Language Education in Asia

LEiA
Language Education in Asia

CAMTESOL

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Editors' Note

A New Step for *Language Education in Asia*

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Now in our sixth year of publication, *Language Education in Asia* (LEiA) has been the beneficiary of generous worldwide support and interest. Our volunteer editors, for example, come from almost 20 countries, providing varied and invaluable perspectives and expertise. Because of their ongoing efforts, the journal has been able to publish authors representing 22 countries.

While we are extremely grateful to be part of such a generous pan-Asia and global network, LEiA's editorial focus, beginning with this issue, is shifting more toward the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region, particularly Cambodia and the other developing countries within ASEAN. While we will continue to welcome articles from throughout Asia and professional input from around the world, our aim is to have the content of the journal increasingly reflect the ASEAN region's interests and needs. Fortunately, the emergence of a larger, more sophisticated TESOL research community in Southeast Asia now makes this possible. It also allows us to better represent the ASEAN region in the changing makeup of our editorial team, which will gradually take place as new members based in the region come on board in forthcoming issues.

We are confident that this approach will better meet the needs of our readers and the goals of our supporting organizations, which include helping to further strengthen research activity and collaboration in the region, particularly in Cambodia. Including the present issue, we have been able to publish 35 articles by ASEAN authors, including 7 from Cambodia. We hope to steadily increase both of these numbers in coming volumes. The annual CamTESOL Regional ELT Research Grants for authors in the region are one way we hope this can be accomplished.

IDP Education organizes the CamTESOL Regional ELT Research Grants to support resident nationals of Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam, and their research partners, if applicable, in their research. Proposals are evaluated on their potential contributions to ELT in the development context and to the body of ELT literature, written quality, methodology, and the applicant's relevant education and experience. IDP Education awards two types of grants: General Research Grants and Cross-Country Research Grants. Please see http://www.camtesol.org/2016-conference/camtesol-regional-elt-research-grants-program for more information. Papers on the completed research projects are submitted to

LEiA for consideration for publication. The application deadline is 5 p.m. (Cambodia) on January 22nd, 2016.

We at LEiA would like to further support emerging authors from these ASEAN countries by having peer-mentors available for guidance on the writing and revision of papers. We invite interested ELT professionals who have had research-based papers published in peer-reviewed journals to volunteer to help authors with the organization and clarity of papers before and possibly after submission to LEiA. Submitted papers will undergo our regular screening process. If all preliminary requirements are met, the papers will continue to the blind review process. Peer-mentors may choose to continue to support authors if the papers are selected to go through the revision process. With the aim of further fostering a spirit of professional service and support within the ASEAN ELT community, we seek peer-mentors from the ASEAN region as well as from the wider Asian and international communities.

LEiA's evolution is taking place at a time when the number of other freely accessed online peer-reviewed journals for language researchers and practitioners in the ASEAN region has grown. Since many scholars in the region still have little or no access to the proprietary databases containing much of the most current language research, this is a positive development. Yet there is a downside to this situation as well, as some of these journals require authors to pay to submit their work and have it reviewed. While these pay-to-publish journals allow more articles to find an audience, they also put into question the quality of their content. LEiA does not follow this model. It is a no-fee open-access journal. Our published authors can be proud that their work has gone through a legitimate, unbiased review and publication process, made possible by the efforts and many hours of donated time of our editors and the skill and hard work of our Editorial Assistant, Publication Assistants, and others at IDP in Phnom Penh.

Readers should note that while we strive first for clarity in communication when copyediting articles, we also seek to preserve each author's voice. We believe that the flavor of the researcher's home culture—its worldview and linguistic style—is what makes research authentic to the region and best connects it with our readers.

We are proud to start Volume 6, Issue 1 with two CamTESOL Research Grant Papers. In the first, Kea, Meng, and Keuk examine how teachers at six universities in Phnom Penh, Cambodia perceive and use standardized tests as supplementary materials and assessment tools. In the second paper, Nguyen and Edwards report on their study of lexical density (LD) and nominalization in research proposals by students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language at a Vietnamese university.

The research section begins with Keuk's investigation of the development of ELT research engagement by teachers at a university in Cambodia. Next, in the EFL context of Indonesia, Inayati describes how university students were trained to find opportunities to study English on their own outside of the classroom and analyzes the skill types of the activities chosen as well as the participants' opinions of the independent English study activities. In the next paper, Ha investigates how Vietnamese students studying at a university in Australia perceive request situations and politeness in requests, and how these perceptions affect their requests. The research section and the issue conclude with a study in Taiwan by Graham on the effectiveness of the cover, copy, and compare method for spelling in a junior high school EFL context.

In addition to this issue, three LEiA books have been recently released online and are freely available for further reading:

We sincerely thank the LEiA Advisory and Editorial Boards for their essential support and work on behalf of the publication. We are also grateful for the very generous share of time, effort, and expertise that the members of the editorial team offer in tirelessly working with authors to bring papers to publication. We note here that John Middlecamp, whose editorial eye has had a large and positive influence on LEiA, is leaving to pursue other interests, although he will still collaborate with us on special projects from time to time. We wish him the best.

We also appreciate all of the authors who submitted papers, and congratulate the authors whose papers are published in this issue.

Finally, we thank our audience and hope our readers find our current issue reflects all of the innovations we are undertaking to improve LEiA's content and style.

CamTESOL Regional ELT Research Grant Paper

Cambodian ELT University Practitioners' Use of Standardized Tests for Practice and Assessment

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Standardized tests, in particular TOEFL and IELTS, have been used widely in contemporary ELT education in Cambodia, and research has shown that Cambodians perceive IELTS as a key "gate-keeping mechanism" for gaining overseas scholarships and pursuing education abroad. However, understanding exactly how these tests are used by teachers has yet to be explored and is the subject of this investigation. Twelve teachers from six universities in Phnom Penh participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews to determine their perceptions of these tests and how they are used. The findings show that TOEFL or IELTS were viewed as desirable as classroom learning tools and as a valid and reliable tool for assessment, but were sometimes used erroneously as assessments for meeting course objectives. The authors argue that teachers require further training in assessments before the use of standardized tests in classrooms can be effective.

The recent growth of English language teaching in Cambodia has attracted attention from applied linguists, researchers, and teachers. Over the past decade, some studies, such as Keuk and Tith (2006), Keuk (2008, 2009), Moore and Bounchan (2010a, 2010b), Kea (2011), Keuk and Tith (2013), and Keuk and Lim (forthcoming) have shed light on ELT education and its development in this country. Regarding assessment, two key studies have been undertaken. The first was Nguon's (2013) study investigating the use of in-class assessment, and the second was Tao's (2014) study measuring the impact of assessment knowledge and assessment beliefs on in-class assessment practices and correlating the constructs that form assessment literacy. This present study aims to help better discern how university ELT teachers in Cambodia perceive two standardized tests, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the

International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and their use of such tests as practice and assessment tools in this context.

Literature Review

A review of relevant literature reveals two main types of assessments in ELT education: standardized tests and classroom assessments. While standardized tests are essential for schools, universities, businesses, and governments to identify who should be admitted, kept, or dismissed (Brown, 2004), classroom assessments aim to provide evidence of the effectiveness of a language program and success or failure of students' performances within an actual program. What follows is a brief review of the literature related to standardized tests and assessment.

Standardized Tests

In tertiary education, standardized tests are used worldwide for assessing the readiness of students with English as a second or foreign language to gain admission into university degree programs conducted in English (O'Loughlin, 2013). Two such tests most often used in various higher education settings are the TOEFL and IELTS, for they have "construct validity, reliability, impact, practicality, authenticity, and interactiveness" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 9). The impact of standardized tests can be substantial on test-takers' academic and occupational lives since the test scores are used for admission and employment purposes (Derrick, 2013). The tests, besides being employed institutionally, are used in many language classrooms for assessing to what degree students have mastered the course content and for assigning grades (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 147). However, TOEFL and IELTS are viewed by many practitioners and researchers as unhelpful in that they might be irrelevant to the course aim and objectives if the tests are not properly adapted in terms of content (Brown, 2004).

In the Cambodian context, according to Moore, Stroupe, and Mahony (2012, p. 62), the number of IELTS examinees increased from a small number in 1992 to "more than 1,000" in 2010. Taking these tests has recently become prevalent among those who wish to win scholarships for overseas study and those who wish to further their education in an English-speaking country (Moore, Stroupe, & Mahony, 2012). To obtain sufficiently high band scores for fulfillment of the requirements for such overseas studies, Cambodian students need to master a great amount of "world knowledge" (Moore, Stroupe, & Mahony, 2012, p. 62).

Classroom Assessment

A review of related literature also reveals two main streams of classroom assessments: traditional assessment and alternative assessment (Brown, 2004; Genesee & Upshur, 1996). The former is comprised of proficiency, diagnostic, achievement, and placement testing (Hughes, 2003). It is basically used to measure students' declarative knowledge. The latter, used to assess students' performance, includes portfolio, journal, conference, interview, and observation skills (Brown, 2004; Genesee & Upshur, 1996). Other forms of alternative assessment are questionnaires, self-assessments, and peer-assessments (Brown, 2004). Within traditional assessment and alternative assessment, students can be assessed formatively and / or summatively (Brown, 2004). As for formative assessment, in which students are assessed on a continuous basis, Greenstein (2010) has proposed three principles: "student focused; instructionally informative; and outcome-based" (pp. 15-20). The first principle aims to evaluate students' knowledge, comprehension, and application. The second principle aims to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' instructional design. The third principle focuses on whether the set goals of a course are achieved. Summative assessment, in which students are assessed at the end of a course or unit of instruction, is conducted to see if the course or unit objectives are met but not to contribute to students' future improvement (Brown, 2004).

Classroom assessment stands at the heart of the educational process and is seen as closely related with the theories of teaching and learning: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (James, 2008). Classroom assessments promote learning if they conform to three principles (James, 2008). In the first principle, "assessing learning of what [has been] taught" (James, 2008, p. 21), assessment focuses on factual information which entails rote memory, and a comparison is made between what has been taught and the extent to which students acquire the knowledge (Berry, 2008; James, 2008). In this principle of testing, students are passive in learning (Berry, 2008). In the second principle, "assessing . . . as individual sense-making" (James, 2008, p. 21), assessment focuses on deeper understandings acquired through critical thinking (Berry, 2008; James, 2008). This testing principle sees students as active learners (Berry, 2008). In the third principle, "assessing learning as building knowledge as part of doing things with others" (James, 2008, p. 21), with knowledge acquired through interaction, assessment of group learning is needed to gain insights into how students learn, what they can do and cannot do, and what can be done to help them learn (Berry, 2008; James, 2008).

In a similar vein, Berry (2008) proposes that assessments are helpful for language acquisition if ELT practitioners:

> align assessment to teaching and learning; explore multidimensional assessment methods; select assessments susceptible to learning; draw on joint efforts among colleagues; assess students continuously; allow students' participation in assessment process; use assessment to uncover learning; make marking criteria accessible; provide feedback; and analyze and report results. (p. 14)

Assessment in ELT in Cambodia

As stated earlier, two key studies have been undertaken in the context of assessment at the tertiary level in Cambodia (Nguon, 2013; Tao, 2014). These studies have shown that traditional assessment has been widely adopted in Cambodian ELT classrooms, although alternative assessment is endorsed by higher education institutions and practitioners. The practice of such traditional assessment is due to large class sizes, low teaching wages for nongovernment instructors, low salaries for government teachers (Tao, 2014), university requirements, and a passive learning culture (Nguon, 2013). In addition, Nguon (2013) stated that assessments in Cambodian classrooms are purported to identify underlying sources of learning difficulties, to monitor the progress of learning, and, most likely, to fulfill university requirements. However, Tao (2014) has shown that the majority of Cambodian ELT instructors have insufficient classroom assessment knowledge to ensure the validity and reliability of their assessments.

Given that teaching English in Cambodia is generally subjected to time constraints, large class sizes, limited resources, and limited assessment literacy (Nguon, 2013; Tao, 2014), tertiary ELT instructors are likely to use ready-made testing materials (e.g., the materials included in standardized tests) for assessing their students' learning achievements in classrooms. According to Keuk and Lim (forthcoming), when Cambodian ELT teachers use supplementary materials in teaching, they are likely to use materials that train students in test-taking strategies, that is, TOEFL or IELTS test-taking strategies. Some of the teacher participants in Keuk and Lim's (forthcoming) study believed that training their students in test-taking strategies would assist their students in attaining high scores in progress tests or final examinations.

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of Cambodian university teachers of English in using standardized tests (TOEFL and IELTS) as part of practice and assessment. The study thus seeks to address the following questions:

1. Are Cambodian university ELT practitioners aware of standardized tests?
2. To the extent that they are aware of standardized tests,
    2.1. what standardized tests have they experienced taking?
    2.2. have they used practice standardized tests to assess their students' learning achievement?
    2.3. have they trained their students in test-taking strategies in the classroom?
    2.4. what are their beliefs about standardized tests in relation to their students' learning achievement in the classroom?
    2.5. what challenges do they face in adopting practice standardized tests as part of learning and assessment?

Methodology

This research is a qualitative study on current tertiary ELT practice and assessment through exploring teachers' perceptions of standardized tests and use of such tests as classroom assessments. Twelve teachers from six Cambodian universities (one public university and five private universities) in Phnom Penh agreed to participate in this study, and judgmental sampling was employed. At the time of the study, the participants (four females and eight males) ranged in age from 27 to 38 years and had more than four years of teaching experience at the tertiary level. These teacher participants taught Core English, which is a subject offered in the undergraduate degree program (i.e., a Bachelor of Arts in English) in all the selected universities. This course provides students with training of general English.

This research project had three phases. In the first phase, on receipt of participants' approval, the study was clearly explained, informed consent was obtained, and interviews were arranged. In the second phase, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which Burns (2010) describes as likely to offer deeper and richer information in light of diversity and flexibility. The one-on-one interviews spanned a total of six weeks, and only two participants were interviewed on separate days per week. Each interview was conducted at places the participants suggested, and ranged in length from approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The interview protocols consisted of five main questions and a number of subquestions (see Appendix). The interviews were conducted in English by one of the researchers (i.e., the same person) to ensure both internal and external reliability of data collection. Each interview was tape-recorded. In the final phase, the interview data were transcribed for content analysis, coded, and analyzed through NVivo 10 software. The data were thematically categorized under the six research questions. For data validation, a summary of key findings was distributed to all interviewees to comment on the accuracy of verbatim quotes and also to confirm if they agreed with the reported findings.

Findings

This paper focuses on the perceptions of Cambodian ELT practitioners in using standardized tests for practice and assessment. The interviews were conducted with only Core English teachers whose courses primarily deal with language proficiency, and thus standardized tests play a role. The findings will be reported based on each research question.

Research Question 1: Are Cambodian ELT Practitioners Aware of Standardized Tests?

All the teachers (*N* = 12) mentioned their familiarity with standardized tests in terms of names and measurements. TOEFL and IELTS were seen by the majority as prominent in various Cambodian schools, ranging from secondary to tertiary levels. However, the existence of Cambridge ESOL and GMAT in Cambodia, though not widely known among those interviewed, was reported by one participant.

Of the twelve participants, five explained how they had become familiar with standardized tests. First, a course on language testing and assessment was compulsory in a teacher training program or an MA (TESOL) program (*n* = 2). Second, TOEFL or IELTS was a precondition for the participants' scholarships for overseas study (*n* = 3). The rest (*n* = 7) indicated only that they were knowledgeable of standardized tests, but did not report on how they had been exposed to such tests.

To the extent that the teachers were aware of standardized tests, when asked which of the tests they preferred, the teachers, for example Lecturer 4 (L4), stated that the IELTS was more contributive to students' learning as the students needed to "learn hard" and practice the four macro skills before they took it:

> IELTS test is a very good test I think because they require all the skills, speaking, listening, reading, and writing so that students have to study and practice very hard before they enter the test. For TOEFL [referring to paper-based TOEFL tests], I took one as well, but long time ago. There was no speaking skill to be tested. (L4)

Research Question 2.1: What Standardized Tests Have the Participants Experienced Taking?

When asked what kind of standardized tests the teachers had experienced taking, only seven indicated that they had taken the IELTS or TOEFL at least once with one of these two aims: to build their English language proficiency or to win scholarships for overseas study. One of the twelve participants reported that the choice of which test to take depended largely on those countries for which scholarships are offered:

> . . . so for those who are interested in studying abroad or [those who wished to win scholarships], [for example, in the] UK, Australia, or New Zealand, [they] have to take IELTS, and those who are interested in studying in the States or Canada need to take TOEFL tests. (L1)

The rest (*n* = 5) responded that they had not previously taken any standardized tests. They were simply aware of them as a part of their academic journey. These teachers stated they had not taken the tests due to a lack of time for preparation and lack of confidence in taking the tests. Nonetheless, they predicted that they would take a standardized test in the future.

Research Question 2.2: Have the Participants Used Practice Standardized Tests to Assess Their Students' Learning Achievement?

The teacher participants were also asked whether they had used standardized tests to measure students' learning achievements in the classroom. Only one participant did not use these tests as tools for teaching and / or classroom-based evaluation purposes. Eight of the twelve participants mentioned the employment of TOEFL or IELTS with one of these three objectives:

to assess the extent to which students had learned from the course (n = 3); to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses (n = 1); or to promote the students' acquisition of the target language points specified in course objectives (n = 4).

