Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Supporting the Success
of English Language Learners
in the Asian Region

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Internationalization, globalization, and regionalization are increasingly promoting the importance and popularity of English language teaching and learning in Asia. While controversies and debates remain concerning level appropriacy, access, local contextual influences, teacher qualifications, status compared to local languages, and identity (Bray, 2000; Hallak, 2000; Kirkparick, 2010; Phillipson, 1992, 2001; Rahman, 2009), the influence of English is growing, and is predicted to continue to grow in the coming decades (Graddol, 1997, 2006; Nunan, 2003; Phillipson, 2001; Stroupe, 2010). Politically, a number of countries and regional blocs have made moves that have influenced the importance of English in the region, most notably the adoption by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) of English as the working language of the organization (Kirkpatrick, 2011) and the entry of China into the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Nunan, 2003). In addition, in 2004 and 2005, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization made a move to focus on developing the English (and Mandarin) language skills in the region through the *Strategic Plan for English and Other Languages* to further advance economic development (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, 2005).

In response to these trends, countries in the Asian region have implemented educational policies that are refocusing efforts on English language instruction, often beginning instruction at increasingly lower grades, increasing the total number of years of English requirements within a curriculum, and / or increasing the number of hours required within a particular grade level (Gorsuch, 2000; Graddol, 1997, 2006; Hashimoto, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2010; 2011; Nishino, 2008; Nunan, 2003). As a result, local teachers, often with limited resources and / or insufficient institutional or professional support (Hull, 2011; Nguyen & To, 2011; Nishino, 2008; Nunan, 2003; Stewart, 2009) are faced with new challenges in providing English language learning experiences which offer students the support, opportunities for success, and resulting proficiency levels necessary for professional or academic achievement beyond their school experience.

In many cases, global trends and government initiatives have resulted in increased emphasis on accountability as well. In the United States, new accountability procedures are being imposed through educational policies such as *No Child Left Behind* and the implementation of the *Common Core Standards* (Echevarria, 2006; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008;

Saunders, 2009). Australian institutions ensure the quality of domestic and offshore ELT programs through the implementation of the *Standards and Criteria for ELT Centres in Australia* (National ELT Accreditation Scheme [NEAS], 2008). In other cases, already existing international models such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* (Council of Europe, 2011) are being adopted or adapted in other countries to ensure the quality of education in general and language education in particular (Council of Europe, 2001; Graddol, 2006; Kuhlman, Tafani, Delija, & Diaz-Maggioli, 2010).

Countries around the Pacific Rim are also meeting the challenges presented by increasingly diverse student populations. In the United States, the expanding immigrant student population is placing new demands on teachers and the educational system as a whole, while at the same time, specific challenges faced by the increasing number of international students attending domestic universities have been considered (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). Likewise, Australian universities are also striving to meet the unique needs of their growing international student population (Dooley, 2004; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001).

As countries in the Asian region expand their English language education programs (Nunan, 2003), educators and researchers in the Asian region and beyond are investigating and experimenting with creative methodologies, approaches, and materials in order to better support the English language learning of their students (Stroupe, 2010; Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). Emphasis has been placed on utilizing students' cultural backgrounds and L1 effectively in conjunction with English (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004) and increasing students' motivation (Hamada, 2011). Consideration has also been placed on better understanding students' communication styles as they relate to English language learning (Takanashi, 2004).

Developing culturally sensitive and useful materials, both authentic and professionally published, has also been a point of investigation (Chea & Klein, 2011; Hamada, 2011; McPherson, 2005; Vijayaratnam, 2008). Nevertheless, in many contexts in Asia, particularly in Japan (Gorsuch, 2000; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004), China (Deng & Carless, 2010), and South Korea (Hwang, 2003), primarily form-focused, high-stakes university entrance exams continue to significantly impact the methodology, content, and focus of secondary English language instruction.

As instruction employing a communicative approach becomes more widespread (Nunan, 2003), based on changing national policies in the region (Butler & Iino, 2005; Graddol, 1997, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2011; Nishino, 2008), teachers in Asia continue to aim to provide their students opportunities to successfully use English in the classroom. In Hong Kong, Wong (2009) has investigated effective methods of developing skills necessary in seminar classes, while Kobayashi (2001) has reported on Japanese students' positive view of communicating in English as an international language. Also in Japan, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) have examined how an "imagined international community" (p. 569) can be effectively used to prepare students to study abroad. In Taiwan, Lu and Kuo (2011) have considered how teachers' perceptions affect connected speech instruction.

Likewise, other skill areas have received attention. Vocabulary development has been emphasized as a method to support and improve the reading skills of learners in Thailand (Suppasetseree & Saitakham, 2008), while Nation (2011) suggests successful vocabulary teaching activities that can be applied across the region. Developing specific reading strategies is the focus of Subbiah and Ismail's (2009) investigation in Malaysia, and teaching literature in

Cambodia has been considered by Narith and Mab (2006). Additionally in Cambodia, effective feedback on writing has been investigated (Sou, 2010), while Matsuda (2011) has considered how globalization is influencing the teaching of writing.

Coupled with communicative opportunities and language skill development, teachers in the region are increasingly focusing on study skills and strategies, oftentimes adapting them to the local context. Ehrman, Leaver, and Oxford (2003) have provided an overview of learning styles and learning strategies, while Oanh (2006) has considered contextualized student autonomy and independent learning in Vietnam, and Yang (1998) has examined issues related to learner autonomy in Taiwan. Atkinson (1997) has explored the cultural appropriacy of teaching critical thinking skills in the Japanese context; Stroupe (2006) has argued that critical thinking skills should be scaffolded and taught as other skills are throughout language instruction. Such research indicates that many teachers in the region see that supporting students includes skills beyond grammatical or linguistic understanding and communicative competence.

Teachers themselves continue to be the focus of much academic investigation in the region, with particular emphasis on native language and educational background. Increasingly, English language instruction is more often successfully provided by non-native English (NNS) speaking teachers to NNS students who will be communicating with NNS counterparts in the region (Graddol, 1997, 2006; Liu, 2011). Teacher education programs continue to consider the skills teachers will need to prepare the next generation of graduates, including pedagogical content knowledge (Gopinathan, 1999), and more recently, technology (Hallak, 2000). Yet concerns remain regarding whether teachers in the region are supported sufficiently to be fully prepared for the demands of the future (Nishino, 2008; Vilches, 2005).

The connection between school and "the world of work" continues to be important as teachers in Asia prepare their students with the skills necessary to be successful in an increasingly global business sector. Testing preparation remains important through the tertiary level, as companies continue to recruit freshman employees who have achieved high test scores, most notably in TOEFL, TOEIC (Butler & Iino, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Stewart, 2009; Yoshida, 2003), and IELTS, for academic and professional purposes (Merrifield, 2011; O'Loughlin, 2008; Read & Wette, 2009). Yet, increasingly, due to pressures from the business community, solely relying on test scores is often insufficient: employers are now seeking graduates who can demonstrate international communicative competence and are focusing on intelligibility rather than British or American standards, as much communication in English in the Asian region is between non-native speakers rather than between non-native and native speakers of English (Graddol, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Matsuda, 2011; Stroupe, 2010). Proficiency in English continues to lead to economic opportunities, exemplified by call centers in the Philippines (Friginal, 2007), India (Graddol, 2006; Warschauer, 2000), and Pakistan (Rahman, 2009).

In the current issue of *Language Education in Asia*, authors continue to contribute to the discussion of these topics related to successfully supporting Asian English language learners. Researchers have investigated ways in which to improve the language teaching and learning provided to learners in the region. Mirador considers writing in her research article. When examining students' understanding of the purposes of academic writing in western cultures, she also identifies the most common writing errors in this genre with her Chinese students in extension campuses of Western institutions in China. Her results indicate that students most often emphasized skills-based issues related to improvement and overall essay organization rather than higher order aspects of their reasoning through the writing process.

The additional research papers in the current volume focus on strategy use. Selamat and Sidhu consider metacognitive strategy use in lecture style courses in a technical university in Malaysia. Their research indicates that employing explicit metacognitive strategy instruction can result in more effective listening skills for students. Additionally, reading strategies provide the focus for Lien's research in Taiwan. In her study, students' level of reading anxiety was shown to be negatively correlated with their employment of reading strategies. Based on her findings, recommendations for lessening anxiety and improving reading strategies are suggested.

Developing linguistic and learning skills are emphasized in papers related to more practical issues in the classroom. Doan considers the importance of practice when improving students' speaking skills in Vietnam. She emphasizes the role of the teacher is providing specialized activities and guidance to students to result in more effective practice. A more specific class activity, the presentation, is the focus of Shimo's paper. In the context of Japan, she explains a step-by-step procedure that, through providing time for reflection and understanding, allows students to deliver more effective presentations. Also in Japan, Aubrey addresses a common problem teachers face in the communicative classroom: hesitancy on the part of students to communicate. He addresses the willingness to communicate by focusing on specific variables, i.e., group dynamics, relevant topics, and level of anxiety, which can be manipulated to successfully create a classroom atmosphere in which students will be more forthcoming during their communicative activities.

Also related to classroom instruction are two papers on the context of the classroom, one emphasizing the use of input from outside the classroom, and the other focusing on improving listening skills in activities in the classroom. Guo helps students realize that there is extensive English use in their environment outside of the classroom, even in a non-English dominant country such as Taiwan. As they analyzed the accuracy of English examples they found, the students gained a heightened awareness of the proliferation of English in their daily lives. Morley also discusses how he utilized video clips and images in order to provide a more contextualized basis when working with listening activities. When evaluated, learners indicated that they not only preferred activities that were context-rich, but also performed better on associated listening assessments.

It is with great appreciation that I thank all those who have contributed to the current issue of *Language Education in Asia*, including all the teachers and researchers represented in this publication, and all those in the region who continually reflect on their experiences and are determined to improve not only their effectiveness in the classroom, but their students' understanding and achievement as well. Special appreciation is reserved for the publication's Advisory and Editorial Board members, Assistant Editors, Mr. Chea Kagnarith and Ms. Deborah Harrop, and most importantly, the Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Ms. Kelly Kimura, without whose support and dedication this publication would not be possible.

It is hoped that the addition of the articles in the current issue of *Language Education in Asia* to the scholarly work dedicated to improving the understanding and delivery of English language instruction in the Asian region will provide further insight into the unique context in which we teach. Through sharing our experiences and insights, we are able to support each other as educators and researchers; in addition, we enhance our own professional development and the skills and expertise we utilize in our classrooms, which have a direct impact on the success of our students.

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Research

Negotiating "Third Spaces": EAP Apprenticeship, Academic Writing, and Chinese Students

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Abstract

The aims of this exploratory research on the academic writing apprenticeship of Chinese students are four-fold: (1) to determine what students thought were the purposes of academic writing, (2) to find out if students were adopting the preferred organisational patterns in writing argumentative essays, (3) to identify what their most common errors were when writing for academic purposes, and (4) to determine teacher perceptions of the academic writing program. The researcher surveyed 47 Chinese students, analysed the organisation of 31 sample essays, conducted an error analysis of 120 paragraphs, and interviewed 10 EAP writing teachers. Findings revealed that students generally associated academic writing with skills-based improvement rather than development of higher order skills as criticality; students acculturated to the preferred ways of organising essays; lexis posed the most serious issue for student writing; and teachers interviewed generally raised concerns about the effectiveness and direction of the writing program.

One major consequence of globalisation is the increase in the number of extension campuses of western universities in different parts of the world. In this paper, an extension campus refers to an institution that operates as a branch of a university that is based in the west. Asia, in particular, has seen the growth of universities catering to the English language needs of students who would rather be educated on local shores, but within a generally western university model. This has been the case in China.

Most extension campuses of western institutions of higher education offer degree programs featuring a final year of study in the main institution after two or three years of study in China. Studying in an institution following a Western model may pose challenges to students used to the local system of education. Challenges range from adapting to new ways of doing things to acculturating to new conventions and meeting the expectations of western education predominantly taught by an international faculty, most of whom are native English-speaking, if not educated in western countries.

One of the biggest challenges for Chinese students taking EAP writing in their first year lies in the level and kind of writing expected in the university. Candlin & Hyland (1999, p. 11) describe writing as a "site of struggle and change." What may make writing difficult is the process of adapting, fitting in, and accommodating another system quite different to what one brings into the field. Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) noted that there are problems that make writing for academic purposes in one's non-native language an extremely cognitive and socially demanding task. Such problems may be attitudinal, cognitive (adapting to rhetorical styles, expressing opinions, register, and the writing process), or social (e.g., reaction to feedback and how to interact with professors). What may make writing "a site of change" may have been expressed by Shen (1989, p. 46): "Looking back, I realize that the process of learning to write in English is, in fact, a process of creating and defining a new identity, and balancing it with the old identity . . . "

As a subdiscipline, academic writing could not be more complex for students going through this process of transition to a target academic culture. "Academic writing . . . involves familiarity with writing conventions of the university culture and disciplinary subcultures in which the second or foreign language learner participates" (Schneider & Fujishima, 1995, as cited in Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008, p. 71). For Chinese students, a study by Su and Norton (2008) noted that students found linguistic challenges and strategies for writing to be the most difficult hurdle. One possible linguistic challenge is effective vocabulary for academic use. Indeed, Santos (1988, as cited in Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008) found that lexis is what non-native users of English find the most problematic in writing. Jordan (1997, as cited in Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008) also noted that students find vocabulary the most challenging. According to Edwards and Ran (2006, p. 10), "some [students] say that they simply do not have sufficient command of English to explain what an author says in their own words."

This paper explores the academic writing experience of Chinese students in China who were registered in the foundation programs of the extension campuses of two western institutions. The research was guided by the following questions:

- What do the students think is the purpose of writing academic essays?
- What patterns do students follow in organising an argumentative essay?
- Which language forms do they have the most difficulty with in academic writing?
- How do the teachers feel about the academic writing course they were teaching in terms of how this met expectations in higher education overseas?

Conceptual Background

The main concepts that influenced the researcher's perceptions of what was occurring in the contexts being investigated were the idea of apprenticeship via EAP writing and the notion of third spacing.

How is EAP a form of apprenticeship? Firstly, EAP acculturates students to conventions in writing held and practiced in the target academic culture. This is especially the case with Chinese students; many had not written an academic paper prior to their foundation year. The conventions of writing an academic paper are a big jump for students who may have only been exposed to English instruction involving exercises limited to grammar. Secondly, the issue of gaining access into the writing conventions of the target academic culture becomes in itself a process of initiation and apprenticeship into another culture and exposes students to other ways of making knowledge in the classroom that may not have been known to the students, including conscious processes (building autonomous skills) or classroom practices (cooperative

interaction and collaborative work). In this process of apprenticeship, teachers become the transmitters of a target system of conventions that students need to learn. A community where the practice of knowledge transmission is centered on the notion of facilitators or adept practitioners (teachers) and recipients (students) is eventually constructed, similar to Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice. However, should knowledge be only transmitted? Can knowledge be negotiated along this process of apprenticeship?

The other idea that anchors this paper is "third space," used here to refer to the transitional space that students enter as they negotiate expectations in the target discourse/s (see Figure 1). It is that space where students merge where they are coming from with what is expected of them in terms of writing conventions. It is where they assess the value of their experience and their big and small cultures in relation to the apprenticeship they have experienced in the target academic culture. Holliday's (1999) notion of big culture (ethnic / national) and small cultures (any cohesive social grouping, e.g., youth culture or classroom culture) triggers ideas about the frames that Chinese students bring to their academic writing classes and how these merge or contrast with the generally western orientation of EAP programs. A student's big and small cultures may consist of national, youth, classroom, and writing cultures. In contrast, the target EAP cultures are professional-academic, the university culture, the university's national culture, and the western EAP culture. In the research context, the target EAP culture has been known to emphasise critical reading, argumentative skills, critical analysis, and problem solving.

1st Space   2nd Space

Student's background (big & small) cultures — 3rd Space — Target EAP culture
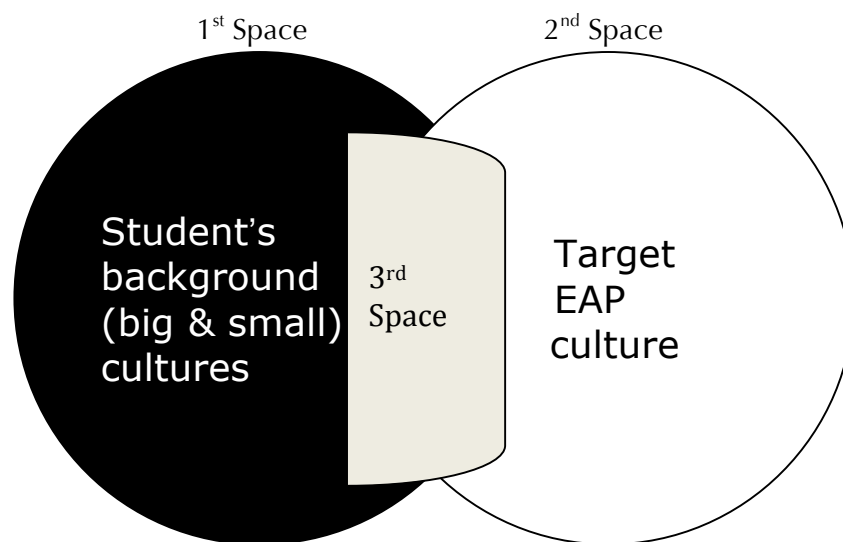
Figure 1. Cultures interacting when students engage in a "third space."

Essentially, *third space*, as used in this paper, represents the hybrid space where students merge their big and small cultures with the target culture, which in this case is the EAP writing culture. It may be important to point out here that Bhabha first used the term *third space* in line with his idea of liminal negotiation of cultural difference (Graves, n.d.); however, it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss third space, as used here, and its similarities or differences to Bhabha's use of the term.

Methodology

Research Contexts

The two research contexts (Institutions A and B, located in different parts of China) had been running EAP writing programs for undergraduate Chinese students for no more than five years at the time the research was conducted. The aims of the writing programs were somewhat similar: to instruct students on the use of academic language needed for Year 2 and beyond, develop student skills in organising essays and arranging evidence to support ideas, develop their criticality, build their skills in autonomy, and develop their voice and stance in writing.

Participants and Procedure

There were four phases involved in this exploratory research.

Phase 1: Exploratory Survey. An initial survey of 47 first-year Chinese students about their experiences to date (most had finished one semester and were beginning their second) was conducted in Institution A, where the research was started. All participants were in their first year of a foundation program for a degree and came from three groups or classes. The purpose of the initial survey was to find out what students thought about joining an EAP program in academic writing in a western university. As shown in the Results section, two questions were of specific importance: 1) what students consider as the purpose of a researched essay, and 2) what students consider as the purpose of essay writing.

Phase 2: Analysis of Organisational Patterns. To find out whether or not students were becoming "acculturated" to the preferred organisational patterns in academic writing, the next step was to determine how they were arranging information in their essays. Phase 2 is the qualitative part of the research where sample sets of writing, comprising 31 essays, were chosen from two student groups in Institution A. The two groups were chosen because one was perceived as strong, and the other weak. The objective for the choice of groups was to see if both groups, regardless of perceived writing abilities, were grasping the concept of organising academic essays. Both groups were asked to write an argumentative essay, as this type of essay was a common academic task expected from students. Both writing sets were collected towards the end of the semester. Both groups were taught by the same instructor. As the outputs were end-of-term work, these had gone through re-drafts at least once.

Phase 3: Error Analysis. As there were evident concerns on form and accuracy reflecting on the written outputs of the students previously taught, it was decided that the research should determine what language-related issues were contributing to student challenges in writing. As the researcher eventually moved to teach at Institution B, Phase 3 was conducted for both Institutions A and B in that it might be interesting to compare the language issues for students in both institutions. An error analysis on student-written samples was done for two groups (a total of 30 students) from Institutions A and B. The corpus consisted of 120 paragraphs (60 from each institution) of eight types. For Institution A, the paragraphs consisted of a summary, comparison and contrast, analysis, and introduction. For Institution B, the paragraphs included non-linear description, process and procedure, introduction, and argumentation. Each paragraph ranged from 120 to 160 words. In addition, to see how errors occurred in a longer text, an error analysis was also done on one full essay written by each group (30 in total). The essays of both groups were argumentative in nature. All texts were practice sets and formed parts of class requirements. The essays and paragraphs were read by one rater, the specific lines where the mistakes registered were coded, and the mistakes were tallied as they occurred in columns representing the categories identified (Tables 1 and 2).

Phase 4: Teacher Perceptions. In the last phase, interviews were conducted with 10 EAP teachers from Institution B to obtain teacher perceptions of how the writing program was fulfilling its objectives. As the researcher had already moved to this institution when the research progressed, access to teachers became possible only for Institution B. At the time of the interviews, the teachers were either currently teaching academic writing or had taught it the previous semester. Except for one, the teachers interviewed were native speakers of English. The questionnaire used is provided in Appendix A.

Results and Discussion

Phase 1: Exploratory Survey

The responses to the writing-related items in the exploratory survey are shown in Figures 2 and 3. Multiple responses were allowed for both questions. A summary of the results is given below.

