of the said activities.

Multimodal oral presentations and debates request the integration of different modes of communication, the combination of different pedagogical techniques and technical resources so that everything is combined in the right way so that learning is significant. Moreover, teachers and students need to share the responsibility during the teaching-learning process and students become the protagonists while they are learning, which has a direct effect in motivation.

A survey was prepared in order to observe if students were aware of the different multimodal resources used in the classroom and the different competences being acquired (see appendix 1). Following Herrera and Enrique (2008, p. 13), we consider that the survey is appropriate to do research because it offers objective information on what students think about a particular topic.

The survey was distributed at the end of the semester, i.e., once students were familiar with the multimodal methodology already mentioned. The participants completed the survey by hand. Most of the questions are closed (see appendix 1) although there is also an open question so that students can express their opinions. The answers that students provided were anonymous. The teacher interpreted the results of the survey by considering the answers that students had provided, as we can see in the following paragraphs.

Question one asked students if they were aware of being immersed in a multimodal teaching-learning process and all the students offered a positive answer. The second question paid attention to what of the different proposed modes of communication, i.e., the explanations provided by the teacher in the theoretical-practical lectures, preparation of cooperative oral presentations, the texts written in *Facebook*, doing oral and written exercises in the classroom and at home and participation of the debates in the classroom, are more helpful for students. It is outstanding that 74,57% students point out that the combination of all of them

as is being done in the subject English Language V. Students who have not marked all the options give importance to the oral presentations and the debates.

The third question tried to observe if students consider that a multimodal teaching-learning process and continuous evaluation paying attention to the different skills have an effect in their motivation to learn. Almost all students, 98,30%, with the exception of one person (1.7%), stated that the fact that the subject is multimodal has a direct effect in their motivation.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth question concentrated on the main competences students consider that they have acquired more in the subject out of the following ones: critical thinking, communication, leadership, writing properly in English, the use of ICTs, group work and autonomous learning. Most students chose different competences being group work and communication the ones chosen by most people (72,88%); autonomous learning was also selected by 57,32% followed by writing properly in English chosen by 53,82%.

We designed question number five because we were interested in knowing if students had some suggestions about how to use other multimodal resources in English Language V to facilitate the way students learn. The majority of students, 85% considered that the subject was well designed and taught as it was and, consequently, they did not make any suggestions. Nevertheless, 15% of students proposed the organization of conversations or debates with native speakers. In addition, some students suggested incorporating the preparation of a video or the creation of a blog in groups to the evaluation of the subject. They make clear that these activities would integrate the use of different skills and the use of ICTs, as it happens also when students have to participate in the debate in *Facebook* or in the oral presentations (see the beginning of this section).

Question number six concentrated on the role of tutorials in the multimodal teaching-learning process. 55% of students considered them essential to supervise the way students work and learn; 35% considered them necessary up to a certain extend and only 10% commented that they could do without them.<sup>4</sup>

Since this is not a specific article about tutorials, we are not going to deepen into their role in high education. However, we consider that tutorials are essential in an experience of multimodal learning as the one presented in this article due to the fact that teachers need to have different roles in the teaching-learning process such as the following: guide, tutor, coach, among others. In other words, teachers need to guide and support students so that they develop the different activities mentioned. Following Cano González (2009) and García et al. (2005), we understand tutorials as one of our responsibilities as teachers because tutorials contribute to establish a personalized relationship between teachers and students.

## 7. Conclusions

Designing the teaching-learning process in the subject English Language V as multimodal contributes to the development of multiliteracies and competences in students so that what they learn in the classroom is connected with real life. The subject promotes students' responsibility in the teaching-learning process because they have to assume an active role while they learn due to the fact that they have to take decisions and be responsible of the different tasks they prepare following the guidelines presented by the teacher at the beginning of the semester.

The use of different multimodal strategies (videos, *Facebook*, multimodal texts with images, among others) favours students' creativity because they make an effort to use different techniques or resources to improve interaction with their classmates in the classroom. Moreover, creativity is promoted because students can be asked to search for texts of their interest and then these texts can be used to analyse cultural aspects or social problems. In addition, the fact that the subject supports the use of different multimodal resources for the learning process and for the evaluation establishes a direct relationship between the subject and real life

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<sup>3</sup> For specific studies on the motivation of university students, see the following references: Crespo and Martínez Lirola, 2008; Martínez Lirola and Crespo, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For specific studies on University tutorials see the following articles Martínez Lirola (2007) (2008); Martínez Lirola and Crespo (2009a) and (2009b).

because society is multimodal in different ways as we can observe in television, advertising, social networks, among others.

Multimodal classes facilitate the learning process and make students be creative, active and autonomous while they learn. This implies that students acquire competences apart from learning contents, which will be essential for their life in general and for the labour market in particular. Emphasizing that students are the protagonists and the leaders in the teaching-learning process makes them be prepared to take decisions constantly about different things such as: the text they choose to write their essay, the topic of the oral presentation and its organization using multimodal resources, the comments they write through *Facebook* on the topic suggested for debate every week and the way they contribute to group interaction.

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## Appendix 1: Survey on multimodal teaching

1. Have you been aware of the multimodal teaching-learning process during the semester in the subject English Language V?

Yes

No

2. Which of the following ways of communication has been more helpful during your learning process? (You can give a percentage to each one)

- Explanations of the teacher in the theoretical-practical sections.
- Preparation and presentation of the group oral presentations.
- Writing texts through *Facebook*.
- Preparation of oral and written exercises in the classroom and at home.
- Participation in the debates in the classroom.-
- Others (please, specify)

3. Are you more motivated to learn due to the fact that the subject is multimodal and it is evaluated during the whole semester paying attention to the different skills?

Yes

No

4. Which of the following competences do you consider you have developed more in this subject? (you can give a percentage to each one)

- Critical thinking
- Writing in English in an appropriate way
- Use of ICTs - Doing group work
  - Autonomous learning
  - Communication
  - Conflict solving
  - Leadership
  - Others (specify)

5. How could the subject English Language V become more multimodal in order to facilitate your learning process even more?

6. What role is played by tutorials in your multimodal learning process?

- They are essential.
- They are important up to a certain extent.
- They are not necessary.

# THE STATUS QUO OF TEACHER-TRAINING COURSES IN THE IRANIAN EFL CONTEXT: A FOCUS ON MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Given that Teacher-Training Courses (TTC's) have responsibility for assisting prospective teachers with building up a repertoire of technical & pedagogic knowledge, the systematic evaluation of such courses is regarded as seminal (Lynch, 2003 and Peacock, 2009). Therefore, the present study is an attempt to (a) probe into the way professional expertise is acquired by preservice Iranian EFL teachers, (b) analyze the instructional content of TTC's currently held in Iran, with a focus on teachings on Dynamic Assessment (DA), and (c) examine preservice teachers' and TTC trainers' opinions about the TTC's. To this end, 9 purposefully selected TTC's were observed, employing participant observation, and content analyses were carried out on their syllabi. Also, 107 TTC participants filled out a questionnaire, and 14 TTC instructors were interviewed; the sampling of the TTC participants and instructors was nonprobability convenient. Results of descriptive statistics showed that accounting for 84.73% of all the instructional attempts, the craft model was the most frequently prevalent model of teacher learning. Content analyses and preservice teacher questionnaire results signified that writing skill was marginalized in all the courses, and none of them included instructions on DA in their syllabi. Open, selective, and axial coding as well as content analyses of the collected data gave rise to eight themes delineating major areas fueling the current research-practice divide in the TTC syllabi. Findings of the study provide an opportunity to examine the status quo, strengths, and weaknesses of the TTC's. The eight identified impediments to the employment of research in pedagogy could help reach a framework for factors that might induce TTC organizers to disregard the implication of relevant research findings for the courses they run.

**Key words:** Classroom assessment, dynamic assessment, models of professional education, models of teacher learning, teacher education, teacher-training.

## 1. Introduction

After the Second World War, learning English turned out to be pivotal to complying with the demands of the *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932), and in tandem with the changing trends in the fields of psychology and linguistics and the observed alterations in learners' needs, frequent swings of the pendulum (Celce-Murcia, 2001) have taken place with regard to language teaching methods and alternative approaches (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As new language teaching methods were introduced, more responsibility for their effectiveness lied with teachers (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, the postmethod condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003) attached wider significance to the value of empowering teachers with cumulative knowledge, skill, and autonomy, and Prabhu (1990) made the point that it is, in fact, a teacher's personal *sense of plausibility* about teaching that renders the act of teaching productive, and methods, by themselves, cannot guarantee learning outcomes.

Therefore, the agency of teachers came to the fore of the teaching process more than ever before, and a number of teachers' attributes such as their identity (Miller, 2009), their mental lives (Walberg, 1977),

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teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002), teachers' characteristics, beliefs, behaviors, and assumptions (Chacon, 2005; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Pajares, 1992; Williams & Burden, 1997) have been researched into during the past score of years. Also, a plethora of research has been conducted on teacher-training and teachers' professional development. To exemplify, studies have delved into issues like reflective practice (Burton, 2009; Johnson & Kroksmark, 2004; Taggart & Wilson, 2005), critical pedagogy (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Norton, 2005; Pavlenko, 2003), and teachers' knowledge about language (Bartels, 2009; Haider & Frensch, 1996); the aforementioned trends have shaped the way Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) is now realized; on the practical side, all such studies are aimed at informing language teachers and/or other stakeholders in SLTE about the findings of the conducted research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

It must be noted, however, that whether or not enough heed is paid to the findings of relevant ongoing SLA research in the field of SLTE can be the subject of some lively debate. In other words, the argument that the type of technical knowledge found in teachers' practice of their profession, that is, 'pedagogic discourse', might be fundamentally different from the kind of technical knowledge delineated in published research into language learning and teaching, that is, 'research-based discourse', has been clearly buttressed by some scholars (Ellis, 2013; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006). Similarly, the separation between research and practice/pedagogy and the bifurcation between researchers and practitioners in language teaching has been already acknowledged (Ellis, 2013; Schön, 1983; Wallace, 1991). Such concerns imply that teachers' practice of their profession is expected to be carried out in accord with the developments in the field, and scientific findings should be attended to in SLTE and included in the syllabi/teachings of TTC's. In view of the fact that teacher education programs, as "a central avenue of knowledge dissemination" (Ben-Peretz, 1994, p. 108), bring aspects of research knowledge to the attention of trainee teachers, focusing on TTC's held in the Iranian EFL context, this research attempts to discern models of teacher learning in TTC's in Iran, analyze their curricula, with a focus on teachings on DA, and investigate TTC attendees' and trainers' opinion about the courses they take and run.

## **2. Review of the related literature**

### *2.1. Language Teacher Education*

Teacher Education (TE) is known to be a rather multifarious, perplexing domain of inquiry (Borg, 2006). Despite the fact that in the 1980s, a number of research into TE looked into teachers' training in disciplinary knowledge, skills of classroom pedagogy, and teacher thinking (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Freeman, 1982; Larsen-Freeman, 1983), from the late 1990s onwards, an expansion in research was seen into teachers' professional identities (Head & Taylor, 1997), actual contexts of teaching practices (Flores & Day, 2006), and the social dimension of both classroom interactions (Raviv, Raviv, & Reisel, 1990; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and the very act of teaching (Fanselow, 1997). Research on TE has also delved into literature survey of the conducted research within the field of TE (Murray, Nuttall, & Mitchell, 2008), the analysis of a multimode TE program that combines the major elements of both initial and in-service TE (Kynäslähti et al., 2006), and teachers' self-confidence, self-efficacy, professional identity, and professional development (Abednia, 2012; Mulholland, Dorman, & Odgers, 2004; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010; Warford, 2010).

In addition, some researchers have examined practicum supervision and mentoring (Hastings & Squires, 2002; White & Le Cornu, 2002; Yarrow, Millwater, & Foster, 1996), efficacy of in-service TTC's (Yuen-Kwan, 1998), the application of teaching portfolios in TE (Berrill & Addison, 2010), and teachers' reflective practices (Clarke, 2004; McLaughlin & Hanifin, 1995; Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002; Schön, 1987). Perspectives on teacher evaluation, including the what, whos, and whys of TE (Smith, 2005), alternative paradigms of TE (Zeichner, 1983), teacher expertise (Tsu, 2005), and the knowledge-base of language TE (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, 2004) have also been investigated.

Applying an inductive paradigmatic analysis, Risko et al., (2008) provided a review and critique of empirical investigations conducted on teacher preparation and identified a number of pertinent limitations. Nuland (2011) spelled out an overview of Canadian preservice teacher education, an outline of some difficulties these programs encounter, and a summary of new teacher induction and mentoring activities.

Working on Syrian EFL context, Albirini (2006) explored the attitudes of high school EFL teachers toward information and communication technologies. However, to date, almost no research has brought TTC's of the Iranian EFL context under scrutiny.

## 2.2. Models of Professional Education

Since “the intent of pre-service education programmes is to provide teacher candidates with the basic knowledge, skills and experiences needed to enter teaching” (Nuland, 2011, p. 411), professional education and teacher learning are indispensable parts of all such programs. Wallace (1991) chronicled three major models of teacher learning: the *craft model*, the *applied science model*, and the *reflective model*. According to Wallace (1991) and as presented in Figure 1., in the craft model, an expert or a ‘master teacher’ demonstrates how to teach or instructs the young trainee, and professional action, mainly seen as a craft, is learnt through imitation, practice and observation. According to Wallace (1991, p. 16), the craft model “does not handle satisfactorily the crucial element of the explosive growth of relevant scientific knowledge in recent times”. The craft model can come under scrutiny in light of the assumptions of ‘mentoring’ in TE, which is considered a “key component in teacher education and professional development” (Delaney, 2012, p. 184) as well as “teacher retention” (Ibid, p. 185). Mentoring relationships can have a positive impact on mentees’ early teaching experiences (Malderrez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007).

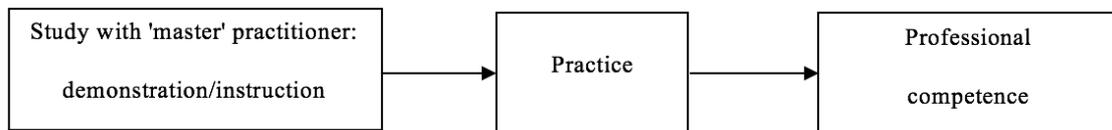


Figure.1. The craft model of professional education (Wallace, 1991, p. 6).

In the applied science model, which is also known as ‘technical rationality’, the trainee studies theories and research findings and amasses scientific knowledge about applied linguistics, and, later, puts them into practice in the context of classroom. As can be seen in Figure 2., through a one-way process, findings of scientific research are handed over to trainee teachers, who then put such solutions and finding into practice. Since practitioners do not really have a say in putting forward proposals to conduct certain experimentations to solve educational problems, the applied science model can result in a research-practice divide.

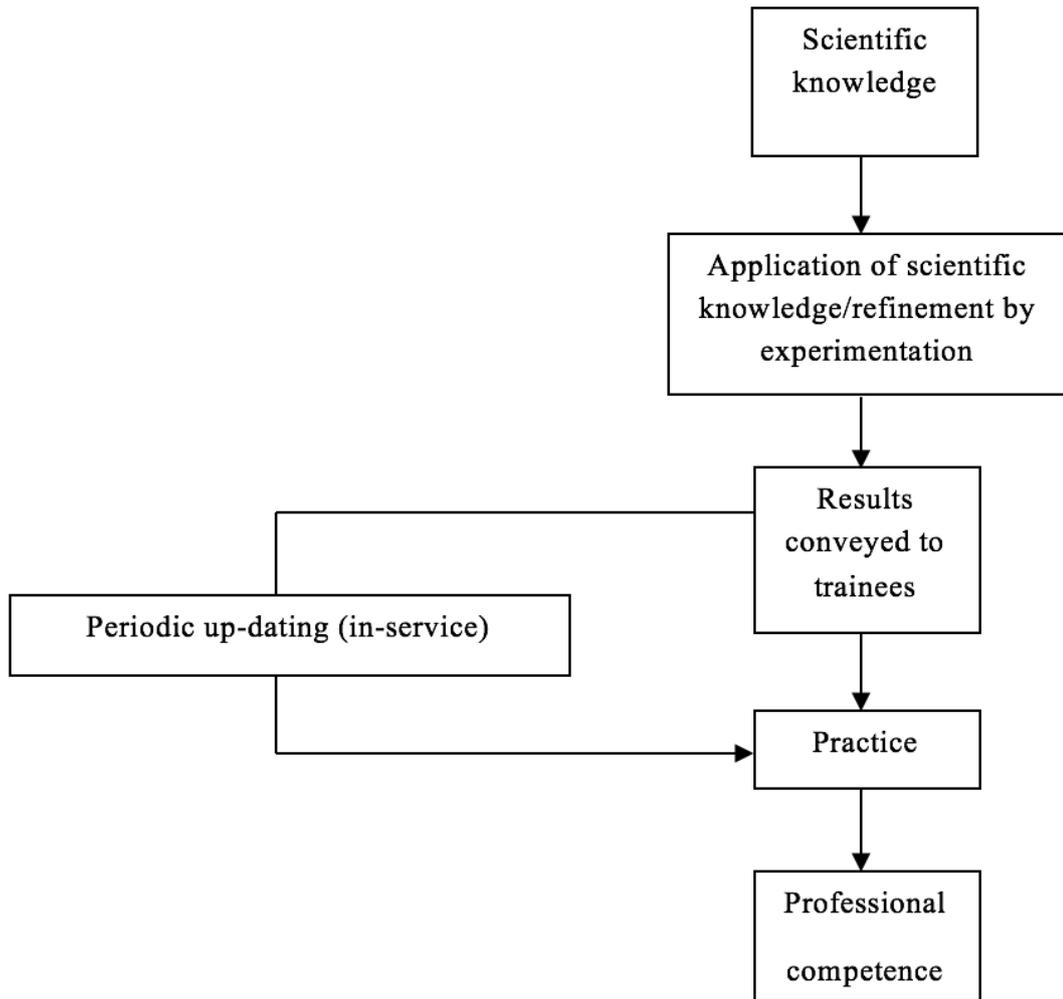


Figure 2. Applied science model (Wallace, 1991, p. 9).

The third model of teacher learning, the basic elements of which are depicted in Figure 3., is the reflective model. It is, in fact, a cycle aiming for continuous improvement and development of trainee teachers. In the first phase, trainees recall, observe, or teach lessons. They then reflect on the teaching practices either alone or in discussion with other colleagues or master teachers, and, finally, they try out the theories of teaching in practice.

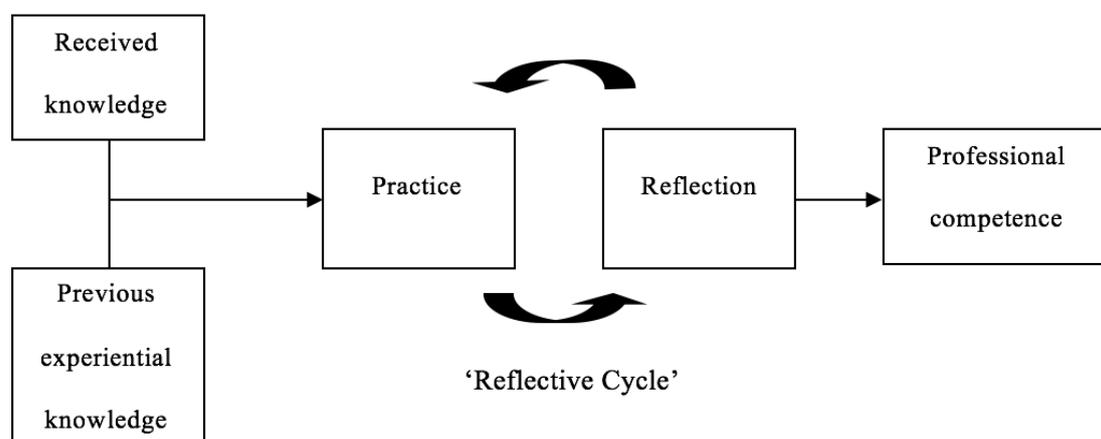


Figure 3. Reflective model (Wallace, 1991, p. 15).

*Received knowledge* includes the relevant theories, concepts, and research findings, which are parts of the content of teacher-training/education programs. Another kind of knowledge which is called *experiential knowledge* refers to (a) trainees' knowledge-in-action, which is developed by the practice of the profession and trainee teachers' immediate judgments and decisions, and (b) their reflections on their professional performance, which results in the conscious development of insights into knowledge-in-action.

### 2.3. Dynamic Assessment (DA)

Since the early 1980s, Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), developed by Vygotsky, has become renowned for its potential to spell out the process of learners' cognitive development. Informed by the epistemological stance of sociocultural turn, its advocates have defined human learning as a dynamic, socially negotiated process which is interconnected with social and physical contexts (Johnson, 2006; Rogoff, 2003). In fact, Vygotsky (1998) conceives of abilities as emergent and dynamic traits, which can be modified during assessment procedures. According to the pedagogical approaches of DA, instruction -as a means of learner development support- and assessment, that is, a way of conceptualizing learners' ability, are to regarded as an integrated (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) and "dialectically fused" (Poehner, 2011a, p. 100) pursuit (see Poehner & van Compernelle, 2011; Yeomans, 2008), which aims at promoting language development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

Within the realm of second and foreign language acquisition, previous studies have delved into theoretical frameworks for the application of DA procedures to L2 assessment and pedagogy (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004), the problem of assessment generalizability (Poehner, 2007), the relationship between assessment and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), that is, learners' potential for future development (Allal & Pelgrims Ducrey, 2000), and principled approaches to evaluating claims about learner abilities and their development (Poehner, 2011b). Moreover, a number of research has been carried out to address questions pertaining to the effectiveness of DA practices in promoting learners' language skills, that is, listening, writing, reading, and speaking, (Ableeva & Lantolf, 2011; Dorfler, Golke, & Artelt, 2009; Hill & Sabet, 2009; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012).

### 2.4. Teachers' Diagnostic Competence

According to Rea-Dickins (2004), "teaching involves assessment" (p. 249), and making decisions about learner progress, learner performance, and specific learning outcomes is an indispensable part of teachers' professional practice. Teachers constantly involve in *classroom based assessment* (Lynch, 2003) in one form or another, which is also referred to as *teacher assessment*. "They make selections based on their experience, on their understandings of learning, language development and of language proficiency itself,

together with what they consider to be most appropriate and in the best interests of those they teach” (Rea-Dickins, 2004, p. 249).

In a sense, teachers are agents of assessment in assessing their students’ abilities in classroom. So, teachers’ diagnostic competence (Edelenbos & Kubanek-German, 2004; Rea-Dickins, 2004) refers to their skills in arriving at grading decisions and constantly assessing the language abilities of their learners. Since teachers’ understanding of assessment and language learning shape their actual assessment practices, TTC’s can, at least partly, affect the efficacy of classroom assessment practices and teachers’ conception of their roles as assessors by instructing preservice teachers on how to carry out classroom assessment, which is attended to in this research by raising the second research question.

To sum up, TTC’s have responsibility for raising awareness in participants by assisting them with building up a repertoire of technical and pedagogic knowledge, the authenticity of which has been approved of by research. By so doing, such courses can bridge the gap between SLA discourse and pedagogic discourse. It is worth noting that by and large, SLA researchers have placed a premium on the language research-language pedagogy nexus (Ellis, 2010, 2013; Gass, 1995; Ishihara, 2010; Nuland, 2011; Nunan, 1991), and some scholars (Brownell, Griffin, Leko, & Stephens, 2011; Ishihara, 2010) have opined that the nexus between theory and practice should be stronger in SLTE.

Despite its importance, the field of TE is regarded as “under-researched” (Peacock, 2009, p. 260), research into it is known to be “noticeably missing” (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 397), and a lack of research on evaluation procedures of language teacher education/training programs is acknowledged (Grosse, 1991). In view of the fact that to the researcher’s knowledge, almost no research has examined the models of teacher learning and syllabi of preservice TTC’s in Iran, the present study attempts to fill this gap by addressing the following questions:

1. What is the most frequently prevalent model of *teacher learning* in teacher-training courses held in Iran?
2. How are the curricula of teacher-training courses planned in Iran? Does the course content of teacher-training courses in Iran familiarize preservice teachers with the theories and principles underlying *classroom assessment practices* and *DA*?
3. What are teacher-training course attendees’ and trainers’ opinions about the TTC’s?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. *Setting and Actors*

In qualitative studies, the place in which research takes place is referred to as the *setting* of the study, which is usually a part of a larger *site*, and those who are observed and interviewed are known as the *actors* of the study (see Creswell, 2009, p. 178). Nine TTC’s offered by the central offices of well-established English language institutes in Iran, which constituted the sites of the present study, were purposefully selected because particularity rather than generalizability is an important characteristic of qualitative research. The selected TTC’s, which were run either by one trainer or a team of two or more instructors (see Table 1), were observed, and their model of professional education and curricula were examined.

Apart from observations, 14 TTC instructors/trainers were called for an interview and were asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the courses as well as suggestions for improving them. Moreover, 107 course participants, that is, preservice English teachers, filled out a questionnaire. So, as depicted in Table 1, the participants or “actors” (see Creswell, 2009, p. 178) of the current study consisted primarily of TTC trainers and attendees. The sampling of the actors was not random but nonprobability convenient; that is, the course trainers and trainees were those who were involved in the TTC’s which were held at the purposefully selected sites.

Table 1. A Description of Actors of the Study

Site	TTC Attendees				TTC Trainers		
	Male	Female	English Majors	Non-English Majors	Male	Female	Educational Background
1	6	11	4 (TEFL) 2 (ELL)	11	1	-	1 (No Information)
2	3	8	2 (TEFL) 1 (ELT)	8	1	2	2 (M.A.-TEFL) 1 (CELTA holder)
3	4	5	2 (TEFL)	7	1	-	1 (Ph.D.-TEFL)
4	5	12	2 (TEFL) 2 (ELL)	13	1	-	1 (M.A.-TEFL)
5	3	9	1 (TEFL) 1 (ELL)	10	1	1	1 (Ph.D.-TEFL) 1 (M.A.-TEFL)
6	3	5	1 (TEFL)	7	1	-	1 (M.A.-ELL)
7	5	9	3 (TEFL) 1 (ELL) 2 (ELT)	8	1	1	2 (CELTA holders)
8	3	6	2 (TEFL)	7	1	1	1 (Ph.D.-TEFL) 1 (M.A.-TEFL)
9	3	7	1 (TEFL) 1 (ELL)	8	-	1	1 (M.A.-TEFL)
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>72</b>	18 (TEFL) 7 (ELL) 3 (ELT) 28 English Majors	<b>79</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	3 (Ph.D.-TEFL) 6 (M.A.-TEFL) 1 (M.A.-ELL) 3 (CELTA holders) 1 (No Information) 14 TTC Trainers

Notes: TEFL = Teaching English as a Foreign Language; ELL = English Language Literature; ELT = English Language Translation; CELTA = Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults.