The rest (n = 3) mentioned the use of standardized tests for both practice and evaluation, the latter of which constituted both formative and summative assessments. When using TOEFL, IELTS or other standardized tests, teachers re-evaluated, modified, and adapted their selected test materials with reference to course objectives, class sizes, learners' levels, and resources at their disposal:

> As practice and assessment, ongoing assessment and final assessment. For example, for this year according to the agreement of all teachers, for the first semester we decided to use IELTS, and [for the] second semester we used TOEFL. (L11)

> Sometimes I use it [a standardized test] as a tool of assessment like assignment . . . I asked them to work in pairs or groups, depending on the number of students in my class. I asked them to do the exercises that I selected from TOEFL and IELTS as the assignment. (L2)

Research Question 2.3: Have the Participants Trained Their Students in Test-Taking Strategies in the Classroom?

The interview further explored the teachers' practices of using standardized tests within classrooms in terms of whether they had trained the students in test-taking strategies when they employed standardized tests as assessment tools. Test experts have shown that examinees who use test-taking strategies while taking the TOEFL or IELTS are more likely to obtain higher scores than those who do not (Brown, 2004). However, only half of the participants (n = 6) mentioned the provision of in-class training of test-taking strategies for their students:

> For freshmen and sophomores, I provided a lot [of training on test-taking strategies] for TOEFL, especially grammar and written expressions. And when they go to Year 3, I trained mostly the IELTS test-taking strategies because scholarships that are provided to Cambodian students now require IELTS scores. (L3)

> [I]t was just a small practice. I selected some parts such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, and some parts in listening. I kept [this practice] as a [supplementary activity] to train [the students] and to help them improve their proficiency. (L9)

Those teachers (n = 6) who did not train their students in test-taking strategies pinpointed two main factors. First, some of the teachers stated that they had not gained sufficient knowledge of standardized tests due to a lack of practice and training they themselves had had. Second, the teachers asserted that the training of test-taking strategies was a time-consuming and daunting task. They did not have supplementary sessions to train the students' in test-taking strategies in class as they needed to complete the predetermined course syllabus, especially the textbook content.

Research Question 2.4: What Are the Participants' Beliefs about Standardized Tests in Relation to Their Students' Learning Achievement in the Classroom?

When asked about the in-class usefulness of standardized tests, half of the teachers ($n = 6$) believed standardized tests (i.e., TOEFL and IELTS) to be a valid and reliable means to check the extent to which their students had learned from the course with reference to the difference between pre- and post-scores. That is, TOEFL or IELTS were viewed as able to measure students' language proficiency more accurately and consistently than those progress tests designed based on the Core English Teacher Guide. The teachers stated that they used standardized tests in the classroom because standardized tests do not test their students' memory, which is the point of classroom progress or final achievement tests. In other words, the teachers believed that the students who learned by memorizing the lessons in the textbook were unlikely to obtain high scores on the achievement tests if they did not use standardized tests for classroom assessment.

One-third of the teachers ($n = 4$) reported that TOEFL or IELTS were incorporated into Core English because two implicit aims of university policy were to prepare students for overseas scholarships and for better employment opportunities upon graduation.

> Of course, I could say that it provides benefits to the students who want to apply for scholarships abroad and even those students who want to apply to work if their English proficiency is good and they can get a well-paid job. . . . The management team cares about this. (L6)

Only two teachers mentioned the negative washback effect of standardized tests on their students' learning. One of them believed standardized tests to be least likely to help students to master real English but most likely to equip them with only test-taking automaticity. The other participant indicated that TOEFL and IELTS were beyond the students' current levels of language proficiency.

> It is useful, but sometimes you do not teach the students the real skill, but you teach them for the test, just for the test. My main concern is that [if] we include the standardized tests in exercises, students will remember it only for the testing but not for their real proficiency. (L5)

This view indicates that the teachers had unclear perceptions about standardized tests and progress tests and their respective roles in classroom language teaching. Standardized tests are supposed to assess students' English proficiency, which is not based on any training in a particular course (Brown, 2004). However, such tests have been used to replace progress tests, which are supposed to measure students' mastery of course objectives within a particular ELT program (Brown, 2004).

Research Question 2.5: What Challenges Do the Participants Face in Adopting Practice Standardized Tests as Part of Practice and Assessment?

The teachers were asked whether or not they had encountered any challenges when they adopted standardized tests as part of practice and assessment. The teachers who reported they had used standardized tests in teaching raised three main constraints on using TOEFL or IELTS in classroom-based teaching and evaluation: (1) TOEFL and IELTS were incompatible with the students' level; (2) the teachers were not qualified enough to adapt TOEFL and IELTS; and (3) the teachers had not been test-takers.

With regard to the first constraint, the majority ($n = 8$) reported that it was difficult to incorporate standardized tests into their Core English courses, for the tests were beyond the proficiency levels of a number of students. Those students who could not follow the test materials seemed scared, bored, and demotivated. The teachers thus suggested that more effort (e.g., additional training sessions on testing strategies outside classroom) was needed to assist the students with taking the tests. Lecturer 2 described often meeting students outside of class time to discuss grammar points. Lecturer 12 reported adopting relevant parts of standardized tests that fit with the classroom practice to assess the students' learning.

As for the second and third constraints, some teacher participants indicated that they did not have sufficient topical knowledge or assessment literacy to adapt TOEFL or IELTS and that they need to be qualified examiners as well as test-takers.

> To use the standardized tests, you need [to be a] qualified examiner. I would say that most teachers here have never tried the standardized tests themselves, so it is impossible for them to give standardized tests if they have not tried them first. (L10)

Discussion

Drawing from the analysis of the data, the study reveals that the majority of the participants were aware of standardized tests (i.e., TOEFL and IELTS). The teachers held a firm view that standardized tests had a great potential for measuring the students' learning in the classroom, and thus adopted such standardized tests for practice and assessment in teaching. However, teachers who were familiar with the tests had not taken them unless they needed scores to apply for overseas scholarships. Another possible explanation for not taking the tests is that the teachers would need to spend what is considered a significant amount of money in Cambodia on such tests (Moore, Stroupe, & Mahony, 2012).

The findings yield some important concerns about teachers' adoption of standardized tests for classroom practice and assessment. The first is related to the participants' misunderstanding of the purpose of these standardized tests. As the literature review shows, standardized tests are valid and reliable assessment tools for assessing students' English proficiency for the purposes of decision-making on admitting students to a particular program or granting scholarships, especially for overseas studies (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown, 2004; Moore, Stroupe, & Mahony, 2012). In contrast, the current study reveals that the participants employed standardized tests to measure the students' learning achievements in the classroom, thus pointing out the mismatch between the purposes of assessment of classroom practice (i.e., testing students' learning progress or achievement) and those of standardized tests (i.e., testing students' general English proficiency).

Another important issue is the participants' treatment of test-taking strategy training as part of English language teaching. The current study shows that there was a balance between teachers who trained their learners in test-taking strategies and those who did not. Corroborating this finding is a research study conducted by Keuk and Lim (forthcoming), reporting that the participants were likely to supplement teaching materials with those taken from standardized tests; training of test-taking strategies was believed to enable learners to acquire higher scores in formative or summative assessment (Brown, 2004; Keuk & Lim, forthcoming). As standardized tests do not run parallel to learners' levels, course objectives, class sizes, and available resources (Brown, 2004; Nguon, 2013; Tao, 2014), Brown (2004) claimed that when used in ELT classrooms, standardized tests might be irrelevant to the predetermined course aim and objectives. Therefore, standardized tests used for language classroom practice could, to some

extent, produce a negative impact on classroom instruction, teaching approaches, and especially course objectives, unless teachers are able to adapt such test materials to appropriately achieve course objectives. Furthermore, taking into consideration the goals for teaching English in the context of globalization (i.e., to enable students to widely communicate with different people from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and languages), such training in test-taking strategies could prevent students from achieving successful communication skills across a wide range of contexts.

The high requirement for success in standardized tests is another important concern. As stated in the literature review, Cambodian test-takers should possess a wealth of "world knowledge" to achieve good scores on the IELTS (Moore, Stroupe, & Mahony, 2012, p. 62). Such a requirement may not be achievable through classroom practices due to constraints such as time, students' levels, and preset goals in English language programs.

Finally, the participants' insufficient assessment literacy and knowledge about adapting standardized tests for classroom use is also an important issue. Nguon (2013) and Tao (2014) pointed out that the majority of Cambodian ELT teachers lack the necessary assessment literacy to ensure a valid and reliable assessment. It is important that ELT teachers are trained to tailor in-class standardized tests to accomplish this.

Limitations

This study presented some limitations. First, given that the study only investigated the current practice of standardized tests as classroom assessment tools from Cambodian university ELT teachers' perceptions about standardized tests and employment of such standardized tests in the classroom, the study was based on one source of information. Therefore, future research undertaken in this area should be grounded in multiple sources of information. The perceptions of ELT management teams, administrators, and students on standardized tests and their use as assessment tools should also be investigated. Second, this study only examined teachers' perceptions of the use and practice of standardized tests. Therefore, future research conducted in this area should make classroom observations to explore teachers' actual practice and employment of standardized tests within classrooms as well as alternative assessments (Brown, 2004; Genesee & Upshur, 1996) in classrooms.

Conclusion

The present study has shed light on use of standardized tests (TOEFL and IELTS) in practice and assessment in the context of tertiary English language education in Cambodia despite the limitations identified above. The study reveals that the participants were aware of standardized tests and had employed such tests for classroom practice and assessment. The participants held a strong view that these tests were valid and reliable assessment tools for measuring students' in-class learning progress and English proficiency. They reported that they have taught test-taking strategies to help students improve English competence and achieve good test scores. As such, this practice of providing test-taking strategies could mismatch the expected classroom practice, including teaching instructions and approaches, the course's predetermined objectives, and the students' level of English proficiency, among other important issues. To enhance the quality of classroom assessment and to develop valid and reliable classroom (progress) achievement tests to meet the actual practice, it is important to help teachers reconceptualize different kinds of assessment (standardized tests, classroom tests, and alternative classroom assessment). As employing standardized tests in classroom assessments has become part of classroom practice, training on assessment in English language teaching

should also be provided to teachers to enable them to adapt standardized tests to meet classroom practice.

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Appendix
Interview Protocols

1. Would you mind telling me your teaching experience?

2. Have you heard about "standardized tests"?
    If YES:

      What are they?
      Could you please describe some standardized tests?

3. Have you ever taken any of the standardized tests?
    If YES:

      Why did you take the test?
      How did you find the test?
    If NO:

      Why did you not take the test?
      Have you ever self-practised the test? If YES, why have you self-practised the test?

4. Have you used any standardized tests in your class?
    If YES:

      What is / are purpose/s for using the standardized tests in your class?
      How did you use the standardized tests?
      Have you trained your students in test taking strategies? If YES, how did you train your students test taking strategies?
      Were there any challenges or constraints when you used the standardized tests in your class?
    If NO:

      Why do you not use the standardized tests in your class?
      If you do not use the standardized tests, what do you use to assess your students' learning achievements?

5. Do you think standardized tests are useful for classroom teaching and assessments?
    If YES:

      Why do you think they are useful for classroom teaching and assessments?
      Would you recommend any standardized tests to your colleagues?
    If NO:

      Why do you think they are not useful for classroom teaching and assessments?

Thanks for your time.

CamTESOL Regional ELT Research Grant Paper

An Investigation of Nominalization and Lexical Density in Undergraduate Research Proposals

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Academic writing is considered an essential skill for academic success not only for undergraduate study but also for students' further education and professional development. This writing genre has certain characteristics often lacking in students' research writing. This study explores two characteristics in students' research proposals, nominalization and lexical density (LD), after the students completed courses on academic writing and Second Language Research (SLR) in their second year at a Vietnamese pedagogical university. It also investigates the effectiveness of writing training in increasing students' performance regarding the use of given features. The findings, obtained from analyzing students' proposals and recorded interviews, suggest that students lacked awareness regarding features of academic writing and not much attention had been paid to linguistic aspects, though explicitly taught, when writing the proposals. The implications of this study will be relevant to academic writing teachers and course designers, as well as language teaching researchers.

Academic writing is the key to students' academic success in both their educational pursuits and their research publications. It has been noted that students even at the doctoral level struggle with this genre (Monceaux, 2015) and demonstrate considerable difficulties distinguishing spoken language from academic writing (Gilquin & Paquot, 2008). This implies the need to raise students' awareness to better support them in their tertiary education.

There is no one single definition of academic writing that is agreed upon. However, it can be seen as having a "formality of tone, complexity of content, and degree of impersonality of stance" (Snow, 2010, p. 450). To be more specific, academic writing is marked as being concise and information-packed (Snow, 2010) and distinctively formal due to the use of the passive voice, nominalization, concise vocabulary as well as other grammatical features (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006). In this research, the definition of academic writing is confined to formal writing in assignments and research produced by Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) trainee teachers.

Among the features of academic writing are nominalization (Biber & Gray, 2013; Snow & Uccelli, 2009) and lexical density (henceforth LD), which are crucial in creating a quality piece of academic writing. Nominalization is defined as "the process of forming a noun from some other word class or the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause" (Crystal, 2008, p. 328), and LD is "the ratio of content words in the total number of words in a text" (Alami, Sabbah, & Iranmanesh, 2013, p. 5366). The significance of nominalization and LD in academic writing was also confirmed in Fang (2005), Kazemian and Hashemi (2014), and Gao (2012). It was found that students' lack of understanding of these features can pose significant obstacles in understanding academic texts (Fatonah, 2014). Nevertheless, research into these two features is still limited. At this point, it is useful to look at how nominalization and LD have been studied.

Nominalization and LD

Nominalization is essential in academic writing because it enables the writer to pack information into the text (Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox, 2006) and to "maintain an impersonal tone" (Baratta, 2010, p. 1017). This feature has been researched in a variety of ways in recent years. For instance, Kazemian and Hashemi (2014) studied nominalization as part of grammatical metaphors in scientific and political texts. They argued that nominalization is a "prevailing feature of both scientific and political texts" (p. 216). In addition, Fatonah (2014) investigated students' understanding of nominalization in scientific reading passages, claiming that students do not have adequate knowledge of nominalization for scientific text comprehension. Therefore, Fatonah proposed that teaching and learning should focus on raising students' awareness of nominalization in scientific texts.

Holtz (2009) analyzed abstracts and research papers in four fields and concluded that nominalizations are used more frequently in abstracts than in articles. Additionally, Gentil and Meunier (2013) reported similarities and differences between French and Spanish students' use of nominalization. They asserted that students generally increased nominalization in their writing as the school year progressed and nominalization could be a fairly reliable criterion to assess students' academic writing improvement. Research on nominalization in different types of texts such as those found in books on applied linguistics and biology (Jalilifar, Alipour, & Parsa, 2014), as well as IELTS writing tests (To, Le, & Le, 2013) was also conducted. It was affirmed that nominalization is closely related to LD (Mahbudi, Mahbudi, & Amalsaleh, 2014).

LD is another distinctive feature in academic writing. The higher LD a text has, the more content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) it includes. Despite its significance, LD has mainly been investigated in studies regarding spoken and written discourse (Alami, Sabbah, & Iranmanesh, 2013; O'Loughlin, 1995; Wu & Zou, 2009). Alami, Sabbah, and Iranmanesh (2013) investigated the LD discrepancy between male and female speakers and concluded that no remarkable difference was found in the two genders' speeches but longer discourse has low LD and vice versa. Cummings (2003) studied the variation of LD in different text types, claiming that LD can be utilized as an indicator of genres. Studies on LD in academic writing are, however, rather limited.

Towards a Holistic View of Academic Writing

Recently, LD has been explored in combination with other text components. For instance, Gao (2012) analyzed nominalization and LD in writing produced by native English-speaking students and their Chinese counterparts on an English for Medical Purposes course, using Hallidayan Functional Grammar as a framework for analysis. Results showed that the Chinese medical writers used nominalization less frequently than the native English writers and LD was

lower in non-native writers, resulting in a lower degree of formality in their writing. Gao concluded that Chinese students need more support regarding features of academic writing. Mahbudi, Mahbudi, and Amalsaleh (2014) also explored the difference in nominalization frequency and LD between English and Iranian writers in medical abstracts, concluding that abstracts by non-native writers had a lower nominalization and LD rate and that a formal academic writing training with a focus on nominalization should be implemented.

Apart from these studies by Gao (2012) and Mahbudi et al. (2014), most research has looked separately at nominalization or LD in different types of texts ranging from research articles to scientific and political texts. Little has been done in the social sciences field, more specifically with TEFL students' research proposals. Recent studies (Biber & Gray, 2013; Fatonah, 2014; To et al., 2013) have addressed the two features linguistically, but they have not linked the issue of nominalization and LD to teaching students to write and do research in their L2. This paper hence aims to fill this gap by simultaneously investigating nominalization and LD in students' research proposals to identify and address issues in their writing. This investigation therefore assists students in doing L2 research as well as better prepares them for further academic pursuits. It also explores the effectiveness of writing training on the students' perception and performance, which is necessary according to previous research (Gao, 2012; Mahbudi, et al., 2014), but has yet to be investigated through empirical studies.