Question 1: What do you think is the purpose of research essays?
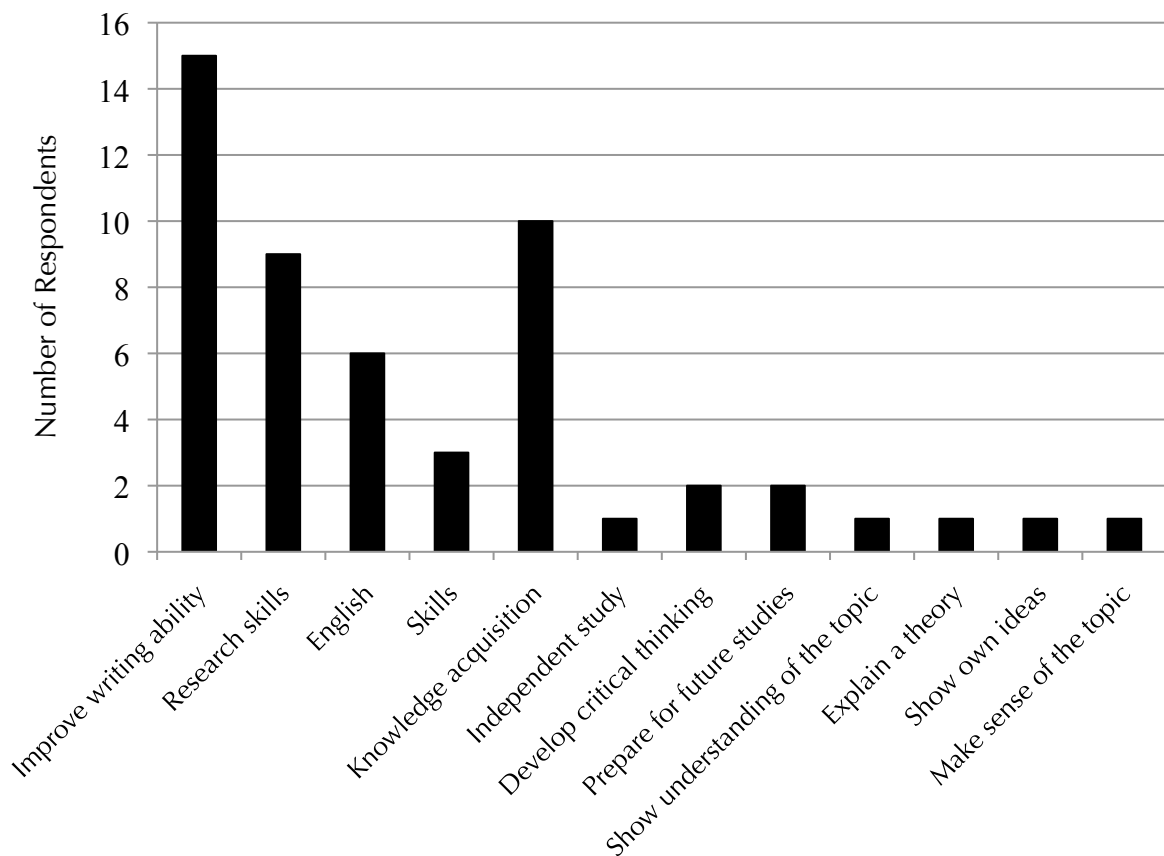
Figure 2. What students consider to be the purpose of researched essays. *n* = 47

As shown above, the development of writing ability was seen to be the main reason for writing essays. Students also chose knowledge acquisition and improving research skills as the next top reasons. However, of the 47 respondents, few chose the development of critical thinking. This begs the question of whether or not they value this skill or lack awareness that it is valued, and whether it is not explicitly taught. It is expected that part of the process of learning how to write in a particular genre (in this case, academic writing) is learning to examine one's ideas.

Question 2: What do you think is the purpose of essay writing?

Figure 3. What students consider to be the purpose of essay writing. *n* = 47

The majority of respondents considered the purpose of essay writing to be to improve their skills in academic writing, improve their English in general, and prepare them for future studies, while only a few respondents mentioned the acquisition of knowledge. This may be explained by the focus on process in an EAP course. As shown below, there seems to be less concern about content. Respondents wrote:
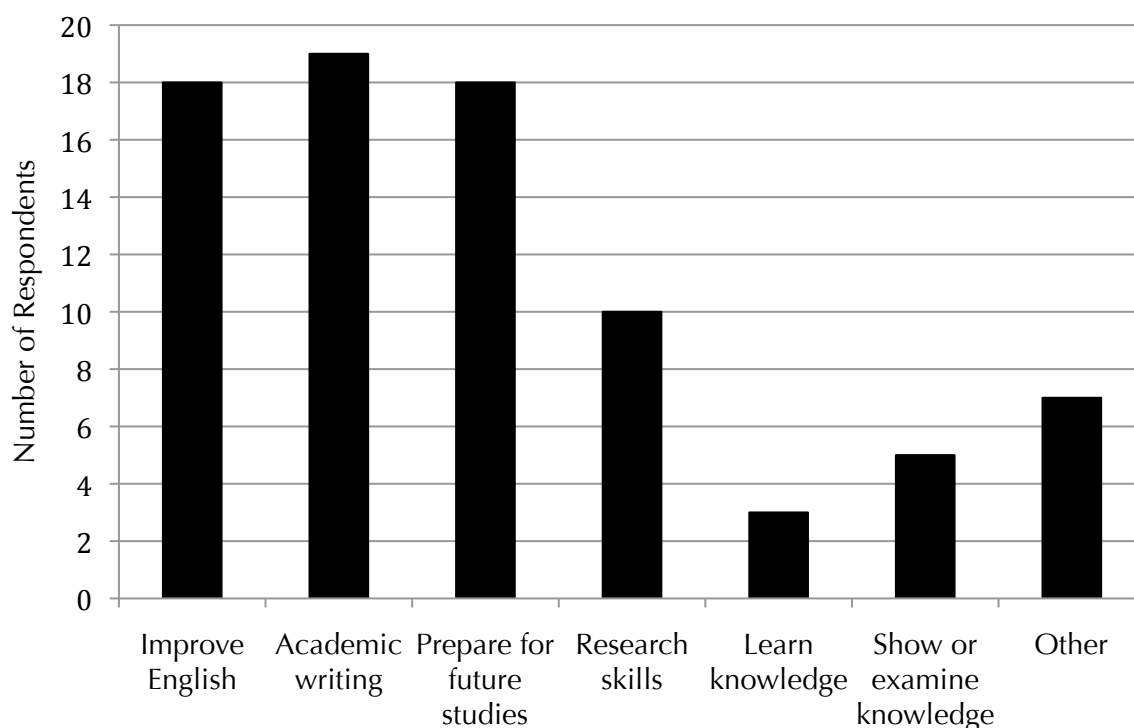
> The content may not be the most important. The process when we are writing may be more important. (Respondent 1)
>
> To practice what I have learnt. Not only theory but also practice. (Respondent 2)
>
> Since we have a lot of time to prepare for research papers, the purpose should be checking whether we can do enough academic reading and collecting, re-organising information. (Respondent 3)

It seems from the responses that student concerns about the purposes of writing essays are more immediate and local, and focus on the development of skills. Such concerns contrast with higher learning objectives such as knowledge acquisition or developing criticality in thinking. In addition, the responses for both questions indicate the small culture orientation that students were bringing into their university-level academic writing program. In this case, what seems to operate as a small culture is the "classroom culture" that students were bringing from high school. This classroom culture tends to value the immediate relevance and applicability of skills being learned.

Phase 2: Analysis of Organisational Patterns

The analysis of 31 argumentative essays revealed that students had clearly developed an awareness of an "EAP" way to structure information in their essays by the end of term. In writing argumentative essays, they adopted one of two options in organising information: the top-down (thesis-driven) organisation of information, or a more open structure that does not state a clear thesis at the beginning of the essay, but initially provides a balanced discussion of two points of an argument and ends with a conclusion that indicates some kind of a decision. Examples of these patterns are given in Appendix B.

For Group 1, eight students adopted a top-down structure, seven followed an open structure, and only one wrote an essay that seemed to show no evident structure at all. For Group 2, five students adopted a top-down structure, while the remaining 10 adopted an open structure for their essays. Results from both groups indicate that students were definitely becoming acculturated to preferred patterns of organising writing in an argumentative essay. In this sense, it can be said that the instruction provided was working and acculturating students to the conventionalised writing expected in the academic context.

In response to a question on what students find easiest to do in EAP writing, one respondent wrote:

> Maybe it's . . . like the outline or the organisation of the whole article . . . The structure, several patterns already designed . . . it's easy . . . We don't have to think of new patterns ourselves. (Respondent 4)

While what was said indicates evidence of student "acculturative" ability to the organisational patterns normally modeled in texts, certainly creating a mind-set among students that fixes organising writing in specific patterns goes against fostering critical thinking. In this sense, therefore, it would seem that there is a need to build awareness among students that rhetorical patterns produce some kind of guide for novice writers. However, it is building among students the thinking that other possibilities may exist in organising information that may need emphasising.

As regards to building cohesion in writing, a growing consciousness was noted on student use of transitional devices to link ideas in their essays. However, a consistent trend was that while students developed an awareness of their use, some were not using them appropriately. Thus, it seems that while students tended to understand some form of academic languaging, connected ideas were not always the end product of their choices. It is crucial to have students think more about this aspect of academic writing, as outputs can read like a collage of disconnected ideas, but have superficial links to give a semblance of cohesion.

The following are examples of the qualitative notes on the analysis of the organisation in student essays.

Group 1 (end of first term)

Adopts a structure but there was no indication of an argument.

A structure was adopted but does not necessarily indicate viewpoint.

Open structure. No clear position taken. No conclusion adopted.

Good flow but lacked discussion of actual position taken.

Lack of support for lead sentences (top-down structure).

Most of presented information was off. Unsupported argument.

Top-down structure followed.

Position taken right at the beginning. Conclusion confirms this.

Discussed two sides of the issue, providing a longer discussion to the position taken.

Group 2 (Semester 2)

Argument not initially clear. Attempted to cite specific examples.

"Open" starter (no particular argument set forth). Next paragraph fails to establish connection.

Purpose statement signals a more open stance but succeeding paragraphs clearly indicate the writer's position.

Open argument at the beginning yet follows through with more directed discussion in the body, which supports a viewpoint.

Use of signposts can be improved. Not necessarily unpacking the argument.

Top down. 5-paragraph essay. Inappropriate use of cohesive devices.

Very clear organisation. Enough details discussed. Inappropriate use of transitions.

Disconnected ideas though some examples are relevant. Inappropriate use of transitions.

Conclusion does not give the impression that the essay is ending.

Already made the transition to the writing culture expected.

Very clear thesis statement. Clearly supported points. A structure was followed.

Again, it is evident from the qualitative notes that the concept of structuring information in essays is something that students have learnt. However, the adoption of a structure did not always necessarily lead to a sound argument. Content and relevance of information remain key elements in the development of an argument.

Phase 3: Error Analysis

Interestingly, an error analysis conducted on 120 paragraphs of variable rhetorical devices written by students from the two institutions showed that students in both groups encountered similar problems. The top four language-related problems were the same in terms of ranking, with lexis proving to be the most cumbersome, regardless of the type of rhetorical device. While this may not be surprising, one may note that students wrote different text types, two of which, Process / Procedure and Non-prose Description, are somewhat technical in orientation. What had been shown by the error analysis is that regardless of the type of writing, students made the same type of errors. This may mean that instead of focusing instruction on the use of

specialised vocabulary or constructions common in a specific text type, direct intervention on these identified errors may be more helpful for students to improve their writing.

The distribution of errors across 120 paragraphs is noteworthy. Tables 1 and 2 show lexis-related errors occurred almost twice as often as those of the second-ranking verb errors for both groups from the two institutions. While the top four most recurrent problems were the same in ranking for the groups in the two institutions, there were slight differences in the extent to which they occurred in student writing. Institution A students had twice as many sentence construction issues than Institution B students and had more form-based mistakes. Both groups, however, had committed the same number of mistakes in subject-verb agreement. Overall, the results point to the consistency of discrete form-based type local errors in written outputs of students. Similar academic writing programs would do well to provide some kind of form-focused instruction on these items, which tend to hamper student efforts at producing more effective written work. Tables 1 and 2 show how consistent the errors are, indicating the level of attention and treatment that they require.

Table 1
Institution A Error Analysis (Summary, Comparison and Contrast, Introduction, Analysis)

Top Problems Identified	Frequency of Occurrence
Lexis-Related (Word Choice / Word Form)	232
Verb Tense / Aspect	131
Sentence Construction Issues	107
Agreement (Subject-Verb)	63

Table 2
Institution B Error Analysis (Argument, Non-Prose, Process and Procedure, Introduction)

Top Problems Identified	Frequency of Occurrence
Lexis-Related (Word Choice / Word Form)	204
Verb Tense / Aspect	106
Sentence Construction Issues	69
Agreement (Subject-Verb)	63

Additionally, results indicate that as mistakes in basic sentence structures are consistent, there is a strong need to address and strengthen students' general English language competence. At the very basic level, this requires re-teaching students the use and function of specific words (including their forms and parts). A question that arises is how can an EAP apprenticeship run smoothly if a student's writing ability does not meet the basic requirements of the program? Of course, there is an understanding that the admission process for both institutions only allows those students who have achieved a certain level of competence via a standard English language testing scheme for international students. Still, simultaneous support or extra help has to be provided to students who, hampered by languaging issues, are unable to navigate their apprenticeship smoothly. In one of the research contexts, this support was available, so the expectation was that just before the students were mainstreamed into university work in their final years, they would be given much more exposure, practice, training, and orientation into the kind of writing expected in a western institution of higher education. However, the other research context lacked this kind of crucial support.

Phase 4: Teacher Perceptions

The ten teachers interviewed for this phase of the research were from Institution B. They seemed to believe that the EAP writing program in Institution B may be too advanced for the level of the students, bringing into question how best to support students in developing their general English language competence. The other factors noted can be considered behavioural or attitudinal, which connects with the notion of "small cultures" that students may be taking with them into the classroom. The teachers interviewed thus noted:

> They're not used to writing in the way they are expected to do. (Teacher 1)

> The work is trying to get students to construct research papers in a logical manner, but unfortunately you are putting a kind of [western] approach on a completely different kind of thinking. The way of thinking is flowery, 'round and 'round the subject without getting to the point. (Teacher 2)

> What we do here, I think it is a kind of indoctrination into the western culture. People say that we're culturally insensitive, but if you study in another country, you have to understand the country's culture. (Teacher 3)

The teachers pointed to significant factors that influence the apprenticeship process of Chinese students in academic writing courses. The main factor is the big and small cultures that may be involved as students make the transition to the culture of writing expected in a western university. Teachers recognised the complexity of the issue of getting the students into the EAP academic writing culture. There did indeed exist expectations of the group (native-English speaking teachers and academics mostly from one country) who were themselves proceeding from their own cultural frames in assessing student performance in academic writing. Worth mentioning is the academic subculture that places emphasis on critical reflection (interpretation, making connections, and evaluation).

Other important themes that emerged from the interviews involved teacher perceptions of what EAP teaching entails, perceptions of students' main issues in writing, and avenues the teachers felt the program should take. Teachers believed that EAP essentially involves teaching students how to write "formulaic" essay types. However, they believed that student competence level is not up to par and there is a need for more work on general English. As regards perceived major problems in writing, some teachers thought achieving an academic style was a problem; others felt that it was accuracy. Hence, the teachers interviewed felt that that there is a need to go back to the basics. They also felt it is important to build student confidence and provide more positive reinforcement. As it was observed that students have a very systematic way of doing things once they grasp the idea of what they are supposed to do, nurturing this potential among students will likely be in their favour.

Teachers commented on the culture of writing expected in the university:

We have redrafting here right. Often the redrafting is making the connections. They're not really reflecting. They're not really engaged in a way of thinking at all. When they go to the university, they get the huge shock or fail because they don't get that. The redrafting and all the artificial stuff we do here, I think that's the biggest problem . . . I was talking to my students about science reports. I was making the connection between scientific writing and academic writing generally . . . Why write that in your science reports. What do you write in the introduction and then in the end, what do you do . . . because that's what you do in the science report? (Teacher 4)

There's a massive lack of transference of skills . . . EAP is teaching quite formulaic essay types, and they do do lots of it in language analysis, but in terms of their whole approach in learning English, I think EAP is quite particular . . . Here we're almost teaching them how to learn something because it's a foundation and bridging year. It's like . . . we're like taking them away from their high school learning. (Teacher 5)

The issues pointed out by the teachers are certainly significant. Firstly, the "culture of writing" itself may run in total opposition to ways of thinking that students bring to their writing activities. The lack of transference of skills or application of knowledge to writing involved in content courses, for one, may imply a heavy compartmentalisation of the teaching of skills that leads to student inability to process connections or transferability. In addition, perceptions of "artificiality" of how things were being done indicate a need to re-evaluate how current programs may be made more relevant to respond to the writing needs of Chinese students.

Conclusion

In sum, this exploratory research has found the following. In Phase 1, Chinese students in the research contexts generally believe that the main purpose behind essay writing is immediate improvement of skills and relevance and use to their academic studies. From the findings in Phase 2, it is evident that Chinese students are able to structure or organise their essays in academically acceptable ways when given some form of instruction or modeling. However, whether or not they are able to take this awareness to approaching the writing of unfamiliar texts is not clear, most probably because of the compartmentalised approach to the teaching of skills. As found in Phase 3, Chinese students' issues in writing are essentially consistent, with lexis occupying a prominent position. This finding implies that universities expecting students to function effectively in their studies (including content courses) must provide focused intervention through provision of support from writing centers, or specialised tutorial help. It would seem that there is a need to strengthen the general English language skills base of students if they are expected to succeed in academic writing programs and take on broad skills from here to apply to writing required in content courses. There is some question about whether to focus vocabulary input on general categories or a specialised academic vocabulary on specific disciplinary content which students have the possibility of recycling. Finally, based on teacher perceptions presented in Phase 4, it is strongly recommended that EAP writing programs in extension campuses responding to the perceived writing needs of Chinese students work on increasing teacher awareness of the subcultural transitions expected from students.

A limitation encountered in this research was that the data were mostly what was available during specific periods as the research progressed. The progression of research was simultaneous with site transfers for the researcher and accounted for why some data were collected only in one institution, rather than perhaps ideally both institutions. However, as the

goal was not to compare the two research contexts, the data collected and analysed for both appear to have served their purposes in their exploratory value. It is thus fair to say that the initial findings here need verification across case studies that would entail following through with particular students beyond their first year of apprenticeship.

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Appendix A
Interview Questionnaire Used with EAP Teachers of Academic Writing

1. How long have you been teaching EAP and in which contexts?

2. Are there any clear differences teaching EAP to Chinese students compared to other contexts you have taught?

3.   What do you see as the emphasis of the writing program that you are currently teaching?

4. What do you see as strengths of Chinese learners of EAP writing? What about main weaknesses?

5. Which aspects in EAP writing programs do you feel Chinese students can engage with effectively? Which aspects can they not?

6. Which specific skills in writing do Chinese students need to function effectively in the context of the main campus in the west?

7. What do you see as the main cause of students' failure to engage effectively in EAP writing practices? (And potentially, with the discourse expected the western higher education institute they will spend their last one to two years?)

8. What is the chance that students' perceived weaknesses may be "subcultural" in nature rather than "learning-based"? Or can the two be distinguished?

9. How do you see the current writing program you teach as addressing the needs of your Chinese students? And in preparing students for writing requirements in the western university they are eventually headed to?

10. If you were to design an EAP writing program for Chinese students to prepare them for a western university's type of writing, which areas would you emphasise, and why?

11. As an EAP teacher, do you see your role as initiating students into a set of practices / conventions in writing? Or as someone who acculturates students into a specific "culture of writing" as that required in the western university which this institute has proceeded from?

Appendix B
Samples of Student Written Outputs and Preferred Organisation Patterns

Excerpt 1
Top-down structure with no clear argument taken, yet has a clearly stated purpose statement. The information was based on a source text.

It is generally believed that war is caused by the negative aspects of human nature, such as selfishness, possessiveness, irrationality and aggressiveness... Fortunately, it is a relatively peaceful era now although some small regional conflicts wars still exist. The terrible and dark world war times have taught human beings a lesson that wars could truly do great harm to people. There's still many argue that with technology developing, modern wars are the most danger to humans. However, the harmfulness of modern wars can't be denied. This essay will mainly discuss the causes, effects of modern wars and ways to prevent it from happening and characteristics as well, which are all used to support the statement above.

Modern wars have been mainly civil wars that are usually caused by three reasons. First, ethnic groups that are fighting for more autonomy or for a state of their own; second, groups trying to get control of a state, and third, the so called 'failed states, where the central government has collapsed or is extremely weak and fighting is occurring over political and economic 'spoils.'

Modern wars are so called not only for they happen in modern times but also for the characteristic that distinguishes them from traditional wars. These two characteristics directly lead to the effects of modern wars. Firstly, modern war often lead to more civilians killed than soldiers. Also, the destruction of the land by the fighting is often immense so that when the fighting finally ends, civilians return to an ecologically damaged land.

Technology used to greatly increase the destructive capacity of weapons is another characteristic of modern wars. Additionally technology has also been used to increase the weapons' accuracy, penetration ability... All these factors contribute greatly to the harmfulness of wars to human beings and all the living things on this planet.

However, although the destruction of modern wars is obvious and severe as illustrated above, we should still hold the confidence that we can control and prevent it from happening.

Excerpt 2

Adopts a structure that identifies a clear argument from the start.

Peace has been the theme of world since the end of WWII. As the countries all around the world have a reach a same agreement that the harm that modern war will bring to mankind is unanticipated. The tragedy of WWI and WWII showed us, war can only brings us deaths and lose, it is meaningless for one to persue it. This essay wil highlight the deepest danger of modern war may bring to mankind, along with some analysis hereby.

The higher technology is applied to the arms, the more dangerous modern war will be. When the newclear weapons were first invented, it is never regarded to be the ultimate development subject, but it comes out to be the killer of numb. The deadly explosion in Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed tons of people of Japan in 1945. Although it accelerate the end of WWII, but the demage to mankind is cruel. .. then a characteristic of modern war is clear to be seen: more civilians are killed than soldiers. The refugees in war have to face the explosions and deaths… War kills people of innocent. This shall be counted in the dangerous sides of modern war.

Except for the deaths, another characteristic of modern war is the use of technology which increases the destructive capacity of weapons, just like some examples in the first part of this essay have mentioned. Thus a bigger amount of citizens will be killed in modern war..a public concern has existed that the possibility of nuclear war seems to be increased, as the world is still devoting to the stockpile of nuclear weapons.

To sum up, it is clear that the final victims of war is human beings ourselves. There is no need to hurt ones own by wasting time and money on the harmful toys. War is the last and worst choice that mankind should avoid.

Student Perceptions of Metacognitive Strategy Use in Lecture Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

Listening to lectures is difficult, especially for students who have just entered university. It is even more daunting for ESL students attending lectures delivered in English. Various literatures have highlighted the importance of explicit training to improve students' academic listening skills (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Swan, 2011). This paper explores ESL students' perceptions towards a Metacognitive Strategy Instruction (MetSI) programme to improve their lecture listening comprehension abilities. The study involved 34 first-year students from the Faculty of Education in a public university in Malaysia. Instrumentation for the study involved the use of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Data revealed that the students perceived the MetSI training as helpful in improving their lecture listening skills and in enabling them to be more effective in extracting information from lectures. Findings from the study suggest the need for students to play a more active role in overcoming their listening difficulties.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest and research on the need for effective listening skills and strategies for ESL university students studying in English-medium institutions (Hyon, 1997). This is because English has become a major language in tertiary education and the language of university lectures (Long & Richards, 1994). Many tertiary institutions in Malaysia use English as the medium of instruction in recognition to the fact that English has become the lingua franca of the borderless community.