Fourteen TTC trainers consisting of six females (43%) and eight males (57%), ranging in age from 29 to 41, participated in the interviews. None of the trainers was a native speaker of English; three of them were Ph.D. candidates of TEFL (excluding one of the researchers who participated in all the nine courses to observe them); six of them were M.A. holders of TEFL, one of them held an M.A. in English Language Literature, three of them were not majoring in English, but held the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) qualification, and one of them was reluctant to provide the researcher with any information regarding his educational background. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to 107 TTC attendees. Of these, 35 were male (33%) and 72 were female (67%). The age distribution of the participants ranged from 19 to 35, and their average age was 22 years. Among the 107 preservice teachers who took the TTC's, 18 course attendees majored in TEFL, 7 in English Language Literature, and 3 in English Language Translation. Quite surprisingly, the other 79 trainees majored in other fields of study.

### 3.2. Instrumentation

In an attempt to collect quantitative data on course attendees' opinions on the effectiveness of the TTC's run in Iran, the questionnaire developed, piloted, and administered by Peacock (2009) was adapted and used. In Peacock's (2009) study, the internal consistency reliability of .87 was allotted to the items. Some minor modifications were made to the questionnaire to make it suitable for the context and purpose of the present study. Also, four items as well as two open-ended questions were added to the modified

questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to gather more information on the inclusion of instruction on techniques pertaining to teaching all the four main language skills as well as DA in the TTC curricula. In crafting the added four items, the issue of content validity was taken into account by consulting the related literature prior to finalizing the wording and content of the items.

The TTC attendees ( $N = 107$ ) gave their responses on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability of the entire sample of the present work was found to be .81, and the questionnaire was piloted before administration. The TTC attendees were informed that their involvement in the study would not affect their final evaluation and that the questionnaires would be treated anonymously; so, it was compulsory for them to include their names as a part of demographic information.

### 3.3. Procedures

#### 3.3.1. Data Collection Procedures

While observation and document analysis were used as the main means of data *collection* in the study, the employed data *elicitation* methods included carrying out an interview and administering a questionnaire. Employing *naturalistic inquiry* (Best & Kahn, 2006), the nine TTC's were carefully observed and their instructional practices and procedures were transcribed and field notes were made. One of the researchers was a *participant* during all observations in order to have a first-hand experience with participants. Since prolonged engagement can enhance research credibility (Mackey & Gass, 2012, p. 194), the data were collected employing "participant observation" (Mackey & Gass, 2012, p. 184). Given that "being a participant observer can give you a richer, insider perspective on the learning taking place . . ." (Bartels, 2005b, p. 5), the observations were carried out by going into the field, that is, the real world of the TTC's. In order to address ethical issues, once the courses came to an end and when the observations were carried out permissions were obtained from the course organizers for using the gathered information as research evidence.

In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducted face-to-face semistructured, open-ended interviews with 14 trainers of the TTC's to elicit their opinions on the shortcomings and merits of the courses and seek their suggestions for further improvement on existing syllabi. The interviews which were done in English and took approximately 15 minutes involved four open-ended questions, crafted in the form of four items (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire, which took about 10-15 minutes to complete, was administered on the last day of each TTC, and 107 trainee teachers answered all of the items/questions.

#### 3.3.2. Data Recording Procedures

Prior to the transcription of the observational data, an observational protocol, identifying the type of data, which was going to be recorded, and the procedures for recording the necessary data, was decided upon. To do so, informed by the research questions and the guidelines outlined by Creswell (2009), the researcher determined to take *descriptive notes* and gather *demographic information* and expound on the participants/actors of the observed sites, events, activities, and types and frequencies of instructional patterns with regard to the models of professional education in the descriptive notes. Also, an interview protocol was used for interviewing the TTC trainers. The collected data were recorded by making handwritten notes, and the interview protocol was piloted twice before commencing the real data collection.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

#### 3.4.1. Reliability and Validity Issues

In order to check for qualitative reliability, also known as *dependability*, the researchers' approach was consistent across different sites (Gibbs, 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2000), and the same strategies were adopted for recording the frequency of employment of each model of professional education and the transcription of instructional materials of all the observed sites. Important details of observed TTC's were noted in order to take care of the need for the documentation of details in qualitative research, which is

referred to as *thick description* (Geertz, 1973; Yin, 2003). After the detailed documentation of the procedures of each TTC session, the model of professional education, the course curriculum, the inclusion of instruction on DA and on trainees' diagnostic competence in that very session were scrutinized by the researchers and cross-checked by a Ph.D. student of TEFL to ensure *intercoder agreement* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In other words, *peer debriefing* was used to enhance the accuracy of the accounts by letting people other than the researcher render a judgment on the analyses. The level of consistency of coding (i.e., inter-rater reliability index) was .93 and high enough to make the study reliable.

To ensure qualitative validity, also known as *trustworthiness*, *authenticity*, and *credibility* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), a number of *validity strategies* (Creswell, 2009) were incorporated into the analysis of the qualitative data. To start with, since credibility can be enhanced by triangulation of data, which is a kind of "discovery of commonalities" (Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991, p. 364), the present study attempted to integrate views of different actors –TTC trainers and trainees- with the three raters' interpretations of the collected data. Therefore, different data source were triangulated to come up with united results and valid justifications. In other words, participant observation, questionnaire administration, and interviews were applied to data analysis procedures. Furthermore, not only was detailed, thick description of the activities and events used, but also *member checking* was utilized; that is, during the interviews, major research findings were taken back to course trainers so that they could attest to the authenticity of the findings. Last but not least, to address *authenticity* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), the data was analyzed without bias, open and honest descriptions of course contents were given, and the researcher refrained from reading more into the data than the data set could support.

#### 3.4.2. Analysis of the Collected Data

The raters independently evaluated the transcribed descriptions of each TTC curriculum and calculated the frequency of employment of each model by determining the type of each and every instructional episode/act in the TTC's, classifying them under the three models of teacher learning, and recording the frequency of each classification. Moreover, the percentages of agreement/disagreement for all questionnaire items were calculated and the quantified data were classified under three categories: strongly agree or agree, neither agree nor disagree, and disagree or strongly disagree, for the ease of presentation and discussion. Next, the content of transcripts elicited by the semistructured interviews and open-ended questions of the questionnaire was analyzed, and blurbs quoting course trainers' opinions of course strengths and weaknesses were analyzed, and useful information was extracted from the comments to be further discussed and categorized.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Prevalent Models of Teacher Learning

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were applied to delineate the frequency of models of professional education that could expound on methods of instruction adopted in the TTC's. Wallace's (1991) model of teacher learning served as a yardstick. Percentage distribution, as demonstrated in Table 2, indicates how many times strategies pertaining to each model was used in the instructional episodes of the TTC's.

Table 2. Percentages of the Employed Models of Teacher Learning in TTC's

Model of teacher learning	The craft model	The applied science model	The reflective model
Percentages	84.73%	11.42%	3.85%

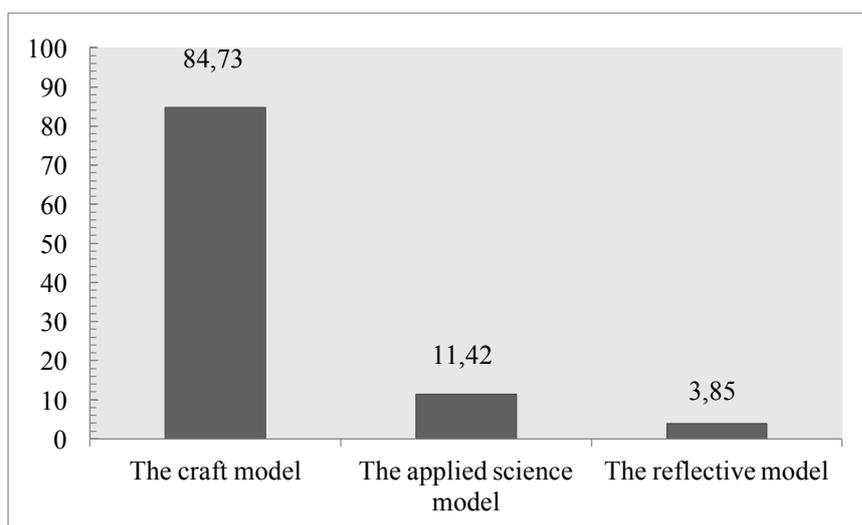


Figure 4. Frequencies of the three models of teacher learning in TTC's in percentage terms.

It was found that the craft model was the most frequently prevalent model of teacher learning in the TTC's. The low percentage of employing the applied science model shows that the primacy of being aware of theories and underlying assumptions of SLA, which can inform teachers' proactive approaches and pedagogical choices, was neglected. The reflective model was the least frequently prevalent model of teacher learning in the TTC's, which indicates that course organizers gave more weight to imitation rather than reflection.

#### 4.2. The Nine Observed TTC's

In order to answer the second research question, the contents of the syllabi of the TTC's were examined with the aim of analyzing the time allotted and attention devoted to each language skill and other components of the course content and investigating whether recent empirical findings on classroom assessment, especially those of research into DA, were translated to the syllabi of the courses.

##### 4.2.1. Components of TTC Syllabi

The written descriptions of the course syllabi, events and procedures of each TTC session were gathered and examined via participant observation. The course syllabi and observation notes were probed into in terms of (a) their model of professional education, (b) the attention devoted to each of the four language skills and other components/systems, (c) the balance between instructing attendees in teaching techniques and diagnostic competence, (d) the presence and quality of teachings on DA practices, and (e) the alignment of the teachings with recent research findings on classroom assessment practices. What follows is an account of the syllabi of the TTC's and clarification of possible ambiguities. Each session took three hours in the TTC's, except for sites 2, 5, and 7 in which each session took almost five hours; that is, each session was comprised of three instructional episodes each of which took an hour and a half. To observe ethics, the names of the nine observed sites are not included.

Table 3. Site 1: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	Icebreakers: getting to know the learners
2.	How to put learners in pairs / groups
3.	Classroom management: logistics, rapport, and teachers' language
4.	Monitoring learners: vanishing, active monitoring, discrete monitoring, and participating

5.	Classroom management: teacher position, dealing with trouble makers, encouragement, and how to use the board
6.	Demo 1: icebreakers
7.	Demo 2: putting learners in pairs and groups
8.	Teaching off-target vocabulary / Demo 3: teaching off-target vocabulary
9.	ESA / PPP
10.	Teaching on-target vocabulary using ESA
11.	Teaching reading, listening, and speaking / Demo 4
12.	Error correction
13.	Teaching grammar/ Demo 5
14.	Final demo

In this TTC, ESA stood for Engagement, Study, and Activation; the Study move included presentation and controlled practice. By PPP, Presentation, Practice, and Production was meant. As can be seen in the course program, writing skill was not attended to in this site and received a complete disregard. In session 12, the differences between slips, errors, and attempts were discussed, but DA was neglected.

*Table 4. Site 2: TTC Schedule*

Session	Topics
1.	Introduction session: book orientation, learning styles, learner motivation
2.	Introductory session on 'Analytical Psychology'
3.	Classroom management / Lesson planning / Presenting vocabulary
4.	Developing receptive skills: listening and reading
5.	Discussing TPs / Observing experienced teachers
6.	TP 1: Receptive skills
7.	Presenting grammar / Practice new language
8.	Interaction patterns / Monitoring and feedback / Effective oral correction
9.	TP 2: Grammar
10.	Functional language
11.	Creativity and the teacher choosing and using supplementary materials
12.	TP 3: Function
13.	Developing productive skills: speaking and writing
14.	Teaching to teenagers
15.	Testing and assessment / Professional development
16.	Admin issues

As can be seen in Table 4, a part of session eight was devoted to teaching effective oral correction and feedback. In this session, ways of dealing with students' errors in speaking were discussed, but, in fact, different strategies of giving feedback were not attended to. However, in session 13, three strategies of correcting learners' writing samples were mentioned in passing: (a) the teacher can underline the mistakes; (b) the teacher can correct all the mistakes; and the teacher can assign codes and identify the mistakes. In the part of session 15 which dealt with testing and assessment, first, a 10-minute test was administered, and then achievement, diagnostic, placement, and proficiency tests were differentiated, but the trainers made no mention of DA.

Table 5. Site 3: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	A general introduction to the course
2.	Presentations and expectations / Teaching vocabulary and grammar
3.	Topics, situations, notions, and functions / Receptive skills: listening and reading
4.	Productive skills: speaking and writing / Lesson planning and classroom management
5.	Interaction and corrective feedback
6.	Reflective teaching
7.	Evaluation and demonstration

In session two, for 'presentation and expectations', chapter four of Harmer's (2007) book was taught. As far as corrective feedback is concerned, the differences among mistakes/slips, errors, and attempts were enlarged upon, and the sources of errors (i.e., L1 interference, developmental errors, and induced errors mainly made by the teachers) were discussed. However, DA was neglected.

Table 6. Site 4: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	Introduction of the course / Education vs. training / Post-method era / Learning cycle / Teacher's role / EFL vs. ESL
2.	Classroom management: giving instructions / ICQ / Interaction patterns / Using whiteboard / Monitoring
3.	Phonology: Single sounds, Word stress, Weak forms vs. strong forms, Stress timing, Intonation, Connected speech
4.	Elicitation / Teaching vocabulary / CCQ
5.	Teaching grammar / PPP/ Error treatment / Demo
6.	BDA / Teaching listening / Teaching reading / Teaching writing / Teaching speaking
7.	Lesson planning / Reflective teaching / Work ethics /Demo
8.	TPs
9.	TPs

The most important role of a teacher, attended to in session one, was known to be creating a condition in which learning takes place. ICQ referred to Instruction Checking Question and CCQ to Concept Checking Question. In session five, which partly dealt with error treatment, self-correction, peer-correction, and teacher-correction were introduced, and a number of error identification strategies (e.g., facial expression, gesture, interjections, and echoing up to the error) were discussed. By BDA, Before/During/After was meant, which was similar to ESA.

Table 7. Site 5: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	Learner-centered teaching / Learner autonomy / Multiple intelligences
2.	Introduction to methodology / CLT & TBLT
3.	Introduction to ESA / The course book
4.	How to teach grammar & vocabulary + Workshop
5.	How to teach reading + Workshop
6.	How to teach listening + Workshop
7.	How to teach speaking + Workshop
8.	How to teach writing + Workshop
9.	Task management & group dynamics + Workshop
10.	Lesson planning / Integration of skills in the course book
11.	Error correction / Feedback / Exams + Workshop
12.	Classroom management / Motivation
13.	Reflective teaching / Self-assessment / Written examination

14.	Teacher's code of conduct & ethics / Administrative briefing session
15.	Workshop 1
16.	Workshop 2
17.	Workshop 3
18.	Demonstration
19.	Demonstration
20.	Demonstration
21.	Demonstration briefing session

The three workshops dealt with phonology, classroom management, and orienting course attendees around administrative aspects and in-house issues of the institute. In session 11, a part of which dealt with feedback, no mention was made of DA.

*Table 8. Site 6: TTC Schedule*

Session	Topics
1.	An introduction to the course / Using course books
2.	Teaching: art or science / Describing good teachers
3.	Learner differences / Motivation and praise
4.	Describing language: meaning in context and part of speech / teaching vocabulary / Using the board
5.	Language form, function, and meaning / Teaching grammar
6.	Demo: teaching vocabulary and grammar
7.	Classroom management / Using the L1 / Student groupings / Monitoring
8.	Lesson stages: ESA / PPP / Activation of language
9.	Lesson planning: pre-task, task, and post-task / Demo
10.	Teaching reading / Demo
11.	Teaching writing / Writing steps / Correcting writing
12.	Teaching speaking / Correcting speaking / Demo
13.	Teaching listening / Types of listening / Demo
14.	When you start teaching: giving tests and scores
15.	TP
16.	TP

As far as feedback and error treatment is concerned, in session 11, overcorrection of writing samples was discussed, and attendees were advised to refrain from using red color and correcting all the mistakes, which can be very demotivating. It was suggested that they could attend to a certain aspect of students' writing at a time (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.) to minimize the amount of correction. In session 12, immediate and delayed speaking correction was talked about. In the latter case, student teachers were advised to monitor learners, take notes on their mistakes, and talk about them once a task comes to an end without saying who had made the mistakes. In this site, classroom-based DA was taken for granted, and no instruction was given on possible ways of its implementation.

*Table 9. Site 7: TTC Schedule*

Session	Topics
1.	Housewarming / Course introduction / Course book introduction / Planning stages of a lesson / Reflection
2.	Managing learning (pair/group work) / Teaching approaches / Reflection
3.	Receptive skills: (reading & listening) / Reflection
4.	Receptive skills mini TP / Reflection
5.	Productive skills: (speaking & writing) / Assessment + Written correction / Reflection
6.	Grammar / Reflection
7.	Lexis/ Reflection
8.	Lexis and grammar mini TP/ Reflection

9.	Learning styles & learner types / TP clarification / Lesson planning Practice
10.	Effective oral correction / Class management / Reflection
11.	TP / Analysis
12.	TP / Analysis
13.	TP / Analysis
14.	TP / Analysis
15.	TP / Analysis
16.	TP / Analysis
17.	TP / Analysis
18.	TP / Analysis
19.	Demo
20.	Demo
21.	Briefing

During TP's (i.e., Teacher Practice), trainee teachers were asked to teach a selected section (i.e., a microlesson) of a course book and tried to put what they had learnt regarding teaching the focused skill into practice. During the demos, which were regarded as a sort of end-of-course evaluation, trainee teachers taught a previously selected lesson in the presence of their peers and one or two evaluators, and they had to demonstrate their teaching and class management skills and abilities, acquired or improved throughout the TTC they had taken. The 'Reflections' at the end of the majority of the sessions had to do with course attendees' personal understanding of the teachings of that very session. During sessions five and ten, parts of which attended to assessment, written correction, and oral correction, preservice teachers were instructed on the techniques of providing learners with feedback on their writing and speaking skills; however, DA was not introduced to them.

Table 10. Site 8: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	Introduction: getting to know the participants / Why are you here?
2.	Who is a good language teacher? Teachers' characteristics and ethics
3.	Getting to know the course book: levels and teaching method / Workbook and supplementary materials
4.	Teaching listening and reading / Demo
5.	Teaching speaking and writing / Demo
6.	Giving feedback, midterm, and final scores: admin issues
7.	Teaching vocabulary and grammar / Demo
8.	Lesson planning: start to have your own lesson plans / Getting to know the course book guide / Assignment: write lesson plans
9.	Classroom management
10.	Demo / Assignment
11.	Final demo / Assignment
12.	Final demo / Assignment

The course organizers of site eight showed a complete disregard for the importance of classroom teacher assessment, and in session six, they only attended to possible strategies of giving feedback on their writing and speaking.

Table 11. Site 9: TTC Schedule

Session	Topics
1.	Background to language learning and teaching
2.	Language lexis
3.	Language grammar
4.	Language phonology

5.	Language functions / Demo: teaching vocabulary and grammar
6.	Teaching receptive skills
7.	Teaching productive skills
8.	Teaching methods / Demo: teaching the main skills
9.	Giving instructions
10.	Error treatment / Giving feedback
11.	Demo
12.	Demo

In session ten, correcting students' written work was discussed, and preservice teachers were advised to factor in both the form and the content of what learners have written when they were given comments and feedback. Like the other eight observed sites, this TTC did not familiarize attendees with the principles of DA and classroom assessment practices either.

As far as the second research question is concerned, it can be noted that the TTC syllabi signified wide variations regarding the curricula among the courses; however, almost all observed TTC's had demonstrations in their curricula. In the TTC syllabi, 'microteaching' (i.e., a technique for advancing experiential knowledge of professional action in a progressive and controlled manner) was referred to as 'demo', 'demonstration', and 'TP'. In the related literature, considerable significance has been attached to the inclusion of microteaching (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Falkenberg, 2010; Nuland, 2011; Wallace, 1991).

Although all TTC's except for site one, had instructions on the writing skill, writing skill, in general, was marginalized in all courses, and very little time and resources were allotted to effective ways of teaching and improving it. Similarly, trainers had a propensity for observing and evaluating preservice teachers' microteachings while they were working on speaking, reading, and/or listening skill, and the evaluation of teachers' ability to assess and enhance learners' writing ability was taken for granted. However, it is irrefutable that, at this juncture, writing skill is not of secondary importance and should not be a secondary consideration in the evaluation of teachers' professional practices. It is also worth noting that although, one way or another, the majority of TTC's attended to error correction and feedback, none of them included instruction on classroom assessment practices and DA in their syllabi, and TTC organizers demonstrated no regard for the development of prospective teachers' diagnostic competence.

### 4.3. TTC Attendees' and Trainers' opinions About the Courses

#### 4.3.1. Preservice Teacher Questionnaire

In order to answer the third research question, agreement/disagreement percentages for each item were calculated. Results of the data are shown in percentage terms below in Table 12 and Figure 5.

Table 12. Preservice Teacher (N = 107) Questionnaire Results

The TTC ...	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
1. ... had good linkage between different teaching components.	66.36	31.78	1.87
2. ... avoided overlapping information between different teaching components.	71.03	28.04	0.93
3. ... gave me adequate training in English Language Teaching.	71.96	26.17	1.87
4. ... gave me adequate training in teaching all the four skills.	27.1	57.01	15.89

5. ... gave me adequate training for the needs of the local context (teaching in English institutes in Iran).	73.83	24.3	1.87
6. ... was up-to-date.	66.36	32.71	0.93
7. ... taught me how to give feedback on my students' writing.	53.27	35.51	11.21
8. ... encouraged me to reflect on my past experiences as a language learner.	32.71	54.21	13.08
9. ... encouraged me to be a reflective teacher (when I start teaching).	42.06	51.4	6.54
10. ... promoted flexibility in using different teaching practices for different situations.	43.93	49.53	6.54
11. ... balanced teacher-centered and student-centered learning on its teachings.	63.55	32.71	3.74
12. ... taught me how to evaluate my students' progress and abilities in writing.	6.54	55.14	38.32
13. ... taught me how to help my students develop their language abilities.	19.63	48.6	31.78
14. ... taught me how to evaluate myself as a teacher.	31.78	46.73	21.5
15. ... taught me classroom management skills.	78.5	20.56	0.93
16. ... taught me how to <i>use</i> foreign language teaching materials.	70.09	25.23	4.67
17. ... taught me how to <i>adapt</i> foreign language teaching materials.	29.91	44.86	25.23
18. ... increased my powers of self-evaluation.	29.91	61.68	8.41
19. ... taught me foreign language assessment skills.	12.15	45.79	42.06
20. ... taught me how to integrate instruction with assessment.	9.35	45.79	44.86
21. ... was relevant to my needs.	71.96	26.17	1.87
22. ... had a good balance between the teaching of: the main skills, language assessment techniques, and classroom management skills.	45.79	42.99	11.21
23. ... prepared me to teach English in the classroom.	78.5	19.63	1.87
24. ... met my needs.	79.44	19.63	0.93
25. By the end of the TTC, I will be ready to teach English.	71.96	27.1	0.93

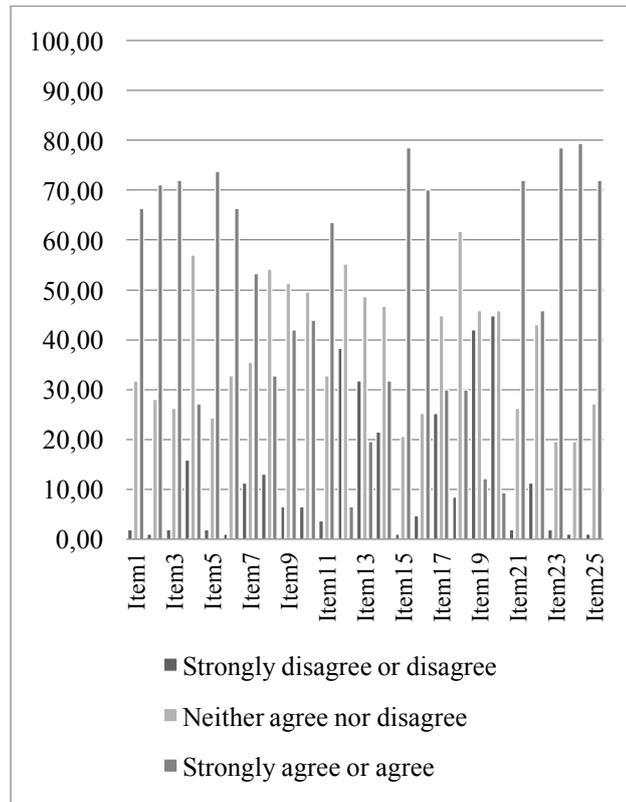


Figure 5. Preservice teachers' responses to the questionnaire depicted in percentages.

As can be seen in Table 12, items 24, 15, 23, and 5 had the highest levels of preservice teacher agreement. 79.44% of preservice teachers agreed with 24 'The TTC met my needs', 78.5% with 15 and 23 'The TTC taught me classroom management skills' and 'The TTC prepared me to teach English in the classroom', and 73.83% with 5 'The TTC gave me adequate training for the needs of the local context (teaching in English institutes in Iran)'. Items 12, 20, 19, and 13 received the lowest levels of preservice teacher agreement. Only 6.54% of them agreed with 12 'The TTC taught me how to evaluate my students' progress and abilities in writing', 9.35% with 20 'The TTC taught me how to integrate instruction with assessment', 12.15% with 19 'The TTC taught me foreign language assessment skills', and 19.63% with 13 'The TTC taught me how to help my students develop their language abilities'.

Course attendees also responded to two open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Their answers to question 26 'Is there a specific language skill (listening, speaking, writing, or/and reading) on which you wish you had been provided with more instructions? Please elaborate on your answer' revealed that they felt a marked lack of instruction on teaching the writing skill and a relative lack of teachings on the speaking skill. In order to quote some relevant blurbs, pseudonyms are used. Mehdi wrote "I wish I would be more prepared for writing skill", Mina commented that "Writing is very difficult. I think I need more instructions for that skill and also for teaching function. I think it was better to have more examples and writing texts to practice", and Zhaleh made the point that:

For listening and reading we had a TP. So we got much more familiar with teaching these two skills and we experienced them in practice but not for writing and speaking. I wish we had a TP on speaking and writing too. I would like to get a hand on that.

Samples of attendees' answers to question 27 'What (positive/negative) comments can you make about the course you took?' are expounded on below. As far as TTC attendees' positive comments are concerned, the courses were known to be "fun", "practical", and "collaborative". Zahra wrote "The course was really useful and helpful", Reza held "I've been able to meet all my needs to be a teacher. Now I feel completely

prepared to be a teacher and wholeheartedly want and yearn to do it”, and Ali wrote “We had very good teamwork sessions. I learned a lot from them”; Amir commented that “It has given me the ability of teaching. Before that I had no single idea of a classroom, but now I can feel it. I know what to do”.

Regarding the weaknesses of the TTC’s, some course attendees believed that TTC’s were too intensive and rushed. Fatemeh wrote “I liked to have more sessions and be more involved but generally it was a very fruitful course”, and Saeed answered “We had very limited time to digest what we learned”.

Although no explicit comment was made about the exclusion of classroom assessment from the course syllabi, two of the trainees alluded to this void by writing:

In the course I learned about teaching, but in the questionnaire there were questions about evaluating student abilities and adapting material which were not taught in the course. They said the exams are given to us. Do I need to know assessment and make tests?