This article explores nominalization and LD in depth and holistically in the context of Vietnamese pre-service teachers' research proposal writing. The findings will supply teachers with an insight into students' perceptions of what is expected of them as well as how to better assist them toward success in writing academically. This study therefore contributes to the growing and important body of research into these academic writing features, and helps to make links between the linguistic features and teaching practice.

The Present Study

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:
1. How do Vietnamese undergraduate TEFL students use nominalization and LD in their research proposals after studying in two second-year academic writing / research courses?
2. What are students' perceptions of academic writing, nominalization, and LD at the end of their second year?
3. How do students' perceptions and use change after an intensive training program on nominalization and LD in their fourth year?

Background to the Study

This research was conducted with a group of six Vietnamese student-participants who were studying for a BA degree in TEFL at a pedagogical university in Vietnam. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis from a cohort of BA TEFL students who the first author taught, as a homogenous sampling would allow for in-depth analysis of the context and sub-group (Dörnyei, 2007). These participants were invited via an e-mail that stated that participants from different project groups were encouraged to take part in the study.

The BA degree course lasts four years and is divided into eight semesters. Academic writing was taught to these undergraduates in a required course named Writing 4 (also the name of the coursebook used for the course) in the second semester of their Year 2. This course provided students with the necessary writing skills for academic purposes, and nominalization and LD were included in a unit about academic language. At the same time, students were introduced

to Second Language Research (SLR), which is a mandatory course providing students with basic knowledge of how to do research in English. By the end of the SLR course, students have to submit a research proposal (around 3,000 words) in groups of three or four as their final assignment, with formal academic writing being an assessment criterion. Students' proposals at this stage comprise a complete introduction, literature review, and intended methodology for research. Procedures and findings are only tentative. The writing of research proposals in Year 2 is also aimed at preparing students for their individual thesis proposal and thesis writing at the end of Year 4.

From teacher feedback and discussion over the years, the researchers noted, however, that students constantly struggled in writing their proposals and theses. This is despite the fact that academic writing is becoming even more critical with the introduction of the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project (Project 2020) targeted at raising teaching quality by improving pre-service and in-service teachers' language competence and teaching methodology. As part of the Project 2020 requirements, teachers of English in Vietnam must achieve a C1 level on the Common European Framework (CEF; Council of Europe, 2001) upon graduation. This may be impossible to achieve without developing students' competence in academic writing

Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used in this study so that not only features of the participants' academic writing could be analyzed statistically for comparison purposes, but also participants' perceptions of writing could be explored This mixed methods design allowed one set of data to help explain the other set (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected in two phases.

In Phase 1, students' group research proposals were collected at the end of Year 2 and six participants from six groups were invited to one-to-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for interview questions). The proposals were run through the Adelex Analyser (ADA), and the result was represented on a percentage scale. Subsequently, CLAW POS5, a highly reliable word tagger (Ooi, Tan, & Chiang, 2007), was employed to tag part-of-speech of all words in the samples. (See Appendix B for links to these tools.) The tagged samples, excluding proper nouns, were then checked manually for nominalization by checking suffixes listed in Gentil and Meunier (2013).

Phase 2 took place when the participants were halfway through their Year 4. These participants received a training program focusing on nominalization and LD before writing their thesis proposals. These proposals were also collected and analyzed, as were the group proposals. This was then followed by another semi-structured interview with each participant to record changes in their perceptions (if any). All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese so that the participants could easily express themselves. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and cross-analyzed for significant themes. The students were coded as Participant 1 to Participant 6 to preserve anonymity. Specific quotes from the participants were translated from Vietnamese to English to support the analysis.

Training

Training was conducted in a separate session outside of the class when the participants were halfway through their Year 4. Materials for training were designed and compiled by the authors comprising five activities: first, exploring participants' previous assumptions of academic writing; second, explicit nominalization and LD teaching; third, controlled practice in

nominalization; fourth, controlled practice in LD; fifth, self-editing a literature review for nominalization and LD (see Appendix C).

Results and Discussion

Pre-Training Performance

After running the participants' group proposals through ADA, the average LD obtained from these proposals ranged from 27.84% to 39.17 % and the mean was 32.29% (see Table 1). In other words, there were on average 32 content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) per 100 words written by the participants with their Year 2 groups.

Table 1

LD in Participants' Group Proposals (Phase 1)

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
Proposal 1	32.58%	31.76%	31.68%	36.71%	39.17%	27.84 %	33.29%

As asserted by To, Fan, and Thomas (2013), LD in reading texts for non-native English speaker undergraduates is around 46.3%. This means a gap exists between what the participants are expected to show and their actual ability, which may be traced back to their inability to make a clear distinction between spoken and written registers (Gilquin & Paquot, 2008) or their overuse of phrasal verbs instead of equivalent one-word verbs in their proposals. In the following examples taken from the research proposals, the students used phrasal verbs where one-word verbs would be more appropriate:

> **Participant 1:** This encourages researchers to *work out* some other authentic techniques solving this problem. (one-word option: devise)

> **Participant 5**: She *looked for* evidences of positions by analyzing the videos that were recorded the lessons. (one-word option: sought)

Another reason for the low LD could be the participants' extensive use of the active voice rather than the passive voice due to their mother tongue interference. In addition to LD, nominalization seemed to pose another problem for these participants. The results are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Nominalization in Participants' Group Proposals (Phase 1)

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
Proposal 1	3.42%	5.22%	5.04%	4.81%	3.96%	3.88%	4.39%

Holtz (2009) pointed out that the percentage of nominalization in linguistics research articles is 10.97%, but as observed from Table 2, nominalization frequency in the participants' first proposals was between 3.42% and 5.22% and the mean was 4.39%. This suggests that the participants' use of nominalization was rather limited. The inadequacy of nominalization, together with the previous issue of low LD due to the participants' extensive use of phrasal verbs, clarified the current level of the participants in academic writing. With a closer look into their perceptions obtained from the first interview, it was possible to gain a better grasp of the participants' difficulties to more effectively support them.

Pre-Training Interviews

Participants' perceptions of academic writing. Analysis of the pre-training interview transcripts showed that the six participants identified academic writing with field-specific terms, use of certain structures, and "difficult and less common words" (Participant 6), which are all valid perceptions. As Participant 1 stated: "Research writing means using academic words and structures." Meanwhile, some of the participants viewed academic writing as rigid and formal, as asserted by Participant 2: "It should conform to the rules of academic writing and writers should use more advanced vocabulary. We cannot use daily language."

Apart from mentioning the lexical differences, the participants appeared to have very little idea about academic writing conventions, including those explicitly taught in Writing 4. Only one participant mentioned impersonality and using the passive voice. While the participants demonstrated basic understanding of academic writing, they seemed ignorant of other linguistic features. This also highlights both the participants' lack of awareness and the limitations of their previous writing instruction.

Participants' use of nominalization and LD. In the coursebook *Writing 4*, the participants were introduced to features of academic writing; nominalization is explicitly included and explained. Though the notion of LD was not introduced, it is related to the use of single-word verbs listed in the coursebook. Nominalization and LD, however, appeared to be neglected when the participants, together with their groups, wrote their proposals. Participant 2 confirmed that "we did not know what LD or nominalization were, we just wrote down what we thought was correct." Although Writing 4 was taught alongside SLR, and these two subjects were expected to complement each other to facilitate participants' proposal writing, only one participant claimed to be able to apply what she learnt about writing the proposals. "Writing 4 was really helpful for us. We learnt how to cite works and how to paraphrase. We could use a lot paraphrasing. We remembered to avoid plagiarism, too" (Participant 6).

Interestingly, two participants acknowledged that they were aware of using nouns and content words. Participant 1 stated, "I myself like to use nouns in writing. I also try to use more noun phrases and content words." Participant 3 stated, "We often used more nouns because it sounded more academic than using verbs." This is possibly the reason why these specific participants' group proposals had higher nominalization and LD frequency compared to other papers. Others, on the contrary, failed to see the link between these two subjects: "We could not use much knowledge from Writing 4 for writing research. Most of the time, we only read model research" (Participant 4). It is thus not surprising that the participants found these two features troublesome, as Participant 6 claimed: "I find it really hard to use nominalization. Now I know about LD, but I still think that it is really, really complicated."

Participants' writing and editing process. Recognizing vocabulary as the most distinctive feature of academic writing resulted in the participants paying more attention to word choice. That explains why most of their difficulties in the writing process were related to lexical issues: "The most difficult thing is how to choose words to express our thoughts, how to choose short and precise words so that our writing is simple, yet easy to understand" (Participant 4).

The interviews also revealed that the participants put more emphasis on the proposal content and grammar rather than on language use. This explains why they tried to "make the writing sound good" (Participant 1). Writing and editing were only based on participants' feelings rather than based on a clearly stated list of criteria. Participant 2 stated "We write in a way that we feel good about and we shorten the lengthy sentences. Academic writing was quite new to us at that time, so we just edited the writing intuitively."

In conclusion, the interviews revealed a lack of awareness of academic writing among the participants. They often viewed academic writing as only having specialized vocabulary and structure rather than having certain linguistic features, which resulted in a limited use of nominalization and LD in their research proposals. This encouraged the first author to conduct a training course to raise the participants' awareness of nominalization and LD by making these features explicit in the training program.

Post-Training Results

The data collected after the training indicated that most participants' individual proposals had a higher LD than their group proposals. As can be seen from Table 3, the LD in participants' individual proposals ranged from 35.32% to 42.78% and the LD in individual proposals was higher than that in the first proposals, except for those of Participants 4 and 5.

Table 3

LD in Participants' Proposals

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
Proposal 1	32.58%	31.76%	31.68%	36.71%	39.17%	27.84%	33.29%
Proposal 2	42.17%	41.64%	35.32%	35.61%	38.88%	42.78%	39.37%

Nominalization, however, appeared to be more difficult to increase, as shown in Table 4. Three out of six participants produced proposals with a lower rate of nominalization compared to the group papers. A slight increase was observed in two of the papers (Participants 1 and 3). Noticeably, Participant 2 had a nominalization rate of 2.8%, which was just over half the rate in her first group proposal. This could be due to her paying attention to increasing LD. In comparison to her group proposal, Participant 4's individual proposal had a lower nominalization and LD. In the post-training interview, she stated that she mainly focused on finding the precise vocabulary and correcting word choice errors instead of nominalization or LD. She also pointed out that she forgot about LD when writing, thinking it was not so important.

Table 4

Nominalization in Participants' Proposals

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean
Proposal 1	3.42%	5.22%	5.04%	4.81%	3.96%	3.88%	4.39%
Proposal 2	4.085%	2.8%	5.19%	2.711%	2.306%	7.86%	4.16%

Participant 6's paper had a rather exceptional rate of nominalization of 7.86%, which was the nearest to Holtz's (2009) nominalization rate of 10.97%. In the interview, the participant emphasized that she paid a lot of attention to nominalization use when she edited her proposal. This could explain why she nominalized so frequently. Other participants' difficulties may have been caused because they were quite new to research writing and they were at the very early stage of writing in the linguistic discipline. Increasing the LD, mostly by means of phrasal verb avoidance, along with boosting the number of content words, was therefore more achievable than nominalizing. A probable explanation for this could be that nominalizing requires a wider range of lexical knowledge and a higher level of linguistic competence, although nominalization may not be new to the participants: "I had known about nominalization before the training but I learned more about LD [in the training]" (Participant 2).

Post-Training Interviews

Changes in the participants' perceptions were also observed. First, the intensive training helped to foster the participants' awareness of features of academic writing. Most of them claimed that they paid more attention to nominalization and LD and they also tried to add these features into their writing, although their performance did not always reflect this. The gap between the participants' consciousness of the two features and their performance suggested that they may need more time to turn their awareness into habit.

LD in the participants' writing increased by means of limiting the use of phrasal verbs, or by the use of more content rather than function words. Some of them also showed attempts to use more nominalization as they had become conscious of its significance. However, most of them confirmed that they only paid attention to these two issues in the editing process: "When editing, I paid a lot of attention to nominalization, I used nouns wherever and whenever I could" (Participant 6).

Interestingly, Participant 6 used more nominalization but at the same time showed concern about nominalization after attending a seminar organized by the university:

> In the seminar, an Australian professor shared with us that it is not always good to use nominalization. It seems that we are trying to show off, so I try to keep the balance. Sometimes I use nominalization, sometimes I use phrasal verbs.

This comment suggested that this participant had developed an acute awareness of nominalization, which led to her extensive use of nominalization when she thought that it was necessary. This is also a valid perception as overuse of nominalization may make a text problematic to readers. The participants also seemed to put thought into linguistic features in their second proposals:

> I wrote it once then read more materials to copy the structure. After that, I asked the supervisor to correct it for me. I also found more good words to use and corrected any grammatical errors I made. (Participant 4)

Changes in perception led to changes in the participants' efforts to pack information into words: "There are many words that carry little content, so I tried to use words which carry more meaning so that my sentences are not too lengthy," stated Participant 1. However, evidence from analyzing the participants' papers, as well as evidence from the interviews, suggested that nominalization was a more challenging issue than LD. In the interviews, all participants subscribed to the idea that training was necessary and that an extended training program would ensure the quality of students' writing. In terms of what they want to learn more of, the participants mentioned citation, paraphrasing, and increasing the readability of their writing as well as their use of nominalization and LD.

In conclusion, the participants were at the earliest stage of writing academically and the training program enabled them to develop an initial consciousness about nominalization and LD during the editing process. It seems, however, that they still paid more attention to lexical choice, grammar, and content rather than to the linguistic side of their proposals. The findings support what Evans and Greens (2007, cited in Cai, 2013) asserted in their paper about language: that lexical issues, in particular, pose obstacles for L2 students in writing academically. When first starting to write academically, participants may not have been mindful of features of this writing genre, resulting in their focus on content rather than language use. The interviews also revealed that improving LD was somewhat achievable, while nominalization was still troublesome,

perhaps because it requires a higher level of linguistic competence. It is, hence, suggested that explicit training be used to familiarize students with writing academically and to help students form the habit of using academic writing features.

Conclusion

This research employed both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data to achieve an overview of six participants' perceptions and performance regarding the use of nominalization and LD in their research proposals. Due to time constraints, this research was conducted with a small sample size and it by no means allows for generalization. Another limitation of the research is the comparison between the participants' group proposals and their individual proposals as the contribution of each participant in group work is difficult to measure. Nevertheless, this study has provided some important insights into undergraduate students' research proposal writing. It can also be replicated to explore contextual issues related to students' perceptions in research writing, and could also be conducted with participants of other nationalities, who may experience different (or similar) problems with academic proposal writing. Furthermore, further research could be conducted regarding lecturers' perceptions and expectations so that educators can have a better understanding of their institutional situation, which could be helpful when developing appropriate measures to enhance teaching and learning.

The findings suggest that language use in general, and nominalization and LD in particular, are neglected when students first familiarize themselves with writing research proposals. It was also found that an intensive training program had a positive influence in terms of raising students' awareness and enhancing their performance. It should be noted, however, that extended training is desired to turn student awareness into habit. The interviews also revealed that regular and comprehensive academic writing training should be better integrated into undergraduate courses to support the students toward writing betterment.

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Appendix A
Pre- and Post Training Interview Questions

Pre-Training

1. Do you plan to study for an M.A.?
2. In your opinion, how is research writing different from other types of writing you have learnt?
3. What aspects of writing research do you find difficult / problematic?
4. Do you know about LD and nominalization? If yes, do you find LD difficult? Do you find nominalization difficult?
5. Did you apply what you learnt in Writing 4 (academic writing) into your proposal writing? If yes, how?
6. What are the steps you follow when writing the proposal?
7. Do you have any strategies/resources to help you improve your writing?

Post-Training

1. Has your view about writing research proposals changed after the training? (If yes, how?)
2. Did you follow the same steps (as in group project) when writing your proposal? (Clarify changes, if any.)
3. Do you think training on research writing is necessary?
4. How has the training on nominalization influenced the way you write your proposal?
5. How has the training on lexical density influenced the way you write?
6. Is there anything else you would like to learn more about research writing?

Appendix B
Online Tools for Data Analysis

ADELEX Analyser
A free tool developed by the University of Granada for counting LD
http://www.ugr.es/~inped/ada/frecuency.php?ada=se7ifu3v5cd6un8ei801mtjum7&lng=english

CLAW Part of Speech Tagger
http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/

Appendix C
Nominalization and LD Training Activities

Activity 1: Sentences from published articles were mixed with sentences taken from students' research proposals. Students were then asked to tick the "more academic statements" and answer four questions:

- Why are the statements ticked more academic?
- What parts of speech are most common in those statements? (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.)
- Can verbs be used instead? Would it sound more or less academic?
- How many content and function words are there in each sentence?

The article extracts are in the field of second / foreign language teaching, which is close to the students' major.

Activity 2: The teacher introduced notions of nominalization and LD as well as their roles in academic writing. Students were asked to measure LD and identify nominalization in the sentences used in Activity 1.

Activity 3: Students practiced replacing phrasal verbs in a text by nominalization (from Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2012, p. 97).