Researchers point out that listening to lectures is a major part of university study (Benson, 1994; Morell, 2004; Richards, 1983) and this is highlighted by Benson (1994) who describes the lecture as "the central ritual" (p.181) of university culture. A study by Ferris & Tagg (1995, cited in Hyon, 1997) demonstrated that the lecture is the most common mode of instruction at over 230 university and college faculties. Hence, effective listening comprehension skills are essential for students' academic success (Benson, 1994; Dunkel, 1991; Flowerdew, 1994; Vandergrift, 2004). However, during lectures in English, ESL students are faced with greater difficulties than native speakers because ESL students have to comprehend subject matter delivered in English as well as contend with other obstacles that a lecture could create, such as

understanding the lecturer's accent, and speed of delivery. ESL students also have to contend with the difficulty of listening and taking notes at the same time, as well as processing visual aids such as presentation slides or textbooks. This leads to comprehension difficulties when ESL students listen to academic lectures.

Mendelsohn (2002) argues that many ESL students' listening skills are not developed enough to enable them to effectively extract content information from university lectures. In fact, lecturers often assume that students develop their listening skills through "osmosis and without help" (Mendelsohn, 1984, as cited in Oxford, 1993, p. 205). This corroborates the findings of a study analysing problems faced by undergraduate students in Malaysia by Aziz & Ismail (2005): ESL students lack the necessary skills to learn through lectures given in English. Experts believe that one of the ways to develop students' listening skills is through extensive training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Swan, 2011).

Although listening has been taught in many language programmes, experts still believe that much research needs to be done to enable a more effective classroom teaching of the skill (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Buck, 1995; Goh, 2000; Mendelsohn, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). New approaches to teaching listening have emerged in recent years due to developments in the field of cognitive psychology (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Goh, 2008; Lynch, 1998; Macaro, Graham, & Vanderplank, 2007; Rubin, 1994). Within this field, the metacognitive approach has become a more popular research topic (Chamot, 1995; Goh, 2008; Mendelsohn, 1995, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). One of the metacognitive approaches is training learners to apply effective strategies to cope with the demands of listening (Mendelsohn, 1998).

Evidence from research on reading and writing highlights the fact that metacognitive strategies assist students in managing their learning more effectively. They are able to maximise the information received to improve their performance of required tasks. Wenden (1998) argues that learners who use their metacognitive abilities seem to have the following advantages:

1. They are more strategic learners.

2. Their rate of progress in learning as well as the quality and speed of their cognitive engagement is faster.

3. They are confident in their abilities to learn.

4. They do not hesitate to obtain help from peers, teachers, or family when needed.

5. They provide accurate assessments of why they are successful learners.

6. They think clearly about inaccuracies when failure occurs during an activity.

7. Their tactics match the learning task and adjustments are made to reflect changing circumstances.

8. They perceive themselves as continual learners and can successfully cope with new situations.

(adapted from Wenden, 1998)

In his study, Vandergrift (2004) employed a technique called metacognitive sequence to facilitate his subjects' use of metacognitive strategies during listening. The results of the study show that these processes benefit the subjects through raising their awareness of the use of

strategy and providing a kind of scaffolding as the subjects go through listening tasks. Vandergrift's study seems to advocate the use of these strategies to improve learners' comprehension as well as to motivate them to learn.

The present study examines beginning university students' perceptions towards a Metacognitive Strategy Instruction (MetSI) programme and its effects on their lecture listening comprehension.

Methodology

Data for the study were obtained from a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the subjects. The subjects were 34 first-semester students undertaking a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) at a public Malaysian university. They were from non-English speaking backgrounds and English was a second or foreign language to them. Prior to entering university, most of their communications in English was limited to English lessons in their schools only. First-year students were chosen because they face greater challenges in understanding lectures as most schools in Malaysia still adopt the traditional teacher-centred learning style and are exam-oriented in nature. In general, the subjects found listening comprehension in an academic English environment rather challenging.

The subjects were 22 females and 11 males in their 20s and one female student who was 42 years old. All the students in this study had enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Education. Ten (29.4%) students were enrolled in the B.Ed in Chemistry course while another ten (29.4%) were from the B.Ed TESL programme. Nine (26.5%) students were enrolled in the B.Ed in Physics programme and five (14.7%) students were in the B.Ed in Biology programme.

Instruments

Questionnaire. Prior to the 10-week Metacognitive Strategy Instruction (MetSI) programme, the students were asked to answer a questionnaire on metacognitive lecture listening strategies. The questionnaire was adapted from the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006). The MALQ has been used in other research as a tool to raise students' awareness of listening processes and to increase the self-regulated use of comprehension strategies (Coşkun, 2010). The questionnaire items are related to five metacognitive factors associated with listening strategies; however, for this study, only four items are discussed: (a) the subjects' personal knowledge on listening, (b) planning-evaluation metacognitive strategies, (c) directed attention strategies, and (d) problem-solving strategies. The questionnaire responses were analysed according to these factors using frequency counts.

Semi-structured interview. At the end of the 10-week strategy training, ten out of the 34 students were randomly selected and interviewed about their experiences in learning the new strategies. In particular, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insights into their perceptions regarding the MetSI training that they had undergone (see Appendix A).

Treatment

Metacognitive Strategy Training Instruction (MetSI) is a 10-week intensive metacognitive listening strategy module aimed at improving students' lecture listening skills and metacognitive strategies. Each lesson consisted of listening tasks where students listened to numerous listening texts, followed by comprehension activities. Each teaching module presented was divided into specific underlying strategies that students would have

opportunities to discuss and practice. The following were some of the metacognitive strategies taught during the MetSI programme:

- summarising
- comprehension monitoring
- planning
- task knowledge
- self and peer evaluation
- directed attention
- problem identification

Integrated within these strategies were activities including lecture wrap-ups, KWL charts (adapted from Ogle, 1986; see Appendix B), metacognitive listening sequence (adapted from Vandergrift, 2003; see Appendix C), and self-questioning strategies.

The lessons included three principal stages: pre-listening, listening, and post-listening. In the pre-listening stage, students were provided with pre-listening questions for discussion. The pre-listening activities included revision and presentation of language items as well as planning and preparation for the activity to be undertaken in the next stage. At the listening stage, students did activities or tasks aimed at practicing the strategies and developing skills. Each lesson consisted of a quick review, including a dialogue or other types of audio exercises. When introducing a new strategy, the instructor included demonstrations and examples so that students would view the strategy in action. The instructor also asked questions. Finally, at the post-listening stage, students were given tasks for strategy practice. They had further practice to consolidate, extend, and review the strategies, either in a different context or to produce an outcome such as completing worksheets or a summary.

At each stage, prompting, questioning, and modelling techniques and strategies were consistently employed by the instructor to increase students' awareness. This was done to demonstrate, discuss learning, and help students to reflect on what they had done, how they did it, and how well they had performed. This is in accordance with Wenden's (1985) suggestion that instructors need to expand their role by taking on a guiding, questioning role which involves informing students about language learning, what they are doing, and how they are going to do it.

Results

The questionnaire items were analysed according to metacognitive factors that are related to listening strategies suggested by Vandergrift et al. (2006), as previously mentioned.

Personal Knowledge

Wenden (1991, cited in Vandergrift, 2002) states that one type of metacognitive knowledge is personal knowledge, which refers to knowledge of the cognitive and affective factors that facilitate learning and what learners know about themselves as learners.

Pre-treatment questionnaire. Analysis of the questionnaire revealed that 47% of the students found listening to be the most difficult language skill compared to reading, writing, and speaking. A majority of the subjects (65%) also viewed listening as challenging.

These findings were further elaborated on by respondents during the interview sessions. The interviews, however, revealed that some students found speaking more difficult than listening because they felt that they were being judged whenever they spoke in English. On the other hand, due to the receptive nature of the listening process, the students did not feel that they were being judged by their listening abilities:

> Speaking is most difficult because sometimes when we speak in English, we think in English right, to come up with the words in English is quite difficult. (S5)

Post-treatment interviews. Interviews also revealed that many students did not feel that listening skills in English were important for them to excel in schools as their English teachers often emphasised reading comprehension skills in the classrooms.

> In my school, teachers always stressed on reading - not so much listening. They just did drilling in class . . . until we had to do MUET [Malaysian University Entrance Test], then we did listening. They also focussed on grammar, no listening . . . (S1)

> I've never learned how to listen. In schools, the teachers didn't teach us listening [skills]. (S3)

However, the interviews also revealed that the subjects' perceptions changed when they entered university, as they were faced with difficulties in understanding lectures delivered in English.

> . . . in class, my friends and I were left behind because it was hard for us to understand and it was also hard for the lecturers to finish the syllabus . . . The lecturers needed to clarify everything to make us understand, so we had a difficult time [completing the syllabus]. (S1)

> I found it so difficult because I didn't practice listening English with my friend [in school] . . . I think we should include it [teach listening] in school because it helps a lot . . . because in Malaysia they [schools] don't teach listening . . . I think it is important because it is one of the skills to help learning in the university. (S3)

The above findings corroborate other research findings that language learners do not view strategies as important in listening skills and most language learners lack awareness that these strategies could positively affect their listening processes (Cohen & Allison, 2000; Coşkun, 2010; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift et al., 2006).

The findings of the interviews revealed that the students viewed the MetSI training as helpful in improving their lecture listening skills.

> Yes, I feel the training is good for me because now I can understand the lecturers better. (S3)

> The training was good for me because now I feel more confident now. (S7)

I wish I had learned the strategies in school . . . (S2)

All ten students interviewed felt that the training had helped them to extract information from lectures more effectively.

When I use the KWL sheet, I find it easier to understand the lecture. It's also easy to note down the important point. (S1)

Now I use the summarising technique so I know the important point of the lectures . . . (S6)

Planning-Evaluation Metacognitive Strategies

Research has shown the benefits of preparing and reviewing topics learned in a lecture. Studies by Rost (1994) and Dunkel & Davis (1994) demonstrate that prior knowledge could assist students in understanding their lessons more effectively. Similarly, a study by Flowerdew & Miller (1992) demonstrates that students with background knowledge of the lecture topic were able to relate more effectively to the lecture content.

Pre-treatment questionnaire and post-treatment interview. Analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that in terms of planning and evaluation strategies, the students did not fully utilise these strategies to assist in their lecture comprehension.

According to the results, only 55% of the students planned ahead on how they were going to listen to a lecture. The post-treatment interviews corroborated this finding, as students commented prior to attending the MetSI programme that they were not aware of the importance of preparing for lectures. Many students also reported that they did not know and had never been taught how to prepare for lectures. In addition, the post-treatment interviews also revealed that before the training, students did not feel that they needed to read lecture notes or the textbook in preparation for a lecture.

I'd just go into the lecture room . . . (S3)

I didn't prepare anything; I just go [to a lecture]. (S5)

Sometimes, I "googled" [the topic] before the lecture, but only sometimes . . . (S1)

Findings from the post-treatment interviews show that after attending the MetSI programme, the students were able to plan their lecture listening.

Before I go to lectures, I fill the first column of the KWL sheet . . . [the KWL sheet] is helpful because I can guess what the lecturer is going to talk about and it's easier for me [to understand the lecture] if I know what the lecturer is going to talk . . . (S1)

Results from the questionnaire also showed that 59% of the students claimed that after listening to a lecture, they reflected on how they had listened, and how they might listen differently next time. However, only 44% of the subjects said that they periodically asked themselves if they were satisfied with their level of comprehension throughout the lecture.

Interviews with the subjects of their experiences prior to the training concurred with the above findings:

> . . . I didn't think (about) how I had done [in a lecture]. (S2)

> . . . I asked my friends if I didn't understand, sometimes I asked the lecturer but after [the lecture was over]. (S6)

> I asked my friend after class if I didn't understand, but I didn't like to stop the lecture. But most of the time I forgot to ask my friend [after the lecture] . . . Sometimes, we needed to go to the next lecture. (S1)

The reason why, prior to the training, students did not reflect or check their comprehension could be because they were unaware of these strategies. However, the interviews showed that the MetSI training had a positive effect in developing the students' self and peer reflections.

> Sometimes, at the end of the lectures, I asked the lecturers if the points were correct . . . before [the training], I didn't dare ask the lecturers. (S6)

> After the lecture, I can exchange my KWL sheet with my friends and I will write down points that I've missed . . . (S2)

Directed Attention Strategies

Students' ability to direct their attention to a subject matter is an essential strategy to enable comprehension, especially during long lectures. This is supported by Kaplan & Berman (2010) who point out that both our "executive functioning" and self-regulation are important factors that enable us to consciously control our attention.

Pre-treatment questionnaire. Analysis of the questionnaire demonstrates that the students were able to utilise this strategy. However, the strategies were limited to forcing themselves to focus. When faced with the problem of understanding a lecture, the majority of the students (80%) would simply focus harder on the text. On top of this, the majority of the students (79%) said that they did not give up and stop listening when faced with comprehension difficulties during lectures. Meanwhile, when the students lost concentration during lectures, the majority (73%) stated that they recovered their concentration right away.

Post-treatment interviews. In the interviews, the students reported that before they attended the MetSI programme, they found maintaining concentration and remaining focused to be the most difficult obstacles to overcome when they listened to lectures delivered in English.

> I always daydream during lectures, especially if it was boring or I couldn't hear the lecturer. (S2)

> Concentrating was difficult . . . maybe I just daydreamt when I didn't understand . . . (S3)

However, all ten students pointed out that the MetSI training had enabled them to be more focused during lectures and this had also helped them in maintaining their concentration.

> Before [the training] I just sit in the lectures . . . now, I can concentrate better because I use the questioning strategy . . . the KWL sheet is also good [in maintaining concentration]. (S8)

> I don't fall asleep in lectures now because I will take down notes using the KWL [sheet] or I use the questioning strategy . . . (S2)

Problem-Solving Strategies

Problem solving is a method of enquiry. It is an important approach to find solutions to a problem. To assist students in becoming effective language learners, it is essential that their problem-solving abilities are enhanced. Although they were not aware of using problem-solving strategies, analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed that, prior to the treatment, the students did utilise problem-solving strategies in overcoming comprehension difficulties as they listened to lectures in English.

Pre-treatment questionnaire. The most used problem-solving strategy was using words that the students knew to guess the meaning of unknown words (85%). Students also utilised their previous experience and knowledge to help them understand lectures (83%) and used the general idea of the text to help them guess the meaning of words that they did not understand (79%).

To assist with lecture comprehension, students also utilised other problem-solving strategies such as comparing what they understood with what they knew about the topic (79%) and thinking about what they had learned before to check that they had guessed the meaning of a word correctly (74%). However, the questionnaire findings also reveal that only a small majority of the students (58%) adjusted their interpretation when they realised that they had guessed incorrectly.

Post-treatment interviews. The interviews revealed that one of the positive effects of the MetSI training was that it provided the students with more problem-solving options when they were faced with comprehension difficulties during lectures.

> When I don't know the word the lecturer said, I try to think what the topic is about. (S1)

> If the lecturer says something I don't know, I try to guess the meaning from what he said before. Sometimes I can understand it [when I use this strategy]. (S4)

Discussion and Conclusion

Listening is a demanding task and it is even more difficult to listen in a second language. Therefore, explicit strategy training such as the MetSI would assist ESL university students in developing their listening skills and improving their lecture-listening comprehension. Findings from the study show that prior to the strategy training, students faced difficulties in understanding university lectures delivered in English. They also faced challenges in maintaining concentration during lectures. In addition, there was a lack of awareness of strategies to improve their comprehension and strategies that could be utilised to help them extract information from lectures more effectively.

The problem was perhaps due to the fact that Malaysian schools do not explicitly teach students strategies on how to listen to long lectures. Hence, the people involved (lecturers,

researchers, curriculum and material developers) should provide support for second language learners to facilitate the task of listening to lectures in English.

ESL professionals have an important role in assisting university students attending lectures in their second or foreign language. As these students face difficulties comprehending lectures in English, pre-sessional training or an in-session programme should be provided to the students. The training should prepare students with the language and listening skills that are required for students to effectively comprehend lectures. The training programme should emphasise exposing students to metacognitive strategies to maximise lecture comprehension.

Finally, more research needs to be conducted on the effects of metacognitive strategy training on students' lecture listening comprehension. It is hoped that through increasing students' metacognitive awareness, they will be able to play a more active role in overcoming their listening difficulties, rather than accepting that the difficulties are unavoidable.

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Appendix A
Post-Treatment Interview

Student Name: _____

B.Ed Programme: _____

Warm-up
- Greet the student and ask permission to tape the conversation.
- Explain the reason for the interview: to know the student's opinion about the MetSI programme.

Questions
1. How would you describe the level of your understanding of lectures before the MetSI programme? Were the lectures difficult / easy? Why? How would you describe the level of your understanding of lectures after the MetSI programme?
2. Before the programme, when you were listening to a lecture, what factors influenced your understanding?
3. Why do you think they influenced your understanding?
4. Now, after the programme, what factors influence your understanding?
5. What did you usually do to understand lectures before, during, and after listening to lectures before attending the MetSI programme? Since completing the MetSI programme, what do you usually do?
6. Describe your MetSI training experience.
   What changes did you experience through attending the MetSI programme?
   Which strategies did you like / dislike? Why?
7. Do you think the programme was beneficial to you?
   Why / why not?

Appendix B
KWL Chart

K What I KNOW	W What I WANT to know	L What I LEARNED

(adapted from Ogle, 1986)

Appendix C
Metacognitive Listening Sequence
Instructor's Guide

1. Prior to the first listening, ask students to state what their goals are.

2. Put students in pairs.

3. Ask them to discuss what they know about the topic and predict the information and words that they might hear.

4. Ask students to predict problems they might encounter and think how they would overcome these problems.

5. Let students listen to the text and tell them to underline words that they predicted correctly while listening. Also ask them to jot down new words or information as they listen.

6. Ask students to compare what they have understood so far and describe strategies that they have used to help them with their understanding.

7. Tell students to note down problems or disagreements that they have with their partners.

8. Demonstrate (through thinking aloud) how to listen selectively to the problematic parts of the listening text.

9. Play the text again. As students listen again to the text, ask them to make notes on any new information they hear.

10. Finally, discuss findings with the whole class.

(adapted from Vandergrift, 2003)

EFL Learners' Reading Strategy Use in Relation to Reading Anxiety

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Abstract

The study investigated EFL learners' reading strategies use in relation to reading anxiety and gender after their participation in extensive reading as a supplemental course requirement. One hundred and eight EFL college freshmen completed a questionnaire, a survey of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), and a modified Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) after eighteen weeks of participation in extensive reading. The results indicate a negative correlation between reading anxiety and reading strategies. It was also found that EFL learners with low anxiety levels tended to use general reading strategies such as guessing, while EFL learners with high anxiety levels employed basic support mechanisms, such as translation, to help themselves understand texts. Some reading strategies were more used by high-anxiety level readers than low-anxiety level readers. Additionally, females tended to be slightly more anxious than males in reading.

Language anxiety, a complex psychological construct, is regarded as an affective variable in the language learning process. Research on language anxiety has examined the possible relationship between anxiety and performance, and its interference in language competence (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Sellers, 2000). The majority of studies have centered on the influence of language anxiety on listening or speaking in language classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986; Phillips, 1992; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). However, anxiety also can be a crucial filter for foreign language (FL) learners as they attempt to comprehend reading or listening passages. The literature on foreign language reading suggests that affective variables such as anxiety could be contributing factors in reading performance (Mohd. Zin & Rafik-Galea, 2010; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000). In a preliminary study, Saito et al. (1999) indicated that foreign language reading anxiety is distinct from general foreign language anxiety and concluded that learners' levels of reading anxiety were correlated with their reading performance.

Another important variable associated with reading performance is EFL learners' use of reading strategies. The relationship between reading strategy use and reading comprehension has been of interest to researchers, since the efficient use of reading strategies benefits learners' reading comprehension to some degree (Al-Nujaidi, 2003; Brantmeier, 2000; Lee, 2007; Wu, 2005). Reading strategies, as Brantmeier (2002) indicated, are "the comprehension processes that readers use in order to make sense of what they read" (p. 1); they are characterized as

approaches, actions, and procedures used to improve reading comprehension. Since reading anxiety and reading strategies are two important influences on reading comprehension, the present study aims to investigate EFL learners' use of reading strategies and gender differences in relation to their reading anxiety levels.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). Foreign language anxiety negatively affects learner confidence and self-esteem (Horwitz et al., 1986). More anxious learners may not recall material learned before (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sellers, 2000) and compared to learners who are less anxious, may be less active in class (Ely, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers of language anxiety have investigated the possible relationship between reading anxiety and language proficiency to identify whether reading anxiety might predict language performance and reading comprehension (Saito, et al., 1999; Sas, 2002). In other words, learners with higher anxiety levels might comprehend reading texts more poorly.

A study by Ipek (2004) revealed that reading anxiety levels varied in conjunction with language proficiency. Learners at the advanced level seem to be less anxious compared with beginner and intermediate level students (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Liu, 2006)

Foreign language scholars have also recognized that anxiety in foreign language learning can facilitate as well as debilitate. An appropriate level of anxiety leads to better learner achievements because learners do not want to harm their self-esteem. However, the majority of studies have shown that foreign language anxiety indeed has a negative influence on the learning process and performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Sellers, 2000; Young, 1991).

Reading Strategies

Learners who are incapable of effectively comprehending reading texts may experience great frustration and may not have motivation for further learning. Thus, researchers study the use of reading strategies to reduce reading anxiety and to enhance reading performance.

Reading strategies are techniques or conscious actions taken to improve understanding and solve difficulties encountered in reading. Reading strategies include reading aloud, paraphrasing, guessing, re-reading the text, visualizing the information, asking oneself questions, translating, and using a dictionary. The successful use of reading strategies benefits learners' reading comprehension (Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009). Additionally, several studies have shown reading strategy use is also positively correlated with reading comprehension (Al-Nujaidi, 2003; Darabie, 2000; Song, 1999).