And:

The whole course was an overall positive. Not able to count each and every, but one aspect of being a teacher was a little less respected, and that was assessment. I think it was a good idea to add a session on how to evaluate students on different skills and then find a suitable way to tackle their problems.

#### 4.3.2. Teacher Trainer Interviews

In reporting the qualitative data gathered from the interviews, in order to observe ethics, the trainers will remain anonymous; so, pseudonyms are used instead of their real names. Regarding the strengths of the TTC’s, some trainers ( $N = 6$ ) said comprehensiveness was a merit. They held the course “was practical”, “taught the maximum a teacher may need to learn in a minimized time”, and “included the necessary teaching techniques”. Several trainers ( $N = 9$ ) said that the courses were goal-oriented and refrained from intangible, complicated theories that may not be used in the actual practice of teaching. Other trainers ( $N = 5$ ) said that the courses had microteachings, which attended to the practical aspects of teaching; Ehsan said “I believe my TTC’s focus on performance alongside competence and let the candidates feel the content to the full”.

Regarding TTC weaknesses, two ( $N = 2$ ) trainers said they wished they had been able to hold different courses for teachers who were preparing to teach children, teenagers, and adults. Five ( $N = 5$ ) instructors said that they wished they had had more attendees in their courses, so that they could assign more collaborative assignments and tasks.

Regarding possible ways of improving the TTC’s, Saeed said “at least two or three trainers must run the course”, and he maintained that it would be a good idea to have a number of “natural learners” in the TTC. Neda said “It is good to go to a real class with the trainees and see what happens”, and, finally, Amir said “I think it is a good idea to ask participants to observe some classes and report on them”.

As far as the alignment of research findings with the TTC syllabi is concerned, a number of interviewees ( $N = 5$ ) believed that current constraints regarding access, time, and payments were major challenges of referring to research for improving TTC’s. Some trainers ( $N = 8$ ) did not even know where they could find relevant articles or reports. Reza said “We do not have access to good articles, and if we have, we do not have that much time to read all of them. To be honest, we are not paid to read articles; we are paid to have teacher-training courses”.

Some trainers stated that second language acquisition papers and publications are full of convoluted terms and sentences, and, at times, they are so complicated that the reader gets bewildered. A number of them ( $N = 5$ ) stated that intricately presented data analysis and statistics can be very unappealing and even demotivating, because they can barely make any sense of them. Saeed asserted that “Even if we bother to find and read relevant articles, we cannot easily figure out what suggestions are made in them. Many authors beat about the bush and discuss many issues, and many articles are not easy to follow”.

Some TTC organizers ( $N = 4$ ) set out that generalizations made in research articles do not correspond to their local teaching context. A number of them ( $N = 2$ ) held that the Iranian EFL context has distinguishing characteristics, which are not taken into account in the majority of research articles. Some trainers ( $N = 5$ ) were quite complacent about the status quo of the TTC's. Three of the trainers ( $N = 3$ ) did not feel responsible for bridging the gap between research and pedagogy, and they held teachers and course book writers responsible in this regard; for instance, Payman said:

In our institute, we believe that teachers' guide of the course books we use are very important. They give the teachers the necessary and sufficient information about teaching each lesson and episode of the book. We also change our course books every four or five years to make them up-to-date. This is what we can do. Let's say this is all we can do. Course book writers and those who write teachers' guides must put the necessary details and new findings in their books, because teachers can follow what they put in the guides.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1. Models of Teacher Learning in TTC's Held in the Iranian EFL Context

Results of the present study indicated that accounting for 84.73% of teacher-training instructional attempts, the prevailing model of teacher learning dominating TTC's in language institutes in Iran was the craft model of professional education, which looks at teaching as a craft that is comprised of certain predetermined technical skills and can be taught to the novice, who are mainly engaged with *what* steps to follow rather than *why* to take each measure. Put another way, trainees seemed to be absolved of all responsibility for figuring out why they took certain steps in their actual teaching practices throughout the courses (i.e., microteachings). This lens frames TE as a process whose goal is to deal with teachers' instrumental capabilities, mainly because the craft model is imitative in nature and mainly applies to static professions but not dynamic ones, which are geared to change.

Although learning technical skills of teaching, teaching routines, and codified stages of teaching certain instructional content has its own merits, the craft model or teacher-craft TE (Zeichner, 1983) neglects the fact that in teaching, like any other complex activity, "the whole is more than the sum of the parts" (Zeichner, 1983, p. 5), and "rule structures are inexhaustive" (Scheffler as cited in Tom, 1980, p. 318). That is, the immediate teaching context and teachers' tacit knowledge are of significant importance in the practice of effective teaching. In addition, pedagogy, directly or otherwise, affects ethical, moral, social, and political issues, and if teachers are merely taught how to teach with monotonous regularity, their reflective capabilities will be scaled down. It is important to note that a teacher's sense of plausibility, as Prabhu (1990) argues, determines how learning occurs and how teaching causes or supports learning, and L2 teachers are "users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their L2 students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" (Johnson, 2006, p. 239).

While the applied science model is believed to be "the most prevalent model underlying most training or education programmes for the professions" (Wallace, 1991, p. 8), results of the study also showed that the applied science model accounted for only 11.42% of total teacher-training moves in the TTC's. Finally, the least frequently employed model of teacher learning in the TTC's was the reflective model, which accounted for only 3.85% of total instructional attempts made in the nine observed courses. It can be discussed that ease of administration and unthinking tradition may have led to the existing models and modes of teaching and learning in TTC's held in Iran.

### 5.2. Curricula of the TTC's

The analysis of the TTC syllabi denoted that there was no integrated national system of EFL teacher-training and significant differences in course delivery, duration, regulations, curricula, and end-of-course assessment was noted. Grosse's (1991) study concluded that this very problem also lied with TESOL methods

course. The markedly different TTC's would exert various influences on preservice teachers' learning experiences and their professional expertise. The same concern was addressed by Nuland (2011) who made the point that "teacher education programmes within Canada are markedly different in structure and duration across provinces, which affects programme delivery for teacher candidates and their opportunities for clinical practice" (p. 409).

Results of the present study pertaining to absence of instruction on assessment in preservice TTC's are in line with the contention that "the dichotomy between assessment and instruction is even visible at the level of instructional organization" (Poehner, 2008, p. 4). The current status of the TTC's held in Iran calls for the inclusion of instruction on how to implement DA in TTC's because for a TTC design to be effective and sustainable, direct relevance of course contents to teachers' work and students' needs must be taken into account, and course curricula must lend themselves to helping teachers put theory into practice (Yuen-kwan, 1998). Also, according to Johnson (2009), the knowledge base of L2 teacher education is, by definition, "the basis upon which we make decisions about how to prepare L2 teachers to do the work of this profession" (p. 21). Moreover, input on SLA can "change teachers' intentions of how they will teach" (Bartels, 2005a, p. 406). Therefore, not only courses on applied linguistics and SLA are regarded as an important part of teachers' professional development (Edwards & Owen, 2005; Grabe, Stoller, & Tardy, 2000), but also it is held that teachers would make use of the knowledge gained from the courses in their teaching practices (Bartels, 2005a; Popko, 2005). Doubtless, the revamp of pedagogical orientations to DA requires "further collaborative endeavors between practitioners and researchers" (Ishihara, 2010, p. 947).

### 5.3. *TTC's from Attendees' Perspective*

In line with findings of the participant observation, preservice teacher questionnaire results and comments indicated that the TTC's did not do well in instructing the attendees to teach the writing skill and implementing classroom assessment practices and DA. The lowest levels of preservice teacher agreement were with questionnaire items 12, 20, 19, 13, and 4 (6.54%, 9.35%, 12.15%, 19.63%, & 27.1% respectively) and their answers to questions 26 and 27 backed this contention up. Among these five items, items 12 and 4 pertain to writing and items 20, 19, and 13 to DA. However, questionnaire results indicated that the courses successfully met attendees' needs (item 24), were relevant to their needs (item 21), gave them adequate training for the needs of the local context (item 5), and prepared them to teach English in the classroom (item 23). Also, the courses appeared to be successful in teaching classroom management skills (item 15). Trainer interview comments and attendees' responses to the open-ended questions backed up these findings.

### 5.4. *TTC's from Trainers' Perspective: Factors Influencing the Current Research-Practice Divide*

The data collected through interviews with TTC trainers as well as field notes of participant observations and the relationships among them were used to identify recurring categories and concepts regarding the factors that hamper empirical research findings finding their way into the instructional materials of TTC's. Open, selective, and axial coding and content analyses of the collected data gave rise to a sum of eight themes (see Figure 6.), which are enlarged upon below.

#### 5.4.1. *Perceived Gap Between Research/Researchers and Pedagogy/Teachers*

The mismatch between theories driven from SLA research and classroom language teaching practices has been touched on by several scholars (Firth & Wanger, 1998; Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2005; Ortega, 2005). Moreover, it is believed that "the gap between educational research and practice will not narrow without significant changes in pre- and in-service teacher educational programs" (Ben-Peretz, 1994, p. 116). Findings of the present study, similarly, revealed a lack of connection between research and TTC instruction and curricula, which can lead to a split between research and professional practice in language pedagogy and lack of compatibility between SLA research and classroom practice.

One way to bridge the theory-practice divided in language pedagogy can be familiarizing pre and in-service teachers with recent findings of SLA research, providing them with practical guidelines on the implementation of empirical findings in classroom context, availing them of opportunities for guided practice, and monitoring

them with the aim of improving their performance and fostering self-reflection. This can be a promising endeavor because “language teaching is largely propelled by the discourse of methodology, which is expressed in terms of classroom practice, theories, and ideologies of learning” (Freeman, 2007, p. 903). In addition, active involvement of major stakeholders in educational contexts would help “blend top-down initiatives and bottom-up participation” (Ben-Peretz, 1994, p. 114).

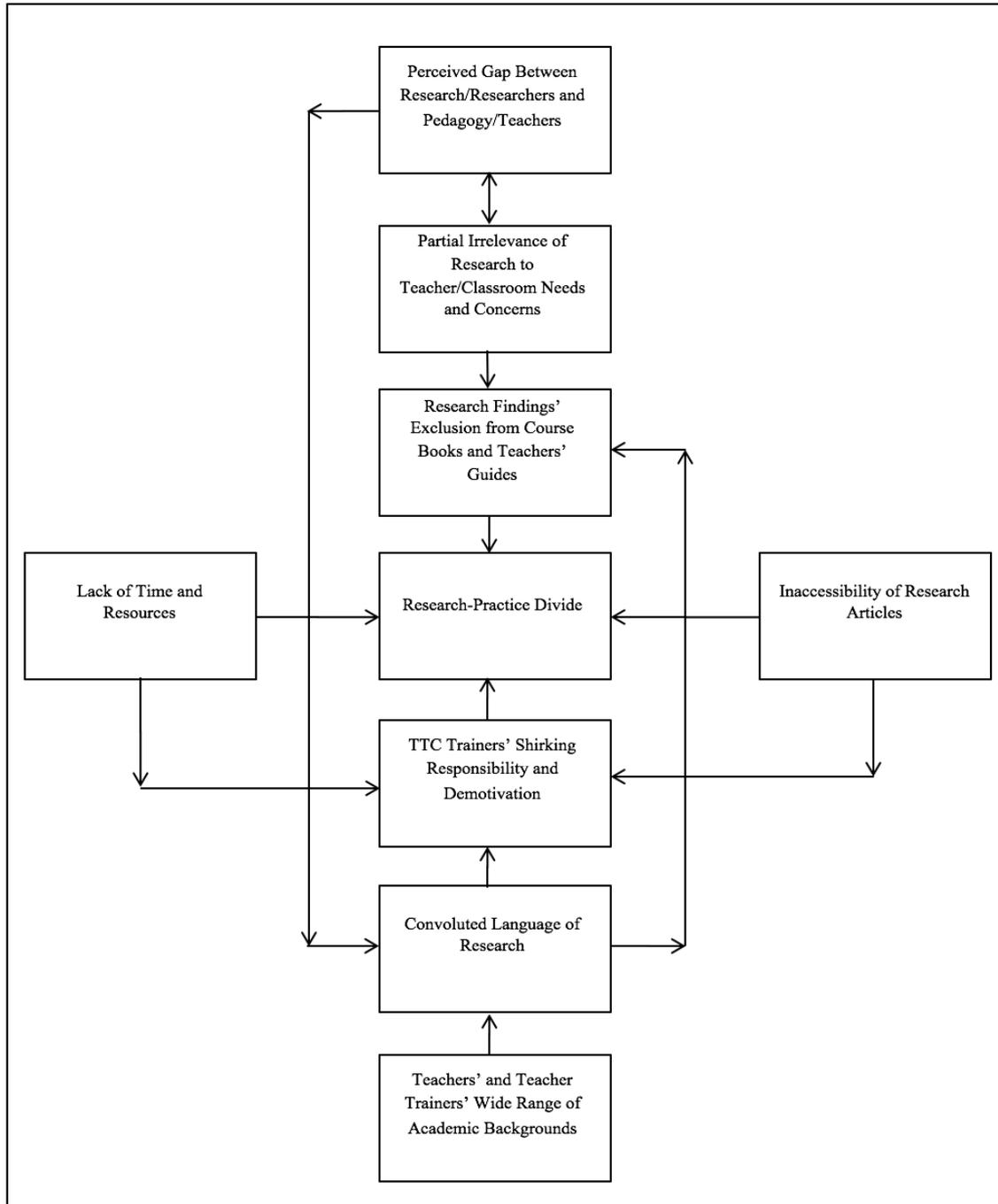


Figure 6. Factors influencing the current research-practice divide in TTC's.

#### 5.4.2. Partial Irrelevance of Research to Teacher/Classroom Needs and Concerns

Results of the interviews showed that some TTC trainers believed that many research reports do not attend to concerns pertaining to actual classroom contexts. In the related literature, it is believed that applied research is not merely after more applications of the same theory and the relationship between theory and practice is not one-way, that is, theory provides grounds to guide pedagogical activity, and, practical activity, simultaneously, develops and informs theory (see Lantolf & Poehner, 2010), which is also referred to as 'praxis' (Vygotsky, 1997). Moreover, according to Tierney (2006), bringing about change in classroom assessment practices calls for sustained, cooperative, and joint effort of knowledge generating source (i.e., researches) and internal and external mediating sources (e.g., educational policy-makers, language program organizers, teacher trainers/educators, teachers, etc.). Bearing in mind the fact that modes of research should be well-suited to the needs of teachers (Ben-peretz, 1994), researchers are to enunciate the implications of their studies for practitioners and materials developers, and teachers are to put empirical findings into practice and feed researchers with their reflections and first-hand experiences.

Moreover, as long as teachers perceive the relationship between themselves and researches as opposing, "there is little chance that university-generated knowledge might become part of the developing knowledge base of practitioners" (Ben-Peretz, 1994). So, to narrow the unchecked gap between researchers and practitioners, it must be noted that teachers' experience, perception, and concerns, informed by their teaching practices in the real, complex context of classrooms can offer avenues towards new research topics and themes based on the needs and concerns of actual classes.

#### 5.4.3. Research Findings' Exclusion from Course Books and Teachers' Guides

One of the TTC trainers pointed out that in the institute in which he worked, course books were up-dated every four or five years, and he noted that this was done to ensure that new teaching innovations and practices find their way into practice. What he said alluded to the primacy of the role of materials developers and curriculum designers in SLA. They are expected to pay proper regard for the implications of recent empirical research findings for pedagogy by including them in the form of practical guidelines in the materials they develop, including teachers' guides. Tomlinson (2011) posited that collaboration is one of the key components of materials development principles and procedures. He reiterated the value of pooling resources and purported that teachers, curriculum developers, university lecturers, researchers, teacher trainers, textbook writers, and publishers are the main contributors in a collaborative endeavor of materials development.

#### 5.4.4. Teachers' and Teacher Trainers' Wide Range of Academic Backgrounds

Findings of the present study (see Table 1) revealed that a large majority of TTC attendees and some of the TTC trainers did not major in fields of study related to English and had no academic background in language teaching, which is a threat to professionalism in the field. Given that one of the roles a language teacher assumes is the role of a user (Edge, 1988; Wright, 2002), who consults scientific resources to solve classroom problems, it is unlikely that preservice or in-service teachers who come from educational backgrounds other than language teaching would be able to refer to academic language textbooks, research articles, and reference books.

Allowing candidates from diverse educational backgrounds to enter TTC's and become language teachers neglects the fact that "technical skill in teaching is to be highly valued not as the end in itself, but as a means for bringing about desired needs" (Zeichner, 1983, p. 6). Put another way, teachers who are not familiar with the scientific and theoretical fundamentals of language teaching might become efficient teachers by acquiring technical skills of teaching and gaining practical experience; however, their becoming action researchers and/or inquirers seems to be improbable.

#### 5.4.5. Convoluting Language of Research

Given that a number of TTC trainers believed that the language of research findings are often perplexing and abstruse, they adopt elaborate study designs, and they tend to report recondite facts and figures that

cannot be easily understood by practitioners, researchers are advised to turn the *implication* section of research report genre to good account, clearly communicate to their target audience, and state how new insights generated by their research can be used in practice by providing clear, practical implications and guidelines. As Elliot (2000) put it, educational psychologists must ensure that they translate their findings into a reader- and curriculum-friendly format.

#### 5.4.6. TTC Trainers' Shirking Responsibility and Demotivation

It is worth mentioning that teacher trainers are also expected to be motivated to stay abreast of the latest developments in the field; they cannot afford to be complacent about their teaching practices and curricula, for they can do much to stimulate the sustained use of research findings. Doubtless, teachers' professional communities and learning communities of teachers can feed into the enhancement of teacher collaboration in this regard (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). Being a member of such communities would encourage teachers and teacher trainers to actively engage in the analysis and evaluation of research-based findings, and they can put them to regular use in their common pursuits.

Teacher trainers must be aware of the significance of their professional responsibilities as well as their important role in language pedagogy, which can be motivating. Since through TTC's, preservice teachers acquire insights into the practice of teaching, teacher trainers should bear in mind that such courses can join the efforts of scholars and practitioners by instructing prospective teachers and informing them about ways through which they can deal sensibly with innovative pedagogical approaches based on research.

#### 5.4.7. Inaccessibility of Research Articles

Results of the interviews indicated that gaining access to relevant research findings and literature on second language teaching and learning, which is demotivating for trainers, was a key issue to be dealt with. Language institute administrators can provide teachers and teacher trainers with some facilities to search the required resources on reliable databases.

#### 5.4.8. Lack of Time and Resources

The amount of time and the resources allocated to TTC's and teacher trainers are among the important contextual factors that can affect TTC structure and function by influencing how such courses are implemented and maintained as well as trainers' level of motivation. Shortage of time imposes constraints on administrators of TTC's. Moreover, busy schedules leave little room, if any, for change in the planning of TTC's. Therefore, "twin demons of time and pace" (Schulman, as cited in Ben-Peretz, 1994) affect the context of institutions, and, consequently, making conscious attempt to read and use relevant research findings pales into significance beside other priorities such as following curricula on schedule. To lower the barriers created by the lack of budget and time, institutes can allocate a fixed budget to their training departments, just like R & D (research & development) departments of businesses, which are concerned with studying new ideas and draw up plans for the production of new products. In fact, the primacy of the power of institutional practice and institutional customs in leaving little room for change has already been emphasized in the literature (Ben-Peretz, 1994; Fullan, 2007; Sarason & Doris, 1979).

### 5.5. *Implications and Suggestions for Further Research*

Given that it is important to systematically evaluate language teacher-training/preparation courses (Lynch, 2003; Peacock, 2009; Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1998), findings of the present study can provide an opportunity to scrutinize the employed models of professional education in preservice TTC's held in the Iranian EFL context, the extent to which ZPD-based assessment (Van Compernelle & Kinginger, 2013, p. 299) is dealt with in such courses, and the strengths and weaknesses of them.

As to the models of teacher-learning in TTC's, it should be borne in mind that although the craft model has certain advantages in training prospective English teachers, TTC trainers should not lose sight of the fact that

for instruction to produce optimal learning benefits, preservice teachers are to systematically ponder and analyze what they have learnt through reflection. So, findings of the study put forward arguments for the need for creating new pathways to prepare English language teachers in the Iranian EFL context to improve the teaching and professional qualifications of prospective teachers.

Moreover, marking down the curricula of the observed TTC's illuminated and typified the potential axioms that were regarded as substantive matters and/or ancillary issues by TTC organizers. Another cornerstone of the findings, which brought the status quo of the TTC's to further light, was that they flagged the complete disregard for classroom assessment practices, DA, and teachers' roles as mediators in TTC's. The fact that instruction in the aforementioned issues was conspicuously absent from TTC syllabi signifies that TTC organizers might have felt that their inclusion was surplus to requirement; however, this study discussed that such issues are hailed as pivotal matters in the relevant, existing literature. Also, the findings can orientate the stakeholders towards the premise that pedagogy must keep pace with research, and the tenuous link between research and pedagogy must be alleviated. In order to make a contribution to the revival of the status quo of the TTC's, the preset study also attended to the reasons that call a halt to the inclusion of relevant recent research findings in the instructional materials of TTC's. Doubtless, meeting the challenges can ameliorate the present status of the courses.

To sum up, based on the findings of the study, recommendations pertaining to educational policies, practice, and research can be made. Policy makers should be informed of the benefits of the application and alignment of research findings to and with the teachings of TTC's. Stakeholders must acknowledge that the aim of research in SLA is improving language pedagogy, and if they simply get into a routine in exercising their professional responsibility, the bifurcation between research and professional practice would widen.

As far as practice is concerned, as Kozulin (2009) notes, classroom context is a promising vein for the implementation of DA. However, it seems that classroom-based DA has yet to break into mainstream educational practice, and instructing pre- and in-service teachers to apply the principles of DA in their classroom can be a starting point for implementing DA.. It is high time teacher educators pondered on what forms the basis of their teacher-training curricula, and they must consider how their instruction shapes prospective teachers' worldview towards their profession. Language teachers should bear in mind that for teaching to be effective, not only should links between assessment and classroom practice be made (Lidz, 1991), but also results of each stage of assessment must feed into their subsequent interventional moves. This cannot be achieved unless teacher trainers and language teachers gain a clear understanding of DA and its practical application guidelines. Materials developers and syllabus designers are to be sensitized to the beneficial effects of DA in learner development and leave room for DA practices in the pedagogical materials they develop.

Further studies can look into the role that using technology might play in TTC's. Given that the appropriate use of technology can help teachers effectively deliver instruction to students and motivate them, familiarizing student-teachers with the underpinning assumptions of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and barriers to using technology in TTC's requires further study. In this line of research, the gap between theory and practice can be examined, too. Moreover, within this strand of research, future studies could explore the inclusion of other empirically approved classroom techniques in the course curricula. For instance, the inclusion of teachings on learner-tailored feedback and the implementation of Group DA (G-DA) could give venue for new research projects.

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**Appendix 1:** The questionnaire which was administered to gather trainee teachers' opinions about TTC's held in Iran **Directions:** For each statement below, please mark the response that best describes your opinion of the Teacher Training Course you took. There is no right or wrong answer; so, please respond as honestly as possible. Thank you!

The TTC ...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. ...had good linkage between different teaching components.	5	4	3	2	1
2. ...avoided overlapping information between different teaching components.	5	4	3	2	1
3. ...gave me adequate training in English Language Teaching.	5	4	3	2	1
4. ...gave me adequate training in teaching all the four skills.	5	4	3	2	1
5. ...gave me adequate training for the needs of the local context (teaching in English institutes in Iran).	5	4	3	2	1
6. ...was up-to-date.	5	4	3	2	1
7. ...taught me how to give feedback on my students' writing.	5	4	3	2	1
8. ...encouraged me to reflect on my past experiences as a language learner.	5	4	3	2	1
9. ...encouraged me to be a reflective teacher (when I start teaching).	5	4	3	2	1
10. ...promoted flexibility in using different teaching practices for different situations.	5	4	3	2	1
11. ...balanced teacher-centered and student-centered learning on its teachings.	5	4	3	2	1
12. ...taught me how to evaluate my students' progress and abilities in writing.	5	4	3	2	1
13. ...taught me how to help my students develop their language abilities.	5	4	3	2	1
14. ...taught me how to evaluate myself as a teacher.	5	4	3	2	1
15. ...taught me classroom management skills.	5	4	3	2	1
16. ...taught me how to use foreign language teaching materials.	5	4	3	2	1
17. ...taught me how to adapt foreign language teaching materials.	5	4	3	2	1
18. ...increased my powers of self-evaluation.	5	4	3	2	1
19. ...taught me foreign language assessment skills.	5	4	3	2	1
20. ...taught me how to integrate instruction with assessment.	5	4	3	2	1
21. ...was relevant to my needs.	5	4	3	2	1
22. ...had a good balance between the teaching of: the main skills, language assessment techniques, and classroom management skills.	5	4	3	2	1
23. ...prepared me to teach English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
24. ...met my needs.	5	4	3	2	1
25. By the end of the TTC, I will be ready to teach English.	5	4	3	2	1

26. Is there a specific language skill (listening, speaking, writing, or/and reading) on which you wish you had been provided with more instructions? Please elaborate on your answer.

27. What (positive/negative) comments can you make about the course you took?

**Appendix 2:** The interview protocol which was used to elicit TTC instructors' opinions on the shortcomings and merits of the courses and seek their suggestions for further improvement on existing syllabi and procedures

Dear TTC instructor,

Please give an account of what you think about the following aspects of the TTC you ran:

- (a) Your opinions on the **strengths** of the course,
- (b) Your idea about the **weaknesses** of the course,
- (c) Your views on possible ways to refurbish/**improve** the course, and
- (d) Your opinions on the alignment and **relevance of research findings** to the syllabi, content and instruction of the course. Are you familiar with the underlying assumptions of Dynamic Assessment (DA), which can be implemented in classroom contexts? If yes, do you think it is worth instructing preservice teachers in DA? Why?

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

# ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENTS' SCIENTIFIC IDENTITY

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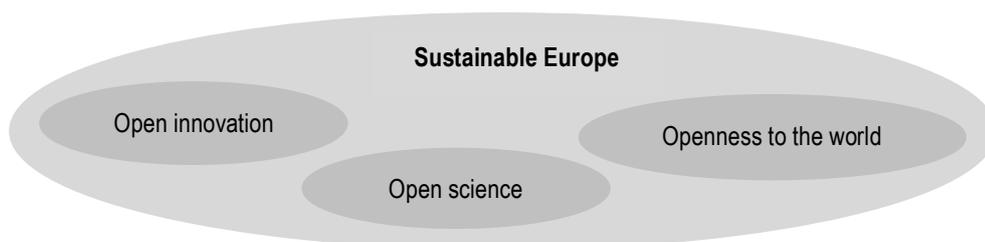
## ABSTRACT

Modern Europe is considered within such three strategic priorities (Moedas, 2015) as Open Innovation, Open Science, and Openness to the World. These three strategic priorities put a particular emphasis on the construction of students' scientific identity. The guiding research question is as follows: What is the relationship between students' scientific identity and English for Academic Purposes? Therefore, the aim of the present research is to analyse the scientific literature on the relationship between students' scientific identity and English for Academic Purposes underpinning elaboration of a new research question for further studies. The theoretical framing herein will discuss the construction of scientific identity via academic language. The meaning of such key concepts as *scientific identity* and *role models* is studied. Moreover, the study demonstrates how the key concepts are related to the idea of *English for Academic Purposes*. The study demonstrates a logical chain: scientific identity → English for Academic Purposes → role models → an empirical study within a multicultural environment → conclusions. Research methods include theoretical and empirical methods. Theoretical methods comprise analysis of theoretical sources and theoretical modelling. In the empirical study, explorative study was employed. Interpretative research paradigm was used. The empirical study carried out in August 2015 involved 22 engineering students at Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia. The results of the empirical study show that engineering students' self-evaluation is of the low level. The findings of the research allow drawing the conclusion that use of role models in English for Academic Purposes is an opportunity for the construction of students' scientific identity. The novel contribution of the paper is revealed in the newly formulated research question. Directions of further research are proposed.