Activity 4: Students compared the use of verbs in published articles and students' papers using sentences from Activity 1. This activity focuses on drawing students' attention to their overuse of reporting verbs. A table of most common reporting verbs was distributed to students (from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/learning_english/leap/grammar/reportingverbs/).

Activity 5: Students practiced replacing phrasal verbs with single-word verbs in their group proposals and measured the LD in the rewritten version. This activity helped students to increase LD by reducing phrasal verb use.

Activity 6: Students wrote part of their literature review at home. They then met with the teacher to receive feedback on LD, and the use of nominalization and reporting verbs.

Research

Participation in Teacher Research at a Tertiary Institution in Cambodia

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This paper reports an examination of Cambodian ELT teachers' participation in the adoption of research at one tertiary ELT institution in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital. The data were drawn from the CamTESOL conference handbooks (2005-2013), journal contents of *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (2005-2009) and *Language Education in Asia* (2010-2013), journal contents and research papers published in the institution's journal (2010-2013), and a teacher research profile survey conducted in 2012 at this institution. The analysis reveals that an increasing number of teachers are involved in doing research, presenting the research at the CamTESOL Conference Series, and publishing research papers in the institution's journal. The analysis also shows that a moderate number of teachers at this institution embrace research as seen through their reported adoption categories of research. The study sheds light on an initiative for developing ELT teacher research to improve professional practices in the institution, in Cambodia widely, and beyond.

English language teaching (ELT) in Cambodia has recently increased its momentum in contemporary Cambodian society. Since the 2000s, there are more English language institutes, both public and private, offering English language training to Cambodians across the country, compared to only a few private English language institutes in the 1990s (Clayton, 2006). Moore and Bounchan (2010) stated that ELT in Cambodia has moved from a status in which Cambodian students were taught by native English-speaker professionals two decades ago to a status in which they are now taught by Cambodian ELT professionals. In a similar vein, English is now spoken among Cambodian people, especially young Cambodians living in urban areas, particularly in Phnom Penh (Moore & Bounchan, 2010).

Alongside the development of English language education, research practice has been initiated. The practice has involved individual Cambodian ELT teachers, domestic tertiary ELT institutions, and broader ELT settings, that is, the CamTESOL Conference Series (CamTESOL). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS), as indicated in its educational strategic plan for 2009-2013, included a focus on research in tertiary education (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, n.d.).

Background

The contextualization of ELT research in Cambodia in this paper is based on the author's experience in working at the institution in this study for about ten years and involvement in CamTESOL presentations as a presenter and observer.

Since the CamTESOL Conference Series was established in 2005, Cambodian ELT teachers have begun to undertake research and present their research outcomes at this conference. To encourage and facilitate research activities, CamTESOL, along with other groups, annually provides research grants to Cambodian teachers (and other Southeast Asian teachers) who have submitted qualifying research proposals. CamTESOL has also organised a series of research workshops to equip those grant recipients with disciplinary research knowledge. Of particular importance, CamTESOL has arranged international mentorship (Mahony, 2011; Moore, 2011b) to help grant recipients undertake research, present the research at the conference, and submit papers to *Language Education in Asia* (LEiA), and previously between 2005 and 2009, the *CamTESOL Selected Papers*.

In alignment with the establishment of CamTESOL and in response to the institution's vision to achieve quality ELT education and research in the region, the institution established a research unit in 2007 to initiate research as an innovation in English language education at the institution. To promote teachers' engagement in research, the unit has organized a series of annual workshops, training sessions, and research grants. This research unit has also established an internal journal, the *Cambodian Review of Language Learning and Teaching* (CRLLT), which publishes research papers in English.

Literature Review

Teacher research in language teaching emerged in the 1980s (Burns & Burton, 2008) and has attracted great attention from applied linguists, researchers, and scholars. Recently, various studies have examined teacher research in language teaching: in a global context (Borg, 2009, 2013), in the United States (Freeman, 1998), Australia and New Zealand (Burns & Burton, 2008), China (Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Gao, Barkhuizen, & Chow, 2011), Vietnam (Pham, 2006), and Cambodia (Moore, 2011a, 2011b). The discussion of teacher research generally focuses on the kind of collaborative inquiry involved (with other teachers and/or external collaborators), aims (Allwright, 2005; Borg, 2010, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), quality of teacher research (Nunan, 1997), and conditions for sustaining teacher research (Allwright, 1997; Borg, 2006). This paper addresses ELT teacher research in relation to Borg's (2010) definition of teacher research in language teaching:

> [T]eacher research [is] systematic inquiry, qualitative and / or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or to enhance teachers' understandings of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms, and which may also inform institutional improvement and educational policy more broadly. (p. 395)

Freeman (1998) describes the nature of teacher research undertaken by various novice language teachers in different contexts (from elementary school to adult EFL learning contexts) in the United States. Borg's (2009, p. 368) survey reported important characteristics of research viewed by 505 language teachers from diverse ELT settings. These characteristics include objectivity, hypotheses, statistics, variables, large sampling, large volumes of information being researched, and experiment, all of which indicate that teachers were likely to conceive of

research as more quantitative than qualitative. The study also reported teachers' conceptions of the benefits research has for improving classroom practice. These reported characteristics are supported by Moore's (2011a) survey of 40 Cambodian ELT teachers, using Borg's (2009) baseline questionnaire.

Freeman (1998) and Hopkins (2007) suggested a variety of data collection instruments that teachers might use to gather information in classroom research activities. The instruments comprise classroom observations, field notes, audiotape recording, student diaries, interviews, discussion, teaching logs, videotape recording and digital pictures, questionnaires, sociometry, documentary evidence, case study, student drawings, stimulated recall, and "mapping 'the process of change' in schools" (Hopkins, 2007, p. 148). Freeman also suggested three data analysis frameworks that teachers might use to analyze information collected through the various techniques mentioned above. The analysis frameworks encompass grounded data analysis, *a priori* data analysis, and quantitative data analysis. See Freeman (1998) for a detailed explanation about these analysis frameworks.

Taking into consideration Rogers' (2003, p. 12) notion of innovation – "innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption," teacher research is an innovation in ELT education in Cambodia. It is therefore important to examine how teachers have adopted this innovation. Moore (2011b), in his observation of the practice of teacher research in Cambodia, asserted some reasons that this practice can possibly grow. These reasons include many Cambodian teachers' interest in doing research to attend international conferences and their aim at building their research capacity and record for pursuing higher education degrees, and tertiary ELT institutions' capacity building (i.e., in order to build institutional status) by way of initiating and promoting research.

Rogers (2003) suggested five adoption categories to describe the different rates that individuals participate in an innovation. These five adoption categories, as displayed in Figure 1, encompass innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. For the purpose of this study, in the context of ELT teacher research, these adoption categories can be briefly described as follows:

Innovators: initiate and organize ELT research.
Early adopters: immediately adopt research and are engaged in research.
Early majority: are initially hesitant to do research. It takes them some time to decide to be involved in research.
Late majority: are uncertain about research. They become involved in doing research only after they have seen other teachers' successful results from being involved in research.
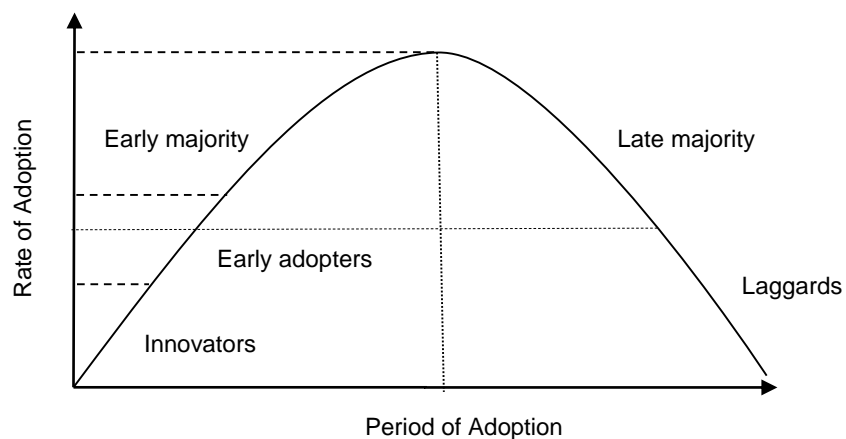Laggards: usually resist doing research. They usually perceive themselves as teachers only.

Figure 1. Adoption categories of research, adapted from Rogers (2003)*.*

Figure 1 represents a diffusion of teacher research. According to Rogers (2003, p. 15-16), there are five reasons why the members (ELT teachers) adopt an innovation. These five reasons comprise (1) the great advantages that the innovation provides when adopted; (2) the compatibility of the innovation (the innovation has relevant value, is compatible with the past experience of the adopters, and fulfills the adopters' needs); (3) the trialability (the innovation is experimentable); (4) the observability (the innovation has the potential consequence of being visible to other members); and (5) the complexity (less complicated innovations tend to be adopted more quickly). Given these five factors, research on teachers' participation in research will provide information about success and constraints of implementation of teacher research activities.

Based on Wenger's (2006, p. 1) notion of communities of practice, which is "groups of people who share a concern, or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly," ELT teachers' engagement in research is viewed as a process of taking part in research, building relations with other researchers, and joining any institutional research events (e.g., research events organized at CamTESOL and the institution's own research unit). This participation can be primary, peripheral, or marginal (Wenger, 1998). Peripheral teacher researchers (i.e., novice teacher researchers) may move along the trajectory of the participatory process to primary membership. In this regard, teachers are engaged in research because they share a similar concern about undertaking research in classroom to improve the quality of teaching.

This paper, which describes part of a large PhD research project, will examine teachers' participation in research at one tertiary ELT institution in Phnom Penh as response to the innovation of teacher research. That is, it will examine the teachers' engagement in doing research, presenting the research at conferences (i.e., CamTESOL Conference Series), and publishing the research papers. This paper seeks to answer the following questions:
1. To what extent have the institution's teachers been involved in research as evidenced by presentations at the CamTESOL Conference Series and subsequent publication in the *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (2005-2009), LEiA (2010-2013), or CRLLT?
2. How do teachers self-categorize their engagement in research at this institution?
3. To the extent that teachers have been involved in research,
    3.1. What research methods, data collection instruments, and data analysis frameworks did they use?
    3.2. Why did they adopt those research methods and data collection instruments?

Research Methodology

The research described in this paper is based on data drawn from five sources: (1) CamTESOL conference handbooks (2005-2013); (2) *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (2005-2009); (3) LEiA (2010-2013); (4) CRLLT (2010-2013); and (5) a survey of teacher research profiles conducted at the institution in this study.

The author examined abstracts accepted by the CamTESOL Conference Series and published in the conference handbooks to identify the institution's teachers who were involved in doing research and presenting it at the conference. The presentations were identified by type: research, paper, workshop, or poster. The CamTESOL Conference Series has recently attracted around 400 international presenters (Mahony, 2011), and in 2013, 376 abstracts were accepted for the conference (CamTESOL, 2013) compared to only 53 abstracts in 2005 (CamTESOL, 2005). Given this rise in the number of abstracts accepted, in categorizing these accepted abstracts in each conference program across nine years, miscounting may occur. Thus, to ensure the reliability of the data, the author went through the accepted abstracts in each annual conference program two times, with a gap of two weeks. For the purpose of this paper, the author only counted the teachers' accepted abstracts for presentations of research papers. The author also examined the teachers' published research papers in the *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (2005-2009), LEiA (2010-2013) and CRLLT (2010-2013).

The data were also drawn from a survey conducted at the institution to investigate the teachers' participation in research. The survey, based on a questionnaire set, asked the teachers to self-categorize their adoption of research into one of five adoption categories (i.e., innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards; see the questionnaire in Appendix). The questionnaire, written in English, and an information-and-consent form were distributed to 63 lecturers, both full-time and part-time, in 2012. In that year, 30 teachers were in postgraduate degree programs (i.e., master's or PhD) overseas, so the survey only represented the active teaching staff in 2012. Thirty-seven of 63 teachers (58.7%) signed the information and consent forms, filled in the questionnaires, and put them in the author's pigeonhole in a photocopy room. Of the 37 respondents, the terminal degree for 30 respondents is a master's degree (in TESOL or education), and for seven respondents, a bachelor's degree in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

Findings

For ease of analysis, the findings are reported for each research question and in three themes: (1) teachers' involvement in teacher research; (2) teachers' adoption category of research; and (3) research methods and data collection instruments that the teachers adopted.

Teachers' Involvement in ELT Research

Research Question 1 seeks to investigate the extent the institution's teachers have been involved in research by examining participation at the annual CamTESOL Conference and subsequent publication in the *CamTESOL Selected Papers*, LEiA, or CRLLT.

From 2005 to 2013, 47 teachers gave 94 presentations at a CamTESOL Conference. Of these 94 presentations, 48 were based on research papers, followed by 28 workshops, 11 nonresearch papers, and 7 posters. The examination of the teachers' presentations of research reveals that in general the number of presentations of research increased. As displayed in Figure 2, the number of presentations increased from one in 2006 to nine in 2011. Research-based presentations sharply decreased to three in 2012, but recovered to 10 in 2013.
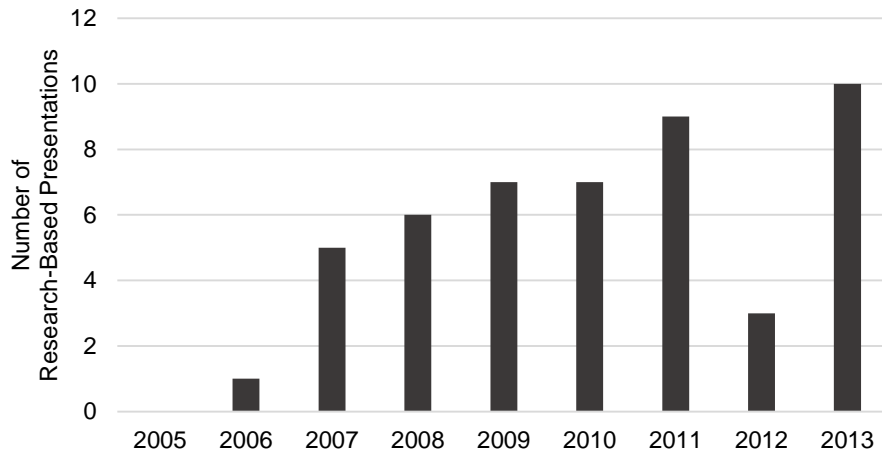
Figure 2. Number of research-based presentations at CamTESOL conferences (2005-2013) by the institution's teachers.

The examination of published papers in the *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (2005-2009) and LEiA (2010-2013) also revealed a number of papers authored by the institution's teachers. Four research papers authored by teachers were published in *CamTESOL Selected Papers* (one paper in 2006, two in 2008, and one in 2009), and one paper was published in LEiA, Volume 1, Issue 1 in 2010. In addition, the institution's teachers have published fourteen papers in CRLLT from 2010 to 2013 (five papers in Volume 1, four in Volume 2, and five in Volume 3).

Teachers' Adoption of Teacher Research

Research Question 2 investigates how teachers have participated in the innovation of teacher research at the institution from 2007 to 2012. In the teacher research profile survey, the data from the 37 respondents reveals the teachers belong to a variety of categories of adoption of research. As shown in Figure 3, three teachers categorized themselves as innovators, twelve identified themselves as early adopters, ten self-categorized as early majority, and seven saw themselves as late majority adopters. Five other teachers self-categorized as laggards.

Drawing from Rogers' (2003) notion of diffusion of innovation, 25 teachers (3 innovators, 12 early adopters, and 10 early majority) might be expected to have embraced teacher research and to have been involved in undertaking research.
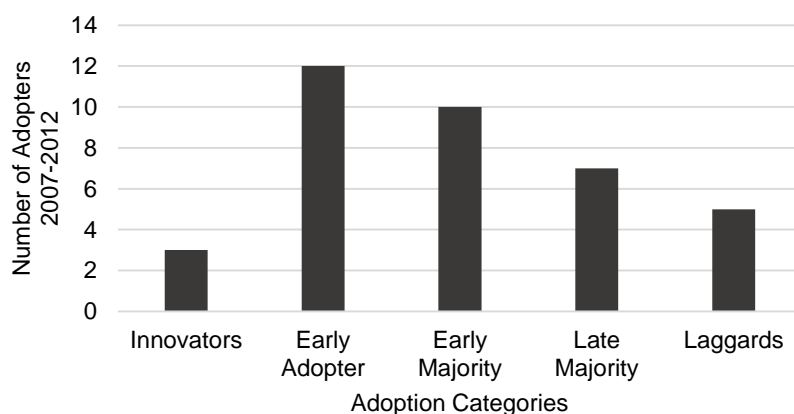

Figure 3. Teachers' self-reported adoption of ELT teacher research.