Moreover, diverse variables related to EFL learners' reading strategy use, such as gender, proficiency levels, personality, and language context, are of interest to researchers. Campbell (1999) explored language anxiety in relation to gender in the four skills and found that from two weeks before the study treatment to two weeks after, the percentage of women with reading anxiety fell by 7%, while the percentage of men experiencing anxiety rose around 9%. Mangubhai (1990) examined reading strategy use in relation to English proficiency and found

learners at a higher proficiency level tended to apply background knowledge to understand the text, but learners at a lower proficiency level seldom used any effective reading strategies to solve the difficulties encountered. Studies conducted by Al-Nujaidi (2003) and Wu (2005) showed that learners with higher reading proficiency levels employed reading strategies more frequently than those with lower proficiency levels.

Another affective variable, reading anxiety, has also been researched in relation to reading strategies. Oh (1990) indicated EFL readers use different reading strategies under the influence of anxiety. Sellers (2000) also found that learners with a high anxiety level use translation strategies directly while low-anxiety learners read the text more holistically and use more reading strategies.

Since a limited number of studies have investigated EFL learners at various levels of FL reading anxiety with respect to reading strategies and gender, the study proposes the following research questions:

1. Does EFL learners' reading anxiety vary in relation to reading strategies?

2. Do FL reading anxiety levels and reading strategies vary with respect to gender?

Research Method

Participants

One hundred and eight EFL freshmen (22 males and 86 females) participated in the study for eighteen weeks. They were enrolled in the Applied English Department as English majors at a university in northern Taiwan. The majority of the participants had studied English for at least nine years, and their English proficiency level was at the intermediate level. The participants were taking basic courses, such as reading, writing, and grammar. In the reading course, intensive reading activities to improve reading comprehension, reading strategies, and reading speed were employed in class. In addition, extensive reading was required; students had to read as many books in English as possible outside the classroom. They chose from graded readers, authentic fiction, or other types of authentic materials, submitted a written report for each book finished to provide evidence of reading and reading comprehension, and kept a reading log.

Instruments

The present study employed three instruments: a questionnaire, the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) and the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). The questionnaire was administered to investigate the background and reading habits of the participants. The second instrument, the 20-item FLRAS, designed by Saito et al. (1999), was used to investigate the participants' reading anxiety (see Appendix A). SORS, designed by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001), was modified to investigate the participants' extensive reading strategies use after participating in the extensive reading program as a supplemental requirement in the reading class and was additionally adapted to measure metacognitive reading strategies (see Appendix B). It includes three subcategories: Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB), and Support Strategies (SUP). Global Reading Strategies allow readers to intentionally monitor or manage their reading. Problem Solving Strategies help readers to directly solve reading difficulties. Support Strategies are basic mechanisms to enhance reading comprehension.

The FLRAS items are rated by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from five points (*strongly agree*) to one point (*strongly disagree*), except for the scoring of positive items (i.e., Items 12, 13, 14, and 18), rated from one point (*strongly agree*) to five points (*strongly disagree*). The theoretical range of the total score is 20 to 100. High scores on FLRAS indicate a high reading anxiety level. Additionally, the 30-item SORS has a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one point (*I never or almost never do this*) to five points (*I always or almost always do this*). The range of scores is from 30 to 150. The higher scores refer to the more frequent use of reading strategies.

In the present study, to eliminate the possible language barrier, the Chinese versions of FLRAS and SORS were employed and the internal reliability with an internal consistency coefficient was .798 and .876 (Cronbach's alpha, *N* = 108), respectively.

Procedure

The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, FLRAS, and SORS after the eighteen-week reading course.

Results

Research Question 1: Does EFL learners' reading anxiety vary in relation to reading strategies?

The FLRAS scores were significantly and negatively correlated with the SORS scores, $r(106) = -.268$, $p < .01$. The FLRAS scores were also correlated with the SORS subcategories, Global Reading Strategies [$r(106) = -.401$, $p < .01$] and Problem Solving Strategies [$r(106) = -.238$, $p < .01$], respectively, but were weakly correlated with Support Strategies [$r(106) = .020$, $p < .01$].

The descriptive statistics of FLRAS and SORS showed that the mean score of the FLRAS was 60.57 ($SD = 7.49$) while the mean score of SORS was 99.33 ($SD = 13.60$). Among the three SORS subcategories, the mean of every item in Problem Solving Strategies was slightly higher than the mean of the other two subcategories. The participants used Problem Solving Strategies more frequently and Support Strategies the least frequently.

Table 1 displayed three strategies used most and least frequently by the participants. The results showed that the participants used fundamental reading strategies such as trying to get back on track when losing concentration and using tables, figures, pictures and context clues to help them to understand reading texts. However, they seldom used more advanced reading strategies, such as critically analyzing and evaluating information, asking themselves questions, or taking notes.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Most and Least Used Reading Strategies

	Category	Strategy	Min	Max	Mean
Most	PROB2	Try to get back on track when losing concentration	1	5	3.94
	GLOB7	Use tables, figures, and pictures	1	5	3.92
	GLOB8	Use context clues	1	5	3.85
Least	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate the information	1	4	2.29
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	1	5	2.35
	SUP1	Take notes	1	5	2.46

To further compare the participants' differences in using reading strategies, the participants were divided into three anxiety groups (high, medium, and low) according to standard

deviation. The participants with a mean above one standard deviation comprised the high-anxiety group; those with a mean below one standard deviation were in the low-anxiety group. The remaining participants were placed into the medium-anxiety group. Seventeen participants belonged to the low-anxiety group, 70 were in the medium-anxiety group, and 21 were in the high-anxiety group. Table 2 shows that the high-anxiety group employed Support Strategies more often, the medium-anxiety group used Problem Solving Strategies more often, and the low-anxiety group adopted Global Reading Strategies more often. The participants in the low-anxiety group tended to use general strategies to intentionally monitor or manage their reading, while the high-anxiety group seemed to employ reading techniques such as taking notes, reading aloud, and circling information.

Table 2

Reading Strategy Use by Category for Different Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Group	Category	N	Min	Max	Mean
Low	SORS	17	75	133	100.58
	GLOB	17	32	61	45.00
	SUP	17	17	36	26.82
	PROB	17	21	36	28.76
Medium	SORS	70	71	136	100.48
	GLOB	70	29	57	43.40
	SUP	70	17	43	27.70
	PROB	70	20	38	29.38
High	SORS	21	73	115	94.47
	GLOB	21	30	51	39.33
	SUP	21	21	36	28.23
	PROB	21	17	37	26.90

The reading strategies used most and least by the three anxiety groups are displayed in Table 3. The low-anxiety group used context clues (GLOB8) the most and took notes (SUP1) the least, while the medium-anxiety group tried to get back on track when losing concentration (PROB2) the most and critically analyzed and evaluated the information (GLOB10) the least. On the other hand, the high-anxiety group translated from English into their native language (SUP8) the most and critically analyzed and evaluated the information (GLOB10) the least. It is surprising to find that the three anxiety groups all seldom took notes (SUP1), asked themselves questions (SUP7), or critically analyzed and evaluated information (GLOB10). The low-anxiety and medium-anxiety groups both used context clues (GLOB8) more often and the high-anxiety group used the translation strategy (SUP8) the most.

Table 3

Reading Strategies Used Most and Least by Anxiety Level

Anxiety Group	Category	Most and Least Used Strategies	Mean	SD
Low	GLOB8	Use context clues	4.05	.55
	GLOB2	Use background knowledge	3.94	.74
	PROB8	Guess the meaning of unknown word	3.94	.74
	SUP1	Take notes	2.29	1.21
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	2.41	1.12
	GLOB4	Think about if the content fits my reading purpose	2.70	.91
	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate the information	2.70	1.04
Medium	PROB2	Try to get back on track when losing concentration	4.01	.80
	GLOB7	Use tables, figures, and pictures	4.00	.79
	GLOB8	Use context clues	3.91	.86
	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate the information	2.25	.86
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	2.35	.99
	SUP1	Take notes	2.48	.94
High	SUP8	Translate from English into my native language	3.76	.88
	PROB2	Try to get back on track when losing concentration	3.76	.94
	GLOB7	Use tables, figures, and pictures	3.76	1.04
	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate the information	2.09	.83
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	2.28	1.00
	SUP1	Take notes	2.52	1.12

Research Question 2: Do FL reading anxiety levels and reading strategies vary with respect to gender?

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the FLRAS and SORS scores of males and females. The results showed there was no significant difference for males ($M = 59.54$, $SD = 7.53$) and females [$M = 60.83$, $SD = 7.51$; $t(106) = -.719$, $p = .474$] in the FLRAS scores. There was also no significant difference for males ($M=59.54$, $SD=7.53$) and females [$M = 102.68$, $SD = 13.64$; $t(106) = -.719$, $p = .474$] in the SORS scores. However, males seemed to be less anxious than females and tended to use more reading strategies than females. Twenty-three percent of the males belonged to the low-anxiety group while only 14% of the females did. The percentages of males and females in the high-anxiety group were close, at 18% and 20%, respectively. As Table 4 shows, males tended to use Global Reading Strategies more frequently to monitor or manage their reading; females tended to use Problem Solving Strategies the most. Both males and females used tables, figures, and pictures to help their understanding more often, but seldom used the strategies of asking themselves questions, taking notes, and critically analyzing and evaluating information.

Table 4

Reading Strategies Used Most and Least by Gender

Sex	Category	Strategy	N	Min	Max	Mean
Male	GLOB7	Use tables, figures, and pictures	22	3	5	4.18
	GLOB2	Use background knowledge	22	2	5	4.00
	GLOB8	Use context clues	22	2	5	4.00
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	22	1	4	2.40
	SUP1	Take notes	22	1	5	2.54
	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate information	22	1	4	2.63
Female	PROB2	Try to get back on track when losing concentration	86	1	5	4.01
	SUP4	Use a dictionary	86	1	5	3.82
	GLOB7	Use tables, figures, and pictures	86	1	5	3.86
	GLOB10	Critically analyze and evaluate information	86	1	4	2.20
	SUP7	Ask myself questions	86	1	5	2.33
	SUP1	Take notes	86	1	5	2.44

Discussion

Language anxiety is regarded as a key factor in reading comprehension. The present study analyzes EFL learners' reading strategy use in relation to reading anxiety level and gender differences after their participation in extensive reading as a supplementary requirement in reading class. The results showed that the FLRAS scores were negatively correlated with the SORS scores; the participants with more reading anxiety used fewer reading strategies, as expected. Among the three subcategories of SORS, FLRAS was correlated with Global Reading Strategies and Problem Solving Strategies, respectively, but was weakly correlated with Support Strategies. This might suggest that less anxious readers use more Global Reading Strategies to intentionally monitor or manage their own reading than more anxious readers, and that most readers, anxious or not, still employ Support Strategies, basic support mechanisms to help them understand texts. Consequently, EFL teachers may need to pay more attention to training learners in Global Reading Strategies to enable learners to consciously monitor their own learning, with the aim of reducing their reading anxiety.

Comparing the mean score of 52.9 (*SD* = 9.4) of the American students in the Saito et al. (1999) study to the mean of 60.57 (*SD* = 7.49) of the Chinese EFL learners in the present study, the Chinese EFL learners seemed to have more reading anxiety. The results are similar to the findings in previous studies (Huang, 2001; Shi & Liu, 2006). While analyzing the participants' use of the three reading strategy categories, it was found that the participants used Problem Solving Strategies the most frequently and Support Strategies the least frequently. This is similar to the conclusion drawn by Mo'nos (2005) and Wu (2005) that EFL college students majoring in English preferred to use Problem Solving Strategies the most and then Global Reading Strategies and Support Strategies the least. This might imply that EFL readers often encounter reading problems, so they are used to applying reading strategies such as trying to get back on track when losing concentration, but they seldom use reading strategies such as asking themselves questions or taking notes to support their reading. These two least-used reading strategies are important and helpful for readers to check their understanding of texts. Thus, EFL teachers might need to involve more Global Reading and Support Strategies in their reading classes to enable readers to reduce their reading anxiety and improve their reading performance and language proficiency.

Reading strategy use by EFL learners at different anxiety levels is explored in this study. The results show that the high-anxiety group employed Support Strategies more often than the other groups, while the medium-anxiety group was more likely to use Problem Solving Strategies and the low-anxiety group more frequently used Global Reading Strategies. This might indicate that EFL learners in the low-anxiety group were confident and tended to use Global Reading Strategies such as guessing, referring to their background knowledge, or using tables or pictures to enable them to monitor or manage their reading. However, the participants in the high-anxiety group seemed to employ Support Strategies such as translation, paraphrasing, or using a dictionary to help themselves understand the text. High-anxiety readers usually are less confident in enjoying the content of reading texts. While they are reading, they might just want to know the meanings of unfamiliar words and sentences. Ensuring understanding of the meanings of words or sentences will ease their anxiety and let them feel secure in reading. However, Global Reading Strategies might be more effective in reducing learners' anxiety, because readers will be more confident and relaxed when they are able to understand the whole picture a reading text represents by guessing or using their background knowledge. Therefore, teachers might introduce holistic reading strategies to build students' reading confidence.

Gender differences in reading anxiety and reading strategies are discussed in this study. Females seemed to be more anxious than males, and males used more reading strategies than females. The first finding is similar to the findings that females are more anxious than males (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). The second finding, that males tended to use more reading strategies, is different from the findings in Green and Oxford's (1995) study. They pointed out that female foreign language learners seemed to use more learning strategies than male foreign language learners. However, their study was concerned with learning strategies and the finding in the present study is related to reading strategies, which are just a part of learning strategies. Additionally, in the present study, in regard to the use of the three subcategories of reading strategies, males employed Global Reading Strategies more frequently while females used Problem Solving Strategies more. Males may be more aware of their reading process and self-monitor their reading strategies, but females focus more on the strategies which help them to solve reading problems. The results also showed that both males and females often used tables, figures, and pictures to help their understanding, but seldom ask themselves questions, take notes, or critically analyze and evaluate information. These least-used strategies are considered to be significant and more advanced strategies that enable learners to examine and check their own reading. Thus, EFL reading instruction may try to focus more on self-evaluating reading strategies and give different reading strategy training based on learners' gender.

Conclusion

To conclude, foreign language reading anxiety indeed is negatively correlated with reading strategy use, and gender influences participants' reading anxiety and reading strategy use. In addition, the reading strategies employed by EFL learners at a high anxiety level were different from those at a low anxiety level, and females tended to be more anxious than males. The three anxiety groups seldom take notes, ask themselves questions, or critically analyze and evaluate information. Based on these findings, it seems essential for EFL teachers to teach more top-down reading strategies such as critically analyzing the texts, guessing the meaning of unknown words, using context clues, background knowledge, taking notes and asking oneself questions. These reading strategies will strengthen learners' confidence and provide them with a more holistic picture of each reading text. Although dictionary use or translation might help learners immediately solve reading problems, learners might rely on these strategies

too much to benefit from or enjoy reading. Teachers should pay attention to reading strategies, which are important and essential for learners, and train their students to use these strategies more often.

From the findings of this study and examination of the different possibilities arising from various studies, room seems to exist for a thorough examination of reading strategies and reading anxiety. Further research needs to be conducted to evaluate the influence of reading strategies on foreign language reading self-efficacy and proficiency. In addition, many fundamental questions concerning foreign language reading anxiety, such as the source of foreign language reading anxiety and the relation between background variables, need further research.

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Appendix A
Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale
(Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999)

Directions: Statements 1 through 20 refer to how you feel about reading English while you are doing extensive reading. For each statement, please indicate whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree by marking the appropriate number on the line following each statement. Please give your first reaction to each statement and mark an answer for each statement.

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2	When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.	1	2	3	4	5
3	When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I'm reading	1	2	3	4	5
4	I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.	1	2	3	4	5
7	When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.	1	2	3	4	5
8	It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English.	1	2	3	4	5
10	By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I am worried about all the new symbols you [I] have to learn in order to read English.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I enjoy reading English.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I feel confident when I am reading in English.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
15	The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.	1	2	3	4	5
19	English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me	1	2	3	4	5
20	You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Survey of Reading Strategies

(Adapted from Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001)

After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) which applies to you while you are reading different texts.

'1' means that "I never or almost never do this."

'2' means that "I do this only occasionally."

'3' means that "I sometimes do this."

'4' means that "I usually do this."

'5' means that "I always or almost always do this."

Category	Statement	Never---Always				
GLOB1	I have a purpose in mind when I read.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP1	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB2	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB3	I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP2	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB4	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB1	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB5	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB2	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP3	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB3	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB6	When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP4	I use reference materials (e.g. a dictionary) to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB4	When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB7	I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB5	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB8	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP5	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB6	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB9	I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB10	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1	2	3	4	5

Category	Statement	Never---Always
SUP6	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	1 2 3 4 5
GLOB11	I check my understanding when I come across new information.	1 2 3 4 5
GLOB12	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read.	1 2 3 4 5
PROB7	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	1 2 3 4 5
SUP7	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	1 2 3 4 5
GLOB13	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	1 2 3 4 5
PROB8	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1 2 3 4 5
SUP8	When reading, I translate from English into my native language.	1 2 3 4 5
SUP9	When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.	1 2 3 4 5

Teaching Practice

Guidance for Learners' Improvement of Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Practice is considered an important part of language learning. Students are always encouraged to practice as much and as often as possible. However, some students do not know how to practice well and feel disappointed as practice does not always help them make much progress in their studies. Thus, as teachers, we should give them guidance on effective practice. This paper reports what and how guidance for practice should be provided for effective improvement of students' speaking skills. Encouraging preliminary results show that a set of appropriate activities to practice speaking and good management of group work can enhance students' speaking skills and increase their autonomy.

Practice is a language learning strategy that learners use to enhance their learning. Learners who want to make progress in their study often spend as much time as possible practicing the skills which need improvement. However, for many English majors at Nha Trang Teachers Training College, much practice does not equate to success.

According to Renandya (2010), only perfect practice makes perfect. This implies that students might not be practicing well. What should teachers do to help students practice well? What guidance is needed? In this paper, the author would like to offer some guidance to enhance students' practice of speaking skills. The main reason why speaking was chosen is

> . . . of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know the language are referred to as "speakers" of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing; and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak. (Ur, 1996, p. 120)

The guidance was a lesson from a small-scale project applied to first and second-year students at Nha Trang Teachers Training College in the academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

Theoretical Background

Teachers' Roles

The main goal of teaching speaking is communicative efficiency. Teaching speaking means helping learners develop their ability to interact successfully in the target language. To do so, one must have communicative competence. Richards, Platt, and Weber (as cited in Nunan, 1999, p. 226) defined the characteristics of communicative competence as:

> . . . (a) knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the language; (b) knowledge of rules of speaking (e.g., knowing how to begin and end conversations, knowing what topics can be talked about in different types of speech events, knowing which address forms should be used with different persons one speaks to and in different situations); (c) knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts such as requests, apologies, thanks, and invitations; (d) knowing how to use language appropriately. (p. 226)

Thus, to help students enhance their speaking skills, the teacher must help students improve their grammar, enrich their vocabulary, and manage interactions in terms of who says what, to whom, when, and about what.

Byrne (1987) stated that developing students' ability to interact successfully in the target language is a gradual process that begins with letting them imitate a model or respond to cues. Therefore, the same type of speaking activity might be practiced several times during the skill acquisition process; however, the task requirements should be of increasing levels of difficulty.

Why Group Work?

Many language classes are big, with students of differing abilities. This is a real obstacle for teachers striving to help students improve their speaking skills. In this case, group work has proved to be an effective way to solve the problem as ". . . group work allows all students to practise language and to actively participate" (Baker & Westrup, 2000, p. 131). Group work is highly recommended by many experts as a useful technique to get students involved in classroom activities, increase student talking time, and reduce teacher talking time (Brumfit, 1984; Harmer, 1991; Nation, 1989; Petty, 1993). More than a simple classroom technique, "it has been considered one of the major changes to the dynamics of the classroom interaction brought by student-centered teaching" (Nunan & Lamb, as cited in Le, 2010, p. 2). The benefits of group work are recognized not only by language teachers and experts, but also by language students: ". . . I began to see the benefits of participating in group work. I could improve my communication skills in the target language, develop my skills in cooperating with group members, and learn new ideas from others" (Qiangba, 2005, p. 48).

Popular Speaking Activities

Kayi (2006) studied popular speaking activities and analyzed their advantages. She recommends the following activities:

Discussions	Brainstorming	Reporting
Role-play	Storytelling	Playing Cards
Simulations	Interviews	Picture Narrating
Information Gap	Story Completion	Picture Describing
		Find the Difference

In the three volumes of *Communication Games* by Hadfield (1996a, 1996b, 1996c), a variety of communicative games and speaking activities provide not only "concentrated practice as a traditional drill," but also "opportunit[ies] for real communication, albeit within artificially defined limits" (1996a, p. iii). In addition to the games and activities recommended by Kayi and Hadfield, language teachers can easily access the rich source of communicative games and speaking activities on the Internet. Whatever the games and activities are named and however they are done, they serve to enhance learners' oral fluency. The teacher's task here is to try to utilize games and activities in such a way that each is exploited to the fullest. To achieve this, flexibility in using games and activities is vital.

Project Background

The researcher was responsible for teaching speaking and listening skills to 32 first-year college students in the academic year of 2008-2009. For many of them, communicating in a foreign language was unfamiliar. Whenever they wanted to speak, they wrote the sentence they wanted to say and then read it.

A variety of speaking activities was used and group work was applied. However, less progress in oral communication was made than had been expected. There were two kinds of students who were unsuccessful in terms of ability to communicate in English in classroom practice: those who spoke naturally and with fluency usually made a lot of grammar and pronunciation mistakes, and those who made fewer grammar and pronunciation mistakes were not fluent and their speech did not sound natural. Moreover, turn-taking was a problem when students conducted conversations. Those who started a conversation by asking questions would continue doing so to the end of the conversation and those who answered questions did not ask questions. Informal talks conducted with the students revealed the causes of unsuccessful communication were phonological problems, lack of vocabulary, insufficient practice of grammatical and functional structures, and the habit of translating everything from English into the mother tongue and vice-versa when communicating in English.