**Key words:** English for Academic Purposes, scientific identity, role models

## 1. Introduction

Modern Europe is considered within such three strategic priorities (Moedas, 2015) as Open Innovation, Open Science, and Openness to the World as shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Three strategic priorities for sustainable European future

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Open innovation is about involving far more actors in the innovation process, from researchers, to entrepreneurs, to users, to governments and civil society (Moedas, 2015). Open innovation means creating the right ecosystems, increasing investment, and bringing more companies and regions into the knowledge economy (Moedas, 2015). Regarding open science, excellent science is the foundation of future prosperity, and that openness is the key to excellence (Moedas, 2015). Open to the World means not only to support collaborative projects but also to enable partnerships between regions and countries (Moedas, 2015).

These three strategic priorities, namely Open Innovation, Open Science, and Openness to the World put a particular emphasis on the construction of students' scientific identity.

The guiding research question is as follows: What is the relationship between students' scientific identity and English for Academic Purposes?

The aim of the present research is to analyse scientific literature on the relationship between students' scientific identity and English for Academic Purposes underpinning elaboration of a new research question for further studies.

Research methods include both theoretical and empirical methods. Theoretical methods comprise the analysis of theoretical sources and theoretical modelling. In the empirical study, an explorative study was employed. The interpretative research paradigm was used. The empirical study carried out in August 2015 involved 22 engineering students at Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia.

The meaning of such key concepts as *scientific identity* and *role models* is studied. Moreover, the study demonstrates how the key concepts are related to the idea of *English for Academic Purposes*. The study demonstrates a logical chain: scientific identity → English for Academic Purposes → role models → an empirical study within a multicultural environment → conclusions.

The methodological background of the present research is based on the System-Constructivist Theory (Maslo, 2006, 39). The System-Constructivist Theory is introduced as the New or Social Constructivism Pedagogical Theory. The System-Constructivist Theory is formed by

- Parsons's System Theory (Parsons, 1976) on any activity as a system,
- Luhmann's Theory (Luhmann, 1988) on communication as a system,
- the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1973),
- the Theory of Subjectivism (Groeben, 1986).

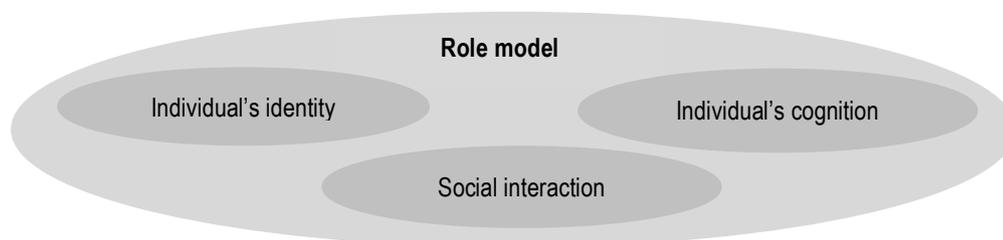
The System-Constructivist Theory implies the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites that contributes to the understanding of the relationship between external (social, social interaction, teaching, etc) and internal (individual, cognitive activity, learning, etc.) perspectives as the synthesis of external and internal perspectives (Bassus & Zaščerinska, 2012). By perspective, a certain embodied fundamental assumptions (Barry, 2002, 3) are meant. Application of the System-Constructivist Theory to learning introduced by Reich (Reich, 2005) emphasizes that the human being's point of view depends on the subjective aspect (Maslo, 2007); experience plays the central role in the knowledge construction process (Maslo, 2007). Therein, the subjective aspect of human being's point of view is applicable to the present research.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This theoretical framing will discuss the construction of scientific identity via academic language (Andreeva, Zaščerinska, Glonina, Zaščerinskis & Aļeksejeva, 2016).

The use of role models is often said to be a key to successful development of young aspiring specialists (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2003) needed by society and production (Kincāns, 2015). Role models assist in guiding individual's personal development, making important decisions that affect the human well-being and finding satisfaction and fulfillment in individuals' lives. Role models allow constructing a professional identity, too (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2003). Therefore, role models have attracted a lot of research attention.

The concept of role models (RMs) has been investigated from at least as early as 1970 but definitional ambiguities have plagued the professional literature, particularly in relation to the concept of "mentor" (Ferguson, 2007, 96). Some researchers have used these two terms synonymously and others have made distinctions between them (Ferguson, 2007, 96). For explaining how role modelling functions, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) has been used (Singh, Vinnicombe & James, 2003). The application of the System-Constructivist Theory (Maslo, 2006, 39) has assisted in identifying such elements of role models as individual's identity and cognition as well as social interaction as illustrated in Graph 2 (Zaščerinska, Andreeva, Aleksejeva, 2015).



Graph 2. Elements of role models

Gauntlett (2002, p. 214-215) identifies six role model types to demonstrate their distinguishing qualities and possible points of identification for individuals such as:

1. The 'straightforward success' role model: individuals such as sports people, media personalities and politicians who have achieved success within their specific discipline;
2. The 'triumph over difficult circumstances' role model: people who achieve success by prevailing over adversity;
3. The 'challenging stereotypes' role model: figures who challenge traditionally prescribed roles, expectations and assumptions;
4. The 'wholesome' role model: those who are perceived as 'clean living' and therefore deemed an appropriate example for young people to follow;
5. The 'outsider' role model: individuals who reject social conventions and are therefore spurned by mainstream society; and
6. The family role model: this group includes both personal family members and celebrity parents who are admired.

While the importance of role models is generally recognized, their defining characteristics and how they influence education and career choices is still unclear. Analysis of scientific literature reveals that research findings vary: some suggest celebrities are most likely while others have found that family members and friends are still most influential (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). In higher education, the impact of role models on medical students has been explored (Wright, Wong & Newill, 1997). English for Academic Purposes studies as part of higher education are identified as an opportunity for the development of scientific role models (Zaščerinska, Andreeva & Aleksejeva, 2015). Scientific role model is a part of role model as

- two elements of three of both English for Academic Purposes studies and use of role models coincide as well as
- the construction of individual's identity is mediated via language (Zaščerinskis, Aleksejeva & Zaščerinska, 2012, 131) in general and scientific identity – via academic language in particular.

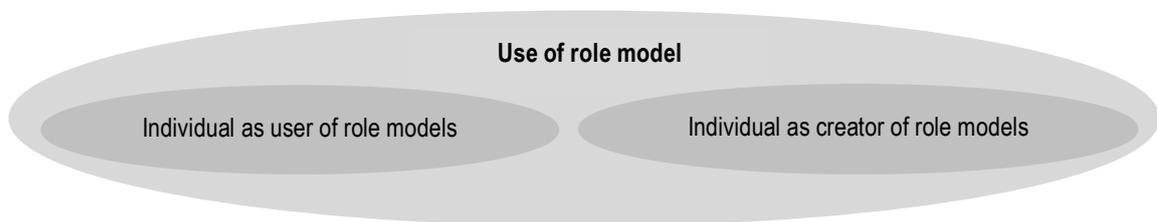
However, the use of role models in higher education is traditionally considered from one perspective only: students are users of role models created by their educators. Little attention has been given to such a perspective on use of role models in higher education as students are creators of role models.

A role model is a person who serves as an example by influencing others (*American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2011). Role models can be also described as a process, namely use of role models.

In higher education, the use of role models are traditionally characterised as one-modal phenomenon. By the use of role models, the tendency of individuals, namely students in the present research, to identify with other people described by the similarity between a role model's and individuals' characteristics, behavior or goals (Gibson, 2004, 136) is meant. Against this background, the authors of the present contribution define the use of role models to be a bi-modal phenomenon as the System-Constructivist Theory that serves as the methodological background of the present research implies the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites (Bassus & Zaščerinska, 2012). It should be noted that by bi-modal phenomenon, a phenomenon that obtains or exhibits two contrasting modes or forms is meant (Ahrens, Zaščerinska, 2014). Application of the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites (Bassus & Zaščerinska, 2012) to use of role models emphasizes that use of role models as a bi-modal phenomenon include

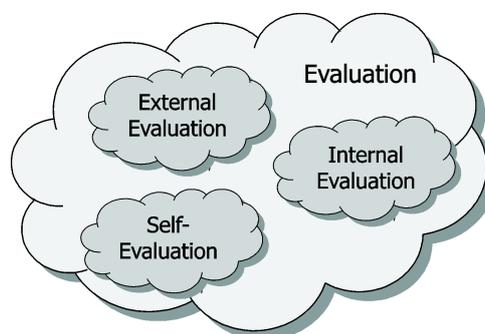
- on the one hand, individual's emulation of observed behaviours, styles and attributes of their role models and,
- on the other hand, individual's behaviours, styles and attributes emulated by others.

In other words, the use of role models in general and in higher education in particular is the individual combination of user of role models created by others and creator of role models as demonstrated in Graph 3.



Graph 3. Use of role model as a bi-modal phenomenon

Self-evaluation is a method that allows determining students' levels of role models. Self-evaluation is part of evaluation as depicted in Graph 4 (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012).



Graph 4. Elements of evaluation

By evaluation, the process of examination and its results are determined (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012). Evaluation includes assessment as shown in Graph 5 (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012).



Graph 5. Inter-connections between evaluation and assessment

Traditionally, assessment reveals student advancement, placement and grades (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012). In its turn, evaluation provides feedback on the worth or value of a course, module, curriculum or use of role models in the present research. Moreover, evaluations often utilize assessment data along with other resources to make decisions about revising, adopting, or rejecting a course, module, curriculum (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012) or use of role models in the present research. Self-evaluation is usually used by the students of a course, module, curriculum (Ahrens, Bassus, Zaščerinska, 2012) or use of role models in the present research.

### 3. Empirical study

The present part of the contribution demonstrates the design, results and findings of the present empirical study.

#### 3.1. Design of the empirical study

The design of the present empirical study comprises the purpose and question, sample and methodology of the empirical study. The guiding question of the empirical study was as follows: How do engineering students self-evaluate themselves as role models? The purpose of the empirical study is to analyze engineering students' self-evaluation.

The present empirical study involved 22 respondents within the 11th Baltic Summer School *Technical Informatics and Information Technology* at Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia, July 20 – August 2, 2015. The sample included seven females (F) and 15 males (M). The age of the respondents differed from 20 to 30. All 22 students were involved in Bachelor studies in different fields of electrical engineering such communication, shipping, robotics, etc. Working experience of the students was different, too. The students represented different countries such as Albania, India, Italy, Russia, Malaysia, Estonia, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Spain and Germany. Therefore, the sample is multicultural as the respondents with different cultural backgrounds and diverse educational approaches were chosen. Students' different cultural and educational experience emphasized the significance of each engineering student's self-evaluation of the self as a role model (Luka, Ludborza, Maslo, 2009) within the present empirical study. Thus, the group (age, field of study and work, mother tongue, etc.) was heterogeneous.

The interpretive paradigm was used in the empirical study. The interpretive paradigm aims to understand other cultures, from the inside through the use of ethnographic methods such as informal interviewing and participant observation, and establishment of ethically sound relationships (Taylor & Medina, 2013). The interpretive research paradigm corresponds to the nature of humanistic pedagogy (Lūka, 2008, 52). The interpretive paradigm creates an environment for the development of any individual and helps them to develop their potential (Lūka, 2008, 52). The core of this paradigm is human experience, people's mutual everyday interaction that tends to understand the subjectivity of human experience (Lūka, 2007, 104). The paradigm is aimed at understanding people's activity, how a certain activity is exposed in a certain environment, time, conditions, i.e., how it is exposed in a certain socio-cultural context (Lūka, 2007, 104). Thus, the interpretive paradigm is oriented towards one's conscious activity, and it is future-oriented (Lūka, 2007, p. 104). Interpretive paradigm is characterized by the researcher's practical interest in the research question (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003). The researcher is the interpreter.

In order to analyze the engineering students' self-evaluation, the survey was based on the following questionnaire: Question 1: Do you think you are a role model? The evaluation scale of five levels for Question 1 was given, namely, strongly disagree "1", disagree "2", neither disagree nor agree „3“, agree "4", and strongly agree "5". The evaluation scale was transformed into the level system as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Indicators and levels of students' self-evaluation

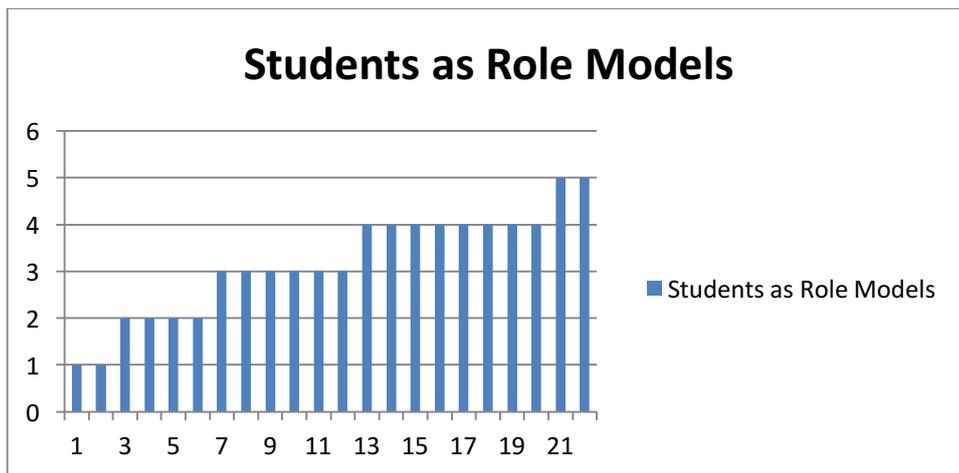
Indicators	Levels				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
	Very low	Low	Average	Optimal	High
	1	2	3	4	5
Students as role models	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>

Question 2: For whom (your family members, colleagues, friends, etc) do you think you are a role model? No evaluation scale was applied to Questions 2 as the question was open, and more than one choice was possible.

### 3.2 Results of the empirical study

The results of Question 1 (Students as Role Models) of the questionnaire used in the survey are demonstrated in Graph 6 where:

- the vertical numbers show five levels to measure students' self-evaluation of the self as role models, and
- the horizontal numbers present the code number of the student who participated in the survey.



Graph 6. The results of Question 1 (Students as Role Models)

The results of Question 1 (Students as Role Models) show that:

- two students' - two male - self-evaluation refers to the very low level,
- four students' – one male and three female - self-evaluation refers to the low level,
- six students' – four male and two female – self-evaluation refers to the average level,
- eight students' – six male and two female – self-evaluation refers to the optimal level,
- two students' – two male – self-evaluation refers to the high level.

The data of Question 1 were processed applying *Excel* software.

Frequencies of the students' answers to Question 1 were determined in order to reveal students' self-evaluation as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Frequency of the students' answers

Indicator	Level	Gender	Number of answers	Total percentage	Percentage by gender
Students as role models	very low	M	2	9.09%	9.09%
		F	0		0%
	low	M	1	18.18%	4.54%
		F	3		13.63%
	average	M	4	27.27%	18.18%
		F	2		9.09%
	optimal	M	6	36.36%	27.27%
		F	2		9.09%
	high	M	2	9.09%	9.09%
		F	0		0%

The survey results demonstrated in Table 2 showed that the engineering students' self-evaluation is of the optimal level (36.36%), particularly, male students (27.27%). Further on, the mean results indicated in Table 3 determine the low level of the students' self-evaluation of the self as role models (2.95). The findings of the empirical study allow concluding that the male students demonstrated a higher level of the self-evaluation of the self as role models (3.06) in comparison to the female students' self-evaluation of the self as role models (2.85).

Table 3. Mean results

Indicator	Level	Gender	Number of answers	Mean	Mean by gender
Students as role models	very low	M	2	2.95	Male
		F	0		
	low	M	1		
		F	3		
	average	M	4		Female
		F	2		
	optimal	M	6		
		F	2		
	high	M	2		
		F	0		

The results of Question 2 (For whom Students are Role Models) of the questionnaire used in the survey show that:

- 11 students' – six male and five female - role models influence their family members,
- three students' – two male and one female - role models influence their colleagues,
- 14 students' – 10 male and four female - role models influence their friends,
- one student's – one male – role model influences children as the student works with children.

The survey results of Question 2 indicate that the engineering students are role models for their friends (14 answers), family members (11 answers) and colleagues (three answers).

### 3.3 Findings of the empirical study

The summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2004) of the data reveals that the students' self-evaluation is of the low level. The engineering students are role models for

- their friends,
- family members and
- colleagues.

## 4. Conclusions

The theoretical findings of the research allow drawing the conclusion that use of role models is of bi-modal nature. The findings of the theoretical research allow drawing the conclusion that use of role models in English for Academic Purposes is an opportunity for the construction of students' scientific identity.

The empirical results demonstrated the low level of the engineering students' self-evaluation. Moreover, the engineering students indicated that they are role models for their friends, family members and colleagues. Therein, there is a need for the increase of the level of the engineering students as role models. And a particular focus has to be put on the increase of the level of the engineering female students as role models as their self-evaluation referred to the low level.

The following research question has been formulated: How to organize use of role models of bi-modal nature in higher education?

The present research has limitations. The inter-connections between role models, bi-modal phenomenon, the use of role models and students' self-evaluation have been set. Another limitation is the empirical study conducted by involving only the engineering students of one higher education institution. Nevertheless, the results of the research – the elaborated questions for a survey - may be used as a basis of analysis of students as role models in other institutions. If the results of other empirical studies had been available for analysis, different results could have been attained. There is a possibility to continue the study.

Further research tends to implement empirical studies in other institutions. The search for relevant methods for evaluation of students as role models is proposed. A comparative research of universities' different programmes and levels could be implemented. A comparative research of different countries could be carried out, too.

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# OFFICIAL PEDAGOGY, FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LITERACY: A FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

The theoretical framework that informs this paper is systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994, Mathiessen, 1995 and Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004). This paper is not meant to be a guide for foreign language teachers on how to teach with a list of prescriptive tips to be adequately followed, but meant to highlight the importance of language teaching as a social functional activity. It stresses the need for a particular type of literacy that helps learners reflect on the ideational content of the educational input, questions beliefs and settled practices of their societies, and dwells on the educational requirement for any country to join the socio-economic revolutionary processes of Globalisation.

**Key words:** Education, pedagogy, foreign language teaching, systemic functional grammar, globalisation.

## 1. Introduction

To start with, the term functional is used here in its Hallidayan sense where language is seen as a semogenic phenomenon. Language is, indeed, a powerful meaning making resource that it is central in the process of socializing the individual. It is, thus central to teaching and learning that take place in our every day experience. It is, as Halliday (1993, p. 94) rightfully points out, "... the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience *becomes* knowledge" (Emphasis in the original). It plays an essential part in our socio-semiotic evolution as human beings.

No matter what our social background is, we all went, in our infancy, through the process of learning before our schooling experience. We are thus all prepared for any experience of official pedagogy. Our ability to learn is natural. What differentiates us is the social environment that we are raised in: our social interactions with our meaning group first (Halliday, 1975) and speech fellowship (Firth, 1957) and finally the wider speech community. As learners, we have all gone, starting from our schooling period, through two parallel types of pedagogy: the official pedagogy which refers to the institutionalized one and the local pedagogy ... that experience of learning implicitly on our own from our social environment. The latter always mediates the former.

Children capacity / speed to learn varies. This variation is not biological; it is in fact due to the social environmental conditions that children are brought up in. Students come to the classroom with their semiotic history. Our role as language teachers is to understand all the socio-semiotic aspects of these learners so that to help them to build the bridges that will give them "freedom to think, open up spaces for the mind to stretch to explore beyond here and now to what it truly means to be human" (Hasan, 2004, p. 70).

This process requires material educational conditions. A government that denies these conditions will necessarily end up with a nation incapable of understanding discrimination and invention (ibid: 43). In fact, underfunding and overcrowding are but two major short –cuts to mediocre education. This point leads us to mention the three key components of 'official pedagogy': curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. It is necessary to know the place/influence that these components have on transactions between the teachers and the cohort of students with whom they may be dealing. This topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

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Lukin (2012) argues that any educational system is iconic of the society in which it is implemented. She goes on saying that authoritarian societies will come up with an educational system that would maintain the existing authoritarian social structures and so on (ibid). In such contexts, what is, then, our responsibility as language teachers?

## 2. Teachers' role

First and foremost, there is a need to understand the nature of language not simply as a set of formal linguistic rules but as a resource for making meaning. We need to know that meaning is not encoded in linguistic forms, 'out there' and 'ready made', so to speak, to be consumed, but it is the outcome of the interface of language and the ecosocial environment. Learners should be well aware that it is a socially collective product derived through a mutually negotiated process (Breen, 1985). As teachers, we should provide learners with the wherewithal to construct, 'on the fly', a bespoke social grammar that not only reflects, to use Hymes' notions, the formally possible and the appropriate, but also the feasible and the performed. Students, in fact, must be aware of how meanings vary according to the use of language and reflect on its role as Halliday (1989, p. X) points out:

Language is a political institution: those who are wise in its ways, capable of using it to shape and serve important personal and social goals, will be the ones who are "empowered" (to use a fashionable word): able, that is, not merely to participate effectively in the world, but able also to act upon it, in the sense that they can strive for significant social change.

Internalizing the grammar is not enough for the language teachers. They have to tell their students how this lexicogrammar, in its Hallidayan sense, works so that to make meaning, and how meaning changes when changes at the structural levels are operated. This in fact goes in line with Widdowson's claim that in spite of the essential regulative function grammar has:

It has to be learnt in its regulative function, in association with lexis, as a necessary communicative resource. Over recent years we have seen the restoration of grammar from its temporary exile. But we surely do not want it restored under the old dispensation. We need to enquire into the way it relates to lexis, how it operates as a complement to context in the achievement of pragmatic meaning, how it functions in the regulation of language use. (1992, p. 334)

This cannot be achieved unless, as teachers, we know that grammar, when represented systematically, shows up three distinct network systems: language as reflection (construing human experience), language as action (enacting personal and social relationship), and language as enabling (facilitating the construction of the text). If teachers fail to tell their students that every act of meaning embodies all these metafunctions and show their intrinsic nature to language, learners will always deal with grammar at its formal level devoided of its social- semiotic dimension. Hence, teaching grammar in its traditional form isolated from its functional role, as meaning making resource, is a waste of time, likewise is the introduction of meaning without talking about how the formation of the structure (lexicogrammar) realizes systemic choices. In so doing, teachers will deny their students "the power of reflections of how meanings are transacted in their communities" (Hasan, 2011, p. 374) and capture the reality of language as experienced by its users. Knowing these issues is a precondition for being a teacher of the kind of literacy that Hasan (2011) refers to as 'reflection literacy'.

## 3. Types of literacy

Hasan (ibid) talks about three kinds of literacy: recognition literacy, action literacy and reflection literacy. Recognition literacy presents language as a mere passive means of reflecting pre-existing knowledge without any control of that which it reflects. It is somehow an education, which serves better indoctrination and prepares learners into a framework where they follow orders and conform to the rules of those in power

(see Chomsky, 2012, p. 3-14). However, language is far more than that. It construes reality and shapes meanings that are socially motivated.

Action literacy is an approach which sees schooling as necessary for providing equal opportunities for learners to develop their discursive competence. For this reason, education has many consequences for life chances in society. It remains one of, if not the best means for social success /promotion in life.

Reflection literacy is a literacy that is meant to produce knowledge. This production starts with the recognition of the semiotic resources and their role in construing ideological discourses that might be challenged. If this kind of literacy is successfully implemented through an appropriate pedagogy, it will produce, within learners, a distrust of what we refer to as 'doxic knowledge', i.e. knowledge whose sole authority is the authority of someone in authority (Hasan, 2011, p. 200). The advantages of this kind of literacy is that it develops within learners an inquisitive mind, a type of knowledge that would enable them to question established beliefs, cultural norms and confirmed discourses, including the educational discursive norms. They would be able hence, to depart from the moulded traditional norms to more organic integration diversities. Literate students in such framework:

might be able to question the wisdom of the short-sighted goals that we have embraced the world over. They might indeed be able to ask what we have lost by gaining control over the environment, while ignoring all notions of self-control, by construing knowledge as a competitive enterprise, while failing to acknowledge the centrality of the over in our very survival as human beings. (Ibid: 200-201)

Indeed, such literacy that turns its back to the established norms and questions them, and if it stands as such will most probably equate the term literate with that of educated and this with that of understanding better our conditions and improving them.

#### **4. The functional relevance of foreign language teaching**

How does this relate then to the act of foreign language teaching? How can the kind of reflection literacy be implemented in the foreign language classroom? What would then be its functional relevance? One may suggest that why should we, after all, bother ourselves with such a peripheral discipline ... for it is considered as such in most cases ... and claim its relevance? Is not foreign language teaching just a kind of an official educational subject meant to be a sort of 'time filling', keeping students, so to speak, busy?

Over the last two decades and with the emergence of Globalisation, there has been a growing interest/ revival, I would say, in the learning of foreign languages, English in particular. Most of the international education reform movements insisted on establishing English not only as a subject itself, but also and most importantly as a medium/ tool of academic study. This has been intertwined with the capacity to compete internationally and broadening ' students' general and specialised knowledge and build professional expertise in English so that they can take leadership in the international arena' (Taguchi, 2012: 15). Indeed, in many countries English-medium curriculum has been twinned with the efficiency in conducting business and leading international organisations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "We need the English language to enter the global arena. Out of 10 million books published in the world 85% are in English. The science, all the new developments and information - they are all in English nowadays," asserts the Kazakh president, Nazerbayev (Zhumzhumina, 2013). This interest has to do with the desire of many countries to be part of this ongoing process that involves an increasing local diversity and speedy exchange of commodities and information (Kubota, 2002:13). As such, there is a need to transform social and institutional conventions to adapt to the international demands. For this, human contact through cultural boundaries is a necessity. This raises the discourse of English as a lingua franca/ international language influencing foreign language education. Indeed, the flow of people around the world, the development of the information based economy facilitated by the new information technologies has increased, in this era of globalisation, the need ... to contradict here Pilar and Pavlenko (2009, p. 11) ... for one particular language: English. This has become,

regardless of what the advocate of linguistic imperialism may think, synonymous with foreign language teaching. As such, all other things being equal, my next discussion will focus mainly on this particular language.