Research Methods and Data Collection Instruments

Research Question 3.1. The data from the teacher profile questionnaires indicate that of the 32 respondents (i.e., those teachers who self-categorized as innovators, early adopters, early majority, and late majority), 27 lecturers reported to have actually undertaken research. The respondents were asked to select research methods provided in the questionnaire to indicate the methods and data collection instruments that they used. The responses show that the most used research approach is a mixed methods approach (55.5%), followed by a qualitative approach (29.6%) and a quantitative approach (14.8%). As illustrated in Figure 4, the most used research instruments are interviews (92.6%), including semi-structured interviews (51.9%), structured-interviews (33.3%), and unstructured interviews (7.4%); and questionnaires (70.4%). Other reported data collection instruments comprise focus groups (25.9%) and classroom observations (14.8%), followed by narrative frames, fieldnotes, and diary writing (3.7% each).
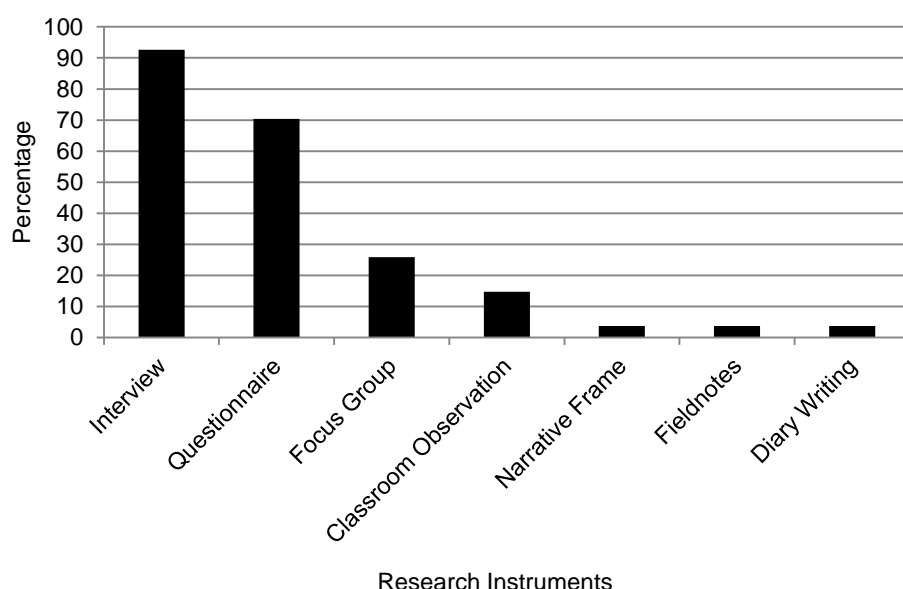
Figure 4. Teachers' research instruments (*n* = 27).

However, the examination of the 14 papers in CRLLT indicates a slight difference in the data collection instruments from the instruments the survey respondents reported using. Seven papers reveal a quantitative approach by way of administering questionnaires, and two papers indicate a qualitative approach in terms of employment of a focus group and in-depth interviews. Four papers indicate a mixed methods approach, of which two papers used a questionnaire and focus group, the third paper used questionnaire and semistructured interview, and the fourth paper used a questionnaire and think-aloud protocol. One paper analyzed learners' errors. In a similar vein, of the five research papers published in the *CamTESOL Selected Papers* and LEiA, two papers used questionnaires and three papers analyzed students' written texts; two of these three papers also included interviews.

In addition to the data collection instruments reported to have been used, the analysis also indicates that the majority of papers adopted descriptive statistics to report the research findings. In 11 of the 19 published research papers (in CRLLT, *CamTESOL Selected Papers*, and LEiA), the authors adopted descriptive statistics for data analysis. One paper used linguistic analysis, and two papers used text analysis. Thus, a moderate number of these published papers shows that a quantitative approach with a questionnaire as an instrument to garner data is

actually the most used approach and data collection tool, and descriptive statistics is the most used framework for data analysis.

Research Question 3.2. In the last part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to express opinions about the research approaches and instruments they adopted for research activities in an open-ended question. For the analysis, the respondents were assigned numbers from L1 to L37. The analysis shows the teachers' selection of certain research approaches and instruments for research projects was influenced by their beliefs about those approaches and instruments. For example, some respondents selected a mixed methods approach because it is a triangulation of research instruments (2 respondents) or because it possibly yields more valid and reliable research results (2 respondents). Respondents selected certain approaches and methods because of appropriateness to research topics and questions (9), convenience (4), duration of time spent on research (3), potential for probing rich data (3), and familiarity (2).

As interviews and questionnaires were the research instruments overwhelmingly selected by the respondents, it is worth noting their opinions about these research instruments in their own words:

> Semi-structured interviews allowed me to elicit the necessary information to answer my questions. (L18)

> From the student interviews, I can get more in-depth understanding and face-to-face interaction with my respondents. (L19)

> Also, semi-structured interview was used to gain more insight from the participants. (L24)

> It [semistructured interview] allows researchers the freedom to tailor their questions to the interview situations and unexpected things that may come up in their mind during the interview. (L31)

> As the matter of fact, some of my respondents are educated and [some are] uneducated and illiterate people; therefore, questionnaires were not appropriate for them. (L32)

> We only used questionnaires because of time constraints and resources availability. Also it is the easiest means for data analysis. (L5)

> It [using questionnaires] is convenient. (L13)

> Questionnaire allows me to probe a lot of aspects related to my topic. (L19)

> [Questionnaires provide] more accurate data analysis. (L20)

> I'm familiar with the use of questionnaire as a tool for data collection the most. (L22)

> [Questionnaires can be used] to reach all the participants, especially after their graduation. (L23)

> Questionnaires were used to collect data for my research because the information gained could be transformed into percentage and could be reported as mean, graphs, and tables. (L24)

> First, it's convenient. I just placed the questionnaires in the instructors' pigeonholes and went back to collect them. Second, questions can elicit the information that I need from the instructors in a very non-intrusive way. Third, I used the already designed questionnaire with some adaptation like adding and removing some questions. I find it effective. (L30)

This analysis suggests a way that the respondents designed research methods and selected data collection instruments for their research projects – a way that sought convenient and harmonious strategies in conducting research. These strategies help them deal with time constraints, ease in data collection and analysis, size of samples, and coverage of topics under investigation. These teachers appeared to be apt to undertake research adhering to surveys rather than deep examination of research topics of their interest. Although interview is the most reported research instrument, in fact, the respondents' comments in the questionnaires reveal that this instrument was reported to have been used mainly to triangulate the data collection as indicated in a mixed methods approach.

Although mixed methods is the respondents' dominant reported approach in the survey, the most actually used method and instrument in the 19 published research papers are a quantitative method and questionnaire. Therefore, it appears that the most common features of research involve a wide scope of the topic being researched, objectivity in data collection, large samples as seen in the adoption of a quantitative approach and questionnaires in actual research papers, and data analysis using descriptive statistics. These features are in line with the commonly reported characteristics of good research provided by language teachers worldwide (Borg, 2009) and by other Cambodian teachers (Moore, 2011a). In this regard, most of the institution's teachers who have adopted research and published research papers in CRLLT appear to perceive research as quantitative rather than qualitative.

Discussion

From the data analysis, there was an overall increase in the number of research-based presentations by the institution's teachers at the annual CamTESOL Conference from 2005 to 2013. This increase could possibly be caused by a number of many possible factors. First, based on the author's observation and experience as a Cambodian ELT professional, it may be in part due to the increase in the number of teachers who hold postgraduate degrees (i.e., MA in TESOL or MEd) from domestic tertiary institutions or overseas universities. Some of these postgraduate students, having conducted research projects in postgraduate programs, may present research papers at a CamTESOL Conference. Second, this increase could also possibly be explained by individual teachers building research records to secure a pathway to admission to postgraduate (PhD) programs (Moore, 2011b). Third, this increase may result from teachers' interest in taking part in research in order to improve professional practices.

As previously mentioned, Moore (2011b) has observed the development of ELT teacher research in tertiary ELT institutions in Cambodia as these institutions aim to secure institutional status. If the developments at this institution are indicative of a trend for tertiary ELT institutions in Cambodia to pay attention to developing research, ELT teacher research will become a long-term approach for professional development to improve the quality of teaching English at these institutions. It seems plausible that teachers at the institution have joined in research, and their

participation categories range from innovators to early majority. This seems to indicate the possible increasing growth of ELT teacher research at this institution.

At this initial stage of development, teacher research has encountered some important issues of concern about research practice at the institution. The first important issue could be related to a research practice adopted by the institution. The teachers who receive institutional research grants may present the research at the annual CamTESOL conference, yet, as required by the research unit, they will submit the research papers to CRLLT journal. This practice may result in a lack of published research papers authored by the institution's teachers published in LEiA (or in other ELT journals elsewhere). This way of research practice may neither be productive for improving ELT profesional practices in this institution, as well as in Cambodia widely, nor provide the teachers with opportunities to socialize with a wider research community. The second important issue of concern may be related to teachers' adoption of research methods. The study indicates that a quantitative approach (e.g., the use of a questionnaire as an instrument and descriptive statistics as a data analysis framework) are most fitting in teacher research at this institution. It also indicates that the teachers' adoption of research approaches and instruments may be based upon the possibility that the research projects could be undertaken rather than on research rigor. Thus, it is questionable whether or not the institute's teachers are aware of various data collection techniques and data analysis frameworks that teachers can use in undertaking research in classrooms as suggested by Freeman (1998) and Hopkins (2007). This finding calls for further investigation into this area in order to have a clear view of teacher research undertaken by these teachers. Thus, teacher research practice at the institution needs attention for further development. To achieve this aim is to choose an appropriate, yet effective and practical model as a framework for implementing research. Drawing upon Wenger's (2006) notion of communities of practice, to sustain research, teachers need to be intentionally and actively involved in undertaking research. If they are mutually engaged in doing research and learning to do research together, they will create opportunities for learning, that is, learning to teach by undertaking research in their own contexts.

Limitations

The analysis of teachers' adoption of research revealed in this study is grounded in the information responded by only 37 active teachers. As noted earlier, 26 teachers did not respond to the questionnaire. Moreover, 30 other teachers were on leave for overseas studies. It is, therefore, unclear whether these 56 teachers were involved in research during this period. Furthermore, this survey only asked the teacher participants to self-categorize their research involvement at the institution into one of Rogers' (2003) five adoption categories (see Figure 1) through the questionnaires. The findings show that 25 teachers self-categorized their research engagement into innovators, early adopters, and early majority, but 27 teachers reported to have undertaken research. These different figures could possibly be understood in a way that two teachers may have done research elsewhere rather than in the institution. Moreover, it is uncertain whether those five lecturers who self-categorized as laggards had not been involved in undertaking research activities elsewhere. The survey did not deeply explore the teacher participants' actual research activities and rationale for adopting the innovation of research, especially the five reasons for adoption suggested by Rogers (2003), which could be helpful for further improving the diffusion of the innovation of research in ELT. Therefore, further research in this area should be undertaken, and any future research done in this area should be grounded in qualitative data (i.e., through interactive interviews), and preferably in ethnographically informed data (Moore, 2011a).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachers' engagement in research at the institution has generally increased since the establishment of CamTESOL in 2005 and the institution's research unit in 2007. An expected number of the institution's teachers appears to have adopted the innovation of teacher research introduced to them and to have been involved in undertaking research, presenting the research, and publishing the research papers. The teachers' self-categorization of adoption of research sugests plausible development in the practice of research at this institution. If the aim is to create a research community, following Wenger's (2006) notion of communities of practice, these teachers who self-categorized as innovators (3 teachers) early adopters (12 teachers) and early majority (10 teachers) are potential primary members to develop a research culture.

As noted earlier, this paper reports on only part of a large PhD research project. It thus serves as a preliminary report on the development of ELT teacher research in ELT education in this context. A broad, deep, and appropriate understanding about contemporary ELT teacher research at this institution in particular and in Cambodia more widely, with implications for other contexts where research is an innovation, will be realized when this research project is complete.

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Appendix
A Survey Profile Questionnaire

(An introduction which comprises the information about the institution is omitted. This survey profile investigated the teachers' participation in research between 2007 and 2012.)

A. Personal Information

1. How long have you worked for the institution? _____ years
2. In what year did you begin? _____
3. What degree(s) do you hold? Please place a cross (X) in the appropriate box (or boxes if you hold more than one degree).
   - ☐ Bachelor degree
   - ☐ Graduate diploma
   - ☐ Master degree
   - ☐ PhD
   - ☐ Others (please specify _____)

B. Participation in ELT Teacher Research at the Institution

Rogers (2003) proposes five adoption categories to account for a community's members who have responded to an innovation. These five categories comprise (1) innovators; (2) early adopters; (3) early majority; (4) late majority; and (5) laggards. Below are brief descriptions of each adoption category.

Innovators:	They have initiated and organized research at the institution.
Early adopters:	They have immediately adopted and engaged in research at the institution.
Early majority:	They're often reluctant to accept the innovation. It takes them long time to decide to engage in research at the institution.
Late majority:	They are sceptical and cautious about research. They've been involved in research only after they've seen other lecturers' successful results.
Laggards:	They're uncertain about research and fear failure when they join the activity. They usually perceive their role as teachers only.

In which adoption category would you locate yourself in order to indicate your participation in ELT teacher research at the institution? Please answer the question by placing a cross (X) in the appropriate box below. Choose ONLY one category.

- ☐ Innovators
- ☐ Early adopters
- ☐ Early majority
- ☐ Late majority
- ☐ Laggards

C. Research Experiences

Please answer the following questions.

1. Have you conducted any research?
   - ☐ YES (if YES, please continue to question 2)
   - ☐ NO (if NO, please return the questionnaire to pigeonhole **116**. Thanks.)

2. What research approach did you adopt? (Please choose ONE answer)
   - ☐ Quantitative research approach
   - ☐ Qualitative research approach
   - ☐ Mixed quantitative and qualitative research approach

3. What research instruments did you use for data collection? (Please indicate all instruments you used)
   - ☐ Questionnaires
   - ☐ Structured interviews
   - ☐ Semistructured interviews
   - ☐ Unstructured interviews
   - ☐ Focus groups
   - ☐ Classroom observations
   - ☐ Narrative frames
   - ☐ Field notes
   - ☐ Diary writing
   - ☐ Others (please specify: _____)

4. Could you please provide reasons for the research instruments you selected?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Please return the questionnaire to pigeonhole 116 in the copy room.
Thanks.

Promoting English Independent Study for EFL University Students in Indonesia

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This paper aims to investigate the implementation of English Independent Study (EIS) activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational contexts. In this study, 32 pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate participants attending a course named Basic Skill Course at an Indonesian university were introduced to the concept of and strategies for pursuing EIS. This investigation focused on analyzing the students' choice and perceptions of EIS activities and the continuity of the initiative. The findings show that students are more inclined to do receptive skill activities as opposed to those of productive skills for their EIS, students generally perceive EIS activities positively, and almost all students continued EIS activities on their own after they finished the semester. Some insights on how teachers could optimize students' motivation to do EIS activities are offered, such as providing extensive resources for independent study and devising various schemes to promote such activities among students.

One of the key aspects of globalization is the use of international languages as the means of communication among people from various countries. As one of the international languages formally recognized by the United Nations, English has gained increased acceptance as the primary means of international communication, indicated by the high number of nations which feature English as the main international language in their educational curricula (Crystal, 2003). Therefore, nurturing English skills among people in countries where English is considered a foreign language is essential. However, what often happens in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Indonesia and many other Southeast Asian and even Asian countries is that the teaching of English in school is not sufficient for students to speak English as well as expected (Soliman, 2014), and students' English proficiency often remains limited (Renandya, 2007). One way to address such problems is by introducing and supporting the habit of English Independent Study (EIS).

EIS offers a solution for the limited time and resources of English learning in the formal educational system by allowing and encouraging students to find authentic resources and integrate English learning into their daily activities. Studies have shown that independent learning is one of the key components of successful language learning (Wong & Nunan, 2011; Yanren, 2007) and that students expect some independent learning strategies to be taught in classes (Luk, 2012). However, studies about nurturing independent study and its continuous impact have, to the author's knowledge, never been conducted. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate efforts to introduce and foster such practice to two groups of Indonesian undergraduate students majoring in the English language. The purpose of the scheme was to promote continuous learning of English independent from the presence of the traditional

educational system and to encourage lifelong learning of English. This study specifically focused on analyzing the types of English independent study that students did, their perceptions of EIS, and the continuity of the EIS initiative after the semester finished.

Literature Review

Second Language Acquisition

Independent English study has its roots in the theory of second language (L2) acquisition. As theorized by Krashen (1982), L2 is acquired through significant exposure to the language from the environment in the form of authentic communication, much like the acquisition of the first language. This theory, which is also the basis of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, is employed as the theoretical framework of the current study.

According to Krashen (1982), "language acquisition is a subconscious process—language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication" (p. 10). The acquired competence, he further argued, is subconscious as well—making the understanding of the L2 rules "felt," instead of deliberately learned or known. This way, one would feel that grammatically correct sentences sound "right," and grammatically incorrect sentences sound "wrong," without necessarily knowing the exact reasons. This notion is in line with the theory of first language acquisition, one of the features of which is the rich exposure to the language from the environment, such as from the parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, and media (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). When applied to the teaching of a foreign language, one of the closest approaches resembling the idea of first language acquisition is EIS.