To help students become better at speaking means to help them gain communicative competence and reduce the number of mistakes they make. In this particular case, the focus was to help students improve their pronunciation, enrich their vocabulary, frequently practice grammatical and functional patterns, and form the habit of thinking in English. To provide guidance for practice, the teacher had to find a way to help students enhance their speaking skills. As a result, in the academic year 2009-2010, a two-year project to help students improve their speaking skills began with 28 first-year students.

The Project

The project was divided into two phases: guided practice for first-year students, and less-guided practice for second-year students. The teacher had to direct students' practice, evaluate their abilities, form and reform groups, identify common mistakes students made, choose or design speaking activities and communicative games, collect frequent feedback from students, and make timely adjustments as needed. The students had to identify their own problems, set their goals for practice, and work in groups.

Setting Goals to Enhance Speaking Skills

In the first class session, an overall guidance for students to enhance their own speaking skills was given. A list of common speaking problems was provided. The students were asked to tick their problems and write suggestions (see Appendix A). All 28 students indicated that they

had problems with the first five items: being unable to remember words or phrases, making grammar mistakes when speaking, making pronunciation errors, thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English, and being unable to express their ideas well. The students were able to give suggestions on the first three problems; however, they could not suggest solutions for the last two. These two problems are, in fact, closely related to each other. Once students are able to think in English, they will have no difficulty expressing their ideas. Thus, helping students form the habit of thinking in English has primary importance.

The students were given a worksheet to set their own weekly goals (see Appendix B). In the first column, they wrote what they wanted to learn by heart or practice more. In the second column, they noted mistakes they wanted to correct. The mistakes were pointed out by the teacher, by their classmates, or recognized by themselves. The students' goals were different, depending on individual needs. Setting small goals helped the students move step-by-step towards general improvement in speaking and helped strengthen their self-confidence. In a sense, setting goals can be considered to be planning one's practice. This was done throughout the academic year.

Thus, identifying problems and giving suggestions helped the students know exactly what they had to handle when practicing speaking. Having set the goals, the students would pay attention to areas that they wanted to improve. Students were asked to practice as often as possible with their classmates and students from neighboring and upper classes on the following principles: from simple to complicated, less to more, prepared to unprepared speech, and inside to outside class.

Assigning Groups to Enhance Speaking Skills

Organizing group work. To make practice effective, student collaboration is important. Good collaboration partly depends on the way students are arranged in groups. Dominance by more-able students and passiveness by less-able students as well as increases in the gap between more-able and less-able students should be avoided. Groups should encourage equal participation, help less-able students be self-confident, motivate the more-able students, and make all students be responsible for what they are doing.

Group formation was only done after the first four weeks of study and was based on the teacher's observations. The observations helped in evaluating students' abilities and in knowing, to some extent, students' personalities and relationships. The 28 students had different levels of language proficiency. All were friendly and helpful, and got along well with each other. They were numbered according to their ability from the most able (Student 1) to the least able (Student 28) and placed into seven groups (Table 1).

To avoid dominance by the more-able students, each student in Column A of Table 1 was the group leader and had to manage and help all the members in the group. This may seem as if there was too much work for the group leaders and no chance for them to speak when they worked with less-able students. In fact, they were able to practice speaking English as the other group members did. They shared their ideas with their group and helped less-able students express their ideas. It was important that the group leaders were aware of giving speaking opportunities to all group members.

In the first round of group work, real communication could not be achieved. This round was like the preparation of "ingredients" for a real conversation later ("real conversation" here is confined to classroom practice).

Table 1

Group Assignments

Group	A	B	C	D
Rose	S1	S8	S21	S28
Daisy	S2	S9	S20	S27
Sunflower	S3	S10	S19	S26
Daffodil	S4	S11	S18	S25
Carnation	S5	S12	S17	S24
Lily	S6	S13	S16	S23
Tulip	S7	S14	S15	S22

(S = Student)

To maintain the interest of more-able students as well as to create more chances for less-able students to practice, there was a second round of the group speaking activity. Groups were reformed. All students in Column A of Table 1 worked together, as did the students in Columns B, C, and D. The new groups had no leaders. The emphasis was on fluency and naturalness of speech. The less-able students, with the "prepared ingredients," were able to manage the practice themselves, so they gained confidence.

Language teachers usually have problems arranging students in groups: ". . . the biggest problem is one of selection of group members" (Harmer, 1991, p. 246). Should students work in groups with members of differing language abilities or should they work in groups with members of similar abilities? The practice in this study demonstrated that mixed-ability groups helped less-able students improve and gain more confidence and raised the more-able students' responsibilities (in a sense, more-able students shared the teacher's work in class). However, the success of the mixed-ability groups could only be achieved because the more-able students were clear about their role from the beginning of the course and were willing to help their peers. Groups of similar language abilities motivated the more-able students; the less-able students were successful in such groups only when they had guided practice beforehand.

When working in groups with speaking activities in which monologues were preferable (storytelling, picture narrating, reporting, picture describing), the students were encouraged to recognize their classmates' mistakes (see Appendix C) without giving any comments or corrections until their friends finished their talks. The group leaders recorded all the mistakes recognized by the group and reported them to the teacher. The teacher circulated to give help while the students were working. With speaking activities in which conversations took place, there was no emphasis on recognizing and correcting classmates' mistakes as this might interrupt the flow of conversation.

Being able to identify errors had an advantage: the students could reduce their own mistakes. The students were given the list of "often-made" mistakes and asked to pay attention to avoiding them whenever they practiced speaking. A question might be raised: if students tried to be conscious of avoiding errors when speaking, could they have real communication? The reality was that they could not at first; however, at the end of the first year, the students were making fewer mistakes when they spoke and they were improving at communicating with structures they had learnt.

One problem language teachers may worry about when managing group work is the students' use of their mother tongue. This could not be totally avoided; nevertheless, the teacher was able to reduce mother tongue usage by giving clear instructions for the tasks and "jumping in" in time to help the students.

Selecting speaking activities. Activities and role-plays from course books and the Internet were used. Appropriateness to the students' level of speaking was always taken into consideration. For first-year students, the activities involved repetition / imitation, whereas the activities for second-year students required more creativity on their part.

Many activities were used for both first-year and second-year students (see Appendix D); however, the levels of difficulty and the requirements were different (see Figure 1 and Table 2).
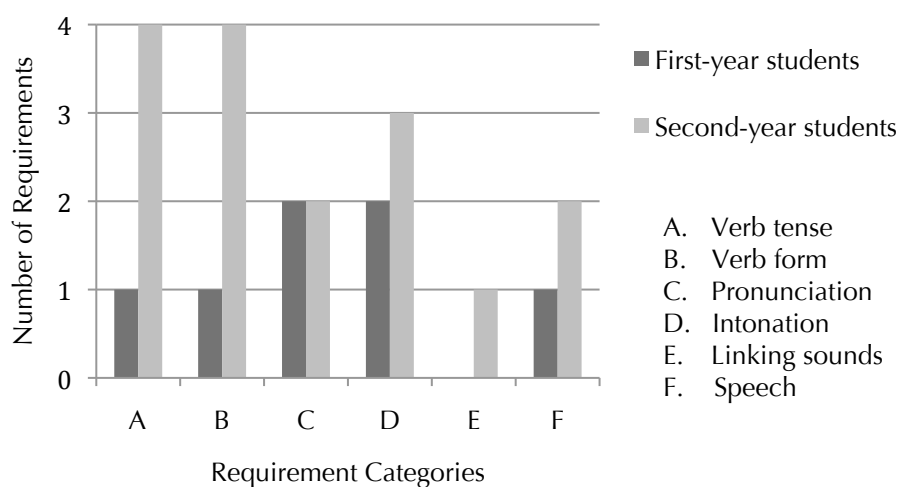
Figure 1. The requirement categories for the same type of speaking activity for first-year students in their first term and for second-year students in their fourth term in the project. The number of requirements gradually increased from the first to the fourth term.

Table 2
Interview Activity Requirements for 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ Year Students

First-Year Students Term 1	Second-Year Students Term 4
Activity: Interview your friend about his / her last holiday.	**Activity:** Interview your friend about his / her learning English.

Requirements:
 	
A. Correct verb tense
   1. Simple past
 	
B. Correct verb form
   1. Simple past
 	
C. Correct pronunciation
   1. Simple past of regular verbs
   2. Simple past of irregular verbs
 	
D. Correct intonation
   1. Yes / No questions
   2. Wh- questions
 	
F. Speech
   1. Good turn-taking
	Requirements:
	
	A. Correct verb tenses
	   1. Simple past
	   2. Simple present
	   3. Present perfect
	   4. Present continuous
	
	B. Correct verb forms
	   1. Simple past
	   2. Simple present
	   3. Present perfect
	   4. Present continuous
	
	C. Correct pronunciation
	   1. Simple past of regular verbs
	   2. Simple past / past participle of irregular verbs
	
	D. Correct intonation
	   1. Yes / No questions
	   2. Wh- questions
	   3. Choice questions
	
	E. Linking sounds
	
	F. Speech
	   1. Good turn-taking
	   2. Smooth speech

To make improvements in using grammatical and functional patterns, frequent out-of-class practice was encouraged. As homework to practice learnt structures, the students brainstormed ten questions per week on topics suggested by the teacher and the students. The topics were simple (e.g., family, job, hobbies) in their first year and more complicated (e.g., campus life, environmental problems, poverty) in their second year. The teacher collected and corrected the questions. This gave the teacher an opportunity to see what mistakes were common, and what remedy could be applied. With the teacher's comments, the students themselves were gradually able to learn how to generate questions and avoid making mistakes. More importantly, the students saw the teacher's effort in helping them to enhance their speaking skills. In return, they studied harder.

After receiving feedback from the teacher, the students were asked to memorize their questions and to practice asking and answering questions with as many students as possible, whenever and wherever they could. Once a month, the teacher randomly selected a prepared topic, and the students practiced asking and answering questions on the topic in class.

This activity was a simple drill, but it helped students to eradicate the habit of thinking of questions and answers in Vietnamese and then translating them into English when communicating. The more often the questions and answers were practiced, the more deeply they became rooted in the students' minds. Moreover, this activity helped the students to organize their ideas as they were required to put the questions in a logical order.

Although the activity was beneficial, there were some shortcomings. First, it required much preparation time for the teacher. Second, it was possible for students to copy questions from their classmates. Despite these shortcomings, the students' improvement in speaking could be seen clearly after they finished their first year (see Appendix E).

Conclusion

The project is still in progress. However, positive feedback from the students and the progress the students have made show that the project is fruitful. To help students practice speaking well, the following points should be considered:

- Guidance for students' speaking practice should be given at the beginning of the course as this will help students save time in finding ways to improve their speaking skills.

- Speaking activities should be appropriate to the students' ability.

- Speaking activities should involve and motivate the students.

- For less-able students, more attention should be paid to correct repetition than to performance skills.

- For more-able students, the proportion of repetition and performance skills should be considered carefully as this influences their motivation in learning speaking.

- Good management of group work helps to achieve the active and equal participation of all students and will help to increase the effectiveness of speaking activities.

Language teachers, like ship captains, should guide their students to the harbor of success. When practice is well planned and combined with hard work and commitment on both sides, students' speaking skills will be improved.

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Appendix A
Speaking Problems and Suggestions

List of Common Speaking Problems

Directions: Please tick the problem(s) you have when learning speaking and write your suggestion(s) next to the problem(s).

My Problems		My Suggestions
1. I can't remember words / phrases.	☐	
2. I usually make grammar mistakes when I speak.	☐	
3. I usually make pronunciation mistakes when I speak.	☐	
4. I think in Vietnamese and then I translate into English.	☐	
5. I don't know how to express my ideas well.	☐	
6. I feel shy when I have to speak.	☐	
7. I am afraid of making mistakes when I speak.	☐	

Table A

Students' Common Speaking Problems and Their Suggestions

Problems	Suggestions
Can't remember words / phrases	Learn them by heart and use them more often.
Make grammar mistakes	Do more grammar exercises. Practice grammar structures more in speech.
Make pronunciation mistakes	Read aloud the words until you get the correct pronunciation.
Think in Vietnamese and then translate into English	No suggestions
Don't know how to express ideas well	No suggestions

Note: There is no ranking of the students' problems in Table A. All the students ticked the first five common speaking problems list. They were not asked to number the items from the most to the least problematic.

Appendix B
Weekly Student Goals

Week 3 (Unit 2, Conversation 1: Tell me about your family)

Student A

Things I Want to Learn by Heart / Practice More	Things I Want to Correct
Vocabulary: cousin, nephew, niece, musician, look alike, married, single, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, aunt, uncle *Functional structures and expressions* - Tell me about your family. - Do you have any brothers or sisters? - Have you got any brothers or sisters? - I have three brothers but no sisters. - No, I'm an only child. - We're twins. - How old is your brother? - We're the same age. - He's the same age as me. - Is your brother single / married? - Does your brother have any children? - You look too young to be an aunt. - He works as a waiter.	*Plural ending:* twin<u>s</u>, brother<u>s</u>, sister<u>s</u> *Consonant clusters*: young<u>est</u>, old<u>est</u> *Linking sound*: I have two <u>brothers and</u> one sister. *3rd person singular ending*: My brother live<u>s</u> in Nha Trang. He work<u>s</u> as a hotel receptionist.

Student B

Things I Want to Learn by Heart / Practice More	Things I Want to Correct
Vocabulary: look alike, sister-in-law, brother-in-law *Functional structures and expressions* - No, I'm an only child. - We're twins. - We're the same age. - He's the same age as me. - You look too young to be an aunt. - My brothers and my sisters are all younger / older than me. - He works as a chef.	*Consonant clusters*: young<u>est</u>, old<u>est</u> *Linking sound*: I have two <u>brothers and</u> one sister. *3rd person singular ending*: My sister work<u>s</u> for a foreign company. She live<u>s</u> in Ho Chi Minh City with her family. She is married and has two children. Her husband work<u>s</u> as a pilot. He fli<u>es</u> to Ha Noi twice a week.

Student C

Things I Want to Learn by Heart / Practice More	Things I Want to Correct
Vocabulary: look alike *Functional structures and expressions* - No, I'm an only child. - We're twins. - We're the same age. - He's the same age as me. - You look too young to be an aunt.	*Linking sound*: I have two <u>brothers and</u> one sister. *Unnatural speech - hesitation*

Appendix C
Common Student Mistakes

Grammar Mistakes	Pronunciation Mistakes
- incorrect verb tense forms / incorrect - use of tenses - incorrect use of prepositions - missing prepositions - incorrect use of articles	- missing the ending sounds in plural nouns (e.g., oranges = orange, apples = apple) - missing third-person singular ending of the verb in the simple present tense (e.g., likes = like, watches = watch) - missing ending sound of regular verbs in the simple past tense or in the past participle form (e.g., stopped = stop, stayed = stay) - missing certain sounds in final clusters (e.g., film: /film/ = /fim/, text: /tekst/ = /tek/) - inserting a vowel sound into a consonant cluster (e.g., /spi:k/ = /s…pi:k/) - adding hissing sound/s/ to all the words (e.g., I go to school = I/s/go/s/to/s/ school/s/) - no linking sounds - incorrect intonation

Note. The functional patterns presented in the speaking course book cover the grammar points listed in the table.

Appendix D
Activities for the First and Second-Year Students

Activities for First-Year Students	Activities for Second-Year Students
Brainstorming Information Gap Storytelling Story Completion Reporting Interviews Picture Narrating Role-Play Talks on Topics	
Playing Cards Find the Difference Picture Describing	Discussions Stage Plays Simulations

Appendix E
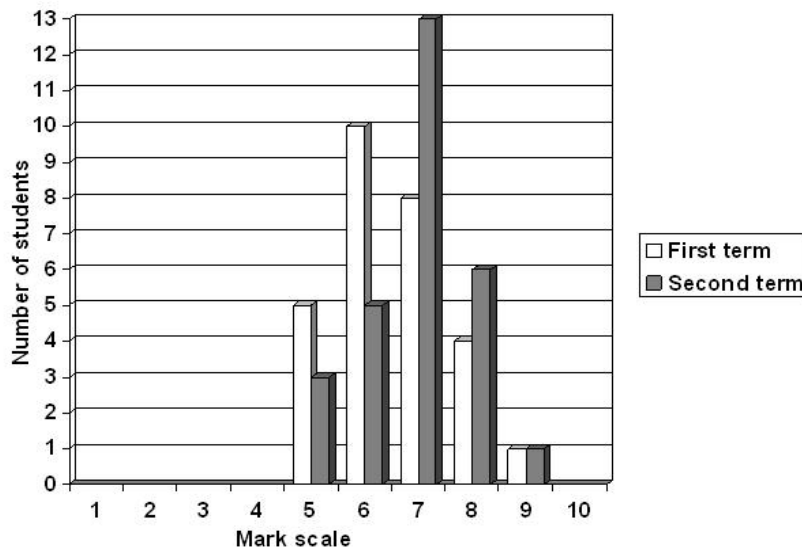**Results of the 1st and 2nd End-of-Term Speaking Exams (First Year)**

Figure E. In the first term the number of students receiving marks of 5 and 6 in speaking test exceeded the number of students receiving marks of 7, 8 and 9. In the second term the result was opposite. At the college, in the students' study records, decimal numbers were rounded up or down to the nearest whole numbers.

The examiners of the speaking test were the teachers of speaking; one was the researcher, and the other one was chosen at random. These teachers supervised and were interviewers in both the first and second term tests.

The speaking task had two parts: role-plays (8 marks) and interviews (2 marks). In role-plays based on learnt structures and topics, each pair of students was asked to sit separately. They had three minutes to read the requirements on the cards for preparation, and then they were asked to perform their conversations in pairs. The students' role-plays were assessed on the following criteria: ideas and length (2 marks), accuracy (1 mark each for pronunciation, intonation, grammar, and learnt structures) and fluency and manner of speaking (1 mark each for turn-taking and natural / fluent speech). In interviews, the examiners asked each student two questions (1 mark for each answer) related to learnt topics. These questions were not related to the topic of the presented role-play; for example, if Students A and B had to perform a role-play in a restaurant, then the questions for them would be about their future plans or intentions. The students had no time to prepare. The answers were assessed on (a) ideas (0.25), (b) language patterns (0.25), (c) pronunciation (0.25), and (d) quick answer (0.25). In cases where the questions had to be repeated, no mark was given for (d). There was no second repetition of the questions.

Implications for Effective Ways of Conducting and Assessing Presentations in EFL Classes

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore more effective ways of conducting and assessing presentations in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classes. To this aim, the author discusses student reactions to presentation assignments as well as the results of comparisons between the teacher and student evaluations of the presentations in English classes at a Japanese university. The students practiced presentations repeatedly with different partners (i.e., simultaneous presentations) before making presentations in front of the whole class at the final stage. This paper suggests that providing step-by-step procedures in presentation assignments is as important as having students experience various presentation styles. Additionally, allowing students ample reflection time and dialogues with the teacher and among themselves may help students understand the objectives of the small steps in the assignments and the intended purpose of the assessment criteria.

Many current university students in Japan have had very few opportunities to make presentations in English prior to entering university. Many of them may have not even had very many chances to speak English in class at all (Apple, 2011). Since the so-called "period for integrated studies" started to be implemented in the school curriculum in 2000 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology [MEXT], 1999), students have been encouraged to do problem-solving activities, including research and presentation tasks, in Japanese. Information technology education is now part of the school curriculum (MEXT, 1999), and more and more students have had experience in creating PowerPoint slideshows before they enter university. However, it still seems to be the case in many secondary school English classes that students remain passive and listen to the teacher's explanation with few opportunities to speak in English with others (Nishino, 2009).

For these Japanese university students who have a limited experience of using English in meaningful and authentic situations such as presentations, it is important to have a step-by-step method of teaching presentations in English classes. Thus, in the author's classes, students made presentations repeatedly in different small groups (i.e., simultaneous presentations) before they presented in front of the whole class.

This paper investigates students' perceptions of the presentation assignment, as well as the teacher and student evaluations of the presentations. This discussion is expected to lead to suggestions for more effective ways of conducting and assessing presentations.

Literature Review

Simultaneous Presentations

The "simultaneous presentation" technique is similar to "speed dating" (Brown & Diem, 2009; Martinez, 2008). Martinez (2008) explained that in speed dating, ten or more men and women participate and have a chance to talk to each other one-on-one for five minutes each. Likewise, in simultaneous presentations, students make presentations repeatedly with different partners.

The simultaneous presentation is actually a frequently-used technique in Cooperative Learning (CL) classrooms (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002). Two of the CL principles are "simultaneous interaction" and "equal participation," which means that all students ideally participate in the task at the same time and to the same degree of engagement (Jacobs et al., 2002). When students make presentations simultaneously in pairs, one makes a presentation, one listens to the presentation, and then they switch roles; this technique can create an optimum situation for simultaneous interaction and equal participation. The listening student is the only person in the audience and is inclined to listen attentively in order to give feedback to the presenter at the end. The presenter is likely to be more serious in front of an attentive audience. In short, the simultaneous presentation can work as an effective CL technique.

Furthermore, the simultaneous presentation is useful in increasing speaking practices and reducing performance anxiety (Brown & Diem, 2009; Martinez, 2008). In the author's classes, students' limited experience of speaking practice and performance anxiety were the teacher's major concerns. Limited experience was suspected to be part of the cause of second language (L2) anxiety for the students, and it was theorized that repeated practice could help build confidence. When learners repeatedly experience situations that make them anxious speaking in the L2, they are conditioned to feel anxious whenever they speak in the L2 (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In order to avoid such conditioning, it is helpful to provide a less threatening learning environment (Brown & Diem, 2009; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Martinez, 2008; Young, 1999).

Assessment Method

A major concern for assessment of simultaneous presentations is that the teacher often cannot watch presentations in person. For example, in the author's classes, there were 15 pairs in one class making presentations simultaneously. If the teacher had wanted to observe every student's presentation, students would have had to repeat their presentations 15 times. Such repetition may not be impossible, but does not seem to be realistic, effective, or motivational. If students made improvements over the 15 performances, then they could benefit from this repetitive experience. However, in this case, students whose presentations were evaluated later would have an advantage, which would not be fair to the other students.