All the educational reforms that took place worldwide promoted the acquisition of the communication means of the West, English in particular. This linguistic choice was believed to enable citizens to express and explain their countries values and points of view to people worldwide. The case of Li Yang Crazy English, in China, and his slogan is a good example: "Conquer English to make China stronger" (Osnos, 2008). This is not the only aim and the sole tendency. This perception of English has not only brought about a phenomenon of English fever, but also endorsed an economic pragmatic view in learning English as an international language (revenues from English language learning reached \$35.5 billion in 2013 and are expected to raise considerably in 2018). Consequently, it has reinforced ELT practices that aim at preparing learners of English for not only the 'understanding of others' but also for 'being competitive', and here lies the functional relevance for the introduction of English in national curriculums. The aim envisaged is to develop self-expression fostered through learning English for communicative purposes as well as focusing on the 'expressive' mode, along with developing within learners logical thinking necessary in international communication (Kubota, 2002, p. 17). This logical thinking is to be developed through writing and cross-cultural understanding. What is questionable is not in fact this choice per se, but the kind of methodology applied to achieve it. The inevitable questions are what kind of literacy is associated with learning English in the educational system? Is there any discrepancy between the political aims and the pedagogical ones? And how English is taught?

Any functional approach to language teaching/learning must take into account the following guiding principles:

- Learning is a semiotically mediated activity.
- Language and content are inseparable.
- Language users make choices based on their linguistic repertoires and these choices are related to the situations they participate in.
- Second language development is an expansion of the meaning making resources.
- Academic language features can be recognized across languages.
- Learning about language by developing a meaning-based metalanguage allows language users to be reflective about the meaning and power of the linguistic choices that others and they themselves make.
- Focused work on analyzing texts allows users to become aware of the meaning and power of language choices.
- Learning is socially distributed and occurs in communities of practice.

(Achugar *et al.*, 2007, p. 12-13)

This can be achieved only through the kind of literacy that Hasan referred to as reflective one and where knowledge of form and knowledge of discourse are treated as varying and variable. There is a necessity in such literacy for the teacher to make learners aware of the choices available to them so that to make meaning and how their choices construe experience and enact social processes. This cannot be realised unless s/he possess a particular knowledge of how to talk about language, a kind of metalanguage that Systemic Functional Linguistics offers, indeed.

Language from a functional systemic perspective is used, as Halliday and Mathiessen 2004 assert, to make sense of reality and carry out interactions with other people.

A key issue in education today is enabling students to participate in learning in such contexts in ways that make new ways of meaning available to all students and that build on linguistic diversity

as a resource that enriches learning for all. Therefore, pedagogies dealing with this reality need to have a dual focus: promoting academic language development and creating a space to value the linguistic resources students bring with them. (Achugar *et al.*, 2007, p. 9)

However, to go back to the questions that I have raised in the previous lines, there seems to be a negative side about the way English is dealt with in the language classroom. The communicative learning, though it sees meaning as intrinsic to language fails, or should I say, teachers fail to show how this meaning is negotiated, how it is transacted. In other words (in Widdowson's words), there is a need to show how language has been used along a diachronic continuum, so to speak, to serve social functions, and how these uses have been abstracted then semantically encoded (Widdowson, 2004:15). They do not raise learners' awareness to the metafunctions of language and show how they are intrinsic to language itself, i.e. its fundamental property, something that is basic to the evolution of the semantic system. Thus, meaning must not be seen as a single entity realised by the use of language in context, it is a composite of four components: experiential, interpersonal, logical and textual. These are all interwoven in the making of discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1989). This is the essential nature of a functionalist approach that could make reflection literacy possible. In dealing with meaning in such a perspective, teachers will inevitably address ideological issues and practices allowing their learners to reflect upon the content, looking for ways of construing another reality different from that of the author. The result of this process would make them ready to respond critically to new registers that they encounter in their daily life. They would be less ready neither to align to the cultural assumptions of the text they read nor consume naturally their ideologies.

## 5. Conclusions

It would be hard to see how foreign language teaching could help countries join in the global village if their leaders deny their population the right to question established values by imposing through the educational institutions that they have under their control a monolithic view, their view of the world. We cannot be involved in the ongoing process of globalisation, which by its nature requires openness to the notion of otherness, reflecting/accepting beliefs of others, interacting/cooperating with them while we have been introduced starting from our schooling era to a literacy that recognises only knowledge of he who is in authority and aligns us naturally with the 'official' state discourse. The educational system as it is set in Algeria and in authoritarian countries is a state controlled/contrived system, starting from the management of the school to that of the classroom. The presence of different types of inspectors: administrative and pedagogical is not to ensure a better management, that's what we are left to think, but to ensure the state upper hand on these institutions. Private schools were called for 'order', some closed down, though their management at all levels was simply excellent, just because they did not observe thoroughly the national curriculum ... a pedagogical document imbued with ideological beliefs and practices ... those of the state system. The outcome is such that we have ended up with a mediocre education incapable of providing the country with valuable competencies in all domains on one hand and increasing our ignorance of otherness on the other. We are neither capable of reflecting on our values nor understanding those of other nations. Our schooling institutions are unable to produce knowledge, let alone disseminate it. Countries fall apart, I would argue, when they give the label 'intellectual elite' to people that are incapable of reasoning, thinking and producing knowledge. This happens and happens quite often. After giving the matter a serious thought, it seems at the face of it, that the kind of 'literacy' we are introduced to is that which enables us to read the state instructions and act on the state orders, no less and no more. Between giving me a fish and teaching me how to fish, I would rather go for the latter.

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# TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF TARGET LANGUAGE USE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: A REPORT FROM NORWAY

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## ABSTRACT

For a considerable number of years, mother tongue (MT) use has been ostracized in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms as a form of poor teaching that negatively affects target language (TL) acquisition (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). However, research on the potential disadvantages of teaching approaches that integrate MT use is inconclusive, as is research on the positive effects of an all-TL learning environment (Hall & Cook, 2012). Thus, EFL teachers who share the same language with their students are often left wondering to what extent and in what contexts they should employ TL and MT. Unlike the curricula of other countries, where policy makers often suggest the maximal use of TL, the Norwegian curriculum for the subject of English does not contain any direct statements prescribing English as the sole language of instruction. The present study investigated the perceptions of Norwegian primary school teachers in different grades regarding their TL use when teaching EFL using an online survey. Specifically, the project addressed the following research questions: (1) How often do teachers use English in the EFL classroom? (2) In what situations and for what purposes do teachers use the TL? (3) Is there a correlation between years of teaching experience and the amount of TL use in the classroom? (4) Do teachers who have college credits in English employ the TL to a larger extent than the teachers who do not? The participants' self-reports suggest that while the TL is used up to 50% of the time, its use varied from giving instructions and stating objectives to giving praise and criticism. This implies that Norwegian teachers may employ the TL to a lesser extent than the existing literature suggests (Macaro, 2005). However, no correlation was found between the amount of TL used and teachers' expertise in and experience teaching the TL. To caution against an overdependence on MT, the article concludes by reiterating the need to develop and define systematic practices of MT use that facilitate foreign language acquisition and by calling for future research to shed light on bilingual or multilingual approaches in foreign language teaching.

**Key words:** Target language, mother tongue, EFL, EFL teachers

## 1. Introduction

During the last two decades, the teaching methodologies favouring communication in the L2 has led to the ostracization of the mother tongue (MT) in monolingual English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in support of the monolingual principle that advocates exclusive use of the Target Language (TL) in lessons, and which has been "promoted as best practice" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p.252). Consequently, in an attempt to abide by the underlying assumption that learning a Foreign Language (FL) can only be achieved through maximized exposure to the TL, many language instructors embraced the monolingual approach, which, in many cases, resulted in the prohibition of the usage of the students' MT. Despite the increasing tendency towards L1 use, Sampson (2012) argued, "the reality remains that even in many of today's most sophisticated learning centres, 'English only' wall signs can be found alongside the interactive whiteboards and systems of forfeits for 'rule breakers' form part of everyday class routine" (p. 294). As national curricula for FL lessons enforced these practices in many countries, the prominence of TL use in the EFL classroom has further strengthened, and an all-TL lesson has been considered the ideal environment, and one that would increase possibilities for learning (Pacek, 2005; Pachler & Field, 2001; Thornbury, 2006). The national

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curriculum in Wales (ACCAC, 2000), for instance, states that “pupils should be expected and encouraged to use and respond to the target language for most of the time... [L1] may be required, but should only be used when necessary” (p. 28). Similarly, the current English language curriculum guide in Hong Kong prescribes teachers to develop a setting which would make extensive use of the TL. In particular, the guide urges teachers to “teach English through English and encourage learners to interact with one another in English” (The Curriculum Development Council, 2004, p. 109).

In the Norwegian curriculum for the subject of English (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013), however, there are no direct statements instructing teachers to employ the L2 as the sole or principal language in their lessons. As a matter of fact, there is no clear guidance as to the amount of TL and MT that should be used in the EFL classroom. The only reference that the English subject curriculum makes regarding the medium of instruction is in its introductory section where it emphasizes that the objective of the course is to “build up general language proficiency through listening, speaking, reading and writing, and provide the opportunity to acquire information and specialized knowledge through the English language” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 2). On the other hand, the curriculum stresses that students should be able to draw on their MT knowledge in the process of acquiring English. Considering the absence of detailed teaching guidelines and expectations, the rationale behind this study is to investigate Norwegian EFL teachers’ language use practices in their classrooms. In fact, it specifically focuses on Norwegian EFL primary school teachers, and its purpose, after a short review of the associated literature, is to explore through self-reporting the extent to which they employ the TL in their lessons.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *Monolingual principle origin*

The belief that EFL teachers should maximize their TL usage and even strive for an all-TL classroom owes its origin to the decline of the Grammar-Translation method and the rise in popularity of Krashen’s (1985) input hypothesis (Hall & Cook, 2012). Krashen considers input crucial for language acquisition, and in monolingual settings, the language classroom constitutes the main source of input (Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). As the input hypothesis holds that second language acquisition parallels first language acquisition, it is believed that students should immerse themselves in an environment with a sufficient quantity of comprehensible TL input for acquisition to take place. When EFL teachers heavily rely on the MT, exposure to comprehensible input decreases significantly (Chambers, 1991; Duff & Polio, 1990; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; MacDonald, 1993; Pennycook, 1994). With the monolingual principle gaining widespread recognition and language institutions proceeding with the rejection of the Grammar-Translation method, the alternative approaches that emerged, such as Communicative Language Teaching and the Direct Method, support L2 exclusivity, lack of translation, and the prohibition of the MT in the foreign and second language classroom.

### 2.2 *Advantages of extensive TL use*

What expanded the popularity of all-TL approaches, and ultimately cemented the prevalence of the monolingual principle in EFL settings, was the assumption that students’ exposure to the TL, not only outside but also inside the classroom, is limited, and TL use in the classroom should, therefore, be maximized. (Bateman, 2008; Crichton, 2009; Duff & Polio, 1990; Hitotuzi, 2006; Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2000; Meiring & Norman, 2002; Schmidt, 1995; Turnbull, 2001). Meiring and Norman’s (2002) study, for instance, conducted amongst FL learners in schools throughout Britain, showed that less TL was produced by students than was expected given the number of years of language learning they had undergone. Macaro (2000), however, highlighted that language learners can only attain high levels of communicative competence if they employ the TL. Elaborating on this further, Meiring and Norman (2002) argued that while research findings have not conclusively supported exclusive use of the TL, its integration in the classroom positively affects language acquisition. This is because, Macaro (2001) added, “teaching entirely through the TL makes the language real, allows learners to experience unpredictability, and develops the learners’ own in-built language system”

(p. 531). Pinter (2006) claimed that the latter is particularly true for young learners as it helps them familiarize themselves with the phonological system of the TL.

It is precisely for the reasons outlined above that Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) stressed the teachers' key role in increasing opportunities for TL exposure. Evidently, even though emphasis should be placed on students' usage of the TL, teacher usage of the TL is equally important (Meiring & Norman, 2002). This is because, Chaudron (1988) underlined, instructors are responsible for offering students a setting that makes extensive use of the TL not only in direct teaching but also in classroom management practices. This idea was also mirrored in Turnbull's (2001) study, which also supported the significance of providing students with sufficient TL, especially in situations where students' only opportunity to practice the language is in the classroom. Understanding the restrictions of practicing the TL in monolingual environments, the student participants in Brown's (2009) study postulated that in an ideal learning environment, teachers should force students to employ the TL outside the classroom. Turnbull (2001), too, acknowledged that prompting teachers to integrate more TL usage in the EFL classroom to enhance student learning does not suffice, yet he proposed that further studies should explore the topic before drawing final conclusions. It is vital, he persisted, for future research to define "maximized and optimal TL use by teachers ... in terms of quantity of its use and in terms of when it is acceptable and/or effective for teachers to draw on the students' [MT]" (p. 537).

Extensive use of the TL in the lesson is also believed to eradicate possibilities of heavy dependence on the MT (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005; Turnbull, 2001). If teachers fail to make students understand the role of the TL, Harbord (1992) warned, the interaction with their teachers and their peers will take place in the MT even if learners are able to utter what they wish to convey in the TL. This seems to chime with the findings of a study conducted by Hitotuzi (2006), which stressed the significance of prompting EFL learners to use the TL from the early learning stages to help them evade their resorting to their MT.

Furthermore, the use of the TL was underlined in the literature as one of the factors that contributes towards mitigating MT interference (Halasa & Al-Manaseer, 2012; Hitotuzi, 2006; Ross, 2000). Interference occurs when "an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference from, or some degree of similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner's first language" (Jackson, 1981, p. 101). Such possibilities were identified in the literature as early as 1937 (Keating, 1937). Instances of MT interference, Ross (2000) argued, vary widely, and perceived similarities with learners' MT can prove a hindrance to the mastering of TL grammatical structures, stylistic features, and pronunciation. While teachers are often aware of interference issues, many of them feel they are unable to help students eradicate them (Ross, 2000). Hitotuzi (2006), on the other hand, and despite popular belief, highlighted that MT interference in the TL learning process "is just one minuscule source of error" (p. 165). In addition, Kavaliauskiene *et al.* (2010) found that negative transfer was reduced whenever students were provided with information regarding links between the two languages.

Emphasizing the practical aspect, Meiring and Norman (2002) proposed strategies which promote student TL use in the EFL classroom. For example, they suggested a practice of inducements offered by teachers which could contribute towards increasing TL usage. To help students surmount the obstacle imposed by unfamiliar vocabulary, the two authors encouraged them to incorporate body language to express themselves instead of resorting to the MT at once. Some of the further methods they proposed included the consistent use of the MT for explanation and contrasting purposes to enhance student language awareness, as well as frequent use of the TL when furnishing students with instructions or in other regular classroom activities to activate increased TL output. Yet, as a first step, Oxford (1999) underlined, teachers should allow students to employ the TL "with less than perfect performance" (p. 67) to reduce their potential fear of making mistakes.

### 2.3 Teacher anxiety and TL use

In an attempt to maximize opportunities for TL exposure, some institutions, as well as individual EFL teachers, proceeded to adopt radical measures. Some of the participants in Duff and Polio's (1990) study, for instance, stated that they were advised against the use of the MT in the classroom, while Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) pinpointed that their participants' curriculum encouraged maximum use of the TL instead of the MT. Similarly, the participants in Ford's study (2009) favoured an English-only approach, with some

teachers extending this to a complete prohibition of the MT. Studies have revealed, however, that teachers in monolingual settings had recourse to the students' MT in their lessons (Kim & Elder, 2005; Macaro, 2001; White & Storch, 2012). Correspondingly, studies conducted in Norwegian EFL classrooms have reported heavy reliance on the MT, which is frequently employed for translation purposes (Drew, 2004; Drew, Oostdam, & Toorenburg, 2007; Eikrem, 2012; Mehl, 2014).

In the last two decades, research investigating teachers' beliefs regarding the use of the MT in the EFL classroom in different cultural settings elicited the participants' idealized perceptions towards the exclusive use of the TL (Al-Shidhani, 2009; Crawford, 2004; Drew, Oostdam, & Toorenburg, 2007; Duff & Polio, 1990; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Peng & Zhang, 2009; Polio & Duff, 1994; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). The argument these researchers put forward supported the assumption that using the MT would discourage learners from focusing on handling TL information in particular when they were aware that they would be furnished with clarifications in their MT. For this reason, Sharma (2006) argued, some teachers chose not to use the MT even if it would be advisable for practical reasons. Overall, it seemed that teachers idealized the all-TL classroom based on prescriptions sourced in beliefs and maxims, which, because of a lack of research, are still embedded in their minds, while these unfounded assumptions are also cultivated and encouraged by curricula across the world (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; White & Storch, 2012). Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005) ascribed similar views to "the single tenet [that] has persisted throughout the Western language pedagogy revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond," namely "that the use of L1 is to be avoided in the FL classroom" (p. 235). The idealization of TL exclusivity is an attitude that still seems to be instilled in teachers and influence EFL settings (Imran & Wyatt, 2015).

In spite of this idealization, policies mandating English-through-English instruction are also associated with increased teacher anxiety levels over not being able to adhere to the guidelines (Kim, 2008; Lai, 1996). Kim's (2008) study conducted in Korea, for instance, where English is prescribed as the medium of instruction from primary to secondary school, revealed the presence of anxiety about using the TL among teachers. This lack of confidence triggered by similar policies was linked with teachers of higher grades who had to cover more demanding and advanced topics than in the early years of English while they also experienced "additional pressures [from their duty] to prepare their students [for a] college entrance exam" (Kim, 2008, p.63). The participants underlined that this policy created "a psychological barrier" (p. 53), while 40% of the teachers identified it as "painful" (p. 60). Teachers with increased TL and EFL teaching experience, however, reported less anxiety. This is because, as Littlewood and Yu (2011) along with Pachler, Evans, and Lawes (2007) underlined, adopting an all-TL environment presupposes a dedication and firmness which can only be founded on "a long-term view of language learning" (Pachler, Evans, & Lawes, 2007, p. 31). The latter, the two research studies concluded, can only be acquired by increased experience, which also contributes towards boosting teachers' confidence in employing the TL as the main medium of instruction.

Furthermore, teachers' quest to transform their classrooms into what Wingate (1993) labelled a "little corner of an English-speaking country" (p. 22) often leads to striking discrepancies between actual and reported classroom practices, with the range of MT use being underreported (Kim & Elder, 2005). In their study, White and Storch (2012) found that teachers were influenced by beliefs about what makes a good EFL lesson, resulting in their idealising all-TL settings, which often did not reflect their actual classroom behaviour. Despite teachers highlighting their preference for an all-TL approach, studies that examined the teachers' stance on TL usage revealed the participants' reliance on the MT in their lessons (Al-Shidhani, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). In some cases, the discrepancy between teachers' idealized views and their classroom behaviour, as illustrated in the literature, could generate a feeling of guilt for not being able to abide by the institutional requirement policy that mandates English-only teaching (Burden, 2000; Butzkamm, 2003; Gulzar, 2010; Trent, 2013).

#### *2.4 MT and TL use in the classroom*

Evidently, despite teachers often stating otherwise, studies investigating MT usage by teachers in monolingual settings demonstrated its presence in the classroom. Research conducted in classrooms across the globe identified that the purposes for which teachers choose to have recourse to the MT fell into three categories: (1) developing productive classroom relationships between teachers and students, (2)

exemplifying difficult TL concepts, and (3) establishing discipline in the classroom (Bateman, 2008; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Complex grammar concepts which were deemed too difficult to be expressed in the TL constituted the main reason for initiating MT exchanges (Cianflone, 2009; Duff & Polio, 1990; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Kim & Elder, 2005; Polio & Duff, 1994). This choice was triggered by two factors: students' limited proficiency level and the ensuing difficulty in grasping abstract ideas and/or concepts, especially when there were no similarities with the MT. However, it was also linked to the need to save classroom time, as explaining complex concepts in the TL was often perceived as something that takes undue time. Littlewood and Yu (2011) even proceeded to stress that an insistence on the TL during grammar explanations might be a "possible source of demotivation" (p. 70). Precisely because of its helpful role when dealing with complex language concepts in the classroom, the MT has been described as an important "psychological tool" (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998, p. 314) used to lower anxiety. This seems to correspond with quantitative studies conducted in university settings which revealed students' preference towards the MT for grammar exemplifications, as they believed it assisted in the comprehension process and in imparting knowledge (Dujmović, 2007; Raschka, Sercombe & Chi-Ling, 2009; Rolin-lanzity & Varshney, 2008; Sharma, 2006; Tang, 2002). Additionally, the MT has been found to assist in creating good teacher-student relationships and a relaxed environment (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Pachler & Field, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994; Qian, 2009; Rolin-lanzity & Varshney, 2008). Pachler, Evans, Redondo and Fisher (2001), for instance, found that a lack of the MT prevented teachers from making connections with their learners and instead contributed towards setting up a barrier. In addition, the MT is considered particularly effective when employed by teachers to discipline students and maintain order when they fail to comply with instructions (Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994; Tang, 2002). In these studies, students were more obedient and willing to conform to their teachers' guidelines whenever told to do so in their MT. The effectiveness of this approach constituted the third main reason teachers opted for the MT.

The TL, on the other hand, has almost unanimously been found essential when used by teachers to map out and conduct tasks and drills (Chavez, 2003; Duff & Polio, 1990; Rolin-lanzity & Varshney, 2008). Because of the limited opportunities available to practice the TL outside the classroom, both teachers and students feel that the TL should always be used in oral activities including presentations, discussions, and role plays (Cole, 1998; Macaro, 2001). Such possibilities are also believed to enable students to practice pronunciation and familiarize themselves with the phonological system of the TL (Chavez, 2003; Rolin-lanzity & Varshney, 2008). For this reason, students and teachers tend to agree that the use of MT for procedural purposes is "too good an opportunity to expose students to ... the TL to waste on the mother tongue" (Prodromou, 2002, p. 7). Most teachers, therefore, select the TL for classroom management including providing students with feedback and instructions (Macaro, 1997; Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-lanzity & Varshney, 2008).

### *2.5 Bilingual approaches to EFL teaching*

Current research has deviated from the teachers' preference of the monolingual principle in support of a bilingual approach to EFL teaching, an approach, in other words, that strives to strike a balance between TL and MT use in the language classroom. The gradual shift away from an English-only classroom is mirrored in recent studies conducted in EFL monolingual settings, pinpointing the "fundamentally flawed argument" (Weschler, 1997, p. 79) governing all-TL environments which predetermined such setting as a prerequisite for successful learning (Dujmović, 2007; Ford, 2009; Hall & Cook, 2012). These studies highlighted that such inferences were based on unfounded educational hypotheses rather than meticulous research. EFL pedagogy has overlooked, and in some cases subdued effective bilingual approaches favouring instead the monolingual principle which was associated with "good teaching" (Inbar-Lourie, 2010, p. 351).

In light of an increasingly widespread belief embracing the benefits of multilingualism (Cenoz & Hoffmann, 2003; Cook, 2009), current research promotes judicious integration of the MT while encouraging teachers to adopt a bilingual pedagogy to EFL teaching and prompting them to work with students' languages to develop the TL (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia et al., 2011; Halasa & Al-Manaseer, 2012; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lin & Wu, 2015; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Codeswitching has been acknowledged as an inescapable process in EFL environments, and the conviction that bilingual approaches can be detrimental to language learning has been reconsidered. Time, therefore, seems to be ripe to abandon the

monolingual principle which has for years governed second language teaching and to embrace students' linguistic repertoires as an asset in the acquisition of consecutive languages (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cheng, 2013; Halasa & Al-Manaseer, 2012; Hall & Cook, 2012; Lin & Wu, 2015).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 *The research context*

In Norway, English is taught as an obligatory school subject beginning in grade one. Universities and university colleges offer teacher education programs in three tracks: grades 1–7, 5–10 and 8–13. The national guidelines specify that teacher education students are required to take core courses in pedagogy, and students in the 1–7 track are also required to obtain credits in Norwegian and mathematics. To obtain an English endorsement, 60 credits in English are required at the middle and secondary school level. Up until 2015, however, when the new guidelines requiring elementary school teachers to obtain 30 credits in English to receive an EFL teaching endorsement were introduced, no credits in English were requisite in the 1–7 track. Consequently, in elementary grades, English is often taught by teachers without formal qualifications in the subject (Drew *et al.*, 2007; Lagerstrøm, 2007).

To date, research on TL use has mostly been conducted in contexts in which authorities mandate the monolingual principle (Duff & Polio, 1990; Giannikas, 2011; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). The amount of TL use has been found to vary and to be associated with teachers' personal views on language teaching and years of teaching experience, with increased teaching experience leading to increased TL use (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Kim, 2008; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Pachler, Evans, & Lawes, 2007). The particularity of the Norwegian context is that curriculum guidelines for the subject of English not only do not explicitly require exclusive TL use in the classroom but also instruct that students should be able to draw on their MT skills in acquiring English and “see relationships between English, one's native language, and other languages” (Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 2). In grade five, for example, a student is expected to “find similarities between words and expressions in English and his/her own native language” (p. 4). At the same time, many primary EFL teachers working in Norwegian classrooms do not have formal qualifications in teaching English (Drew *et al.*, 2007). Finally, most research to date has inquired into teachers' use of the MT, whereas the goal of the present study was to investigate the issue from the TL perspective.

#### 3.2 *Research questions*

To investigate the extent of TL use in contexts in which the curriculum does not prescribe it as the sole medium of instruction, the present study probed into EFL teachers' beliefs about oral and written TL use and the specific contexts in which the TL is employed in primary schools in Norway. To this end, the study collected data through an online survey. This method was selected to obtain results from a large number of participants across the country. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers in Norway employ the TL in oral and written communication in the classroom?
2. In what situations and for what purposes is the TL used?
3. Is there a correlation between years of teaching experience and the amount of TL use in the classroom?
4. Do teachers who have college credits in English employ the TL to a larger extent than the teachers who do not have such credits?

#### 3.3 *Data collection and participants*

The online survey, administered in Norwegian, included items that elicited information about the participants' background and their self-report about their use of English in the classroom. Information about the age and gender of the teachers was also collected. In addition, the teachers were asked about their

formal education in English. This is because until 2015, as stated earlier, primary school teachers in Norway were not required to obtain credits in English or foreign language pedagogy, but only credits in general education studies. The participants were also instructed to provide general information about their teaching background including the part of the country in which they have been teaching, their years of teaching experience, the grade level(s) in which they have been teaching, and the length to which they have been involved in teaching English. Questions pertaining to TL use in the classroom were as follows:

1. In your opinion, what percentage of oral communication is performed in English?
2. In your opinion, what percentage of written communication is performed in English?
3. In what situations do you use English in your EFL classroom at different grade levels? (Multiple answers possible; answer choices: grades 1–7; announcements, instructions, criticism/discipline, praise, activities, everyday conversations, routines, lesson plan and objectives, introduction of topics and activities, lectures, I do not use English).

To obtain generalizable results, respondents from all over the country were invited to participate. The survey was sent to five schools in each of the country's 19 counties, located in five different regions, and the only primary school on Svalbard, which amounted to 96 different schools. Sixty-six teachers responded, but eleven of the responses were incomplete and were, therefore, removed from the study. Thus, a total of 61 responses were included in the analysis.