English Independent Study (EIS)

There have been a number of studies about independent study in English, a notion also commonly referred to as independent learning or autonomous learning (Luk, 2012). Smith (2008) defined autonomous learning as one's capacity to be in control of one's own learning. Therefore, in this study, EIS is defined as any student effort outside the classroom to improve the student's English skills, without specific instructions or assignments from a teacher. EIS requires students to find or create their own English exposure, thus maximizing their attempts for acquisition. This is especially true in EFL contexts, such as that in Indonesia and many Asian countries, where exposure to the language in the students' natural environment is limited. In EIS, students are expected to choose the materials or activities that they enjoy and which suit their level of English proficiency. Therefore, students should first be given training about how to choose appropriate materials and activities for their EIS. This is in line with Krashen's (1982) suggestion that English language teachers should provide not only the content or materials to study, but also the tools and strategies to help students to continue learning and improving beyond the boundary of the classroom. In EIS, such training is focused on helping students firstly to find potential English exposure in their immediate surroundings or to create their own English exposure, and secondly to do the activity effectively by considering some principles and strategies in conducting independent learning.

As explained by Crabbe (1993), autonomous learners learn in their minds, regardless of the place. He added that the success of language learning relies on how well students could make the best use of various learning opportunities both within and outside the classroom. In other words, in addition to classroom learning, students should be assisted in finding potential English exposure by improving their sensitivity to anything "English" around them. For example, English sensitivity could be developed by being more aware of things that contain English words, phrases, or sentences, such as the information on food packages, shop names and descriptions, advertisements, online materials, and TV programs. Meanwhile, creating English

exposure could be achieved by introducing some English into one's daily life. For example, if a student enjoys listening to songs and his or her playlist consists only of non-English songs, he or she could add some English songs to it, and if a student attends a lecture or meeting and usually makes notes, he or she could write the notes in English.

In addition to finding and creating their own English exposure, students are encouraged to consider some principles and strategies of effective and efficient independent learning. Some principles of Extensive Reading could be applied to EIS, since Extensive Reading could be regarded as a form of independent study focusing only on reading, while EIS is an effort to extend the approach to all four language skills. Therefore, adopting some principles of Extensive Reading activities such as those proposed by Renandya (2007), Day and Bamford (2002), and Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007), EIS principles can be formulated as follows. First, high availability of resources is essential. Here, students should be encouraged to find or create as much exposure as possible and / or to do EIS activities as many times as they can. Students could be assisted to identify potential resources in their immediate environment, for example, English newspapers, TV programs, music, or texting or posting on social media in English. Second, students should freely choose materials and activities that interest them. This would likely ensure that those materials are personally enjoyable and relevant for them. Third, comprehensible language input and output is important. Students should choose materials or activities that are not too difficult nor too easy for them, and their EIS should be balanced between input (receptive skills) and output (productive skills). Fourth, various strategies to enhance EIS should be introduced. For example, students could be taught strategies to identify materials of suitable level of difficulty, such as the "five finger rule" (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2007, p. 4), in which if the first page of a book contains more than five unfamiliar vocabulary items, then it is too difficult for the student. Thus, the student can choose to read another book that is easier. Another strategy dealing with watching movies is to avoid local language subtitles. Students can try to watch a movie without subtitles, or if this is too difficult, they can set the subtitles to English. If they still find it too difficult, they can start by watching an easier genre of movies such as children's or animated movies, in which the language use is relatively simpler than that of science fiction or psychological thriller movies.

Previous EIS Studies

Independent study has often been correlated to successful language learning. Wong and Nunan (2011), for example, identified effective language learners as being independent and active in their learning approaches. Based in Hong Kong, their study involved one hundred and ten undergraduate students in Hong Kong. They were classified as "more effective" and "less effective" language learners based on their scores on a standardized public English examination administered at the end of secondary school. One of their findings suggested that a significantly longer time was spent by the more effective learners in independent study and in the practice of their English skills outside the class compared to that of the less effective learners. In addition, Chamot (2005) reviewed two studies about how the teaching of strategies could help foster independence among students. The first study reported students' positive remarks towards the usefulness of the training, while the latter study reported that the experimental group, who were explicitly trained in language learning strategies, performed significantly better in an English test than the control group.

An interesting study was conducted by Yanren (2007), who interviewed several winners of national English speaking and debate competitions in China. She found that these Chinese learners of English spent a great deal of time outside class learning English independently by imitating and memorizing dialogues from their favorite books and movies. Another study on

EIS in EFL contexts was conducted by Luk (2012), who surveyed 45 students in a Japanese university to see if they did any form of independent study outside class. The findings showed that all students reported that they did some independent study activities outside the class to improve their English proficiency. The author then concluded that the study participants were generally willing to spend some time outside the class time to learn English and that they need more guidance in doing it effectively and successfully.

Methodology

This study employed content analysis and a survey to analyze the types of English independent study that the participants did, their perception of EIS and the continuity of the EIS initiative after the semester finished. Students' independent study weekly reports were analyzed to answer the first research question about the types of independent study activities that they did during the semester. For the second research question about the students' perception of the independent study activities during the semester, their end-of-semester reflection was employed as the data. Finally, a survey was used to probe the continuity of the independent study after the semester had finished. The survey items were mostly open-ended to allow the provision of un-influenced answers about the continuity of the activities, the benefits (if any), and the factors that facilitate or hinder independent study activities after the completion of the course (see the Appendix).

The participants in this study were students from two classes of the English Department in the vocational college of a public university located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The students' first language was Indonesian, and they had previously learned English mainly from high school. At the time of the study, their English proficiency level ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate (TOEIC scores of 350 to 650). They were the students of the 2013 enrollment year, and each class consisted of 16 students. There were 32 students in total, with 25 female and 7 male students, whose ages ranged from 18 to 20 years. At the time of the study, the students were in the second semester and were taking the Basic Skill Course (BSC) taught by the researcher. The course taught integrated skills at the intermediate level, involving all language skills and components, to prepare students for both advanced skill and content courses offered in the following semesters. This course began in February 2014 and lasted for 14 weeks until June 2014.

During the course, the students were introduced to the concept of English independent study in the first week and were then asked to try to do some EIS activities based on their interests. The introduction involved a short lecture on how maximizing opportunities for language acquisition could assist second language learning and how students can implement this concept into their learning through EIS activities. Following the lecture, students were asked to brainstorm and discuss potential ideas about English exposure in their immediate environment. Some strategies and principles on how to find EIS materials and activities were given, such as those proposed by Luk (2012), Yanren (2007), Renandya (2007), Day and Bamford (2002) and Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007). Next, students were encouraged to try different EIS activities every week, and they were to report the activities in a weekly EIS report for 12 consecutive weeks. At the end of the semester, the students were required to write a reflection paragraph about their EIS activities during the semester. Finally, the survey about the continuity of the students' EIS activities was administered in December 2014, six months after the semester had finished. At that time, the former Basic Skill Course students were not being taught by the researcher; thus, there was no direct influence from the researcher on the students regarding EIS activities.

The data collected were then analyzed using content analysis to identify themes and draw inferences. The analysis was conducted manually as the volume of the data was not high. The findings of the analysis are presented in the following section.

Findings

Types of EIS Activities

In total, there were 32 weekly reports collected by the end of the semester; each, if completed, contained 12 EIS activities conducted by the students. However, some absent students chose not to report their EIS activities in the weeks they missed, thus some reports contained less than 12 activities. The analysis of the reports shows that receptive skills (reading and listening) are higher in popularity than the productive skills (writing and speaking). The most common skill that students pursued for EIS was reading, followed by listening, while writing and speaking activities were less commonly employed by the students. Figure 1 illustrates students' EIS activities as shown per skill and the respective frequency of occurrence in the students' weekly reports.
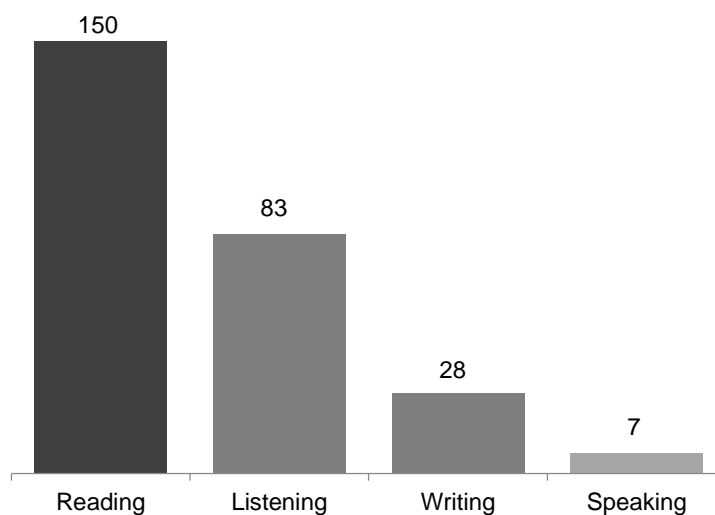
Figure 1. Number of EIS activities by skill done by the students during the semester

Looking further into the details of the EIS activities noted by the students in their weekly reports, the most popular activities were listening to English-language songs (34 references), reading articles in English (33), and watching English-language movies (32 references). The second most popular activities were reading English-language books or novels (18 references), reading posts in English on social networking sites (16 references), playing computer games with instructions in English (13 references), and reading posts on social media sites such as blogs and Tumblr (10 references). There are 39 other activities found with a relatively lower popularity, indicated by the references of less than 10. These activities included reading newspapers, writing social media posts in English, speaking with friends in English, watching English-language television programs, texting in English, and learning from the BBC website.

Student Perceptions of the EIS Activities

Both positive and negative perceptions about independent study were found in the students' end-of-semester reflections about their EIS activities. In general, however, the students perceived the activities positively; there were 45 references for positive perceptions and only four references for negative perceptions. For the positive perceptions, the most mentioned

benefits were that EIS was helpful in enriching their English vocabulary (17 references), and effective in improving general English skills (ten references). In addition, some students reported that it helped them to see their old habits anew (two references), such as learning English from listening to songs or writing social media posts. There were seven other benefits which represented positive perceptions, each referred to by one student, and they were: it raised awareness to study harder, it was a useful activity, it helped learning new knowledge, it helped to increase speaking skills, it helped to make a new and educative hobby, it was challenging, and it helped learning by oneself. Below are selected student comments.

> I think when I did things, it's useless, but now I find it interesting. So when I listen and watch something, I do it carefully to find unfamiliar words. I feel more clever as they are useful in class. (Student 14, Class B)

> It's a good way to study English well, because after I wrote the words, I also know how to use it. (Student 6, Class A)

As for the negative perceptions, two students thought that EIS was difficult, one student thought it was not really effective, and the final student thought it was confusing at first but then said that it was challenging.

In addition, the impact of EIS was found to go beyond language learning. One student noted that EIS helped her to spend her time more usefully by turning everyday activities into opportunities to learn English. She deliberately tried to learn some English vocabulary when she watched movies and put the language setting of her accounts in English. Another student reported that EIS also trained her to be more honest. This was because she did EIS independently and if she chose to be honest and really did it, she would reap the benefits for her English language learning. However, if she reported something she did not actually do in the weekly report, she was aware that she would not benefit from it.

Continuity of the EIS Activities

At the end of the next semester, the former students of the BSC course were invited to complete a survey about the continuity of their EIS. At this time, 25 out of 32 students participated in the survey; three were male and 22 were female. The students were asked if they found the independent study training in the previous semester useful. All of them found it useful, with a bit of variation in the degree of usefulness: 15 thought it was useful, eight thought it was very useful, one thought it was somewhat useful, another thought it was less useful, and no one thought it was useless.

When asked about whether they continued some EIS activities discussed and tried in the previous semester, 96% of the students reported that they did, with only one student saying no. The students who reported continuity were then asked about the types of EIS activities that they did and the frequency of doing them. An analysis of the answers showed that the types of the EIS activities they did were somewhat similar to what they did during the semester in that receptive skill activities were more frequently mentioned compared to those of productive skills. It was found that activities related to listening were the most commonly chosen, followed by various reading activities. Not far in popularity from reading were the writing activities and finally, speaking activities and integrated English activities were the lowest in popularity. Figure 2 displays the types of EIS activities that students did six months after the semester ended and the number of references to the activities.
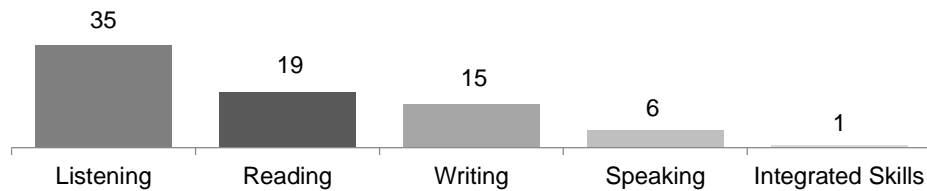
Figure 2. Number of EIS activities by skill done by the students after the semester finished

The questionnaire probed the affordances and barriers of doing EIS activities. Some factors reported to support the students' EIS activities were the fact that they liked listening to music (nine references), watching movies (seven references), reading articles (three references) and reading books / novels (two references). These hobbies that they used to enjoy in their native language were turned into English learning by, for example, listening to English songs, watching western movies with English subtitles or no subtitles at all, and reading articles and books or novels in English. Other factors that students reported as affordances were, for example, that they wanted to get good scores in their studies, they felt motivated when seeing people talking in English fluently, they had specific targets for their English proficiency, they wanted to speak with people from other countries confidently, and they wanted to increase their knowledge. These factors served as the drive that motivated them to initiate EIS activities.

Students reported the biggest factor that hindered them from doing EIS activities was laziness (nine references). The second most mentioned factor was limited time (seven references); they reported that time-consuming activities, such as doing course assignments and student organization activities, prevented them from doing EIS activities more frequently. Other factors that served as barriers include distraction (e.g., other activities not related to English) and lack of funds to buy English materials such as books or novels.

Discussion and Implications

The EFL environment presents a unique challenge in that exposure to the language is limited. However, this study found that such exposure is available if learners are assisted to create more awareness. In general, this study found that most participants were in favor of EIS activities during the semester and almost all of them continued the activities in various forms and degrees after they finished the semester. The participants in this study showed some qualities of autonomous learners in that, as pinpointed by Crabbe (1993), they were able to make use of some learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom. In addition, like the students in Yanren's (2007) study, the EIS activities chosen by the participants in this study were those that they personally enjoyed, such as reading and watching movies. Looking further into the types of EIS activities done by the participants, they somewhat reflect Luk's (2012) study in that receptive skills are more popular in comparison to productive skills. Furthermore, many similarities were also found in the details of the EIS activities for each skill. This similarity may

be because both studies were conducted in EFL environments—one in Japan and the current study in Indonesia.

A slightly different result in types of EIS activities reported by the participants during and after the semester was found. During the semester, reading activities were the most popular EIS activities, but after the semester finished, listening / viewing activities were the most popular ones. Looking deeper into the data, the listening activities done by the participants were mostly listening to songs and watching movies, relatively popular hobbies among teenage students, which could be one of the reasons for the shift. Another possible reason is that there was no push for them to vary their EIS activities as there was during the semester when they were encouraged to do different activities each week. In other words, without any interference, students may find listening / viewing activities to be the most enjoyable EIS activities.

The relatively large discrepancy between productive and receptive skills in the types of EIS activities done by the participants should be of deeper concern for English language teachers. Analysis of the EIS activities conducted during and after the semester shows that the receptive skills practiced, such as reading and listening / viewing are more popular than productive skills such as writing and speaking. This may be because productive skills require relatively more effort than receptive skills. However, in learning a new language, both input and output should be balanced. As Nation (2007) suggested, effective L2 learning should balance several issues, two of which are input and output. To address the imbalance, teachers could introduce measures to motivate students to do both productive and receptive skills in equal proportions. One way to do this is by teaching more strategies to do writing and speaking activities independently and by integrating such activities into students' daily activities. For example, they can be encouraged to develop an English-speaking policy schedule with siblings or friends, practice speaking alone regularly, or write daily notes in classes or in meetings in English. Another way is by establishing a speaking club or speaking corner where students could go to if they want to practice independently. In addition, it is important to note that after the semester, one student reported a new type of EIS activity involving integrated skill activity using an interactive website for EFL learners. This case could be viewed as an advancement in the student's EIS and, with regard to achieving balance between receptive and productive skills, such websites could be introduced to students as another means of EIS.

Optimizing the Continuity of Students' EIS

Almost all students reported that they continued the EIS activities on their own accord. This shows that the EIS training was reasonably successful in arousing students' awareness in creating their own exposure to English and in igniting students' initiative to learn English independently. However, it is understood that there are many factors that may influence students to do EIS activities independently, such as their level of motivation, the availability and accessibility of resources, and the potential hurdles that may block students from actually doing the activities. Understanding these factors could help teachers, institutions, and policy makers take measures to assist students' independent study initiatives.

Based on student reports of motivation, opportunities, and barriers, teachers and institutions could devise various methods to help increase students' motivation such as by exposing students to various contexts where English is needed and various opportunities in which they can use their English in meaningful ways. For example, by students creating an English club, sharing communities, or going on study excursions, they could experience firsthand the benefit of their EIS activities. In addition, to increase students' opportunities to do EIS activities, institutions could establish a self-access center containing English learning resources designed

to support independent learning. Although some institutions have already established self-access centers, many institutions, such as that where this study was conducted, have not. Considering the benefit of independent study to students, a self-access center in addition to English programs is important, and the characteristics of learning resources that students enjoy could be used as a guide to select the materials and resources that could be provided in such centers. This center could also potentially solve students' problems of lacking self-funding to buy independent study resources. Finally, to overcome potential barriers such as time limitations, students could be encouraged to integrate their English learning into their everyday activities, thus reconsidering the common view that learning should be done at a particular time, such as during the class time. Some strategies to integrate learning through EIS into students' lives also need to be emphasized in EFL classes along with supervision from teachers before students actually try EIS activities by themselves in the future.