To solve this problem, peer assessment was used by Brown and Diem (2009). Peer assessment is often said to have a problem in its reliability. For example, Cheng and Warren (2005) found that students' peer assessments did not always coincide with the teacher assessment and suggested that practice might have helped students to improve their peer assessment techniques.

Regardless of assessment methods, it is important to inform students of what elements constitute a satisfactory achievement of the assignment in order for them to achieve a successful result in the assignment and gain the most knowledge and skills from the learning experience. In a study with business undergraduate students, Rust, Price, and O'Donovan (2003) reported that when students attended an assessment workshop in which they marked sample assignments, discussed the sample assignments in groups, and listened to a tutor's explanation about assessment criteria, they achieved significantly better results in their course.

Moreover, research has been conducted on student viewpoints about assessment criteria (e.g., Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2000; Otoshi & Heffernen, 2008). Otoshi and Heffernen (2008) concurred with Orsmond et al. (2000) on the importance of involving students in creating assessment criteria for more effective learning, but at the same time, cautioned that teachers have to be careful about adopting student-derived assessment criteria.

In a study with university biology majors, Orsmond et al. (2000) claimed that learning outcomes may differ when assessment criteria are prepared by a teacher and when created by students; the purposes of the activity might be different in the two situations. The researchers also reported that students tried harder to understand what each of the teacher-prepared criterion meant compared to the student-derived ones. In addition, discussion between the course assessor and students, as well as among students, is important (see also Rust et al., 2003). It is important for teachers to provide criteria that help students develop the skills that they should be developing, and to discuss the criteria with the students or let the students discuss the criteria among themselves to help them understand what each criterion means.

In the author's classes, teacher evaluation was mainly used for course grades, while students' self- and peer assessment was mainly for the purpose of raising their awareness about the assessment criteria, i.e., the important elements for successful presentations. Peer assessment activities were also expected to help students in the audience pay close attention to the presentations. The teacher was concerned that students had not had enough training in assessment; therefore, since students' self- and peer assessment might lack in reliability, the portion of self-assessments was minimized and peer assessments were not used for course grading. The assessment criteria were prepared by the teacher and presented to the students with written and oral explanations. (See the Presentation Assessment Method section for more details of how presentation assessment was implemented in the author's classes.)

The Study

Data Collection

The research data was collected from two groups: Class A and Class B taking a course titled "English Seminar." Students took English Seminar 1 in the first semester (spring) and English Seminar 2 in the second semester (fall) with the same teacher and were given similar presentation assignments in both semesters. A questionnaire in the students' mother language, Japanese, was administered at the end of each semester to collect their reactions to the presentation assignments. Responses were collected from 49 students in the spring semester and 47 students in the fall. The data from the spring semester was discussed in Shimo (2010); this paper will focus on the data from the fall semester survey (see appendix). In addition, the students' self-evaluations and the teacher's evaluations in the fall semester will be compared.

Students and Their Learning Context

The English proficiency levels of students in English Seminar Classes A and B ranged from higher intermediate to advanced (Figure 1). There were 15 psychology and 14 environmental studies majors, for a total of 29 students in Class A, and 30 socio-mass media majors in Class B. All students in both classes were native speakers of Japanese.

The goal of the English Seminar course was to promote basic comprehensive English abilities. The class met twice a week for ninety minutes each session, once in a traditional classroom with audio equipment at the teacher's desk, and once in a computer room. Students did various activities, including writing essays and reading passages using a textbook that had 20 chapters about social issues. Presentation assignments accounted for 15% of the course grade in both semesters, with the remaining 85% comprising quizzes, exams, essays, and many other in-class and out-of-class assignments.

A.C.E. Placement	Level	TOEIC
300		680 +
280	Advanced	600 +
270		560 +
260		540 +
250 Class B		520 +
240	Lower Advanced	500 +
230		480 +
220	Class A	460 +
210		440 +
200	Higher Intermediate	420 +
190		400 +
180		380 +

Figure 1. Students' proficiency levels in Class A and Class B. Created based on a resource provided by the English Language Proficiency Assessment [*Eigo Unyo Noryoku Hyoka Kyokai*].

Presentation Requirements and Performance

For the presentation assignments, students were required to: (a) make either a newsletter (one B4 size page or more) or a PowerPoint presentation (five slides or more), (b) choose a chapter from the textbook for their presentation, (c) include a summary of the chapter and additional information that they searched for and collected, and (d) make a three- to five-minute presentation. Students made their presentations in a computer classroom.

Students simultaneously performed presentations in pairs several times in the same class meeting. First, one student in a pair became a presenter (Student A) and the other a listener in the audience (Student B), and then they exchanged roles. Student A then moved to a different seat and repeated this process with a new partner (Figure 2). In these pair presentations, students recorded their presentations using recording software. At the end of their final presentation day, they chose their best performance and turned in the electronic file to the teacher along with a hard copy of their presentation materials.
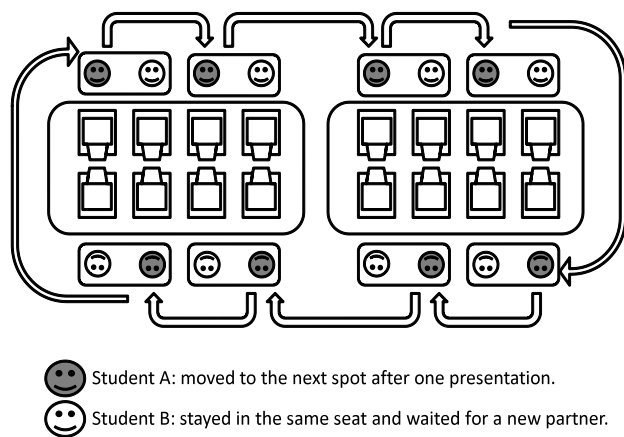
Student A: moved to the next spot after one presentation.

Student B: stayed in the same seat and waited for a new partner.

Figure 2. Pair presentation method (Shimo, 2010)

In the spring semester, students had seven pair presentations, including three in rehearsal and four in the final stage; they presented to seven partners. In the fall semester, all students were required to present in front of the whole class after four pair presentations, two in rehearsal and two "final." The teacher used the term *final* for the last two pair presentations before the

whole-class presentations to encourage the students to make improvements from rehearsal to the final stage (Table 1).

Table 1

Presentation Steps Taken in the Spring and Fall Semesters

Step	Activity	Spring Semester	Fall Semester
1	Presentation guidelines provided for students	Mid June	End of September
2	Pair presentations in rehearsal	1st week of July: three times in different pairs	2nd to last week of October: two times in different pairs
3	Final pair presentations	2nd week of July: four times in different pairs	Last week of October: two times in different pairs
4	Presentations in front of class	------	November to December: a few students per class over several weeks

Presentation Assessment Method

In the fall semester, four criteria were set and announced to the students along with the presentation guidelines: content (5 points), comprehensibility (5 points), time length (5 points), and improvement (5 points). The first three were adopted from the spring-semester presentation assignments. For each criterion, a brief explanation was given to students:

- Content: Is the presentation interesting and informative?
- Comprehensibility: Is the presentation easy to follow and understand?
- Time length: Is the presentation time sufficient?
  (Less than two minutes = 1 point, two minutes = 3 points, three to five minutes = 5 points)
- Improvement: How did you improve your presentation after rehearsal?

Students were asked to evaluate their own and their classmates' presentations each time so that both presenters and audience would focus more on these assessment criteria.

In the fall semester, the teacher evaluated the students' performance in the final pair presentations using the first three criteria in the same way as in the spring: by listening to the students' recorded presentations, which were submitted as an electronic audio file, while referring to their hard copies of presentation materials (15 points in total). The students' self-evaluations about improvement from rehearsal to final pair presentations (5 points) were also added when calculating course grades. The total of 20 points in the steps of pair presentations accounted for 5% of the course grade, and so students' self-evaluation points were eventually reduced to 1.25% of the entire course grade. The teacher also directly evaluated students' very final presentations in front of the whole class, using the first three criteria (15 points), and this evaluation accounted for 10% of the course grade. Thus, the presentation assignments as a whole accounted for 15% of the entire course grade.

Data and Discussion

Student Reactions to Presentation Methods

Students generally agreed that rehearsing pair presentations twice was useful for their learning, but fewer students agreed about the two final pair presentations (Figures 3 and 4). Many of the student comments revealed that they appreciated these steps, similar to Shimo (2010), because they were able to practice more, receive feedback, and check where to improve in a relaxed atmosphere in a small group. On the other hand, a few students stated that presenting to one person is so different from presenting to the whole class that it did not help them get ready for the final stage.

Next, more students -14 students compared to nine and six in the previous stages respectively - agreed or strongly agreed that the whole-class presentation was useful (Figures 3, 4, and 5). There was also slightly more variety in responses (Figure 5). Students who responded positively often commented that it was a good learning experience, or that they were able to learn from other classmates' presentations. For negative responses, two said that they ended up simply repeating what they did previously, and two pointed out that there was overlapping in the choice of topics and therefore there were repeat performances of similar presentations.

Finally, ten students wrote suggestions about how presentation assignments can be designed. Three students commented that part of the pair presentations were not necessary. Perhaps some students needed more guided reflection time so they could make improvements between the repeat performances in order to better comprehend how they could benefit from this experience. Four commented on the whole-class presentation: one said it was very good, two said it was not necessary for everyone to do it, and one said it would have been better to do it in a traditional classroom. Various student preferences and motivation levels

Figure 3. Rehearsal in two pairs: useful for learning? *n* = 47.

Figure 4. "Final" in two pairs: useful for learning? *n* = 47.

Figure 5. In front of the whole class: useful for learning? *n* = 47.

for learning seem to have been reflected in these different responses. The other three comments were: "[It is good to] have presenters answer a certain number of questions in English," "I wanted to do a group presentation," and "If we do it, we should assign chapters to individual students [rather than having students choose a chapter from the textbook]. Otherwise we end up collecting similar information about the same chapters and [the presentations] become boring." The last comment coincides with the above comments about
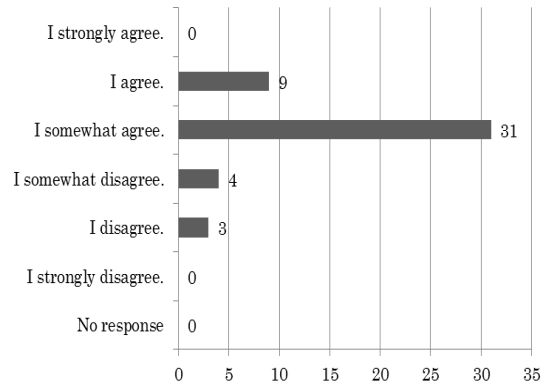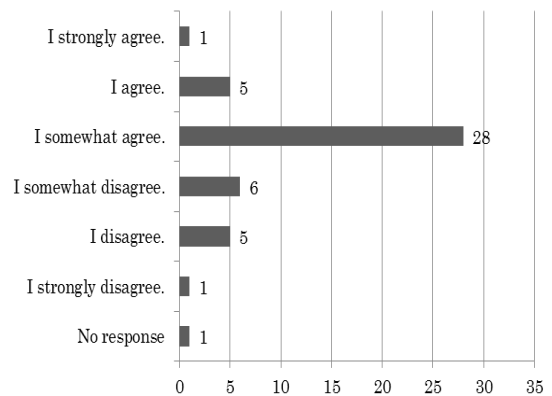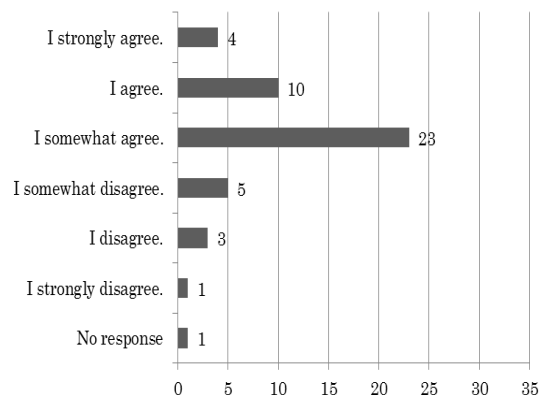
similar presentations; these comments imply that presentation topic options have to be carefully prepared.

Student and Teacher Assessment

Comparisons between students' self-evaluations and the teacher's evaluations in the final pair presentations revealed interesting findings (Table 2). First, the students' self-evaluations were severer than the teacher's. This tendency was observed in the spring semester, as well (Shimo, 2010). Second, correlation of the teacher's and students' self-evaluation in comprehensibility was very weak ($r = .16$), while that of content was relatively strong ($r = .56$). This implies that the students' and teacher's interpretations or understanding of comprehensibility may have been very different. It is possible that students' different confidence levels had a stronger effect on their self-evaluations of comprehensibility compared to those of content. Less confident students may have evaluated their performances more severely even though the performances were more comprehensible than they thought they were. Likewise, Cheng and Warren (2005) reported that students felt less comfortable in their peer assessment activities assessing their peers' language proficiency levels, compared to other non-language related criteria. The researchers attributed this to the students' lack of knowledge about what constituted high and low language proficiency and to their lack of confidence in their own language proficiency. In the current study, the teacher did not evaluate each student's presentation during the actual performance, but by listening to the recorded presentations while referring to a hard copy of the presentation materials; this may also have contributed to the gap.

Table 2

Comparison between Teacher Evaluation and Student Self-Evaluation of Pair Presentations

Evaluation	Content (5 points)		Comprehensibility (5 points)	
	Teacher	Students	Teacher	Students
Mean Score	3.68	3.21	3.52	3.02
Pearson's Correlation	$r = .56$		$r = .16$	

Conclusion

Findings in this study have useful implications. First, most students in the study favored simultaneous pair presentations, finding this method helpful for their learning. Students were able to practice more and receive ample feedback in a less threatening atmosphere. However, some students found some repetition boring or unnecessary. To address this, teachers should help students understand the objectives of each step so that students can make the most of the assignment. Teachers should not only explain the purpose, but also offer ample time for reflection (Shimo, 2010).

The problem of some students finding repeat performances rather useless can be partially ascribed to the restricted choice of presentation topics. The students in this study were told to choose a chapter from their textbook, which meant there were only about ten topics to choose from each semester. Some topics were more popular than others, leading to overlapping information in presentations. The overlapping was even more obvious when all presentations were shared in front of the class.

Next, while step-by-step teaching is necessary, students should eventually be exposed to different presentation styles, through which they can learn different strategies and skills. The various responses to the whole-class presentations implied that more motivated or confident students were willing to try various styles of presentations. When designing classroom

assignments, teachers should consider students' different preferences such as group presentations as well as various future needs. Some students may not like speaking in front of a large audience, but may want to practice it, and some may realize its value only after they have the opportunity.

Finally, this study, as well as Shimo (2010), suggested that there may have been a discrepancy between student and teacher interpretations of assessment criteria. To reduce the impact of potentially low reliability in students' self- and peer assessments in the final course grade of the author's classes, the self-evaluation portion was minimized and peer evaluation was not included. This reliability issue should be investigated further in future studies. A small suggestion for now is that in addition to the teacher simply explaining criteria to the students, dialogues between the teacher and students, and between students, will be helpful (Orsmond et al., 2000; Rust et al., 2003). When students understand what constitutes a successful result, they can make the most of the learning situation.

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Appendix
Questionnaire about Individual Presentations (Fall Semester)*

* This questionnaire was originally written in Japanese and was translated by the author for this paper.

1) In the fall semester, the presentation assignments included the following steps. Do you think each step was helpful for your learning?
   i. Presentations to two different partners in rehearsal
   ii. Presentations to two different partners in the "final" stage
   iii. Presentation in front of the whole class

1: I strongly disagree.	2: I somewhat disagree.	3: I disagree.
4: I agree.	5: I somewhat agree.	6: I strongly agree.

   Do you think each step was helpful for your learning? Circle the appropriate number and write reasons for your response.

   i. Presentations to two different partners in rehearsal   1 2 3 4 5 6
      Reasons for your response _____
      _____
      _____

   ii. Presentations to two different partners in the "final" stage   1 2 3 4 5 6
      Reasons for your response _____
      _____
      _____

   iii. Presentation in front of the whole class   1 2 3 4 5 6
      Reasons for your response _____
      _____
      _____

2) What did you learn from the presentation assignments?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3) What did you find difficult in the presentations?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4) Write any opinions or suggestions you have about ways of conducting presentations.
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Facilitating Interaction in East Asian EFL Classrooms: Increasing Students' Willingness to Communicate

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Abstract

Research has pointed to specific classroom conditions that increase EFL students' willingness to communicate in English (WTC); these include group cohesiveness, topic relevancy, and anxiety. Additionally, certain language-learning attitudes, such as international posture and student acceptance of communicative language teaching (CLT), have been shown to affect a student's WTC. This paper will explain how, by paying close consideration to these variables, teachers in East Asian classrooms can promote their students' WTC and improve spoken interaction among their students.

Having deep linguistic knowledge is no longer a sufficient goal for EFL students; students must strive for communicative competence in English as well. Because of this, it is imperative that teachers not just provide opportunities for students to practice language skills in a communicative way – they must also instill in students certain attributes that are conducive for creating a communicative environment. Thus, one primary goal of language teachers should be to increase their students' willingness to communicate in English (WTC).

Key Concepts for Discussing Communicative Classrooms in the East Asian Context

Willingness to communicate in English. WTC, a fairly recent development in L2 instruction theory, has been described as the probability that one will engage in communication when one is free to do so (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). For a teacher to teach English communication skills, students must possess a high WTC to be ready to participate in activities focusing on "unpredictable" uses of language forms (Littlewood, 2007, p. 247). WTC in a first language is mainly attributed to personality factors; however, WTC in L2 is considerably more complicated. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) suggested a heuristic model that accounts for L2 WTC behavior and proposed the following as possible influences: situated antecedents, motivational propensities, affective-cognitive context, and social and individual context. Research has indicated that many other situation-specific elements partially account for L2 WTC as well; some include group cohesiveness, anxiety, and topic relevancy, all of which could be important factors when teachers attempt to construct an ideal classroom environment (Aubrey, 2010; Cao & Philp, 2006; De Saint Léger & Storch, 2009). By giving careful consideration to influences on WTC, teachers can manipulate classroom conditions and tap into students' latent WTC to optimize student interaction.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In contrast to other language teaching approaches, CLT emphasizes the importance of using an L2 for meaningful communication. CLT includes a spectrum of activities which are based on "interaction between learners" rather than individualistic approaches to learning (Richards, 2006, p. 2). Specific methodological proposals, such as task-based teaching, have been gaining popularity. The intended outcome of these methodologies is meaningful student-student interaction, which research has shown creates learning opportunities and facilitates the second language acquisition process (Long, 1983; Pica, 1992). However, for CLT to be effectively implemented, students need to have WTC.

International posture. International posture, an attitudinal construct suggested by Yashima (2002), may be a specific factor influencing WTC among East Asian students. Yashima described international posture as a positive orientation toward the international community, or an "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures" (p. 57). Students who have a more positive orientation toward the international world are more likely to be motivated to use English inside and outside of class. Yashima concluded that "the path from international posture to WTC, although not strong, was significant" (2002, p. 62). Results from a study by Aubrey (2010) also indicated that "students who had an interest in international affairs and intercultural communication tended to participate more in class" (p. 47).

East Asian students' acceptance of CLT. In addition to international posture, the degree to which methodologies associated with CLT are accepted by students is a particularly sensitive variable for EFL students in East Asia. According to Wen and Clement (2003), the Chinese educational culture changes the linguistic, communicative, and social variables that affect students' WTC in a Chinese setting. They argue that feelings of "belongingness," "oneness," and "we-ness," characteristic of in-group members, are essential for successful interaction in the classroom (p. 26). In East Asia, CLT is sometimes considered to diverge from traditional teacher-centered approaches that focus on transmitting information from teacher to student. Audiolingualism, grammar-translation, and situational language teaching are some of the most common methods used in China and Japan (Watkins, 2005). Researchers have argued that CLT may pose a conflict between western educational values and East Asian traditional education (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005) and that the view of language learning as a process rather than learned content causes considerable difficulties (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004). However, arguments have been made to the contrary. According to Littlewood (2000), Asian students want to "explore knowledge themselves . . . together with their fellow students" (p. 34). Additionally, Aubrey (2010) found that it was not enough for teachers to simply expose students to a communicative learning environment; students needed to exhibit a higher acceptance of CLT in order to be willing to speak in class. In regard to teaching practices for East Asian EFL students, Aubrey (2010) also suggested that "for teachers who want more interaction in their classroom, an attitude shift must take place on the part of students towards a more positive view of CLT and a more "internationally oriented" approach to learning English" (p. 47).

Ways to Increase Student Interaction

In the following sections, simple suggestions on how to increase interaction in the classroom will be summarized. They are based on classroom implications of past WTC research and are particularly important for teachers seeking ways to manage larger classrooms. Coleman (1989) suggested that the barrier that larger classes have on participation could be overcome by a

classroom approach that encourages interaction. Aubrey (2010) found empirical evidence to suggest that interaction in larger classes can be increased substantially by focusing on ways to facilitate student-student as opposed to teacher-student interaction. Group cohesiveness, communication anxiety, topic relevancy, acceptance of CLT, and international posture are all factors that can be easily manipulated by teachers to increase students' WTC and student-student interaction.

Group cohesiveness. Peer-group cohesiveness may be a unique situation-specific factor influencing East Asian students' WTC in class (Aubrey, 2010; Kim, 2010; Wen & Clement, 2003). To cultivate cohesiveness, a strong sense of trust between students must be established, to the extent one might find in a family. Some key aspects of attaining this trust are outlined below.

Using positive traits of students. Like a member of a family, a student in a cohesive classroom must learn to value working with their group members more than working individually. Students must come to understand their classmates' positive traits, what they can contribute, and how their individual characteristics can benefit the collective effort. Teachers can promote this process by using some of these simple techniques:

1. Have students explicitly interview each other: "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" "What makes you unique?" "How are you different from others?" etc.

2. Hold elections where students can vote on leadership positions before group tasks are carried out.

3. After the completion of classroom language tasks, such as presentations or groups projects, give students a small amount of time to reflect on how each student contributed and in what aspect each student excelled. This reflection time could take the form of a small group discussion or a written peer evaluation.