In total, five males and 50 females from all five regions of Norway submitted complete survey responses. The majority of the respondents were 31 years of age or older, with only seven being 30 or younger. Only six of the participants could be considered novice teachers, with 0–2 years of teaching experience. The majority (30 teachers) had more than 10 years of experience, and 19 of the participants had completed 3–9 years of teaching at the primary level. In addition, over half of the participants had six or more years of experience teaching English. Only 10 of the participants taught English between 0 and 2 years, and 14 between 3 and 5 years. However, of all respondents, only 26 (about 47%) indicated that they had received credits in English. One of the respondents reported no teaching degree.

Because the survey did not specifically ask about the municipalities in which the teachers have been working, it is not possible to determine if and to what degree each municipality is represented in the study. The researchers did, however, collect information about the regions in which the respondents have been working: 26 respondents were from Eastern Norway, 10 from Trøndelag, nine from Western Norway, nine from Northern Norway, and one from Southern Norway.

### 3.4 Data analysis

It was hypothesized that the reported TL use would be lower and less extensive than in contexts in which the monolingual principle was mandated by national curricula. It was also hypothesized that teachers with less teaching experience and those who did not have formal qualifications in English would use the TL to a lesser extent than those with more years of teaching experience or formal qualifications in English. Finally, it was expected that TL use would increase with grade level.

To allow for a quantitative analysis, only closed-ended questions were used. The survey was completely anonymous and participants' IP addresses were not stored. The data were coded in Excel and analyzed using the SPSS analytical software. In addition to descriptive statistics, chi-square tests were used to investigate whether there was a significant correlation between reported TL use and years of teaching experience as well as between reported TL use and whether or not teachers had college credits in English.

### 3.5 Findings

As this study aimed to explore the extent to which the TL is used and the situations in which primary school EFL teachers in Norway employ the TL in the classroom, the first two questions asked the participants about their estimated use of English for oral and written communication. The majority of the teachers estimated their oral TL use at 31% or higher. However, only 38% of the respondents claimed that more than 55% of oral language use in their classroom is performed in English (Table 1).

*Table 1. Self-reported percentage of oral TL use*

ANSWER	Number of respondents	Percentage
0–15%	3	5.5%
16–30%	11	20%
31–55%	20	36.5%
56–75%	11	20%
76–100%	10	18%
Total	55	100%

The reported TL use for written communication was lower than for oral communication. In fact, over half of the respondents estimated less than 55% of written communication in their classes to be in English, with 27% claiming between 0 and 15% of written communication to be performed in the TL. Only about a third of the teachers reported frequent use of the TL for written communication (56% or higher). In all, the findings suggest that English is used more frequently for oral than for written communication with students.

*Table 2. Self-reported percentage of written TL use*

ANSWER	Number of respondents	Percentage
0–15%	15	27%
16–30%	12	22%
31–55%	8	14.5%
56–75%	14	25.5%
76–100%	6	11%
Total	55	100%

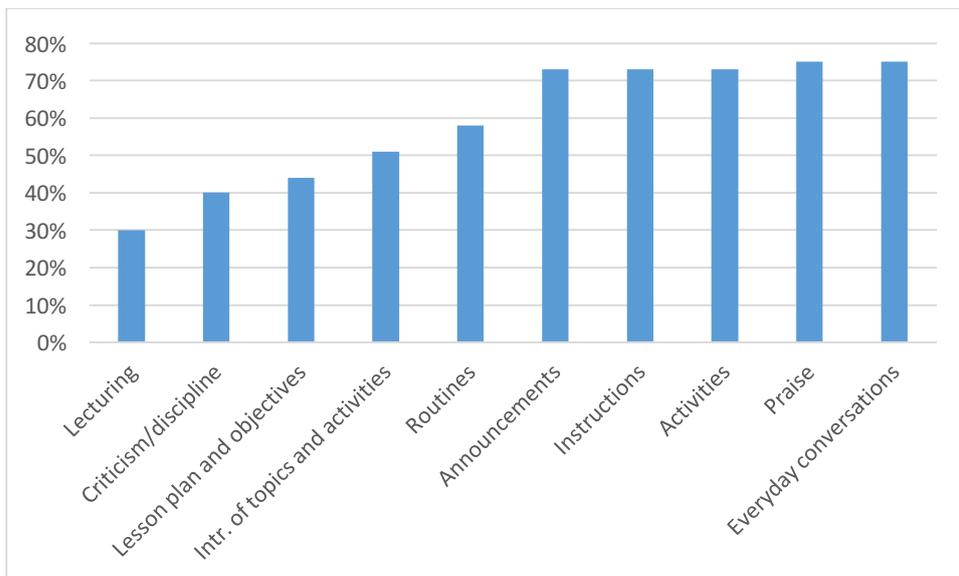
It was hypothesized that teachers with college credits in English use TL to a higher degree. A chi-square test was used to examine whether teachers who had credits in English employ the TL in oral and written interactions more than 55% of time. The results indicate that there was no significant association between the amount of oral TL used and whether or not the teacher had credits in English or not  $\chi^2(1)=3,28, p=,063$ . Similarly, no association was found between written TL use and credits in English  $\chi^2(1)=,86, p=,26$ .

Additional chi-square tests were run to examine whether the number of years of experience teaching EFL is correlated with the amount of oral and written TL used. As highlighted in the literature review section, increased teaching experience has been associated with increased TL usage in the classroom (Kim, 2008; Lai, 1996; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Pachler, Evans, & Lawes, 2007). The results of the present study, however, indicate that no such relationship existed in our data. Neither oral nor written TL use was associated with greater EFL teaching experience (Table 3).

Table 3. Chi-square results: correlation between oral and written TL use and EFL teaching experience

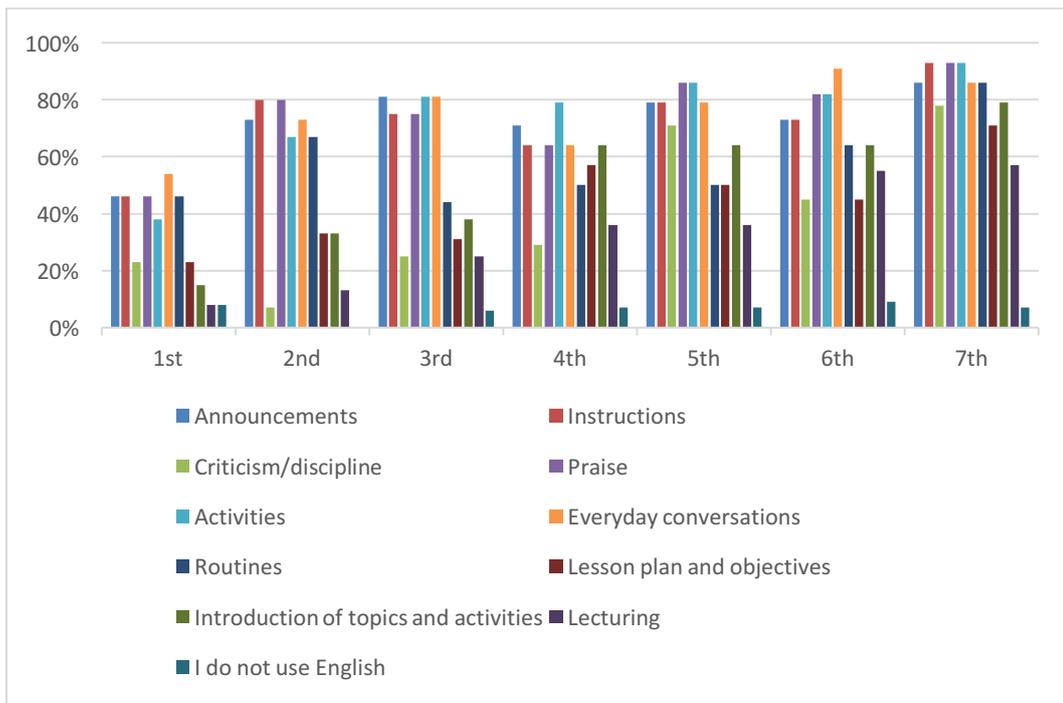
Oral TL use	Written TL use
$\chi=1.872$	$\chi=0.003$
df=1	df=1
p=0.14	p=0.59

The third question in the survey focused on the various situations in which English is employed, as well as how the use varies at different grade levels. Multiple answer choices were possible, as primary teachers in Norway can teach in more than one grade.



Graph 1. Amount of TL use in diverse situations

Overall, it can be noted that the highest percentage of teachers reported TL use during praise and everyday conversations (Graph 1). Relatively frequent use of English was also reported for routines, announcements, instructions, and activities, while the situations in which English was employed the least included lecturing, criticising/disciplining, presenting lesson plans, and stating lesson objectives.



Graph 1. Amount of TL use in diverse situations in different grade levels

The lowest use of the TL was reported by first-grade teachers. Only in the category “everyday conversations” did more than 50% of these teachers indicate that they use English. First-grade teachers appeared to use English to some extent in announcements, instructions, praise, and routines. However, very few of them employ English to criticise/discipline, to state lesson plans and objectives, to introduce topics and activities, and to lecture.

In second grade, an increase in the TL use was indicated. In particular, a high percentage of second-grade teachers reported the use of English to make announcements, provide instructions, conduct activities, deliver praise, and conduct routines, and hold everyday conversations. Very few second-grade teachers used the TL in criticism and discipline, in stating lesson plans and objectives, and in lecturing. Similar patterns were also noted in the case of teachers working with fourth- and sixth-grade students. Fifth- and seventh-grade teachers, on the other hand, reported a more frequent use of English for criticism and discipline as compared to the other grade levels. Fifty-percent or more of these teachers stated that they use English in all situations, except for lecturing in fifth grade. The majority of sixth-grade teachers also reported frequent use of the TL, with a particularly high number (over 90%) employing it in everyday conversations.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

This study set out to continue the line of research that explores the extent of TL use in foreign language classrooms. Specifically, it focused on a teaching context in which the exclusive use of the TL is not mandated by national curricula, in comparison with previous findings established for classrooms guided by the monolingual principle. Previous studies have identified a range of self-reported TL use in different settings from 10% to 100%, (Crawford, 2004; Dickson, 1996; Peng & Zhang, 2009; Polio & Duff, 1994). Whereas the participants in this study reported more TL use in oral than in written communication, the majority of them indicated that between 15 and 75% of their classroom communication is conducted in the TL. Thus, the amount of TL use appears to be highly individualized. This finding conforms to previous

research, and the hypothesis that Norwegian EFL teachers use less TL than teachers who are required to do so by national curriculum regulations is neither supported nor rejected.

The participants in this study reported more TL use in older grades. Whereas in all grade levels English is used most often for praise, everyday conversations, routines, announcements, instructions and activities, a steady increase occurs from first to seventh grade. The hypothesis that the TL use increases with grade level is thus supported. In addition, the participants reported that they rarely use the TL to criticize or discipline students, to present lesson plans and objectives, to provide introduction to topics and activities, and to lecture. This finding confirms the results of former studies, which have found that teachers often choose to perform these classroom functions in the MT (Macaro, 1997; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005).

In contrast with previous research, however, this study revealed no correlation between the amount of teaching experience and TL use. Research suggests that more experienced teachers employ the TL to a higher degree than do novice teachers (Kim, 2008; Lai, 1996; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Pachler, Evans, & Lawes, 2007). In the present study, no relationship was found between the extent of TL use and whether teachers had formal qualifications (and thus potentially more confidence in their own language skills) or whether they had more than five years of language teaching experience. Thus, the hypothesis that TL use increases with teaching experience is rejected. It is possible that the relationship between teaching experience and TL use is more complex than formerly assumed, but because the present study did not investigate factors such as teacher perceptions of what constitutes the best teaching practice in terms of TL and MT or other confounding variables, a more lucid explanation of this phenomenon is not possible at present.

There is a reason to believe that Norwegian is relatively common as the language of instruction in English classrooms (Drew, 2004; Drew *et al.*, 2007; Eikrem, 2012) including, heavy reliance on translation between the two languages (Mehl, 2014). Our findings indicate that some teachers employ the TL for less than 50% of classroom communication. It can thus be inferred that either Norwegian or other MTs (e.g., Sami, another official language in Norway, or other minority languages present in the classroom) are used alongside the TL. This may in part be due to teachers' low competence in English, especially in primary schools where until recently, there were no formal requirements for an English endorsement (Drew *et al.*, 2007; Lagerstrøm, 2007). However, it is also possible that Norwegian EFL teachers employ the MT judiciously in order to raise language awareness and enhance the comparison between the TL and the MT, as prompted by the national curriculum guidelines. As learning environments in Norway are becoming increasingly multilingual (Surkalovic, 2014), it is important to ensure that all students' linguistic repertoires are utilized as a valuable learning resource in the acquisition of additional languages, such as English.

It is important to acknowledge that this study has some limitations, in particular the sample size and the constraints inherent in the use of surveys as a data collection method. Future research in similar contexts should be conducted with larger sample sizes and include questions about both TL and MT use. Questionnaires should also be administered to students, whose viewpoint on the MT/TL debate is scarce. Observations could also be conducted to identify whether reported classroom behaviour reflects actual classroom realities. Other variables such as teachers' and learners' levels of language proficiency, teacher views on the right balance between the TL and the MT, and teachers' attitudes to multilingualism in the EFL classroom need to be included in the analysis. With Kim and Elder's (2005) and Carless's (2008) stressing the impact that teachers' language choice could have on increased TL use by students, a new avenue of exploration can be opened in this regard.

Notwithstanding its limitations, this study is an important contribution to the research on TL use in foreign language classrooms. It confirms that complete reliance on the TL mandated by the monolingual principle is undergoing a shift towards more balanced approaches and classrooms in which teachers practice balanced, judicious TL and MT use. Language teaching pedagogy can no longer "ignore or even suppress bilingual or multilingual options endorsing a predominantly monolingual policy, one which equates "good teaching' with exclusive ... target language use" (Inbar-Lourie, 2010, p. 351). On the contrary, the MT should have a critical role in enhancing the students' learning experiences. Understanding this could also contribute towards removing the stigma with which the MT is associated, as well as the guilt triggered by the difficulty of maintaining an all-TL environment. It is thus important to provide teachers in Norway and other European countries that have recently experienced a rapid increase in their immigrant populations, and thus in the number of non-majority language students in the classroom, with professional training that targets better

multilingual awareness and ability to draw on students' multilingual competence as a valuable resource (Cook, 2005;). The time has come to embrace multilingualism and to develop MT-inclusive approaches to foreign language instruction.

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# USING ICT TO CONTACT THE TARGET CULTURE: TEACHERS' VIEW

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## ABSTRACT

While information and communication technologies (ICT) have made speakers of and content from the target foreign culture easily accessible to learners and teachers alike, they may cause conditions for FL teachers. This study sought to uncover the nature and extent of FL teachers' use of ICT to contact the target culture, both for instruction and teachers' informal lifelong learning. By means of a survey, interviews and a mini-group interview with students, we portrayed the FL teachers' knowledge, beliefs, context, and behaviour in terms of ICT, and scrutinized how they are related. Findings showed that while teachers and students are sufficiently ICT-skilled and equipped, informal exchanges on the Internet are the exception. Excerpts from the interviews are presented in association with quantitative results.

**Key words:** Information and Communication Technologies, foreign language teaching, lifelong learning, informal learning; videoconference.

## 1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) learning has become an asset worldwide, and FL teachers are key agents in this achievement. Teaching a foreign language (FL) entails considerable more challenge than teaching a second language. Teachers are expected to provide contact and practice with the target language and be advised of cultural updates such as neologisms and new social entities. This study explored the two main aspects of teachers' professional practice: teaching, and learning as an informal and autonomous endeavour, also called 'lifelong learning' (LLL).

## 2. Using ICT to contact the target culture

With a global scope, lifelong learning is tied to the strategic objectives of all societies (e.g. Fauré, 1972; Delors, 1996; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1996; European Commission, 2000; Grace, 2013), and learning a language represents a complete example of a lifelong task (Council of Europe, 2001; Benson, 2013). In that continuous endeavor, informal learning becomes essential for a language learner's development because of its more authentic out-of-the-classroom language experience (Eaton, 2010; Oxford, 1996; Benson and Reinders, 2011; Richards, 2014). With the advent of ICT<sup>2</sup>, information and knowledge can flow across regions, allowing contact in real time on the internet with many others so transcending geographical distance (Urry, 2002). Thus, the global Internet user population has grown to include one third of the world's population<sup>3</sup>, offering a myriad of possibilities for intercultural interaction (Thorne, 2010) with native or proficient speakers of the target language located anywhere. Research shows evident support for the use of ICT in teaching language skills (e.g. Bates and Poole, 2003;

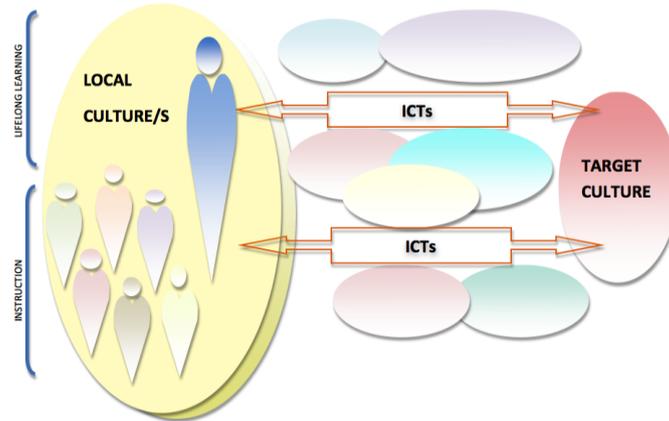
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<sup>2</sup> ICT include "all communication devices or applications, such as computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as social media or social networking tools, videoconferencing and distance learning" (Antoniadou, Canals, Mohr, and Zourou, 2011, p. 13).

<sup>3</sup> [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

Egbert and Hanson-Smith, 1999; Bonk and Zhang, 2008; Antoniadou, Canals, Mohr, and Zourou, 2011) since sustainable communication with people in distant locations seems a means for 'authentic, direct, and speedy access to native speakers and their cultures' (Kramsch and Thorne, 2002), thus offering advantages over the traditional language teaching approaches (Warschauer, 2006). These new approaches and networks benefit students and they can also forge links among instructors, vitally supporting teachers during the demanding professional-development process of learning (Müller-Harmann, 2007). Graph 1 represents the typical scenario for teachers:



Graph 1. Schema of ICT mediation with the target culture for LLL and instruction.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has more than fifty years of history as a sub-field of second language development research focussing on in-class or instructionally related uses of technology (for discussions, see Bax, 2003; Chapelle, 2009; Hubbard, 2009). Many useful and consistently corroborated findings have emerged from this literature (for reviews, see Chun, 2008; Thorne, 2008a; Couros, 2010; Ducate and Nike, 2011; Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, and Haywood, 2011; Warschauer, 2011). Communicating has stepped far ahead when massive communication by email and chat was complemented with the Voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) thus contributing with audio- and/or videoconferencing to FL pedagogy (Richards and Schmidt, 2002; Mullen, Appel, and Shanklin, 2008). Since then, calls can be made over the Internet across the world at no marginal cost, through free software such as Skype or GoogleTalk, even replacing landline technology (Graddol, 2006). Research has shown that online language exchange projects of this nature can contribute to the development of learner autonomy (O'Rourke, 2005; Schwienhorst, 2000; Newby *et al.* 2007), linguistic accuracy (Kinginger and Belz, 2005; O'Rourke, 2005; Ware and O'Dowd, 2008), intercultural awareness (Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd and Ritter, 2006; Ware, 2005), intercultural skills (Belz and Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Thorne, 2010), electronic literacies (Hauck, 2010), and task development (Appel and Gilabert, 2002; Furstenberg, Levet, English, and Maillet, 2001; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd and Waire, 2008, 2009).

With the growing use of CALL, various second language learning theories came about and emphasized the need for a unifying theory (Thorne and Smith, 2011). Most Internet-based CALL research has focused on institutionalized online international partnerships of structured collaborations (Thorne, 2010), which disregard the countless possibilities for intercultural interaction that open up in freely chosen social media. Siemens' (2005) connectivist theory of learning is characterized by learning environments with multiple partners in an open, dynamic and chaotic network. And although connectivism acknowledges the facilitating role of technology in the process of personal network creation, it contemplates the building of online as well as offline learning communities. Connectivism has broader scope than other learning theories as it is situated on different epistemologies (Bell, 2011), and thus parallels the principles of foreign language learning perspectives such as Vigotskian sociocultural theory (Thorne, 2008b), the interaction approach (Smith, 2003), and the ecological approach (van Lier, 2004).

The best-practice sought in the study entailed the use of online social network/s (e.g. Skype, Facebook, Twitter or other specifically for FL learning) to make connections with persons or groups with whom s/he shares interests and can sustain an exchange (i.e. through videoconferencing, web-based calls, chat, etc.).

Ideally, that exchange takes the form of conversational interaction, which has been considered essential for FL acquisition (Hymes, 1971; Krashen, 1981; Hatch, 1978; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Any of these learning activities may take place beyond the classroom walls with as varied interlocutors as possible.

In secondary schools, online intercultural exchange projects have been supported by major platforms such as ePals<sup>4</sup> and the European Union's Etwinning<sup>5</sup>. For example, the European project NIFLAR<sup>6</sup> studied the added value that integrating synchronous collaboration through video-web communication or virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life<sup>7</sup>) might have in language learning (Krooshof, Oldeman, de Graaff, 2011; Canto, Jauregi, and van den Bergh, 2013). Also, social networks that pair language learners with native speakers of the target FL help each other learn (e.g. Livemocha<sup>8</sup>, Busuu<sup>10</sup>, Italki<sup>11</sup>, and Myngle<sup>12</sup>).

In a recent report of the INTENT project<sup>13</sup> about the integration of telecollaborative networks in European Universities, (Helm, Guth, and O'Dowd, 2012), one case's aim was:

to open the student's network to include peer support chosen by the individual from native speakers, and encourage awareness of the advantages and disadvantages this can bring. Increasing the choice and making it as easy as possible to find people who share your interests for social as well as academic reasons seems important.' (Ibid, p. 74)

Although still within an institutional structure, the relatively informal and 'class-independent' nature of this exchange 'has avoided many of the problems which telecollaborative teachers often encounter' (Ibid, p. 74). If language teaching has become more exciting, it has also become considerably more complex (Kern and Warschauer, 2005). Organizing and implementing telecollaboration projects in foreign language curricula is not an easy endeavour (Belz and Thorne, 2006; Guth and Helm, 2010), as pedagogical, organizational and technical issues have to be addressed before cross-cultural interaction sessions can be carried out (O'Dowd and Ritter, 2006; O'Dowd, 2011; Thorne, 2003). These issues make many teachers reluctant to integrate telecollaboration in their teaching, as they are more aware of the burden such initiatives might impose than of the benefits they might have for language learners (Canto, Jauregi, and van den Bergh, 2013).

Designed for FL teachers, SpeakApps<sup>14</sup> is a multilingual European project, which offers free tools and methodologies online to encourage language students to practice oral skills (Appel, Santanach and Jager, 2012). Also, the DOT<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>project is a training kit for language teachers, which promotes up-to-date online teaching projects including bite-size activities for online language teacher training, suggestions for reflective activities and collaborative tools for sharing self-training experiences.

Regarding teacher learning, the Pan-European case study conducted by Kelly, Grenfell, Allan, Kriza, and McEvoy (2004) on secondary school L2/FL teacher training, provides a frame of reference for FL teacher pre- and in-service education, which recommends training in collaboration and networking inside and outside the immediate school context. These shifts in contexts, purposes, and genres associated with 'new-media-in-the-wild', i.e. the provision for learners to interact freely in open networks that they build (Thorne, 2010, p. 158), make it necessary to reassess the role of the teacher in telecollaborative exchanges with a responsive and proactive vision of FL instruction' (O'Dowd, 2007; Thorne, 2010). For Fitzpatrick and

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<sup>4</sup> [ePals.com](http://ePals.com)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.etwinning.net>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.niflar.eu>

<sup>7</sup> [secondlife.com](http://secondlife.com)

<sup>8</sup> <http://livemocha.com>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume15/ej59/ej59m1/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://busuu.com>

<sup>11</sup> <http://italki.com>

<sup>12</sup> <http://myngle.com>

<sup>13</sup> <http://es.slideshare.net/franhelm/the-intent-project>

<sup>14</sup> <http://moodle.speakapps.org/>

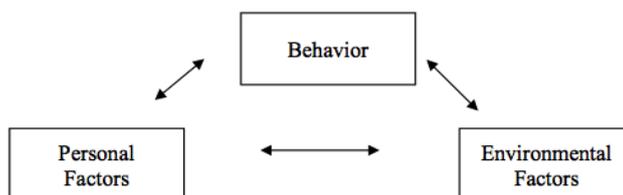
<sup>15</sup> <http://dots.ecml.at/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ecml.at/tabid/277/PublicationID/76/Default.aspx>

Davies (2003), these changes necessitate a “shift of paradigm” in teacher / student roles. Teachers are called upon to abandon traditional roles and act more as guides and mentors, exploring the new media themselves as learners and acting as role models for their learners.

### 3. FL teacher's view

We framed the study drawing on Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes how personal (cognitive), environmental and behavioural factors interact to determine behaviour. For example, teachers' performances (behavioural factors) are influenced by how school policies (environmental factors) affect teachers themselves (cognitive factors) by. Graph 2 shows the social cognitive model.

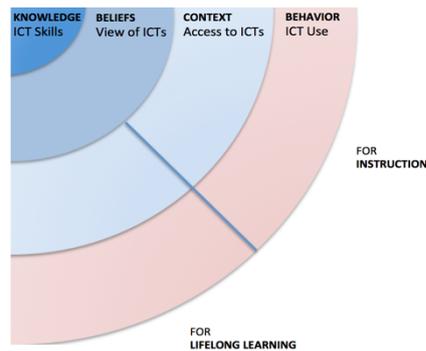


Graph 2. Overview of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977).

Empirical research has since confirmed Bandura's theories, and most researchers agree that cognitive variables mediate the relationship between an individual's environment and his/her behaviour (Lathem and Pinder, 2005). As regards FL teachers, research has shown that the social, institutional, instructional and physical settings in which teachers work have a major impact on their cognitions and practices (Borg, 2003, 2006). However, merely providing teachers with the equipment is not enough; many teachers do not take advantage of these new technologies in their classrooms (Kang, 2007), and it is necessary to convince them of the benefits (Lam, 2000; Cuban 2003).

Research has proved that teacher cognitions and practices are mutually informing (Borg, 2003, Borg, 2006; Richards 2009; Pajares, 1992; Cuban, 1993; Freeman 1996, 1998; Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Richards and Nunan, 1990; Scovel 2001). Teachers' attitudes to ICT and appropriate concepts for the orchestration of learning will decide whether the desired outcomes can be achieved and whether a major shift in the culture of learning is possible (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2003). In the analysis of cognitive factors, it has been difficult to study how the meaning of beliefs differs from that of knowledge (Pajares, 1992). An example likely to happen in the FL teacher scenario is how a teacher thinks s/he masters teaching, and how s/he really does. Mishra and Koehler's (2006) Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model addresses the combination of knowledge that teachers require in the 21st century, and gives a place to the knowledge of how to employ technologies' powerful resources to best affect learning.