Conclusion

English Independent Study (EIS) was conceptualized as a solution to the problem of limited exposure to English in EFL contexts, to help students to be more aware of potential exposure around them and / or to create their own English exposure. This paper analyzes the implementation of EIS activities and their continued practice by the students after the training ended. It was found that students did various EIS activities with relatively high preferences to receptive skill training compared to productive skill training. The students generally perceived the EIS training positively and they also reported continuing EIS activities even after the semester finished. Some suggestions and principles to implement EIS were offered, for example, the teaching of strategies for EIS, the high availability of learning materials, and the freedom of students to choose resources of interest to them.

Some limitations of this study, such as the absence of discussion about the impacts of EIS training on students' English proficiency, or the single education level studied, could be a basis to guide further study in the area. Despite the limitations, this study still offers valuable insights for other EFL teachers and practitioners who work in ELT contexts with minimum resources as an alternative way to improve and maximize students' English language learning.

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Appendix
Survey on the Continuity of English Independent Study

Personal Information
1. Which BSC class were you?
   ☐ BSC A   ☐ BSC B
2. What is your sex?
   ☐ Male   ☐ Female
3. How old are you?
   _____ years old
4. What is your TOEIC score?
   _____

INSTRUCTION: Based on your real experience, please answer the question below. You are allowed to answer using either English or *Bahasa Indonesia*.

1. How useful was the information and training on English Independent Study you received during the BSC class last semester?

Not Useful	Less Useful	Somewhat Useful	Useful	Very Useful
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. What English Independent Study activities that you still did after the class finished or even until the present time? And what about the frequency of the activities?*

Independent Study Activities	Frequency			
	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Example: listening to English songs				X

   Note: *Seldom* (less than once in a month), *Sometimes* (one to three times a month), *Often* (once a week or more), *Very Often* (everyday)

3. Do you think doing English Independent Study is useful for improving your English proficiency? If so, in what way?
   ☐ No, it is not useful.
   ☐ Yes, it is useful, for example . . . (e.g., it adds my English vocabulary)

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____ *

4. In your personal context, what are the affordances (*pendorong*) and barriers (*hambatan*) of doing English Independent Study?

       Affordances: (e.g., I love reading books, so I choose English books)

       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

       Barriers: (e.g., I am too busy with organization, I don't have time)

       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

If you need more space, you can continue behind the page.

Explanations of Request Formulations by Vietnamese Learners of English in Australia

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Request performances can be influenced by contextual factors. This paper examines the explanations of the request formulations of six Vietnamese learners of English in Australia. The retrospective interviews provide interesting insights into learners' request wording, such as the underlying motivations and reasoning, that are not apparent in traditional analyses of the forms. First, an analysis of learners' contextual perceptions shows that age differences, perceptions of the relative role relationship, and the formality of the situation influence their request formulation. Second, learners' judgements of politeness and their reported use of politeness devices suggest that learners may rely on supportive moves to manage harmony with their interlocutors. Therefore, the study suggests that appeal to alternative sociopragmatic interpretations could be the main reason for the differences in making requests between Vietnamese learners of English and English native speakers. The findings may advocate the explicit teaching of request speech acts for Vietnamese learners.

This study employed retrospective interviews following discourse completion tasks (DCTs) to explore learners' pragmatic knowledge about request speech acts. Requests are both common and sensitive in daily communication. They are particularly important for learners in a study-abroad context who cannot avoid making requests during their stay. Request formulations are influenced by contextual factors which are culture specific (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). To make an appropriate request for a specific communicative situation, a learner has to take into consideration the contextual factors involved, for example, the relative social power and the extent of social distance from the interlocutor, and then be able to select appropriate linguistic forms to carry out the act (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Literature on requests has predominantly focused on performance data, such as role-plays or written DCTs. Little research has provided insights into what underlies request performances, especially for Southeast Asian learners of English. Examining transcriptions of verbal reports could be one useful method in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research, since this could provide insights into learners' perceptions of speech act situations and the influence of such perceptions on speech act utterances (Cohen, 2004). This study used interviews following written DCTs to examine the reasoning for request formulations by Vietnamese learners of English regarding perceptions about contextual factors, politeness consideration, and the use of supportive moves (i.e., peripheral elements).

Literature Review

Interlanguage Requests

Requests have been one of the most researched speech acts in cross-cultural linguistics and interlanguage pragmatics studies since the 1980s. The majority of studies on requests by non-native speakers (NNS) of English have been contrastive analyses of native speaker (NS) and NNS comprehension and production (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009, 2010). A request consists of a request head act, with or without request modification devices or request modifiers. A request head act is "the nucleus of the request" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 2002) which helps the requestee to realize the requestive force of the act. It is thus the central part of a request. A request modifier is an additional optional element that may precede or follow the request head act and is important in requesting, in that it helps to vary politeness levels of the requesting act. It does not necessarily change the propositional meanings of the head act but serves to downgrade or upgrade its requestive force (see Schauer, 2009; Trosborg, 1995).

In her framework of rapport management, Spencer-Oatey (2008) proposed four important sets of contextual factors influencing request performances: participant relations, message content, social / interactional roles, and activity type. Participant relations consist of four subfactors: power, distance, interrelationship between power and distance, and the number of participants taking part in the act. Message content is a broader term for what Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 81) and others have termed "imposition" or "rank of imposition." It consists of the considerations of costs, such as time, effort, imposition, inconvenience, and risk. Social / interactional roles refers to relationships such as teacher-student, employer-employee, chairperson-committee member, and friend-friend, as people have the right to have expectations of the other member and the responsibility to carry out obligations. Activity type refers to the conventions about how to structure a particular type of communicative activity.

Mitigating devices in requests function "to reduce any negative impact associated with the speech act" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 23). Findings from production data research show that NNSs have often been found to differ from their native counterparts in mitigating their requests in particular communication situations (see Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009). These differences may be culture specific because cultures may differ in both "the frequency of use of given levels of directness in given situations, and also in the rapport management value associated with the level of directness chosen for a given situation" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 23). For example, in Vietnam, directness is often used in situations where interlocutors have a close relationship or where they wish to enhance solidarity (Sasaki, 1998). However, Vu (1997) argued that indirectness may be also used in relation to degrees of imposition of utterances.

Aside from ILP and cross-cultural pragmatic studies employing production data, some studies combined the production data by using DCTs with retrospective verbal reports to investigate learners' pragmatic knowledge. Research using retrospective verbal reports as data has provided more insights into what underlies speech act performance, such as learners' thinking, reasoning, or motivations (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Felix-Brasdefer, 2008; Hassall, 2008; Robinson, 1992; Woodfield, 2010).

Requests by Vietnamese Learners of English

Although there have been several studies dealing with requests by learners of English across a range of languages backgrounds, for example Danish (Trosborg, 1995), Greek (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2009), Jordanian-Arabic (Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010), and German (Schauer, 2009), there are only a few exclusively investigating interlanguage requests by Vietnamese learners of

English. Ha (1998) used a DCT questionnaire to research a group of third-year Vietnamese English majors and compared their requests with those made by a group of Australian English NSs. She found that Vietnamese learners used more direct request strategies (e.g., imperatives) and underused request modifiers in their requests compared to NSs (Ha, 1998). Pham (2001) carried out a study with a group of Vietnamese students in Australia and compared the results with Ha's (1998) to evaluate the effects of students' proficiency levels and length of their residence in the target country on making requests. He found that his participants used more direct requests with fewer internal modifiers (i.e., syntactical modifiers) but more external modifiers (e.g., reasons) than their NS counterparts. His participants were more native-like than Ha's (1998) in employing request strategies and modifications (Pham, 2001). The results suggested that the proficiency levels and length of residence in the target country have positive effects on the acts of requesting of the language learners. This finding is in line with Schauer's (2009) larger study on German learners of English in a study-abroad context, which showed that studying abroad could help learners be more aware of social norms of the target language and thus behave in a more native-like manner.

These studies used performance data, which might provide an incomplete view of learners' pragmatic knowledge. The present study employed retrospective interviews following written DCTs to explore the learners' reflections on their actual requesting utterances. It explores learners' perceptions of contextual factors and the influence of these factors on their request formulations, including the use of strategy types, mitigating device *please*, and supportive moves.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:
1. How do Vietnamese learners of English perceive requesting situations?
2. How do these perceptions influence the request formulations of Vietnamese learners of English?
3. What are learners' perceptions of politeness in requests and how do they achieve politeness?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the study were six Vietnamese students enrolled at a mid-sized multinational university in Victoria, Australia. Four were postgraduates and two were undergraduates. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27, and all had an IELTS of 6.0 or over and used English as a medium of study and everyday communication. Length of stay in the target language community ranged from 17 to 49 months. To select participants, 120 students in the e-mail list of the Association of Vietnamese students were invited to participate by email. Of 33 who volunteered to participate, three males and three females were then selected randomly.

Data Collection

Method, instruments, and procedure. The data were collected through DCTs and retrospective interviews. The DCTs employed consist of three scenarios varying along the dimension of relative social power between the requester and the requestee. These scenarios have been used by Ha (1998) and Pham (2001) to examine learners' requesting strategies and modifications. Participants were asked to read the scenarios and write what they would say (see Appendix A). The retrospective interviews in this study were to elicit learners' perceptions of the requesting situations and their evaluations of their request wordings. The interviews

consisted of both fixed and data-driven questions based on participant responses in the DCTs (see Appendix B).

Participants individually met with the researcher and received instructions for completing the written DCTs, which specified that they should try to understand the scenarios and provide answers as naturally as possible. After the participants finished the scenarios, they were asked to participate in an interview regarding their responses in the DCTs. Both DCT responses and interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded with interviewee consent for transcription and analysis. The same process was administered for every participant. Each interview session lasted from 40 to 50 minutes, yielding about 5 hours of recorded conversation.

Data Analysis

The DCTs were analysed using Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme taken from the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns Project (CCSARP). Participants' requests were categorised into request strategies of the request head acts and types of request modifiers.

Verbal report transcripts were then analysed according to participants' metalinguistic knowledge statements. To examine participants' perceptions of contextual factors and politeness, the metalinguistic statements were coded according to participants' comments relating to participants' perceptions of contextual factors, politeness considerations, perceptions of the politeness marker *please*, and consideration of supportive moves.

Findings and Discussion

Contextual Factors

Most participants reported that they understood the requesting situations and took into consideration various contextual and cultural factors before deciding how to word their requests. They reported noticing the urgency of the requests, the requestive goals, and the relationships between the requester and requestee, such as roles, power, distance, and age. Overall assessment of these factors, sometimes reflecting combinations of factors, contributed to the perceptions of the situations as formal or informal. These perceptions were shown to influence the way participants shaped their requests in the DCTs. The variable of power was found to influence participants' request formulations. However, the nature of the relationship is different from what has been found in the literature.

Power, roles, and rights. Situation 1 (see Appendix A), a police officer asking a driver to show his / her driving licence, was perceived as formal. Four participants commented that in the role of police officer, they should behave politely to keep their image and that a police officer should be responsible for his job and respect others. For example, Participant 1 commented, "[As] I am a police officer, I have to ask nicely [to] the law breaker."

In this situation, the requester has more power than the requestee; the requester also has a legitimate right to ask and the requestee has an obligation to carry out the requested act. Blum-Kulka and House (1989) claimed that level of directness correlates strongly with the expectation of rights and obligations between the requester and the requestee. This study's findings do not support this claim. This may be due to the influence of the participants' perception that a police officer has an obligation to behave politely as part of their job. This finding shows that "sociality rights and obligations" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 16) (e.g., rights and obligations between teachers and students, parents and children or police and passengers)

influence the way learners formulate their requests. However, the influence is not necessarily in the way that their requests' directness correlates with requesters' rights and the requestees' obligations, as suggested in Blum-Kulka and House (1989) and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010).

Discussing terms related to interlocutors' role, Spencer-Oatey (1996) pointed out that in some cases, interpretations of power in relationship to rights and obligations are not obvious and are complex. Regarding Situation 1, the police officer has a legitimate right to ask for a driver's licence when the driver does not obey the traffic rules; and the driver has an obligation to show it. However, in Vietnamese culture, the driver could have the right to expect the police to behave politely; and the police officer may also have the obligation to behave politely towards the driver.

Participants may be more concerned about their obligation as a police officer to give good service to people. For example, Participant 3 reported, "Yeah, because I'm a police officer, I have to behave politely, that's why I used *sir* to talk to the driver." They all, thus, would request politely with supportive moves and the query preparatory strategy type. For example, Participant 1 reported how he would make the request: "Excuse me, I'm a police officer on duty. This is my identity card. You have just gone through [a] red light, so could you please show me your driver's license?" The DCT results and reports in this example are consistent with this interpretation. Spencer-Oatey (2008) stated that different cultural groups of people may expect different typical degrees of power and distance and / or socially-defined rights and obligations, which influences their assessments of appropriate language use.

Rapport enhancement. Situation 2 (see Appendix A), asking a new neighbour to help open the front door, was perceived as informal. Participants commented that they would try to make this request in a friendly way. Participant 2, for example, commented, "I think most about how to make something more friendly, less formal."

Participants' comments show that they held a "rapport enhancement orientation" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 32) and attempted to enhance the harmony of their relationship with other interlocutors. They did not try to use request strategies and mitigating devices to avoid threatening the other's face or infringing on the other's sense of sociality rights. Yet, they tried to establish a good relationship with the other (the neighbour). Participant 2 commented, "In Situation 2, I want to be friendly by talking to him before asking him to help." Participants chose to manage the harmony with the other interlocutor (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) or tried to be liked by the other interlocutor by talking in the same way that they talk to friends and relatives. This may be due to the Vietnamese collectivist culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) in which speakers tend to establish, maintain, and sustain common grounds and social relationships with the interlocutors (Trần, 2004). Spencer-Oatey (2008) also noted that people of different cultural backgrounds assess contextual factors differently, which has substantial impact on their language use.

Comments from the interviews also show a close relationship between the formality and politeness judgements (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006). Participant 4 commented, "Situation 2 is informal so I use [a] less polite request than in the first situation." In an informal situation, participants would not try to employ indirect requests with internal modification. Three reported that they would use *Can you give me a hand?* to realize their requests, a relatively direct request used when the requester does not estimate any potential face risk. Participants also reported that they would use informal openers such as *hey* instead of *excuse me* in their requests. This finding lends support to Felix-Brasdefer (2006) in that direct requests may not threaten the requestee's face but instead may be used to express closeness or affiliation.

According to Vu (1997, p. 221), in informal situations, Vietnamese speakers often employ "respectful politeness" strategies, relying on rules of respect and solidarity. In this study, Participant 1, for example, explained that "You show him that you respect him so he will know that you want him to respect you." Participants reported that they would employ more request modifications with formal honorifics (e.g., *sir*), the past tense of auxiliary verbs (e.g., *could*), or a consultative device (e.g., *would you mind*) to formulate their requests (see Situation 1, Appendix A). Participants judged these modifications as important in formulating polite requests. Indirectness is likely to be considered and used in these formal situations (Sasaki, 1998). Consequently, formal situations may be more likely to generate polite requests, while informal situations may be more likely to generate friendly, informal, but not necessarily impolite, requests.

Age and urgency. Situation 3 (see Appendix A), stopping an old man on a country road to borrow a jack to fix a flat tyre, was perceived as urgent and serious, but participants reported that polite requests were necessary. All participants noticed the age difference between the interlocutors, and three considered this situation serious due to its urgency. For instance, Participant 4 commented that "I saw a guy who is older than me and I need his help, the guy, he's older than me. [You] can see the language I use, it's more polite and respect[ful] to the man."

The goal and urgency of the requesting situation and the age difference between interlocutors influenced participants' requests. The DCTs show that the participants would use formal requests and ways of addressing the requestee (e.g., *sir*) or apologizing (e.g., *sorry sir, excuse me*) in this situation. Thus, the requestive goal and request urgency significantly influence how participants shape their requests (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010).

Regarding the age difference between interlocutors, all participants considered this a significant factor influencing their request formulation. Age may be one of the most influential factors influencing Vietnamese speakers' language use (Sasaki, 1998). For example, Participant 6 said, "I think most about the fact that he's older than me." The universal social norm is that the young have to communicate with older people respectfully (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Le, 2011; Sasaki, 1998). In Vietnamese, there are various kinship terms (Sasaki, 1998) to address others of a different age, such as *anh* (brother), *chị* (sister), *cô* (aunt), *chú* (uncle), *bác* (uncle), *ông* (grandfather), and *bà* (grandmother). These may influence participants' choice of terms of address and openers of a request. In the DCT, two participants reported that they would address the interlocutor with *sir*, and two participants would begin with *excuse me*, both showing formality.