4. Keep records of feedback on individual students. If students are comfortable with each other, ask permission from students to display their positive feedback on a wall chart for all students to view. Use this to inform your choice of classroom seating, pairing students, or group project membership.

Facilitating an awareness of individual positive traits acts as a validation process, whereby each student's being part of the "in group" (i.e., class membership) is justified.

Personalizing student connections. Some students may be shy and might not put themselves in a position to get to know every student in the class; therefore, the teacher may want to facilitate connectedness among class members in the ways listed below:

1. Enable student-student networking by compiling a list of student email addresses and handing them out to all students in class. Students could voluntarily submit their emails to the class list if the teacher foresees student privacy problems.

2. Have students organize birthday events, off-campus meetings, or holiday celebrations.

3. Have students rely on each other for task and course information. For example, the teacher could email homework to only half the class; the other half would have to contact their peers in order to obtain the required homework instructions.

Making student networking a key component of every class will increase group cohesiveness and improve students' WTC.

Communication anxiety. L2 anxiety often stems from a fear of exposure or risk of being judged by peers who may notice imperfections (Aubrey, 2010; De Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Young, 1990). To lower anxiety and increase students' WTC, teachers may want to limit the amount of forced exposure imparted on a student. Decreasing students' perceived imperfections in language production will most likely increase their WTC. To increase a student's confidence in this way, it is necessary for teachers to adjust their approach in eliciting student participation, as the following suggestions propose:

1. Allow plenty of time for students to prepare an answer. It is tempting to single out students by name and elicit spontaneous responses to questions, but this can be a stressful experience for students.

2. Write questions on the board and divide students into groups to discuss possible answers among themselves. Without forcing students to expose their answers to the whole class, the teacher can walk around, listen to discussions, give positive feedback, and encourage group members to share good answers with the class.

By following these techniques, teachers are both encouraging students to voluntarily participate and eliciting valuable student-student interaction. This results in richer, more accurate student responses.

Topic relevancy. Making the lesson topic interesting and personally relevant to students has been shown to enhance students' WTC (Aubrey, 2010). Students who do not have an interest in the lesson content may not participate. Even if the required curriculum is rigid, there are at least two approaches to increasing topic relevance that can be used to build WTC.

Knowledge of student interests. Knowing the interests of students can be a powerful teaching tool. It makes lessons interesting and can harness a student's latent WTC. Below are some suggestions for achieving this:

1. Administer a short questionnaire that surveys students' hobbies, dreams, goals, and general interests.

2. Adjust how lessons are presented based on this knowledge. Use language in the context of students' interests and prepare debates, tasks, or other activities that will elicit WTC based on topic interest.

3. Incorporate topics into lessons with the purpose of making English immediately useful for students and eliminate, when possible, irrelevant topics. For example, activities could be based on popular American TV shows or movies.

Students are more likely to participate freely in English if they are absorbed in the content.

Giving students some content control. For teachers who have a degree of control over the content of their courses, and to aid the transition to a more learner-centered classroom, having students choose what and how they learn can maximize lesson relevancy. Some possible strategies follow:

1. Preview textbook chapters or the course curriculum. Have students vote on which parts to omit or include.

2. Give students a choice. Make lists of writing topics, speaking tasks, and authentic listening or readings. Have students choose which they find most stimulating.

3. Be flexible with the skills taught in class. Obtain input from students on how much time should be spent on writing, listening, speaking, or reading.

4. Assign a class leadership position to a different student each week. The student leader can be responsible for making day-to-day content decisions along with the teacher.

Relinquishing complete control may not be wise. Many students may be unaware of what they need to learn, so asking "What do you want to learn today?" may not be a suitable approach. However, by giving students choices, teachers remain in control while letting students begin to more confidently exercise their right to choose what they learn.

Acceptance of CLT. Task-based teaching and other popular pedagogical proposals that fall under the umbrella of CLT are useful in that they promote classroom interaction. However, interaction can only happen if students consider this learning environment beneficial. Past research (Aubrey, 2010; Littlewood, 2000) has indicated that Asian students respond positively to CLT under certain conditions. Of particular interest to teachers is the finding that having a more "positive attitude towards CLT is essential for producing an ideal classroom situation" (Aubrey, 2010, p. 42).

"Selling" CLT. To give students a positive orientation toward the CLT approach, teachers need to try to "sell" their CLT methodology to students from the first day of class. Just as language-learning researchers need to provide evidence to teachers of how language is acquired (in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles), teachers should articulate their approach in the classroom and show how it is beneficial. Some possible approaches follow:

1. Explicitly communicate to students what CLT is and how it will be used in the classroom.

2. Give examples of CLT-type tasks and activities that will be used in the course.

3. Explain why CLT is being used. Highlight potential benefits.

4. Use simple empirical or anecdotal evidence to support the choice of CLT. For example, show students results of action research or case studies that illustrate how former students showed a positive attitude toward this teaching approach and, as a result, improved their language skills.

5. Emphasize that for CLT to work, there needs to be voluntary student participation.

Teachers can facilitate an attitude change towards a more positive acceptance of CLT by making it clear that participation is a proven path to language learning success and that this is most easily achieved through communicative activities that involve other students.

Instilling an international posture. MacIntyre (2007) states that "the major motivation to learn another language is to develop a communicative relationship with people from another cultural group" (p. 569). Evidence has clearly been provided to support this claim, particularly results which suggest a significant positive correlation between international posture and WTC (Aubrey, 2010; Yashima, 2002, 2004). If students who are more internationally oriented are

more willing to interact in class using English, then international posture is clearly something EFL teachers need to instill in their students. Some possible approaches follow.

Making use of international students. To interest students in the world of English, one suggestion is to make use of international students at the same institution. The Contact Hypothesis states that there is reduced prejudice and hostility when two segregated groups come into contact with each other (Pettigrew, 2007). In other words, EFL students will take on a more positive attitude toward the international community if they come into regular contact with international students. Teachers can facilitate this by using the techniques below:

1. Have international English-speaking students speak to the class about their home culture.

2. Have students find and interview international students outside of class and use their interview data in class projects.

3. Make use of virtual international communities. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, can provide virtual intercultural interaction, which is especially useful if the local international-student community is limited.

Meaningful exposure to international students is a valuable way of connecting English to the world outside of students' immediate non-English speaking community.

Instilling global awareness. "A global cultural awareness is the missing link connecting basic English competence and fluent intercultural communication" (Aubrey, 2009, p. 130). Teachers can adjust teaching practices in the following ways with the goal of instilling in their students a global awareness:

1. Implicitly incorporate culture into the classroom by carefully selecting texts written by authors from a variety of English-speaking cultures. Moreover, these reading texts can be used by the teacher as segues into critical reading exercises focusing on learning and understanding different cultures.

2. Dispel cultural stereotypes. Nowlan (2009) suggests "having students develop a list of stereotypes one group of people may have of another, then having students identify exceptions and falsehoods of each stereotype" (p. 150).

3. Explicitly incorporate culture by including topics such as nonverbal communication, individualism / collectivism, and high / popular culture into the course.

4. Use current international events as a focus of discussion in class. Political or human-interest news stories can be used in class with other materials or on their own.

Raising the global cultural awareness of students can lead to an increase in international posture, which in turn, may ignite a motivation to speak English.

Conclusion

Kang (2005, p. 291) points out that teachers should "provide the factors facilitating WTC as much as possible, instead of focusing on one factor at the expense of other facilitating factors." In response to this, this paper has made some suggestions on how to capitalize on some of the most pertinent factors leading to classroom interaction. To conclude, traits of a high-WTC student will be summarized.

According to past research and in line with the teaching suggestions above, to be a meaningful participant in a large EFL classroom, a student must: (1) be ready to interact with other students, because it is believed that individual linguistic knowledge can be shared and collectivistic knowledge will be increased by doing so; (2) have low anxiety when interacting with peers, either because there is a high level of trust between all students or because the teacher rarely puts the student in a vulnerable position where mistakes are being exposed; (3) find the lesson topic personally relevant and tasks engaging; (4) understand the teacher's classroom philosophy and believe that the ensuing methodology is ultimately beneficial for language learning; and (5) have an interest in international people, travel, and issues, along with a desire to be an active member of the global community. By being mindful of the teaching practices outlined in this paper, teachers can realistically and practically cultivate the above attributes in their students.

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Impact of an Out-of-class Activity on Students' English Awareness, Vocabulary, and Autonomy

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Abstract

Students in non-English speaking countries may be under the impression that they lack access to an authentic English environment. Outside the classroom, most students are immersed in a first-language environment with limited exposure to English. Out-of-class activities can be devised to show students that they are surrounded by English if they make a little effort to pay attention to the language as it is used in their daily lives. In this study, students were asked to observe and take notes on written English on display. In class, students discussed and analyzed the correctness and appropriateness of the English usage they had observed. A quantitative methodology was adopted to investigate the scale of students' language awareness before and after the activity. The results showed that this activity expanded students' awareness of the English language available to them outside the classroom and added to the degree of students' autonomy in learning.

The context in which learning takes place makes a vital contribution to the success of learning; this is true in particular for language acquisition. Countries in which English is not a primary language often lack an authentic English environment. In such countries, in-class instruction may be the only contact students have with English. Once students leave the classroom, they are totally immersed in their own first-language environment, which seems to offer little exposure to English materials and few chances to see or use English in real settings. Because sole reliance on classroom instruction is far from sufficient for EFL learners to practice the target language (Xiao & Luo, 2009), more effort needs to be made to increase opportunities for these students to encounter English.

Recent reports indicate that for past three years, the English proficiency of students in Taiwan has continued to fall behind that of students in neighboring countries (Educational Testing Service, 2010; Hsieh & Chu, 2006). To address that problem in an immediate way, this author suggests that teachers and students make better use of the authentic English resources that exist at the neighborhood level. These readily available resources could serve as an impetus for language growth. For that purpose, the author created the *English Detective Activity*. The challenge offered by the activity was to make students aware of the presence of English in their immediate environment and its usefulness in improving their mastery of that language.

This paper describes the out-of-class activity, as it has been incorporated in a study intended to demonstrate its beneficial effects.

Literature Review

Research on Out-of-Class Learning

Most English classroom instruction and activities in Taiwan adopt textbooks or pre-selected materials. While these materials provide valuable information to learners, students seem to have little interest in them. Textbooks often fail to achieve a meaningful level of involvement on the part of the learners; learning need not be confined to the classroom with set textbooks and practice (Griffiths & Keohane, 2000). Students need to develop the ability to acquire information that is available both inside and outside the classroom context (Field, 2007). In-school learning tends to be symbol-based, while out-of-school learning is more directly connected to events and objects in the physical worlds, with the result that learning well in schools is not sufficient preparation for functioning well outside of school (Resnick, 1987). Hyland agrees: "[Language learning] can take place at any time and in any place, including the home and the community" (2004, p. 180). In a study by Nunan (1989), a majority of students found classroom instruction itself to be insufficient for the development of English competence; on the other hand, engagement in outside classroom learning enhanced their language development, demonstrating the need to incorporate activities outside the classroom for greater learning success.

Correlations are found between out-of-class experiences and educational gains among university students; these gains include complexity of cognition such as critical thinking and intellectual flexibility, growth in knowledge acquisition and application, humanitarianism, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and practical competence (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994). Out-of-class activities can also foster language acquisition among EFL learners. Hyland (2004) noted significant out-of-class learning of English based on a study with 208 student teachers and 20 primary teachers in Hong Kong. Successful language learners were found to engage in various English activities outside the classroom. The immense benefits of out-of-class activities should lead institutions to use available resources to create opportunities inside and outside of school to accelerate students' learning.

Benefits of Out-of-Class Projects

Out-of-class project work addresses multiple needs and interests of students and creates a variety of authentic English language inputs (Bas, 2008; Hillyard, Reppen, & Vasquez, 2007). *Project Work* (Fried-Booth, 2002) presents various project activities on different scales. Some can be carried out within one class period; some require weeks. The adoption of project work "[encourages] students to move out of the classroom and into the world" and "helps to bridge the gap between language study and language use" (2002, p. 7). Project-based learning allows teachers and students to move beyond the limitations of a traditional English curriculum (Foss, Carney, McDonald, & Rooks, 2007). Engaging students in out-of-class projects offers the significant benefit of expanding the student learning environment. Realizing that their normal surroundings and activities offer meaningful opportunities to learn English is likely to spark interest and increase motivation to learn. Out-of-class activities are also linked with real life applications; this connection is key to fostering more authentic language usage and autonomy (Pearson, 2004).

Fostering Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy was first defined as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981, cited by Hui, 2010). According to Dam (1995), autonomous learners choose their own goals, time, materials, methods, and tasks, implement their choices, and then evaluate their actions. In an examination of the concept, Little (2007) revealed that the term derives from learner-centered theories within constructivist epistemologies; it is also referred to as "independent learning." He further specified (2009) that autonomous learners take the initiative in carrying out actions. As a result, they feel more competent in the things they do. Furthermore, this form of learning enhances learner maturity because it develops critical reflection, decision making, and independent action.

According to the above definitions, autonomous learning does not merely require conscious moves, but also metacognitive strategies such as planning, organizing, and reflecting on language learning. Some researchers speak of learning autonomy as a complex process that also involves affective and social factors such as learners' attitudes toward the target language and learning (Thanasoulas, 2000) and may even include a political aspect in that it allows students to take greater control of their lives and added freedom of choice (Reinders, 2010).

Difficulties in Out-of-Class Activities

Many college students in Taiwan demonstrate low motivation in school learning and are not likely to seek out learning on their own (Guo, 2011), but Little (2009) emphasized that if learners become more autonomous in language learning, their language use will escalate. If students are not motivated and do not take the initiative for self-learning, the teacher can facilitate the learning process by setting up a task with directions that will enable them to attain learning goals. In activity-based learning, the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and students are different from traditional instruction-based learning (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007). The teacher will act as a coach or a facilitator rather than an information deliverer, and students have to take a more active role when they cannot turn to immediate aid from the teacher. However, the teacher is not free of responsibility while students are engaged in out-of-class work. Instead, the teacher needs to provide students with assistance in acquiring the necessary materials and approaches to accomplish the task goal. This kind of learner-centered learning may be easier in theory than in practice.

EFL teachers often doubt the feasibility of out-of- class activities. Little (2009) attributed these concerns to three problems: (1) a lack of an adequate English environment, (2) a lack of know-how for carrying out the task, and (3) the rigidity of the established curriculum, schedule, textbook, or exams. A shift of responsibility toward learners and an adoption of new classroom practices require changes in teachers' perspectives and commitment (Thanasoulas, 2000). The easily implemented out-of-class activity described in this study does not interfere with regular teaching. In the following sections, the author describes the design and implementation of the activity as well as its impact on students' language awareness through a quantitative methodology.

Origin of Activity

The idea for the *English Detective Activity* emerged as an expansion of the *Passport Activity* previously devised by the author. The *Passport Activity* encouraged students to visit sites both on and off campus where English was used. Some of the sites were preselected, and some were selected by the students. Students asked the site supervisors for a signature to confirm their findings. The activity was successful in significantly increasing students' awareness of English expressions used in locations around them.

English Detective Activity

Following the *Passport Activity*, the author created the more intensive *English Detective Activity,* which requires students to collect examples and then evaluate language usage in real-life settings.

At the beginning of the semester, the author outlined the purpose of the activity to the students and provided guidelines. Students were to take on the role of English detectives, inspecting English usage in real-life contexts. They were required to go outside the classroom in search of objects and places where English words were used. They were informed that they would actually see English signs or words on the street or on products they used every day if they paid attention. To motivate them to participate, students were told they could choose the times and places they preferred and make the event a social excursion with friends so as to create an adventure in language. Students were instructed to take notes on the English expressions and the translations they observed. It was recommended that when possible they photograph the English text as evidence to use in their written report.

Guidelines for the *English Detective Activity*:

a) Students could work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Pairs or groups would have to collect more language data.

b) Students could visit places on campus and other places of their choice to find English words and expressions. Students were to write down English words or phrases and / or their translation if the meaning or usage was ambiguous or incorrect. Students could also note interesting expressions for self-learning or to share with the class.

c) Students visiting businesses or agencies outside of school should explain the purpose of the activity to the staff there to prevent misunderstandings caused by the students copying down information or taking photos.

d) Each student needed to collect at least ten English words / phrases / expressions; however, the more, the better.

e) After collecting the language data, students were to examine the usage and analyze possible errors. Students could help each other with error analysis.

f) Students were to compile the language data and create an analysis report. The written report would then be emailed to the teacher by the given deadline.

In the study, students analyzed the English examples for errors in spelling, grammar (tense, word form), mechanics, and syntax. Prior to the activity, an analysis of sample data had been presented so that students understood what was expected of them. The students submitted a written report and the author compiled the student data to present in class. The whole class then discussed the correctness and appropriateness of the usage and translation of the examples. In terms of the presentation format, teachers who use this project can have students present the information either orally or in writing. The author has tried both approaches, which were equally effective.

Teachers can modify this kind of out-of-class activity based on the level of their students. Advanced students can be required to correct the problems they perceive. For lower-level students, it is advisable to limit the activity to collecting English vocabulary and usage because of the students' limitations in language analysis. Teachers can modify the activity to work on idioms, word collocations, syntax, or semantics.

Methodology

The present study intended to investigate the effect of the out-of-class *English Detective Activity* on students' language awareness in an EFL learning environment. It incorporates students' voices, because students' feedback is perceived as an important source in determining how an activity or a program is to be run (Hsieh & Chu, 2006). The study considered the following questions:

1. To what degree did students pay attention to English signs and usage outside of class in real life?
2. Did students' awareness of English used in their living environment outside of class increase after the *English Detective Activity*?
3. Did students' self-perceived language ability increase after the *English Detective Activity*?

Instruments

In-class surveys can serve as a base for instruction decisions and provide feedback to teachers for improvement (Davies, 2006). In order to investigate the degree of students' language awareness before and after the *English Detective Activity*, a twelve-item questionnaire was administered both before and after the activity. Seven questions probed the degree to which students paid attention to English used in real-life settings, and five questions examined students' attitudes toward language awareness and instruction, including practical usages.

Participants and Procedures

A total of ninety English major students in fourth-year study at a five-year junior college in northern Taiwan participated in this study in 2010. The students were the equivalent of freshmen at a general university. The five-year junior college system offers studies with a practical focus on professional skills. To enter this system, students must graduate from junior high school and pass a national entrance exam (Ministry of Education, 2010).

At the beginning of the semester, the author assigned the *English Detective Activity* and administered the pre-activity questionnaire. Students then had about three months to complete the project by visiting places on and off campus to gather vocabulary, interesting expressions, and translations in real settings. Three months later, the post-activity questionnaire was given, with 88 returned. The final notes on language data were also collected.

The questionnaire was checked by two English teachers for face validity. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.89, which showed that the items on the questionnaire had a high internal reliability consistency. A paired samples t-test was computed to determine the statistical significance before and after the experiment.

Results and Discussion

Students' Attention to English Signs and Usage Outside of Class

The study results showed that prior to the activity, students paid very little attention to the English used in their daily lives. When asked about the English signs and usage on campus, the majority, 53.3% of students, rarely or never paid attention to them, 34.4% sometimes did, and only 12.2% often did. As for English on products they used daily, 45.6% rarely or never paid attention and 40% sometimes did, while only 14.4% did so often or very often. With restaurant menus, however, the percentages were reversed; 35.5% of students paid attention to the English usage on menus, 44.4% sometimes, and only 20% rarely or never.

Students' Awareness of English in Their Living Environment After the Activity

After the activity, the level of students' attention changed dramatically in regard to awareness of English usage on campus, on daily products that they used, on street signs, on store merchandise, and on restaurant menus. The survey results before and after the experiment showed a statistical significance (.*000*) in the above-mentioned areas (see Table 1). Regarding students' attention to the translations of English expressions used in real settings, the results still illustrated a significant difference (.*010*) prior to and following the activity.

Table 1

Results of the Paired Sample t-test on Students' Language Awareness Pre- and Post-Activity

	Means Pre-test	Means Post-test	Std. Dev.	*T*	Sig. (2- tailed)
Daily products	2.66	3.53	0.98	-8.08	*.000*
School signs	2.48	3.41	0.90	-9.63	*.000*
Street signs	2.70	3.67	1.00	-8.76	*.000*
Store signs	2.64	3.61	1.00	-8.82	*.000*
Store items	2.44	3.47	0.95	-9.65	*.000*
Restaurants	3.16	3.74	0.96	-5.58	*.000*
Translation	2.80	3.11	1.10	-2.60	*.010*

Note. N = 88.

p < .05.

Students' Self-Perceived Language Ability After the Activity

In response to the self-rated items on language gain in vocabulary, translation skills, and overall language ability, many students strongly agreed that the *English Detective Activity* could increase their vocabulary size. They also believed that the activity improved their general English ability and translation skills (see Table 2).

Table 2

Results of the Paired Sample t-test on Students' Self-Rated Skills Pre- and Post-Activity

	Means Pre-test	Means Post-test	Std. Dev.	*T*	Sig. (2- tailed)
Vocabulary	3.47	3.67	0.71	-2.69	*0.01*
General ability	3.45	3.63	0.73	-5.00	*0.01*
Translation	3.26	3.47	0.71	-2.60	*0.03*

Note. N = 88.

p < .05.

As for whether school courses included practical English usage, the mean was not as high (see Table 3). According to the survey results, students thought that teachers should teach more practical English usage in class. While teachers may be required to adhere to a class syllabus and materials that are both limited and rigid, they could find ways to incorporate more authentic materials into their classroom teaching and create a learning environment that cultivates autonomous learning.

Table 3

Results of the Paired Sample t-test on Students' Opinions Pre- and Post-Activity

	Means Pre-test	Means Post-test	Std. Dev.	*T*	Sig. (2- tailed)
Practical usage included in instruction	3.30	3.41	0.80	-1.30	0.19
Need for incorporating practical English usage	4.07	4.05	0.54	0.39	0.67

Note. N = 88.

p < .05.