Drawing on Bandura's model to better investigate FL teachers' professional practice in terms of ICT, we devised a simple schema where the 'personal factors' item is divided into 'Knowledge' and 'Beliefs'. While these two categories are common to Instruction and Lifelong Learning, the Context and Behaviour rings were analysed in terms of LLL and instruction (See Graph 3).



Graph 3. Conceptual schema of a FL teacher's professional practice.

In the schema, the four rings are attributed representations as follows:

The *Knowledge* ring symbolizes procedural knowledge, i.e. the know-how to videoconference, chat, etc.) either for instruction or lifelong learning purposes. The *Beliefs* ring symbolizes stated perceptions (e.g. how easy and useful they think ICT are for FL instruction). The *Context* ring symbolizes teachers' facilitators such as equipment, rooms, etc., as well as institutional constraints, i.e. financial and methodological requirements (Newby *et al.*, 2007). The *Behaviour* ring symbolizes recalled use of a specific ICT tool to access speakers or content in the target culture.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Research Context and Participants

The teachers in focus (N= 3,327) were in-service and teach foreign languages (i.e. English, French, German, Italian, Basque, etc.) serving the 547 public secondary schools and 42 Official Language Schools (Escuela Oficial de Idiomas, EOI) in Catalonia, an Autonomous Community within Spain. These two school networks are different; EOIs enrol students from 16 to adults and offer a broader scope of foreign languages (e.g. Arab, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, and Greek).

### 4.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The research process was threefold. Firstly, teachers accessed a 68-item survey online (N=420). For the survey instrument, the research constructs were operationalized using multi-item scales. Secondly, the statistical analysis of questionnaire data provided the list of interviewees (N=10); the selection criteria applied being teachers' capability to use videoconferencing software (VoIP)<sup>17</sup>. This selection draws on the fact that videoconferences can be made over the Internet across the world at no cost (Graddol, 2006), and that they facilitate the most comprehensive form of dialogical interaction accessible either from school or home settings. Thirdly, students of one of the interviewees (N= 3) participated in a mini-group interview (Greenbaum, 1998) in order to corroborate and further explore one interviewee's seemingly outstanding practice.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Skype, <http://www.skype.com> which supports free video, chat, voice messaging, and screen sharing, and chargeable for landline and mobile phone calls, group videoconferencing, and SMS messages.

## 5. Findings

Overall, about 70% of the participants were more than 40 years old, taught in secondary schools, and had taught for longer than ten years. Following, findings organized as per ring of the schema.

### 5.1 Knowledge

The self-report scale listed ICT skills particularly useful for communication with the target culture. While around 80% can chat and text on the smart phone, almost a half can edit sound or video files, convert the sound of a video into MP3, and create a blog or web site. However, only 23% can setup a videoconference, which indicates that they are not fully aware of its comprehensive service for conversational contact with the target culture.

Chi-square tests revealed a strong correlation at the  $p < .001$  level between ICT skills and age; the younger, the more ICT-skilled. The following interview excerpts confirm this condition:

There are teachers around the age of 50 who still prefer to teach 'from the front' and find it hard to implement task-based, interactive learning and student self-assessment. Imagine the "jump" it means for them to integrate ICT. When we discuss in meetings about using Moodle, they are against.

My older colleagues keep thinking that students know more than themselves and that this condition will undermine teacher authority.

Although age seems a digital-divide issue, best practice teachers belong to the older range of the sample (>40 years old). The reported factor that might encourage less skilled teachers to try new tools and activities is the 'pushing' effect of having younger and more skilled colleagues in the language department and the agreed concept that 'ICT provide prestige'.

Those acknowledging a lower ICT Knowledge mostly feel *threatened* by student misuse of ICT and *displaced* by ICT. This suggests that teachers' acquisition of techno-pedagogical content knowledge (Mishra and Koehler, 2006) not only would increase ICT use for LLL and instruction but would also raise teachers' self-confidence (Bandura, 1977).

The chi-square test showed strong correlation between listed beliefs and almost all ICT knowledge items (e.g. 'I can chat'), which shows the effect of beliefs on the decision to acquire knowledge, and further confirms that 'teacher cognitions and practices are mutually informing' (Borg, 2003).

The 80% reported having been completely free to get started with ICT, and over one third of these believe that 'when started, it was too late.' Thus, such 'freedom' to start learning or teaching with ICT may not be entirely positive, as this comment illustrates.

*In fact, there is no imperative to use ICT, and there is no healthy period for adaptation either.*

### 5.2 Beliefs

#### *About ICT to contact the target culture*

While teachers assess ICT as an inexpensive way for students to continue learning the FL on a lifelong basis, that appreciation does not apply to themselves as lifelong learners. One third of the teachers think

that immersion is the only way to learn a language, and one half think that online language learning is a myth. This mistrust of ICT reveals that teachers who are reluctant to use ICT to contact the target culture are not few. This overall result matches the finding in Stevens (2010) of the 'very common belief that language learning is intrinsically related to face-to-face communication and immersion in the target culture' (p. 32).

Also, most respondents (70%) preferred 'contact with native speakers where the target language is official'. This belief represents a restraint to the possibilities that ICT offer for speaking practice. The following comment underlines the benefits of a more open approach in this respect:

*My aim is teaching English as vehicular language, to communicate with speakers of any language who learn English. It has been so since I found out that I could talk in English with Vietnamese about their country and customs. In that way, the scope of possibilities is huge. I can search for school councils worldwide, target a level similar to that of my students, and it is just making contact.*

#### About teaching with ICT

The number of teachers threatened by students' inappropriate ICT practices like plagiarism rises along with the number of years in instruction.

		Seniority (years)					Total
		1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	> 20	
Plagiarism is a Worry	Disagree	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	9.9%	8.1%	11.1%	45.4%
	Agree	4.4%	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	54.6%
	Total	12.3%	16.8%	23.0%	19.8%	28.1%	100.0%

Table 1. Relation between Seniority and Worry about student misuse of ICT.

Students' misuse of ICT is a bigger concern for secondary school teachers than for EOI teachers. This difference may be associated with student motivation and how that environmental condition affects teacher Beliefs (Rádai, 2003; Bandura, 1977). About students' misuse of ICT, two teachers described their experience:

I do not assign writing tasks for homework, otherwise it will be copied or googled, but not the student's true job.

Some not so good students submit perfect texts that are a copy-paste from the Internet. I have to spend time to google the text until I find the source web site.

About one third of the sample think that 'Students surpass teachers concerning technology', and acknowledged that 'When s/he decided to start using ICT it was already too late'. Others believe that the fast development of ICT is a challenge for teachers and students alike. A small group claimed that students manage a small number of tools. The following excerpts reflect the three positions:

*Students extensively surpass me about ICT. Just today, I had to give a PowerPoint to a student from my computer and he gave me a pen drive. 'Do it yourself' —I told him.*

*I can't know about everything and neither can students. Then, I teach what I know and they teach me...The other day they taught me how to use the webcam. We have to 'change the chip', but there is still the stereotype of the sage teacher, and teachers are afraid of undermining their authority.*

*Children do not know as much about ICT as we think. They just know about four or five things for their leisure, but it is our mission to help them know how to use ICT to learn the language and get closer to its culture.*

As opposed to this extended teachers' belief of the highly ICT skilled teenagers, the findings of a study conducted with students in Barcelona by Kompen, Edirisingha, and Monguet (2009) revealed unskilled and unaware young students. Then, teachers' belief may have a strong effect even when not grounded in truth.

Over 80% of teachers believe that students' contact with the target culture requires teachers' continuous cultural update and teacher's guidance. These two reports associated with increased teacher responsibility may be compensated with a general agreement upon 'ICT ease work', as illustrated by a teacher:

*The varieties of French can be easily accessed with the resources available on the Internet; recordings by speakers of Belgian, Swiss origin... even within France you find different accents. In that way, students realize there is not just the teacher's pronunciation but many ways that I can bring to the classroom.*

This blurry position of teachers about why using ICT to contact the target culture is also seen in Helm, Guth, and O'Dowd (2012); while a few respondents set up their online cultural exchanges 'as a response to learning needs or student requests for authenticity', others see ICT 'as a part of everyday life' (p. 15).

### 5.3 Context

Drawing on the concept of 'first digital divide' (Hagittai, 2002), which involves the quantity and quality of available equipment, the focus was set on teacher's and students' individual availability of computer or smart phone and internet connection, as well as how ICT-equipped the school was to contact the target culture. A vast majority of teachers have 'unlimited access to a computer' and 'unlimited internet', and over half of the respondents estimated 'student at-home access to computer resources' as massive.

For the great majority, the school setting is equipped with video, audio and overhead projector, essential to exploit online multimedia or group videoconferencing. While half of the teachers may count on broadband Internet, and a PC for each student in the classroom, only 22% have headphones and microphones for each student. Only 3% of EOI teachers, but 37% of secondary schools teachers have 'One computer per student' (as part of the Catalanian '1x1 Program'<sup>18</sup>).

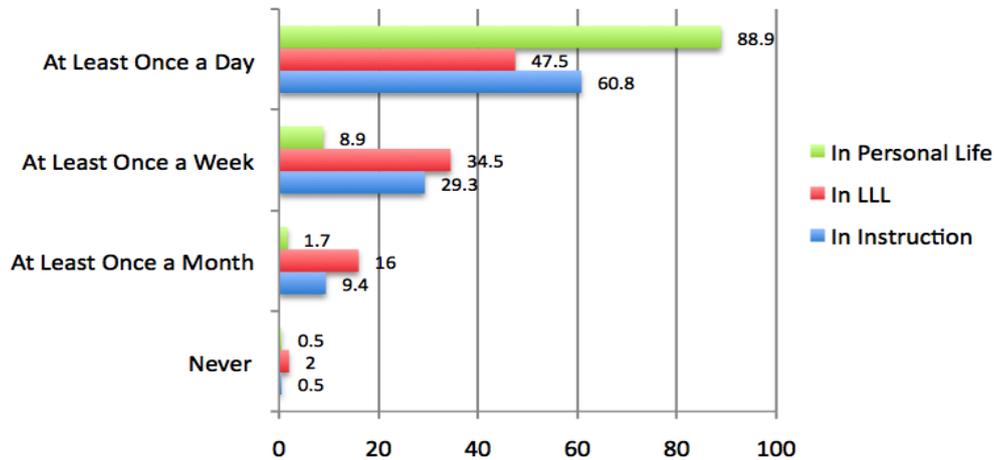
*Other stakeholders* (i.e. parents, government, the labour market) are highly interested in effective FL learning to happen. *The milieu* is technologically furnished: public wireless Internet and state-of-the-art technology are publicly accessible (in libraries, streets, beaches).

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<sup>18</sup> Governmental program which targeted public schools and equipped them with overhead projector and digital board connected to a computer, power network for all students using their PCs simultaneously, enough broad band, and wifi. <http://www10.gencat.cat/gencat/AppJava/es/actualitat2/2010/00421educat1x1.jsp> (in Catalan)

#### 5.4 Behaviour

While the vast majority (89%) use ICT once a day in personal life, only 60% use them for instruction, and just 48% for LLL as depicted in Graph 4.



Graph 4. Frequency of ICT use in personal life, LLL and instruction.

Frequency of ICT use 'In Instruction' obviously associates with ICT equipment in the school, and is strongly correlated ( $p=.000$ ) with: Knowledge of ICT, confidence-related Beliefs: 'Students surpass me about ICT', and 'When I Started ICT training It Was Too Late ( $p=.000$ ).

The ICT that teachers use the most for language learning (i.e. videos, TV and radio, followed by social networking and videoconferencing) concur very closely with Stevens' (2010). This hierarchy in use places the emphasis on receptive activities; i.e. reading and/or listening, rather than on conversational interaction, which has been considered essential for FL acquisition (Hymes, 1971; Krashen, 1971; Hatch, 1978; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994).

For professional development, teachers perform twice to four times more formal than informal activities. Some teachers are not aware that a number of activities they perform represent informal learning, e.g. intentionally watching a film in the target language for practicing purposes. This comments reveal teachers' assessment of formal ICT training and independent ICT use to contact the target culture for LLL.

We have often attended courses that for some people were tediously easy whereas for others were extremely difficult.

Once in a while I go to the target culture to get 'recycled', but, naturally, that takes time, money. It is more comfortable from home through ICT. It is not just like moving to the target country, but you reach a lot of it.

In instruction, although ICT are the main means to contact the target culture for two in five teachers, the textbook seems to be deeply rooted in the teaching practice, and for not few, the teacher is still the main means of contact with the target culture. As a notable experience, an interviewee reported having accompanied very small groups of English as FL students for short stays in countries where English is a FL (e.g. Germany, Croatia). However, she made no reference to pre- or post-trip contact of her secondary-school students with their partners abroad. Except for a few innovators, teachers are not applying a connectivist approach (Siemens, 2005) to language learning and teaching. They do not use ICT for building

out-of-classroom open networks, autonomously choosing appropriate connections within the network, and seeking diversity of language varieties.

The mini-group interview with students sought their viewpoint on a teacher's use of ICT in instruction for two years. She had organized an exchange trip between the French-language class and a Spanish-language class in a school in northern France. Students spent one week in each other's town, staying at the students' home on a one-to-one basis. For the pairs to get to know each other as well as their families and friends before the exchange, they used chat, social networks and videoconference, informally, as an out-of-school activity as informal learning beyond the teacher's control. This exchange went on between the one-week stays and after them. When describing that activity, the teacher said:

It also happened that individuals not participating in the exchange became friends of the children in Paris through Facebook. [...]. It was like opening a door and the other ones dropped in.

## 6. Conclusions

These findings may contribute to the development of customized training and awareness-raising activities in consideration of these characteristics of teachers and students.

Teachers are ICT-skilled and equipped, and those not using ICT to contact the target culture—seem to ignore the possibilities they offer. Teachers are also duly accredited, which makes them pedagogy knowledgeable; and since they are experienced, they have witnessed the evolution of FL teaching along the last decades. All these attributes favour their trial and implementation of new approaches. For Dooly (2009), teachers, far from being conservative, are eager to bring changes to their practice, though conditions may interfere in that change. Although teachers are ready for informal and self-directed learning, they take twice more formal than other forms of training.

Students are also well ICT-equipped both in schools and at home. Social media, the tool that best adapts for contacting the target culture, are deeply rooted in their personal lives, as this comment depicts:

Facebook is an obsession; students associate the computer with Facebook.

However, overall teenage use of ICT in the classroom—especially in secondary schools— involves plagiarism, chaos when watching a video, etc., which does not contribute to teacher's change towards more ICT use. Therefore, teachers should develop the strategies to pedagogically exploit social media and thus break the negative attitude in the classroom.

The educational system provides teachers with considerable equipment to enhance instruction with ICT, and freedom to innovate with syllabi. Formal teacher training seems not to meet the quantity and quality that teachers need. These expressions of interviewees are descriptive:

I am interested in learning not only to teach with ICT but how to overcome the fear for students' multi-tasking.

We have often attended courses that for some people were tediously easy whereas for others were extremely difficult.

Suggestions for future research point to teachers' acceptance of ICT, the evaluation of specific tools to be integrated, and the attitude of students towards ICT for informal learning.

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# HOW COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS WRITING PERFORMANCE: AN INTEGRATION OF THE PROCESS/GENRE APPROACH AND BLOGS IN EFL WRITING COURSES

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## ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental research examined the effects of the process/genre approach (PGA) with the integration of blogs in EFL university-level students' writing classrooms. This was a mixed-method study in which the participants' essays and adopted questionnaires contributed to accumulating quantitative data while the interviews and observations provided qualitative data. The study took place over ten weeks at a university in central Taiwan in which paper-pencil instruction was applied in the control group, while blog instruction was employed for the experimental group.

The students' essays were computed by applying a paired-sample t-test, and the questionnaires were analysed by applying a Wilcoxon signed-rank test to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in terms of the students' writing performance and perceptions toward the PGA and blog writing after comparing the results of the pre-test and the post-test. The qualitative data was analysed to provide in-depth evidence to support the quantitative results.

After the data analysis was completed, the paired-sample t-test demonstrated that there were significant differences in terms of the students' writing performance in both groups, which demonstrates how the PGA developed the EFL university students' writing performance. Because the students had more interactive opportunities to be exposed to the language inputs, this approach facilitated their English writing performance. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test presented that the students revealed positive attitudes toward writing blogs and also positive affections toward blog writing because they had higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of apprehension when blogging. Moreover, there was a significant difference in terms of the factor of "learning with peers" in the control group since the PGA provided more interactive and communicative opportunities. The students also indicated greater understanding about their writing samples in the experimental group, since they were allowed to refer to the instructional contents on the blogs anytime and anywhere.

**Key words:** Process/genre approach, blogs, EFL writing.

## 1. Introduction

In view of the accelerated growth and proliferation of computer technology in the twenty-first century, a variety of forms of computer technology have been introduced in foreign language (FL) education, which have greatly changed the way of how people learn foreign languages. One significant development is the advent of Web 2.0 provides language learners with a greater range of opportunities to communicate and interact in target languages with others, and helps students to learn collaboratively (Huang, 2015). Examples of communication software, such as Skype, Twitter, Google Talk, MSN Messenger, YouTube, My Space, Google Video, BBC, Blackboard, Blog, Facebook, and Wikis can all be used for language learning, while they support learners' language learning through socially interactive learning (Kervin & Derewianka, 2011).

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Due to the features of being user-friendly (Fageeh, 2011; Noytim, 2010), there being ease of use and allowing for collaborative learning (Habul-Šabanović, 2015), blogs have been applied in different disciplines by educators to facilitate language teaching and learning (Blood, as cited in Armstrong & Retterer, 2008). Although its effectiveness has been widely confirmed by many studies (Aljumah, 2012; Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Fageeh, 2011; Kitchakam, 2012; Lin, Groom & Lin, 2013; Lin, Li, Hung & Huang, 2014; Liu & Chang, 2010; Noytim, 2010; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2014), the practical employment of blogging in language writing classrooms remains uncommon (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson & Freynik, 2014; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). Research on the investigation of the impacts of blog in language writing classrooms is also recommended (Aljumah, 2012).

Therefore, a study related to blog writing was conducted in Taiwan in which English learners learn English via regular classes, broadcasts, magazines, among other means, and most of them learn English through reiterative recitation and rote memorisation (Yang & Chen, 2007) [Yang & Chen, 2007](#) because English is not the vehicle for everyday communication in this EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning context, and in actual fact, English is rarely used for daily communication in Taiwan (Wu, Yen & Marek, 2011). Chen (2014) indicated that the rate of using English in different occasions among Taiwanese in daily life is really low, and they spend very little time to use English every day because English is very seldom used as a tool for cognition or socialisation in Taiwan.

In spite of the low rate of using English, the Taiwanese IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test-takers' overall band scores have recently been increasing. However, the writing results are the worst among the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) among Taiwanese IELTS candidates (Chen, 2015). Unfortunately, the skill of writing is deemed as one of the most difficult skills to improve (Lin, Yu, Wang & Ho, 2015). Li (2010) indicated that one of the reasons for Taiwanese students' inadequate writing ability could be attributed to the examination systems, curriculum design, and learning attitudes because of the English education curriculum emphasis on being results-driven and score-oriented. This could greatly undermine students' English learning motivation (Li, 2012). Hence, the study intended to investigate whether the integration of the blog and process/genre approach (PGA) changed the Taiwanese university students' writing attitudes and improved their writing performances.

The PGA combines both the process approach (PCA) and genre approach (GRA) that was proposed by Badger and White in 2000 (Gao, 2012). In PGA writing classrooms, teachers have to provide as many similar social contexts as possible for learners, and also offer sufficient information for them to draw up the writing purposes (GRA). Students then use their language knowledge and skills to respond to writing tasks (PCA). Therefore, students will be able to use writing skills (PCA) to acquire greater linguistic knowledge (GRA), and understand the writing purposes (GRA), so their writing competence might be developed when their potential is motivated (PCA) and language inputs are provided (GRA) (Badger & White, 2000).

According to the statements mentioned above, three pertinent research questions were raised in the study:

- (1) In terms of the students' writing performance, does the PGA develop the EFL university students' writing ability?
- (2) In terms of the students' perceptions toward the PGA, are there any statistically significant differences after the treatments?
- (3) In terms of the students' perceptions toward blog writing, are there any statistically significant differences after the treatments?

## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1. *The affordance of blogs in EFL writing classrooms*

The utilisation of Internet-based collaborative learning is increasing on account of its convenience, ease of use, and rapid development. This kind of learning provides a great number of opportunities for learners to obtain information and learn collaboratively (Boulos, Maramba & Wheeler, 2006). Collaboration is an important element leading to successful learning because one's effective learning may be due to the

participation and interaction with others' modelling behaviour and thought processes (Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin & Chang, 2003). The concept of collaborative learning in a social-cultural environment has also been found in educational technology. It has been accepted that computer technology enriches social resources in one's learning process, and helps learners retrieve knowledge whenever and wherever they need. For example, the notion of computer supported collaborative learning enables learners to learn collaboratively in an Internet community, such as blogs (Selwyn, 2011).

Blogs are "up-to-the-minute posts, latest first" (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004, p. 42) electronic journals to record users' written work in Internet communities (Johnson, 2004) in which learners of the same target language can convene together to practise using the language (Chapelle, 2010; Zhytska, 2012) so that their interactive connections could be developed (Top, 2012). Blogs are potential pedagogical alternatives in FL writing classrooms because they effectively develop students' writing ability in a collaborative manner (Normand-Marconnet & Cordella, 2012; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2014; Warschauer & Liaw, 2011), and they serve as a complementary role to traditional (face-to-face) classrooms for FL education (Normand-Marconnet & Cordella, 2012).

The application of blogs in FL writing classrooms may be very helpful to instructors. Not only can blogs improve students' writing contents and organisation of these contents, but also allow for students to easily receive and give feedback without there being restrictions of time and place. Some beneficially supplementary and auxiliary materials, such as pictures, sound or video files that convey meanings and inspire students' language learning could be uploaded to blogs as well (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Torut, 2000). Hence, a teacher's instruction is not confined to face-to-face instruction, since instructors and learners can meet whenever and wherever necessary (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010). As for students, they can read others' writing samples, share their comments, and come to understand how to edit each other's contents. It is also convenient to correct and re-write essays on blogs because they save writers' time by being much faster than conventional writing, and therefore are more productive for writers to compose essays. Required information can be also retrieved when the contents are found online. Consequently, writing blogs develop FL learners' writing competence, increase their writing motivation, and improve their learning autonomy (Sun, 2010). Students are thus able to gain more opportunities to learn FL writing through functioning on this quick and easy operating platform (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011).

Lin *et al.* (2014) pointed out that blog writing generated lower levels of anxiety and improved performance among EFL learners. They found that the students might be relieved of apprehension when writing on blogs, which contrasts with another group of students who wrote with pen and paper. Moreover, the majority of the participants in Aljumah's (2012) study reflected that they enjoyed the blogging programme where they posted entries, read posts, and gave comments. The participants had very positive attitudes toward the use of blogs in English writing classrooms, so they believed that blogs were useful, motivational and effective in developing their writing ability. Fang (2010) also indicated that the majority of the students under study were quite satisfied with the blog writing programme, and there was a positive effect on the development of the learners' writing skills. Therefore, the students had very positive attitudes toward the use of computer technology in writing classrooms, and revealed how they expected to have a programme of this kind in their future writing classes. Armstrong & Retterer (2008) conducted a study with reference to the use of blogs in Spanish writing classes, and found out that most of the participants (more than 80% of them) enjoyed writing on blogs because they were easy accessible, and online references and dictionaries could be easily accessed.

However, some counter viewpoints have been posited about using blogs in writing classrooms. Less-proficient students might not feel sufficiently confident about posting their entries on blogs, which could result in negative affections about blog writing, such as losing face among peers, which is to be considered a grievous matter in Asian classrooms. Also, the instruction method in a blog community is student-centred rather than teacher-directed, which might influence students' learning, including among Taiwanese students in particular. Because Taiwanese students have long been dependent on the teachers in classrooms, in which they expect to receive "correct" answers from their teachers, they might feel uncertain about or uncomfortable with their contents while they are writing in an open blogosphere (Lin, 2015). Also, a peer's feedback only serves a pragmatic function with the possibility of there being extravagantly complimentary words, rather than a linguistic function through providing useful and constructive comments (Wu, 2006). Similarly, commenting on peers' writings might make the students feel embarrassed and even ashamed if

they make mistakes, so they would rather leave encouraging messages for their peers to avoid committing mistakes (Lin et al., 2013). Thus, Aljumah (2012) concluded that peers' feedback was neither helpful nor useful for students' writing development on blogs, especially when the students did not know how to comment or what to comment about on others' entries. In addition, students might also fail to respond to the teacher's feedback while revising their writings because of their insufficient English abilities (Wu, 2006).

## 2.2 *The process/genre approach*

The process/genre approach (PGA) that combines both the process approach (PCA) and genre approach (GRA) was proposed by Badger and White in 2000 (Gao, 2012). The PCA, which views writing as a natural process and emphasises students' creativity and effectiveness to produce a written text (Maybin, 1994), is more learner-centred (Matsuda, 2003; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Tuffs, 1993). In contrast, the GRA is more teacher-centred (Hyland, 2007), so the teachers are responsible for the students' writing development and have to evaluate how successfully the students have learned to achieve tasks toward a specific genre (Maybin, 1994). Despite the differences between the two approaches, they can complement each other because one motivates students' learning and provides learning opportunities through the writing process, while the other helps students understand what linguistic structures are required for a particular genre (Maybin, 1994). Hence, the consolidation of the PCA and GRA becomes more effective to help students understand writing process in a genre when constructing a text (Bijami & Raftari, 2013).

In PGA writing classrooms, teachers have to provide as many similar social contexts as possible for learners and offer sufficient information for them to draw up the writing purposes (GRA), and then students use their language knowledge and skills to respond to the writing tasks (PCA). Therefore, students will be able to use the writing skills (PCA), realise more linguistic knowledge (GRA), and understand the writing purposes (GRA), so their writing competence might be developed when their potential is motivated (PCA) and language inputs are provided (GRA) (Badger & White, 2000). Gao (2012) proposed five instructional steps to introduce how the PGA is implemented in EFL writing classrooms, which include model paper analysis and demonstration, group discussion and imitation, individual imitation and writing, whole-class comment and modification and final drafting and publication.

1. Model paper analysis and demonstration: this phase is similar to the pre-writing stage. Teachers provide model texts for students to analyse, and students understand the genres, writing structures, writing purposes, and linguistic features, among similar considerations. Also, powerful and impressive arguments and expressions should be highlighted and demonstrated.
2. Group discussion and imitation: in this stage, 3 or 4 students form a small group to discuss the theme toward their writing tasks, including the writing style, organisation, expression, grammar, and then discuss how they would construct their writing frameworks or how they would perform their linguistic features for this theme.
3. Individual imitation and writing: students practically write essays in this phase in which they use the writing structures and linguistic features that they have learned from the previous stages into their writing samples. They have to compose an essay with introduction, body and conclusion paragraphs.
4. Whole-class comment and modification: before a whole-class discussion, teachers have to categorise the students' written work according to the marking results and then demonstrate the students' written texts in class. Whole-class discussion is based on both the well-written and poorly-written essays so that students are able to compare and contrast their own writings with samples for correction.
5. Final drafting and publication: finally, students work on their final draft before submission. The previous four stages are involved in the final step in order to make sure that students understand the genres, writing structures, writing purposes, and linguistic features, among similar considerations.