Difficulties for the Activity

Although this study exhibited positive results, some problems emerged. The purpose of the activity is to increase students' awareness of and contact with English; it is not meant to encourage competition. The author first assigned the activity as a co-curricular activity for extra credit. Although provided with incentives such as extra credit and prizes, students showed very little motivation to do the activity because it was not part of the formal curriculum. As a result, the activity was changed to a course requirement. Constant reminders and a collection of drafts midway through the project were necessary to assure that students remained on task. Moreover, with this activity, it is possible that some students might attempt to benefit from the effort of others without taking their own notes and it might be difficult for teachers to verify the authenticity of students' data. As in the completed study, indications are that most students will be honest and do their own work. Teachers could show or post students' findings to honor their work so that students feel their effort is worthwhile. Students' commitment to outside classroom work varies (Gibbs, 1999; Pearson, 2004), but those with a low level of commitment should not deter teachers from creating learning tasks outside of class. For students who are more teacher-dependent and are used to being spoon-fed information, more encouragement and impetus may be necessary for them to embark on a language quest.

Conclusion

The out-of-class activity is intended to help students realize that although they are not in an English-speaking environment, they are still surrounded by English. The present study demonstrates that this activity encourages students to expand their language experience to outside the classroom by making them aware of existing and available English language opportunities in their surroundings. Instead of presenting only formulaic English in textbooks, an out-of-class activity can increase students' exposure to English in existing and familiar contexts. In addition to providing authentic language exposure, the *English Detective Activity* can draw students into a discussion of the appropriateness of language usage and translation. Their conscious attention to English usage in the real world can also increase students' language ability and, in particular, improve their vocabulary.

This study shows the potential value of incorporating out-of-class activities for enriched learning outside of school and for autonomous learning. Non-English speaking countries such as China, Japan, and Vietnam are witnessing an increasing need for international communication and collaboration and have recognized the impact of English as a universal

be more incorporation of English in the environment. However, it cannot be assumed that students will automatically absorb the English displayed in their environment. Institutions need to "[transcend] the artificial boundaries of in-class and out-of-class learning experiences" and provide ample opportunities for learning outside of classrooms (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994). Thus, it is worthwhile for educators in similar EFL environments to implement this purposeful out-of-class activity as a means of promoting English language awareness and enhancing the learning of English in their local contexts.

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Appendix
Students' Language Data Samples

LADIE'S SHOSE →LADIES' SHOES

PROFSSIONAL→PROFESSIONAL
PRESCRIPTIPN→PRESCRIPTION
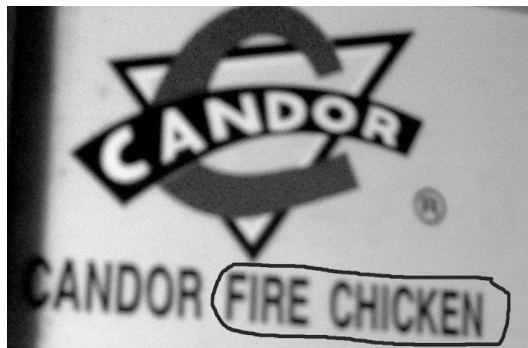
FIRE CHICKEN →FRIED CHICKEN

EASY TO ASSEMBLY→
EASY TO ASSEMBLE
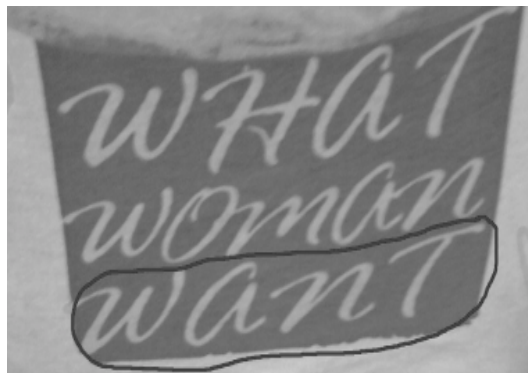
What woman want →
What women want

Record image to win to ask to smile →
Smile, you are on camera

Do Context-Rich Lessons Improve Learners' Listening Comprehension Performance?

Nick Morley
Astana, Kazakhstan

Abstract

This action research project explores whether context-rich lessons produce better listening comprehension results than context-poor lessons. Video clips and professional quality images improved contextual support to scaffold listening comprehension. Listening segments were adapted from a podcasting site. Fifteen upper intermediate Asian learners participated by completing a pre-study listening skills questionnaire and participating in two context-rich and two context-poor lessons featuring listening texts and comprehension gap-fills. Post-listening questionnaires provided learners' evaluations of their listening experience. A post-project questionnaire surveyed impressions of the two lesson types. Outcomes from context-rich lessons were compared with context-poor lessons by correlating learners' post-listening questionnaires with listening comprehension scores to assess whether their reflections matched performance. Results showed listening comprehension scores were higher for context-rich lessons and that learners preferred this approach.

The Research Aims

The project aimed to explore practical values of richly contextualised lesson resources and whether they improved listening comprehension. An additional consideration was how the learners responded to context-rich materials.

Why the Problem is Important

From a pedagogical perspective it would be helpful to clarify effects of context-rich lead in segments to listening comprehension, the perceptions of learners and the potential trade-off in lesson preparation time and effective teaching. Providing appropriate scaffolding and engaging materials are included under effective teaching.

The Context

The participants were a group of fifteen upper intermediate students, two Korean and thirteen Thai nationals aged between fourteen and fifteen. Their course book was adequate, but grammar based and not particularly engaging. Learners were surveyed for a range of topics they would be interested in studying in English, incorporating language points from their course book. Making listening challenging and enjoyable has been problematic, which led to using web-based materials from video broadcasting sites (e.g., http://www.youtube.com),

podcasting sites (e.g., http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com), and stock photography sites (e.g., http://www.corbisimages.com).

Literature Relating to Context

Support for Enhancing Contextual Richness

Brown (1986) argued that materials writers and teachers mistakenly assume when learners of English experience difficulties with listening input these difficulties arise from language deficits which ". . . would arise even if he or she were presented with the same material in the mother tongue" (p. 284). It is the presentation of material that concerns this project. In lessons for listening texts, spending an initial period on pre-listening activities relating to context and emphasising the relationship between noticing language and its subsequent emergence in speech facilitates noticing. If supported by familiar or well-contextualised materials, cognitive processing loads placed on learners are reduced (Richards, 2005, p. 87).

Context is central to cognitive processing and activating schemata (background knowledge). Anderson and Lynch (1988) proposed a psychological model of listeners as limited processors with finite input processing capacities. With this model highlighting listener limitations, implications for establishing a supportive pre-listening context are clear. More cognitive capacity being used for interpreting context means less capacity remains available for noticing language. This aspect of noticing is relevant as learners are increasingly asked to notice language in natural texts rather than explicitly focusing on language points. To address this, Cameron (2001) suggested using familiar stories that provide context and reduce processing demands as familiarity with plot and characters enables learners to spend more time on noticing aspects of language.

Therefore, enhanced context may help learners achieve more, which supports Bruner's concept of scaffolding. Apart from facilitating noticing language, spending an appropriate time establishing context helps students listen more naturally. Underwood's (1989) position on teaching without establishing context is that going directly into a listening text deprives learners of opportunities to use their natural listening skills, as listeners ordinarily match what they hear with their prior experiences or expectations.

Participants in this project are learning English through a variety of topics and specific cultural settings, such as "Festivals" which includes bull running in Spain. These Asian learners have no prior experience of this aspect of festivals. This type of contextual culture gap is an ongoing issue in Asia as learners predominantly use Eurocentric course materials. This view is supported by Anderson and Lynch (1988), who state that it is often not linguistic ability holding learners back, but lack of prior experience or contextual knowledge. Rost (1994) further supports allocating time to context building; this is especially relevant to young learners and cross-cultural factors. In regard to bridging inferences, the author suggests that listeners usually rely on experience of similar circumstances to guide them and tend to assume that any missing information will closely resemble the normal state of affairs. As this tendency is based on life experience, young learners are disadvantaged due to having less broad life experiences to support making bridging inferences and are likely to benefit from contextual support.

Arguments Challenging the Use of Contextual Support

Evidence relating to enhancing context is not all supportive. When discussing the effects of supportive visuals in language testing, Grinther (2002) questions whether positive effects on performance are related to language proficiency. Proficiency is relevant because the most noticeable improvements have occurred with lower level learners. This difference in

performance between learner levels suggests other cognitive factors are involved when additional contextual support is introduced. For example, individuals who are not skilled at generating mental images will benefit more from visual aids. However, those well versed in this skill tend to show signs of reduced listening performance, which could be due to visual interference. The author also suggests learners with low levels of spatial ability find holding and processing images in memory problematic. Therefore, this strategy might be best applied with individual learners who have lower spatial abilities and are experiencing difficulties.

Additional processing load could be created unintentionally by presenting text and images together. Combining text and images can cause this additional workload, because attention then has to be split between the two modalities. Subsequently, images with accompanying visual presentation of a text can overload visual attention and impair performance. An example would be reading the news captions on CNN while trying to listen to the newsreader.

Methodology

Data collection was undertaken by administering questionnaires eliciting learners' opinions on their listening skills and delivering four lessons that generated comparative data.

Four Lessons

Lessons 1 and 3 were context-rich, and Lessons 2 and 4 were context-poor. All lessons featured listening passages from Breaking News English (http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com) and accompanying comprehension gap-fill exercises. Follow-up questionnaires on the listening experience were administered immediately after the listening comprehension exercises. Listening comprehension scores were collated and a post-study questionnaire administered to explore attitudes to context-rich and context-poor lessons. The lessons appear in order of presentation.

Lesson 1 - Context-Rich: Cartoons. A forty-minute topic lead-in culminated in the listening text. Learners brainstormed cartoon characters, discussed cartoons and ideas for using them in education, viewed celebrities talking about favourite cartoons, and watched a clip of *Wallace & Gromit* before moving on to the listening. From this stage, materials were presented consistently across the lesson series the following stages: presenting the news headline, true or false prediction about the listening content based on the headline, listening with accompanying comprehension gap-fill played twice after which learners completed post-listening questionnaires.

Lesson 2 - Context-Poor: Celebrities. A very brief lead in was used via the headline "Paris Hilton Returns to Jail" with a short true or false prediction exercise. Learners listened to the text twice while completing the accompanying comprehension gap-fill. The post listening questionnaire was completed.

Lesson 3 - Context-Rich: Love. This lesson followed the same outline as context-rich Lesson 1.

Lesson 4 - Context-Poor: Festivals. Lesson 4, on the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, followed the same pattern as context-poor Lesson 2. As this was the final lesson in the series, the post-study questionnaire was given while the experience was still fresh.

Triangulation and Criterion Referencing

The project utilised triangulation, suggested by Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000), by focusing on data from a variety of perspectives, ranging from qualitative evidence from learners' ideas about their listening skills, their impressions of how the listening part of the lesson worked for them, to a post-study questionnaire asking for reflection on the lessons and materials. Quantitative data was collected from listening comprehension gap-fill scores and collated to explore differences in performance between context-rich and context-poor lessons.

Criterion referencing was used; referencing focuses on individual learning progress and improvement (Cohen et al., 2000). Therefore, comparison between participants was not considered, as the intention was to describe how individual learners responded to controlled changes in contextual support.

Results

Learners' Perceptions of Listening Abilities

Table 1 below shows the learners' rating of aspects of listening (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = n*either agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), with the majority rating themselves at 3 and above. Importantly for this study, fifty percent selected 4 (*agree*) on the item, "If I don't know about the topic, listening is more difficult."

Table 1

Pre-Research Listening Skills Survey

	Rate 1 *Strongly disagree*	Rate 2 *Disagree*	Rate 3 *Neither agree nor disagree*	Rate 4 *Agree*	Rate 5 *Strongly agree*
1. I am a good listener.	0%	7.70%	61.54%	30.76%	0%
2. I enjoy the listening parts of my English class.	0%	0%	15.38%	61.54%	23.07%
3. Learning to listen with real life materials is more important than using course books.	0%	0%	15.38%	46.15%	38.46%
4. I like to listen to topics I know about.	0%	0%	15.38%	53.84%	30.76%
5. If I don't know about a topic, I like to practice before listening.	0%	15.38%	61.53%	23.07%	0%
6. If I don't know about the topic, listening is more difficult.	0%	15.38%	23.07%	53.84%	7.69%
7. I can listen for overall meaning well.	0%	15.38%	69.23%	15.38%	0%
8. I can listen for detail well.	0%	23.07%	46.15%	30.75%	0%

Note. *n* = 13

Context-Rich Lessons 1 and 3

The majority found the listening texts easy to understand in both context-rich lessons, with 58.33% and 33.33% rating themselves at 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*) and 4 (*agree*), respectively, for Question 1 in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Post-Lesson Survey Results for Context-Rich Lesson 1

	Rate 1 *Strongly disagree*	Rate 2 *Disagree*	Rate 3 *Neither agree nor disagree*	Rate 4 *Agree*	Rate 5 *Strongly agree*
1. It was easy to understand the listening.	0%	0%	58.33%	33.33%	8.33%
2. I felt confident during the listening.	0%	8.33%	75.00%	0%	16.66%
3. I felt relaxed during the listening.	0%	8.33%	50.00%	25.00%	16.66%
4. I felt well prepared and ready to listen about the topic.	0%	8.33%	50.00%	25.00%	16.66%
5. I needed more preparation time to listen well.	8.33%	8.33%	33.33%	41.46%	8.33%
6. My test score was affected by how familiar I was with the topic.	0%	16.66%	25.00%	33.33%	25.00%

Note. n = 12

Context-Poor Lessons 2 and 4

Table 3 below demonstrates differences between context-poor lessons, indicating that learners felt less confident and relaxed when materials were presented with less contextual support.

This is supported by evidence from Question 6, "My test score was affected by how familiar I was with the topic." In Lesson 1, 25% chose 5 (*strongly agree*); in Lesson 4, this declined to 7.69%.

Table 3
Post-Lesson Survey Results for Context-Poor Lesson 4

	Rate 1 *Strongly disagree*	Rate 2 *Disagree*	Rate 3 *Neither agree nor disagree*	Rate 4 *Agree*	Rate 5 *Strongly agree*
1. It was easy to understand the listening.	0%	30.76%	30.76%	38.46%	0%
2. I felt confident during the listening.	0%	23.07%	53.84%	23.07%	0%
3. I felt relaxed during the listening.	0%	23.07%	46.15%	23.07%	7.69%
4. I felt well prepared and ready to listen about the topic.	0%	0%	53.84%	30.76%	15.38%
5. I needed more preparation time to listen well.	0%	15.38%	61.53%	23.07%	0%
6. My test score was affected by how familiar I was with the topic.	0%	7.69%	53.84%	30.76%	7.69%

Note. n = 13

Listening Comprehension Scores for Context-Rich and Context-Poor Lessons

Table 4 below demonstrates two trends: context-rich lessons produced higher listening comprehension scores overall and the performance of high- and low-scoring learners remained reasonably consistent across the four lessons.

Table 4

Listening Scores Across the Four Lessons

Learner	Lesson 1 context-rich	Lesson 2 context-poor	Lesson 3 context-rich	Lesson 4 context-poor
1	Absent	0%	58%	27%
2	47%	14%	33%	27%
3	67%	7%	Absent	0%
4	86%	50%	Absent	55%
5	71%	0%	75%	9%
6	50%	7%	50%	Absent
7	88%	43%	92%	64%
8	29%	Absent	42%	27%
9	50%	0%	33%	0%
10	71%	0%	33%	Absent
11	71%	14%	Absent	18%
12	75%	7%	83%	45%
13	76%	0%	50%	Absent
14	Absent	7%	83%	45%
15	Absent	7%	Absent	27%

Post-Project Questionnaire: Opinions on Relevance, Value, and Effectiveness

Table 5 shows ratings trending positively towards Responses C and D, indicating learners found context-rich lessons helpful.

Table 5

Follow-Up Questionnaire: Reflection on the Lessons

1.Teaching with video clips and help with vocabulary was	
A) Unhelpful	0%
B) Neutral	15.38%
C) Improved my listening a little	46.15%
D) Improved my listening a lot	38.46%

Note. n = 13

Table 6 below shows this positive trend was further supported by responses to Item 2 as 76.92% considered images and video clips helped listening comprehension.

Table 6

Responses to Item 2

2. Video clips and pictures before listening help me understand more.	True	Neutral	False
	76.92%	23.07%	0%

Note. n = 13

Table 7 demonstrates that Item 6 indicates learners perceive contextualising materials as adding value to their course.

Table 7

Responses to Item 6

	True	Neutral	False
6. Using video and pictures adds quality to my English course.	69.23%	30.76%	0%

Note. n = 13

Summary

Overall, results reflected trends indicated by supporting literature as listening comprehension scores for context-rich lessons were over 50% higher in many cases. Learners also responded favourably to context-rich materials with 76.92% indicating they thought visual support helped them understand more and 38.46% stating that visual and vocabulary support improved their listening a lot.

Analysis and Discussion

Results indicate correlation between context-rich environments and improved listening comprehension. However, one weakness highlighted by Mayer and Gallini (1990) is that the effects of multimedia are stronger for subjects without prior knowledge of the topic, but barely noticeable for those with it, indicating a project design weakness. Apart from that factor which may have influenced the degree of change in listening comprehension, the crucial point; is that Asian learners often have very different cultural experiences and expectations which are not well represented by globally published materials. This would be even more relevant for younger learners with less life experience to draw on and potentially makes them ideal beneficiaries for multi-media contextual support. Therefore, while the Upper Intermediate group showed listening comprehension improvements relating to context-rich lessons, a lower level group may have demonstrated more significant changes, as Grinther (2002) suggests lower proficiency groups gain more benefits from context-rich environments.

Considering whether preparation time spent on collecting materials to enhance contextual support is well spent; learners responded positively towards context-rich lesson contents. While this is an affective factor, (relating to emotion and motivation) its value as a learning-support tool should not be underestimated, as engaging motivating lessons foster a positive attitude towards learning which can carry forward to future lessons. Again, younger learners, who rely more on environmental context and learn best from their immediate surroundings might benefit more than older groups who are more comfortable with abstract concepts.

Conclusions

Learners' listening performance definitely improved during context-rich lessons, confirming evidence from supporting literature. Learners expressed a preference for this type of lesson; therefore, for pedagogical and affective reasons, additional time sourcing materials to provide additional context is time well spent.

However, the evidence supporting analysis should not be taken at face value, as texts were not graded for difficulty. On reflection, context-poor lessons required learners to process more difficult phrases and collocations. Rost (1994) discusses degrees of difficulty relating to input and complexity of information. Context-poor texts would be rated as high difficulty because they lack repetition or redundancy and are informationally dense, as news items tend to be.

The project would have more credibility if it had incorporated Grinther's (2002) suggestion that lower proficiency levels benefit more from contextual support. This aspect needs addressing through comparative studies with upper intermediate and elementary-level learners.

Recommendations

This study involved higher-level learners, but the methods have since been used with elementary-level groups. The only noticeable difference was the need to allow additional processing time for elementary-level learners to formulate and discuss their ideas in English as they have fewer linguistic resources to draw on. In terms of benefit, the visual input and contextual examples are likely to provide a significant amount of non-verbal support, although further study is needed to fully evaluate this. The author's preference would be to increase the amount of contextual support for lower-level groups.

As discussed earlier, a large body of evidence supports allocating significant amounts of time to pre-listening activities, whatever the learners' level, to activate pre-existing knowledge and create expectations or predictions of what they are likely to hear. In this way, listening-text topics are able to fit into existing cognitive maps, which supports processing and decoding. Therefore, time spent preparing learners to listen is repaid by an improved listening comprehension experience.

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Appendix 1
A Practical Example

The following example demonstrates that globally published or Eurocentric course materials are not always contextually relevant for Asian learners because the materials may not reflect their interests or life experiences. It is still possible to adapt how listening is approached and ultimately use these materials effectively. This can be achieved by considering how the materials might be presented in the light of present knowledge, contextualised through the use of video or images and adapted to local settings.

The course materials, which were produced in Europe, featured a listening on the topic "Festivals" with bull running in Pamplona, Spain as the listening text. The learners had no prior knowledge of this event, so it was presented in the following way: learners brainstormed and pooled their existing vocabulary relating to festivals by using the prompts, "When you think of Songkran (Thai New Year) and Seol-nal (Korean Lunar New Year), what do you think of, how do you feel, and what do you do?" The learners then added these ideas as well as vocabulary to mind-maps. Having activated learners' schemata (existing background knowledge and expectations relating to the topic of festivals), the next step involved watching a YouTube video of the Pamplona Bull Run while underlining any relevant ideas or vocabulary from their mind-maps. Learners then worked in pairs to discuss differences between their local festivals and bull running before sharing their ideas with a wider audience. At this point, additional language was elicited and provided to support a fuller description of the Spanish festival, especially regarding the differences in terms of family-centred versus individual risk-taking activities, types of emotion, and danger. Learners were then more fully prepared to make the most of the course listening text as the types of event, actions, and narratives would not be unfamiliar and would allow learners to work with existing expectations about the event, its cultural relevance, and associated activities.

Appendix 2
Learners' Views

Post-listening interviews revealed preferences correlating with learners' listening abilities. Regarding context-poor Lesson 2, Learner 1, a capable listener, seemed to enjoy the challenge, whereas Learner 2, who is less skilled, found the lesson difficult.

> Researcher: Can you tell me how you found the listening exercise this week, because there was no video to prepare for it and no vocabulary exercises to get ready for it?
> Learner 1: I think it is a bit hard, but it is not too hard. We should get like this every week, it's not too easy.
> Learner 2: I think it's very difficult because I don't know many words in vocabulary.

After context-rich Lesson 3, Learner 3 stated that additional contextual support was helpful.

> Researcher: What's the best way to do the listening - with video and activity before, or go straight to the listening and why?
> Learner 3: I think to do some video and to do an activity before is better . . . So it makes it easier to do another thing.

Learner 2's comment that the context-poor lesson was difficult because she did not know much of the vocabulary is significant. This is an area which context-rich materials are able to address before listening takes place by providing more listening resources.

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Language Education in Asia is a publication of papers that presents well-researched aspects of language education and learning, innovative, practical approaches to classroom practice, and discussion of relevant issues in the field of TESOL in the Asian region. Papers can be submitted by educators, educational leaders, and researchers; all papers are blind-reviewed by members of the Editorial Board. Beginning with this 2011 Volume, accepted papers will be published on a biannual basis in Summer and Winter Issues. Submissions are welcome and will be considered in an ongoing process throughout the year. Each summer issue will highlight exceptional papers presented at the annual CamTESOL Conference Series during that publication year.

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