However, the instructional procedures in the PGA are recursive, so both the teachers and students could return to the previous steps if necessary.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design

The primary purpose of the study was to examine whether the integration of using a blog and the PGA developed the EFL university students' writing performance by comparing the outcomes collected from the control group and the experimental group in both the pre-test and post-test. To achieve the main purpose of the study, a quasi-experimental design was adopted in this study. The purpose of a quasi-experimental study is to determine the impact of curricular materials or teaching methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), and this kind of research design is able to produce a great deal of knowledge and find reasonable outcomes and conclusions (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Walker, 2014; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). To fulfil the research purpose, the study was therefore designed based on Creswell's (2012) Quasi-Experimental Design: Pre-and Post-test Design which was shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Adopted Quasi-Experimental Design: Pre-test and Post-test Design

Time →			
Groups	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Control Group	English Essays + Questionnaires	Traditional Writing Class (no treatment): Paper-pencil-based Instruction + Observations	English Essays + Questionnaires + Interviews
Experimental Group	English Essays + Questionnaires	Technology Writing Class (with treatment): Computer (Blogs)-based Instruction + Observations	English Essays + Questionnaires + Interviews

As can be seen in Table 1, there were two classes of students participated in the study who were randomly labelled as the control and experimental groups, and also had the same instruments in the pre-test, including the application of the English essays and questionnaires. During the treatment phase, the participants in the control group received paper-pencil instruction while blog instruction was infused into the experimental group. The students in both groups received the same materials given by the same instructor with the same length of instruction time. At the same time, the instructor and another experienced writing instructor observed the classes together. After the treatments, the identical instruments administered in the pre-test were employed for all the participants again in the post-test. Finally, seven individuals in each group were randomly selected for the retrospective semi-structured interviews.

#### 3.2 Participants

A total of 34 second-year undergraduate English majors were consulted in this research while they were studying English writing as a required course at a university in central Taiwan in the autumn/winter of the 2014 academic year. The two classes of subjects were randomly labelled as the control group and the experimental group. In the control group, there were 16 female students, aged from 18 to 20 with an average age of 19.125; in contrast, there were 18 students, including 4 males and 14 females, in the experimental group, aged from 19 to 20 with an average age of 19.055. The participants' English proficiency in these two groups were quite similar according to their university entrance exam results provided by the Testing Centre for Technological and Vocational Education, which is the most authoritative testing centre for technological

and vocational education in Taiwan. All of the students who finish their study at technological and vocational high schools have to take the test to study at universities in Taiwan. Unfortunately, it was impossible to have more students to enrol in the classes because it was a required course for English majors in the department, and only two classes were available for the researcher to conduct the study. Of practical concern is writing classes usually have lower number of students, which is acceptable as an argument for research purposes (Lin, 2014, 2015), and therefore the number of the participants in the current study should be considered adequate.

### 3.3 Research instruments

**Writing Essays** – The topic of the English writing essay was chosen from the teaching material, *全民英檢一路通: 中級寫作能力測驗* (A Pathway to the General English Proficiency Test: Writing Proficiency Test for the Intermediate Level) written by Chen (2013), used in the current study. The purpose of using this book as the primary source material was its appropriateness since the contents of the books suited the course requirements and the students' needs. Considering the participants' English abilities, the materials were appropriate to their needs because this textbook is designed for those who are preparing for the intermediate level (equivalent to CEFR B1) of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which is set up by the Language Training and Testing Centre, Taiwan. This is one of the accepted indices for admissions to universities and graduate schools in Taiwan, and it is also widely accepted by many governmental institutions or private organisations for recruitment or promotion in Taiwan. This textbook was therefore used in this study to help prepare students to pass the GEPT.

**Questionnaire** – In this study, there were two sets of questionnaires: the Questionnaire for the Process/Genre Approach (QPGA) and the Questionnaire for Blog Writing (QBW). The former one was constructed by the researcher since the PGA is relative new in language writing education, and a proper ready-made questionnaire could not be found. The self-made QPGA was formed following previous studies (Badger & White, 2000; Gao, 2012; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Yan, 2005) that have discussed the PGA in detail. As for the QBW, it was revised based on Aljumah's (2012) questionnaire, which has been cited as being reliable and validated. The Aljumah's study was akin to the current study in certain ways: (a) all of the participants were English majors at the university level; (b) they all learned English in EFL contexts; (c) the study was also related to English writing; and (d) blogs were the teaching and learning means in the research. Therefore, Aljumah's questionnaire was suitable for the current study as an appropriate option. Because the questionnaires were either self-constructed or revised based on an existing one, a pilot study was conducted to make sure the reliability and validity before applying a formal utilisation. In the pilot study, the techniques of expert judgement, factor analysis, test-retest reliability, internal consistency reliability, and interviewing were carried out, so the researcher would be able to establish the reliability and validity of the questionnaires. Lastly, all of the items were dislocated according to the arrangement produced by the Researcher Randomizer (Urbaniak & Scott, 1997) in the finalised version.

**Observation** – The researcher and the other experienced writing instructor observed the classes together based on the observation checklist provided which was designed by the researcher and was reviewed by two experts before the formal application. The researcher acted as a participant observer so that all of the instructional procedures had been done and could be likewise confirmed, in addition to developing classroom rapport with the participants to increase the feasibility to gather a great deal of information during the interview phases. The other instructor was a second observer who acted as a non-participant observer, so any bias during the observation phase could be avoided, and the reliability of observation might be improved (Curtis, Murphy & Shields, 2014).

**Interview** – In the current study, retrospective semi-structured interviews were adopted because the participants needed to cast back what happened while they were writing and what happened while they were in class in order to complete the interview questions that were designed following the contents of the questionnaires prior to the interviews in order to answer the research questions. Eight questions were respectively designed for the participants' perceptions toward the PGA and blog writing. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the validity of the interview questions, two experts who have doctorate degrees and have been teaching English in EFL contexts for years were invited to review the interview questions. Five students

were then invited for the pilot test to ensure the questions were understandable to the participants and pertinent to the study.

### 3.4 Data collection

**Blog** – Due to the research needs, all of the participants in the experimental group were asked to register an account on [www.pixnet.net](http://www.pixnet.net), which is free of charge and easy for users to manipulate. The *PIXNET* was launched in 2003 and offers blogs, online albums, guest books, and web communities. The reasons for selecting the *PIXNET* were: (a) it is a Taiwanese website, so the participants might feel more familiar with its interface; (b) some troubles might be avoided while the participants were using it; and (c) it saved the researcher's time to introduce how to use the blogs.

After the students registered on *PIXNET* with a personal account, the students were asked to provide their account IDs to the researcher in order to publicise contents for the other students to see for the future needs. The researcher compiled the students' blog account IDs and announced all of them on a tutor blog so that the students were able to link or crosslink to others' blogs during the experimental period. The tutor blog served the functions of making course announcements as well as distributing teaching materials and feedback provisions. Therefore, it served as an online notice board for the researcher and the participants because some reminders were necessarily made in order to ensure the students were submitting their essays on time and duly receiving class announcements duly. All of the teaching materials could be distributed before the classes started, so it helped the researcher have the participants preview the teaching contents in advance. The researcher was also able to conveniently provide feedback on the subjects' writing samples at different times from various locations. The students used their blogs (the learner blog) to receive course announcements, preview and review teaching materials, upload their assignments, and give feedback to each other.

**The Course** – The data collection in the current study took place at a university in central Taiwan in the autumn/winter of the 2014 academic year. In order to prepare the students to cope with functioning in competitive workplaces or further studies after completion of their university studies, writing courses were designed as required ones throughout the students' four-year university study. On account of the accessibility and availability of the classes, the study was applied to second year undergraduates who had a year of writing training at university before taking part in this research study. This was a weekly two-hour writing class with a total of 18 weeks in a semester.

**Procedures** – The procedures in the study included the pre-test, treatment, post-test, and the interview. In the pre-test, all of the students were given thirty minutes to complete the writing essay, and the questionnaire booklets were given to the participants afterwards.

The treatments were then respectively given to the two groups for eight weeks. In the control group, all of the teaching materials were prepared in advance and were handed out by the researcher in class. The students' assignments were also handed in on paper. In contrast, all of the instructional materials were uploaded to the tutor blog by the researcher before classes began, and the students in the experimental group had to post their assignments on their own blogs before the deadlines. Apart from the teaching tools, the teaching procedures and approaches were really similar in the two groups in which the instructor explained the model articles and elicited the students' ideas. The students discussed the ideas with their peers and provided their findings after their discussions in class. Then, they wrote an essay that was turned in every week. The students' writings were also used as the teaching materials after the researcher's marking. The students had to modify their essays based on the comments given by either the instructor or their peers, and turned in their new writing essays together with the modified one every week. At the same time, the researcher acted as a participant observer while the other was a non-participant observer during the treatment phase. The observation checklists were also completed.

Finally, the post-test whose procedures were quite akin to those in the pre-test were conducted a week after the treatments. In the post-test, the identical writing essay and the questionnaires used in the pre-test were distributed to the subjects.

**Interview** – The interviews were conducted in the following weeks after the post-test. The students' native language, Mandarin Chinese, was used in the interviews to reduce the interviewees' levels of anxiety

and motivate their willingness to participate, so much more information could be expected to be collected during the interviews. A total number of fourteen interviewees from the two groups were randomly chosen and took part in the interviews. Most of them finished the interviews in thirty minutes. Then, the researcher transcribed all of the interviews and translated them into English.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

**Quantitative Data Analysis** – The quantitative data comprised the students' writing essays as well as the questionnaires, and all were involved in both the pre-test and post-test. IBM SPSS Statistics version 22 was used to calculate the numerical data in which both the descriptive and inferential statistics contributed to the quantitative results. In the current study, the paired-sample *t*-test was applied in the study to determine whether there were any significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test in the two groups in terms of their English writing performance based on Hughey, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Jacobs's (1983) English as a Second Language Composition Profile, because this statistical tool is usually used to compare two sets of scores collected from a pre-test and a post-test completed by the same group of participants (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Then, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a nonparametric test, which is equivalent to the paired-sample *t*-test (Field, 2013) was used to compare the data collected from the questionnaires to see whether there were any significant differences between the two sets of data collected from the pre-test and post-test.

**Qualitative Data Analysis** – In virtue of the manageability of the observational data, the researcher could simply use Microsoft Office Word software to note, edit, store, retrieve, link, and highlight the data. The researcher, firstly, input all of the raw data collected from the observations in a Word file, which were then read and re-read repeatedly to find connections and the relationships in the two categories of the observational data (i.e. the instructor's instruction and learners' learning) that was recorded by the two observers. After receiving the preliminary ideas of the observational data, the researcher then conducted the further analysis to look into the possible answers for the observed phenomenon so that it was possible to provide more accurate and robust research findings, and then compare and contrast them with the interview results in the subsequent discussions.

As for the interview data analysis, the participants' native language, Mandarin Chinese, was used in the interviews, and all of the interview processes were audio recorded. The researcher therefore had to transcribe the interview responses and translate them into English. Since electronic recording was used in the interview process, the researcher was able to reproduce the data for the sake of fully understanding the given information. During the transcribing process, the researcher had the opportunity to deliberate the meanings of the given information since transcription is a process of construction, rather than merely recording what was said (Hammersley, 2010). The researcher was thus able to compare and contrast the interview data with facts from the observations.

## 4. Quantitative data results

*Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' English Writing Performance*

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	53.1563	68.4063	53.8056	70.7222
N	16	16	18	18
Std. Deviation	4.5596	7.1162	6.8944	7.2967

Table 2 described the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test regarding the participants' English writing performance between the two groups. In the pre-test, the mean scores were 53.1563 and 53.8056 respectively in the control group and the experimental group, with a slight difference of 0.6493. However, the mean scores in the post-test were 68.4063 in the control group and 70.7222 in the experimental group. The difference of the mean score between the two groups was 2.3159. The result in the experimental group was higher than that in the control group, and the difference in the post-test was greater than in the pre-test's.

Table 3. Paired-Sample *t*-Test of the Participants' English Writing Performance

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	contr_pre	-					-		
	contr_post	15.250	6.019	1.504	-18.457	-12.042	10.134	15	.000
Pair 2	experi_pre	-					-		
	experi_post	16.916	6.952	1.638	-20.373	-13.459	10.324	17	.000

As presented in Table 3, the paired-sample *t*-test demonstrated that there were significant differences in terms of the participants' English writing performance in both the control group and the experimental group. The mean score was -15.250 ( $p = .000 < .05$ ) in the control group, while it was -16.916 ( $p = .000 < .05$ ) in the experimental group. Therefore, the test certified that the participants' English writing proficiency had been significantly improved after the treatments in both groups.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test of the QPGA in the Control Group

	TF2	LwP2	UfW2	MAEW2
	-	-	-	-
	TF1	LwP1	UfW1	MAEW1
Z	-.288	-1.758	-1.084	-.957
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.773	.079	.279	.339
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.797	.092	.345	.362
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.399	.046	.172	.181

Table 4 reported the statistical results of the QPGA in the control group after the treatments, which were analysed by Wilcoxon signed-rank test. It can be found that there was no significant difference in the 2-tailed test. Nevertheless, the question of the study was to realise whether there were any significant differences after the treatments, so 1-tailed test should be taken into account. The results in the 1-tailed test figured out that there was a significant difference in the sub-category of learning with peers (LwP) ( $p = .046 < .05$ ) in the control group.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test of the QPGA in the Experimental Group

	TF2	LwP2	UfW2	MAEW2
	-	-	-	-
	TF1	LwP1	UfW1	MAEW1
Z	-1.230	-.679	-2.411	-1.711
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.219	.497	.016	.087
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.233	.521	.016	.104
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.117	.260	.008	.052

The differences of the QPGA between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group were analysed by applying a Wilcoxon signed-rank test that is illustrated in Table 5. The statistical results pointed out that one significant difference was found in the sub-category of understanding for writing (UfW) ( $p = .016 < .05$ ). Nevertheless, the study tried to find out whether there were any significant differences after the treatments, so the results of the 1-tailed test was also presented in Table 5. However, the outcomes were similar to the aforementioned consequences in which only one significant difference was found in the sub-category of understanding for writing (UfW) ( $p = .008 < .05$ ).

Table 6. Wilcoxon signed-rank test of the QBW in the Experimental Group

	BvPW2	BEW2	BFS2	ATTI2	AFFE2
	-	-	-	-	-
	BvPW1	BEW1	BFS1	ATTI1	AFFE1
Z	-.667	-.530	-1.424	-1.900	-1.929
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.505	.596	.155	.057	.054
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.513	.622	.165	.053	.055
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.257	.311	.083	.027	.027

As can be seen in Table 6, the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (2-tailed) indicated that there was no significant difference in terms of the students' perceptions toward blog writing among the five sub-categories after the treatments in the experimental group. However, the study focused on the understanding of the differences after the treatments, which was a 1-tailed test, so the  $p$  value in the 2-tailed test should be divided by 2. Therefore, it was found that there were significant differences in terms of the students' attitudes toward blog writing ( $p = 0.27 < .05$ ) and affections toward blogs writing ( $p = 0.27 < .05$ ).

## 5. Qualitative data results

**Observation** – In terms of the students' interactions in class, the students tended to be passive and reticent during the discussion phase, which was found to be in stark contrast to their activity during the interviews when they were found to be livelier. Although the PGA increased the numbers of the students' interaction with either the instructor or peers, they were prone to be reserved when they were asked to provide their opinions, which could be partly due to the nature of the Taiwanese educational system, in

which Taiwanese students usually expect the “ideal” or “correct” answers from their instructors, and therefore lack the confidence to voice their ideas in class. However, the PGA still increased their interaction and communication with others during their writing process because they usually wrote individual samples before participating in the study.

Also, the peers’ comments on the blogs were not very constructive in terms of English writing development because the students usually provided encouraging words (e.g. Your writing is good.) rather than offering critical comments to their peers. The possible reasons were: (1) they did not know what to comment on; (2) they were not confident enough to make comments; (3) they were afraid to undermine their friendships with classmates; (4) they were afraid making mistakes in their comments. However, it was also found that giving face-to-face comments might be more effective because the students have opportunities to discuss with their peers or clarify their contents verbally. Therefore, integrating both in-class face-to-face discussions and after-class online discussions to enhance the students’ language learning is recommended (Huang, 2015)

**Interview** – In terms of the students’ perspectives toward the PGA, most of the interviewees confirmed the effects of the PGA in the writing classrooms. They found that they were able to understand writing directions more easily, think of writing ideas more easily, and start writing more easily. All of these separate factors helped them learn writing contents more efficiently. It was found that the provision of the model articles as well as the instructor’s instruction developed their writing potential. By doing so, the students could understand how to pave the way in their writings and refer to the model articles when they had difficulties in writing, so they could think of writing ideas through the model articles and start their writing samples more easily. They also pointed out that they learned a great deal of vocabulary, since they had to read the model articles before writing and read others’ written work during the whole process. Therefore, the students had many opportunities to be exposed to language inputs, which not only improved their language abilities, but also developed their critical thinking abilities. More importantly, collaborative and interactive learning was enhanced in the programme. The interviewees mentioned that they had more interaction with the instructor and their peers than usual, which helped them understand how to learn from others. However, a major difference between the two groups was the students’ ownership and readership were possibly enhanced when they were writing blogs, but this was not found for the other group. This might be because the students in the experimental group realised anyone could read their writing blogs, and they understood they were writing for communication rather than for assignments.

In terms of the blog writing, the interviewees expressed they had a wider range of learning and interactive opportunities with others. It was easier for them to read other’s written work, they were able to leave comments to each other, and writing on blogs involved having less apprehension and anxiety about completing writing tasks. Furthermore, the students might not expect too much from the instructors, as Taiwanese students often rely on the instructors to give them “the best” answers in class. In other words, they were likely to seek solutions by themselves before posting their writing samples on blogs in order to avoid making mistakes before the instructor marked those samples. Consequently, autonomous learning was encouraged. The most prominent finding was most of them mentioned the effectiveness of collaborative learning when blogging. Many of the interviewees noted that they were able to learn from their peers, and they could refer to others’ written work when they had no ideas about how to complete writing samples. In addition, their linguistic knowledge was increased when they were reading others’ writings. As a result, not only could the students’ language abilities or writing competence be developed, but their perceptions toward collaborative and autonomous learning could also be improved.

## 6. Discussions

### **Research Question 1: In terms of the students’ writing performance, does the PGA develop the EFL university students’ writing ability?**

According to the quantitative results (Table 2 and 3), the PGA developed the students’ writing performance in both groups, so it was confirmed that the PGA was conducive to the students’ writing development no matter what kind of writing classrooms they were in. According to the interview results, the offer of the model articles and the instructor’s instruction made the participants aware of the writing

directions, supporting ideas, writing structures, and they also helped the students start the writing easily, focus on the writing topics and collect examples for their writings. However, the researcher found that the model articles and the instructor's instruction are inseparable. That is to say the provision of the model articles might not completely solve the students' writing difficulties, and the instructor's teaching might not fully clarify the students' understanding about completing writing tasks. Therefore, the effectiveness of using model articles could be maximised along with providing a sufficient amount of instruction time, and instruction could greatly meet students' needs with appropriate model articles.

Moreover, the PGA not only develops the students' English writing performance, but also promotes interaction with others. In PGA-based writing classrooms, the students need to interact and communicate with their peers or instructors in order to brainstorm and gather writing ideas together, rather than start with an individual work, so the students could form a social writing network with others. Having more interactions with the peers or the instructor was largely pointed out in the study interviews, which enhanced the students' writing performance because the students were able to learn from others, had more opportunities to be exposed to language inputs, and receive greater opportunities to train their critical thinking abilities. As a result, the social writing network benefited the students' understanding concerning their writing tasks.

Although there were statistically significant differences in both groups in terms of their English writing performance, the mean score of the post-test in the experimental group was higher than the control group's (mean score = 70.7222 > 68.4063). Although the difference of 2.3159 was not really conspicuous, it was greater than the results in the pre-test, in which the difference was 0.6493 (experimental group = 53.8056 > control group = 53.1563). Therefore, the researcher concluded that the students in the blog-based writing classroom performed better than those who were in the paper-pencil-based writing classroom. The possible reasons were the students in the experimental group: (a) could perceive the senses of readership and ownership, so they might pay more attention to verify their writings in order to make them more comprehensible; (b) had more chances to be exposed to the language inputs because they could easily retrieve required information on the Internet and refer to others' writings for their own writings; and (c) had less apprehension and anxiety while they were writing because they had more resources, and could also communicate and interact with others on blogs.

***Research Question 2: In terms of the students' perceptions toward the PGA, are there any statistically significant differences after the treatments?***

The quantitative results for the research question are shown in Tables 4 and 5. The results demonstrated that only a significant difference was found in each group. In the control group, the dimension of "learning with peers" showed a statistically significant difference at  $p = .046 < .05$ , and the outcome for the "understanding for writing" was  $p = .008 < .05$  in the experimental group. This might be because the students in the control group had "genuine" interactions with their peers at all times. In other words, the students in the experimental group read others' work, read others' feedback, or left comments to others on blogs, which might not arouse the students' senses of interaction because all the interactions were conveyed through computers, rather than in person. Additionally, the students in the control group were able to compare their learning experience in this programme with their previous experiences, both of which were completed through paper-pencil instruction, so they could conspicuously find the differences of "learning with peers." With regards the consequence in the experimental group, the students were allowed time for previewing and reviewing the teaching contents, reading their peers' work or retrieving required information whenever they wanted and wherever they were, so they had more chances to involve in the learning context, which very likely improved their understanding of the writing tasks.

Unfortunately, it has to be noted that the PGA is not without its disadvantages. The researcher found that limited creativity, lengthy teaching time, and reticent students might be potential barriers for teachers who apply the PGA in EFL writing classrooms. Firstly, the students' writing creativity might be confined to the model articles provided. Because the students must understand the model articles before commencing their writing, their writing may be limited to the contents of model articles. Secondly, it takes time to process all of the pedagogical procedures. The researcher found time was pressing while attempting to carry out the instructional steps thoroughly because the teacher, the students and either the model articles or the students' writing samples form an interactive relationship in which all the three elements need to be involved

in every single stage. Thirdly, the students might be reticent and even silent in EFL writing classrooms, which applies to Asian students in particular because they usually lack of learning motivation and class engagement (Szanajda & Chang, 2015). It could take time and be difficult for instructors to implement in-class activities.

***Research Question 3: In terms of the students' perceptions toward the blog writing, are there any statistically significant differences after the treatments?***

As can be seen in Table 6, there were significant differences in terms of the students attitudes toward blog writing and affections toward blog writing. Accordingly, it was assumed that the affordance of blogs in the EFL university students' writing classrooms improved the students' mental status toward English writing. English writing is not merely related to one's English language ability, but also one's mental status that is also involved in the writing process. For example, the greater one's confidence, the better one's writing might be. Based on the results in the current study, one's attitudes and affections toward English writing might be enhanced through blogging because the students experienced different kinds of writing instruction in which they had more opportunities to interact with others, be exposed to language inputs, and be able to retrieve online resources.

Consequently, the researcher claims that blogs had greatly improved the students' writing competence both directly and indirectly. In terms of the direct dimension, the students were allowed reading others' work, sharing personal writings, retrieving information, giving comments and offering feedback. As for the indirect dimension, both the students' attitudes and affections might be improved through blogging because they had more interactive and communicative opportunities with others, which helped them understand collaborative writing. Therefore, the students had higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of apprehension when blogging.

## **7. Conclusions**

The researcher asserted that the students could benefit more from both the PGA and blogs for their English writing development. Golonka et al. (2014) mentioned that language learners are fond of using computer technology in their language learning, and they prefer using it to the traditional ones, so language learners might engage more in their language learning process, and they are likely to present more positive attitudes toward language learning. Finally, it is concluded that the integration of the blog and PGA developed the students' writing performance through the reading, sharing, giving, and receiving process in which they were writing collaboratively. As a result, the students' writing attitudes and affections toward writing were improved in this collaborative writing process, which strengthened the students' writing competence by increasing their writing interests and motivations. The research consequences demonstrated that the integration of the blog and PGA resulted in an intricate relationship in which each dimension intertwined with one another to enrich the students' writing performance directly and indirectly. A circulated cycle (Figure 1) was consequently formed to explain how the amalgamation of the blog and PGA facilitated the EFL university students' writing performance.

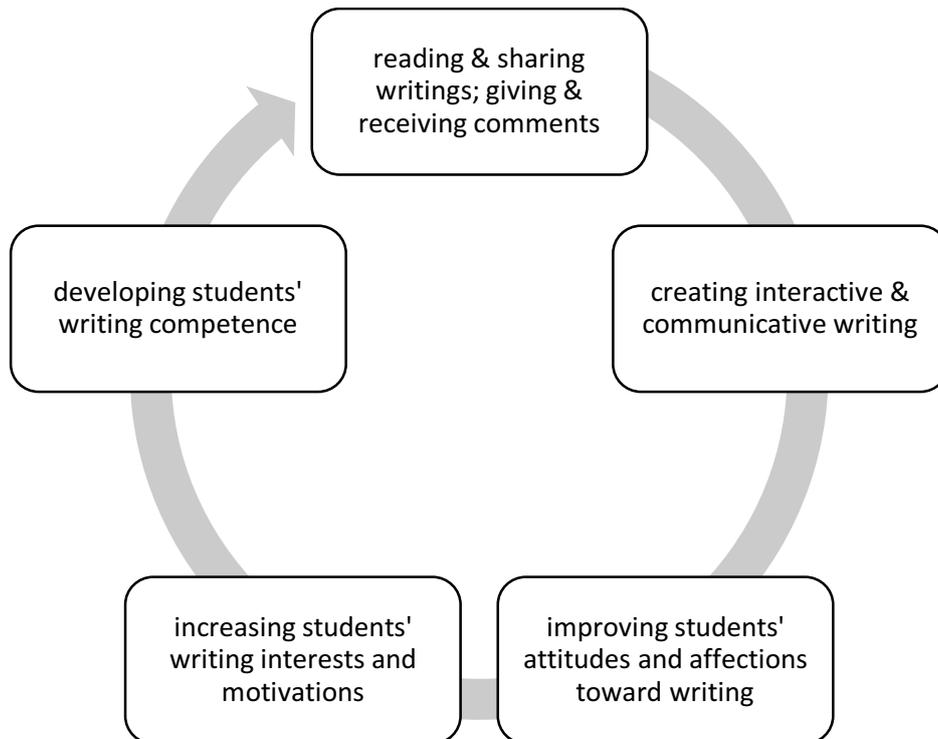


Figure 1. A Circulated Cycle for the Integration of Blog Writing and the PGA

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