Politeness Considerations

Participants' comments in the interviews show that they are normally aware of politeness when making a request. All six reported that politeness would need to be considered when making requests. The following example illustrates how participants perceive politeness and why they considered politeness as important:

> Politeness is very important because the first thing is [that] you show him that you are very responsible for your job [or] your position and the second thing is [that] you respect him. When you do this, he will know that you ask him to respect you. (Participant 1)

This participant expresses respectful politeness, which relies on the rule of respect (Sasaki, 1998). However, in some cases, participants reported that they would not want to make a formal request because this would conflict with their attempts to create a friendly atmosphere. This dichotomy is set up clearly in Situation 2, where the power is equal. Participants noted that this situation was informal, thus they reported that they would want to frame their request as they would when talking to friends. For example, when Participant 6 was asked whether she thought about politeness when making requests, she answered, "Yes, but not too much because I want to make it more friendly."

Perceptions of the Politeness Marker *Please*

Participants' interview comments show that the use of politeness marker *please* might be overgeneralised and used with every request. However, sometimes it is interpreted as too formal, and because it might devalue the requester's rights, it is not used. Participants' comments may show that the way *please* is interpreted could be in some way influenced by participants' first language.

Participant 5 reported that to make a request, she would just use *please* and a question. This way, her requests could always be shaped in the form of query preparatory strategy, the most common request formulation of both NSs and L2 learners of English (Trosborg, 1995). She reported that she would use *please* in all three situations. Participant 2 overgeneralised the use of *please* when he said "*please* is a magic word" in making requests. He reported that he would use *please* in Situations 1 and 3. This finding supports previous studies using performance data that suggest L2 learners may overgeneralise the target language pragmatic conventions (e.g., Robinson, 1992). In contrast, Participant 4 reported that he would use *please* only in the first situation. He considered that the word *please* should be only used for particular reasons and explained, "You can see that in the first situation (red light), that guy made mistake, not me and I didn't borrow [anything] from him so I didn't say *please*."

This feeling is more clearly reflected in Participant 6's interview. She reported that she would not use *please* in any of her three requests because she perceived that *please* was too formal and might devalue her right to ask in these requesting situations. She would choose not to use *please* due to her individual identity, not because she lacked knowledge of this politeness marker. In Situation 3, she reported that she would not have the right to ask and the driver has little or no obligation to respond. Yet she still wanted to keep her sense of identity and reported that she would not use *please* to mitigate her request. She explained, "Because when I put *please* it seems like that my position in the situation is less strong than I am."

Spencer-Oatey (2008) noted that people have a fundamental desire for others to evaluate them positively. Participants' consideration about their identities may have influenced their language choice, and their first language may have influenced their perceptions. The lexical word *please* may be equivalent to either *xin vui lòng* or *làm ơn* in Vietnamese. These words are rarely employed but can be used in formal requesting situations or in situations where the rank of imposition is high ((Le, 2011). This is in line with Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2009) study, which found that Greek learners of English underused the politeness marker *please* due to the influence of Greek.

Supportive Moves

The study suggests that participants would tend to opt for using supportive moves in every request because they would feel comfortable using them and that supportive moves would be significant in making requests. A blunt request was considered to be inappropriate. Two

participants reported that they would use supportive moves to show politeness and respect to the interlocutors. Such supportive moves as openers (e.g., *excuse me, good afternoon*) and honorifics (e.g., *sir*) were thus used. For example, Participant 4 commented:

> As you can see, we are two strangers and we didn't know [each other] before so we just like say [*sic*] hi or something like that, and the reasons why [I] call[ed] them [the polite form], it's also the politeness in the conversation.

As a part of a collectivist culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Trần, 2004) Vietnamese speakers approach the communicative goal in a circular manner, contrary to individualist cultures. One thus often chooses to talk about background information before getting to the main communicative purpose, as he / she wants to establish rapport and make the interlocutor feel part of speaker's in-group prior to making the main request (also called the head act). In other words, the speaker is oriented towards enhancing rapport and harmony with the interlocutor (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Vu, 1997). Vu (1997) argued that, in Vietnamese culture, supportive moves may be one of the three most important devices in achieving politeness, the others being kinship terms of address and indirectness. A similar finding was reported in the collectivist Jordanian culture. Al-Ali and Alawneh (2010) suggested that Jordanian learners of English opted to use request grounders (i.e., reasons, explanations, or justifications) because they believed that a grounder is less face-threatening than a request head act. Thus, in this study, making a blunt request before justifying its need could "be considered an act of flippancy or discourtesy especially in situations which involve the social factors of power and distance" (Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010, p. 327). The interview data shows that these Vietnamese participants reported that they would rely more on the use of supportive moves to express their politeness, which can be regarded as respectful politeness (Vu, 1997). Participants also reported that they would not tend to use language strategically to avoid face threats, but that they would attempt to enhance a good relationship with the other interlocutor.

Conclusion

This study employed DCTs and retrospective interviews to explore participants' pragmatic knowledge about the speech act of requests. The analyses of participants' comments on their request performance reveal several findings about their perceptions of contextual factors and how these perceptions influence their request formulations, use of the politeness marker *please*, and supportive moves. The findings show that participants tend to perceive relative power relationships, sociality rights and obligations, and age as the most influential factors.

There are several limitations to this study. First, data from a small number of participants makes it impossible to generalise the findings. Second, this self-report study without any research observation could be easily biased because participants are only reporting what they *think* they would say, which might not be what they would say in a real situation. Moreover, all of the participants were Vietnamese who share the same first language and cultural background.

However, the study still may suggest that Vietnamese learners of English attempt to enhance rapport and harmony with their requestees in informal situations, which supports Spencer-Oatey's (2008) theory of rapport management. The study also suggests that Vietnamese learners of English tended to use supportive moves in every request but would not use *please* frequently because it was perceived as too formal. This may be due to the influence of the Vietnamese language and culture. Therefore, explicit teaching of *please* in making requests, with specific attention paid to its role in English-speaking culture, may be advisable.
Future research should include larger numbers of participants to further examine the use of *please* by Vietnamese learners of English in making requests. It should also triangulate data

with role-plays, retrospective verbal reports, and especially, actual observation of speech acts for more generalisable results. The use of participants from various cultural and first language backgrounds should also be employed.

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Appendix A
The Discourse Completion Tasks (Ha, 1998)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather some background information and to find out what you would naturally say in three situations listed below (Part II).

Part 1: Personal Details
1. Your gender (circle one): Male / Female
2. Your age:
3. Are you doing an undergraduate / postgraduate degree?
    Your course:
4. When did you arrive in Australia? Month:_____ Year:_____

Part 2: Three Situations
Write down what you think you would say in the following situations.

1. You are a police officer on duty. You see a car going through red traffic lights. You stop the car and ask the driver to show you his / her driving licence.
    You say:

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

2. You are a doctor. You have just moved into a new flat. You have difficulty opening the front door. Just at that moment one of your neighbours, who is also a doctor, and whom you talked to yesterday approached you. You want to ask for help.
    You say:

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

3. You are driving along a country road and discover you have a flat tyre. You do not have a jack with you. Another car is coming towards you. You wave down the car. The driver, who is older than you, stops and pops his head out.
    You say:

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Appendix B
Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

I would like to ask you about the answers you provided in the questionnaire. All three answers are formulated as requests.

Scenario 1 (repeated for Scenarios 2 and 3)
1. What did you notice about the situation when you first read the scenario?
2. What did you think most about when you wrote the request?
3. What factors influenced your decision to word your request as you did? Did you consider the relationship between you and the other person in the situation? (If so / if not: what factors did you consider and how did this affect your request?)
4. Did you think about politeness when making the request?
5. Could you give me some other alternative ways that you might have worded a request in this situation?
   a. Now looking back over your answer, why do you think you decided to write the phrase [*…………*] when you were making the request? What do you think this phrase does? What does this wording achieve for you when you use it?
   b. Why did you use [……] (and not [……] for example) in this situation?

At the End of the Interview
Were you satisfied with your answers?
Did you think of these requests in Vietnamese and then translate them into English? Do you think this affected your answers?
Do you think the way you learned English affected any of your responses?

An Investigation of the Cover, Copy, and Compare Method for EFL Spelling

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This research study examines the effects of the cover, copy, and compare (CCC) spelling study method on Taiwanese junior high students enrolled in an upper-beginner level English as a Foreign Language course. Data were collected on the change in scores between four tests. Test results show a slight difference between a control group and experimental group in gains of correctly spelled words between the pretest and the posttest. However in two delayed posttests, the experimental group retained their gains slightly better than the control group. The results suggest that CCC may help English learners retain studied spelling words, but further research is required to confirm its effectiveness.

The Importance of Spelling

Spelling is an important skill for English Language Learners (ELLs). Strong skills in spelling have been said to make both reading and writing easier, allowing the student to focus on ideas rather than on letters in a word (Joshi, Treiman, Carreker, & Moats, 2008-2009). Spelling, whether good or bad, can often influence perceptions of other people toward the speller since spelling is seen as a "serious social error, making a person, at least, illiterate if not outright ignorant" (Cronnell, 1979, p. 202). Poorly spelled words can lead to frustration and embarrassment for English language learners (Joshi et al., 2008). With the availability of technologies such as spell check, one may easily dismiss the idea that strong spelling skills are needed. However, Jones (2009) reminds us that the technology is not a complete solution, with the user still having to pick the correct word from a list of suggestions.

To increase the ease of literacy skills and to avoid social criticism, learning to spell correctly is important. Therefore, teachers of ELLs must be equipped with solid pedagogical practices for spelling to help their students succeed. This paper will examine the effects of a spelling study method called Cover, Copy, and Compare (hereafter CCC) on upper-beginner EFL junior high school students' spelling ability in terms of initial success and retention of correctly spelled words. It begins with a survey of the literature that documents attitudes toward spelling instruction in EFL contexts and the successes of CCC with a variety of student populations. It then describes the methods of the current study on CCC conducted with junior high school EFL students in Taiwan. The paper ends with a discussion of the effects of CCC and a call for further study.

Literature Review

Spelling Instruction in EFL Contexts

The teaching of spelling is a contested issue in the field of foreign language teaching (Pérez Cañado, 2006). The debate revolves around the issue of whether to allow spelling to be learned through explicit instruction or to be learned implicitly. Researchers such as Krashen (1989) present evidence that suggests adequate exposure to text will result in spelling ability. However, Shemesh and Waller (2000) suggest that a more explicit approach is necessary. Some such as Nation (2009) advocate for a balanced approach. This lack of clear consensus may be why researchers of EFL tend to focus on other areas such as vocabulary and grammar rather than spelling (Mahmoud, 2013). Although the debate continues, Graham and Santangelo's (2014) meta-analysis resulted in support for explicit spelling instruction.

What is Cover, Copy, and Compare?

CCC is a study method used to help students improve their skills in spelling (Skinner, McLaughlin, & Logan, 1997), math (Skinner, Bamberg, Smith, & Powell, 1993), geography (Skinner, Belfiore, & Pierce, 1992), sight word recognition (Conley, Derby, Roberts-Gwinn, Weber, & McLaughlin, 2004), science (Smith, Dittmer, & Skinner, 2002) and foreign language acquisition (Carter, Wong, & Mayton, 2013). CCC requires three steps. First, the student looks at a stimulus to be mastered, such as a written word, a mathematics problem with an answer, or another item relevant to the subject. Second, the student covers the stimulus from step one and makes a response either orally or in written form. Third, the student looks at the original stimulus item and compares it with the response (Skinner, McLaughlin, & Logan, 1997, p. 296). Whether an additional step is required depends on the response. If correct, the student repeats the process for the next academic stimulus. If incorrect, the student corrects the mistake, redoes the CCC process, or engages in another type of practice.

Research Findings on CCC

Research on CCC for spelling has been conducted on many different age groups and classroom situations. The results of studies have shown CCC to be helpful with improving the spelling of elementary (Darrow, McLaughlin, Derby, & Johnson, 2012; Erion, Davenport, Rodax, Scholl, & Hardy, 2009) and middle school students (Hollingsworth, Keith, McLaughlin, & Derby, 2012; Poindexter, McLaughlin, Derby, & Johnson, 2012). A study by Merritt, McLaughlin, Weber, Derby, and Barretto (2012) concluded that CCC produces positive results for students classified as at-risk. Furthermore, Cordes, McLaughlin, Derby, and Higgins (2012) reported positive results of using CCC with an elementary student with autism. Poindexter, McLaughlin, Derby, and Johnson (2012) studied a seventh-grade male with learning disabilities and a study by Hollingsworth, Keith, McLaughlin, and Derby (2012) found that CCC was also effective for a seventh-grade male with severe behavior disorders. As for high school, Carter, McLaughlin, Derby, Schuler, and Everman (2011) used CCC to help increase the spelling accuracy for four high school students diagnosed with severe behavior disorders. These studies demonstrate CCC's versatility in many classroom settings.

Although these mostly single-case and small-group studies have suggested that CCC alone facilitated increases in spelling ability, Membrey, McLaughlin, Derby, and Antcliff's (2011) study of three middle-school students revealed that adding steps to CCC can increase its effectiveness. Although the researchers found that all three students improved after implementation of CCC, for one student, the researchers added copying and spelling out loud to the procedure. Following the modification, the student scored perfect scores on the last three spelling tests.

Although the effects of CCC have been documented for many age groups and student types, no studies were found during a search of the literature that studied CCC's effects on EFL students. In one recent study, Carter, Wong, and Mayton (2013) studied the use of CCC in a Spanish class by a 15-year-old student diagnosed with a learning disability. However, the focus of this study was on reading and translation, not spelling. CCC has been shown to be "effective for increasing performance across curricula, settings, and subjects" (Skinner, McLaughlin, & Logan, 1997, p. 296), but the research currently lacks data to support its effectiveness with EFL students. This study fills this gap by testing the effects of CCC on EFL students.

Methodology

The Context

This study took place in an English as a Foreign Language junior high school classroom in northern Taiwan. The study was conducted with 18 seventh-grade Taiwanese students enrolled in an upper-beginner English class. All students in the class had studied English for varying periods of time prior to entering the school, but a spectrum of ability levels existed within the class. Using the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (2006) Levels of English Language Proficiency, student ability level ranged from Level 2 (Emerging), with ability to "communicate limited information in simple, everyday and routine situations by using memorized phrases, groups of words, and formulae," to Level 4 (Expanding), with language skills "adequate for most day-to-day communication needs" (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2006, p. 40).

Data Collection: Spelling Tests

The 18 seventh-grade EFL students were administered four identical spelling tests: a pretest, a posttest, and two delayed posttests, with intervals described below. All of the tests required the students to spell the same 10 words (see Appendix A). These words were taken from the unit they were covering in the course reading textbook as required by the school's course syllabus. For all tests, the teacher dictated each word twice and the students wrote the words on the test paper. Scores on each test were out of 10 and 1 point was given for each correctly spelled word. The target score on the tests was 7 or higher, which would be considered passing.

The pretest was given before any instruction had occurred and was used to gauge the students' prior knowledge of words. Following the pretest, the students were divided evenly into two groups: nine in a control group and nine in an experimental group. These groups were based on students' pretest scores, with the goal of having an even balance of spelling ability in both groups.

Seven days following the pretest, a posttest was given. Immediately prior to the administering of the posttest, students in the experimental group were given a CCC study grid with five columns (see Appendix B). Students were instructed to look at the first column with the spelling word. Next, they wrote the word into the second column. Following that, students covered the first two columns with their textbook. Without looking at the first two columns, the student wrote the word into the third column from memory. The students then removed the textbook from the first two columns and compared their spelling in the third column. If their spelling was correct, students put a checkmark in the fourth column and moved on to the next word. If their spelling was incorrect, students wrote the word one more time in the final column without covering the other columns. The experimental group was allowed to work through the CCC study grid at their own pace and was not given any time restrictions. While the experimental group completed the CCC study grid, the control group was instructed to study their vocabulary list quietly in preparation for the test.

At an interval of 5 days and 19 days following the posttest, delayed posttests were administered in the same way as the posttest in order to gauge retention. These intervals were chosen based on Pimsleur's (1967) graduated interval recall schedule, but adapted to the class meeting schedule (i.e., the 19th day was used as opposed to the 22nd as called for by Pimsleur). Students were not explicitly informed, other than through the study consent form, that these tests would occur. Unlike the posttest, where CCC was administered to the experimental group and the control group studied independently, neither group of students was given any time prior to the tests to prepare. These delayed posttests were administered after the completion of the reading unit.

Findings

Spelling Test: Pretest

The pretest results showed that most of the 18 students were not familiar with the majority of the words prior to instruction. With the exception of two students who correctly spelled six and five words correctly out of ten, the majority of students were only able to spell two words or fewer on the pretest. Five students correctly spelled two words, six students correctly spelled one word, and five students were not able to spell any of the words correctly.

Spelling Test: Posttest

Results from the spelling tests show that the gain between the pretest and posttest for both the control and experimental group were similar. Both groups' highest score was ten words correct and both groups' lowest score was three words correct. The control group went from an average of 1.6 words correct on the pretest to an average of 7.3 words correct on the posttest with an average gain of 5.7 words. Similarly, the experimental group went from an average of 1.4 words correct on the pretest to an average of 6.9 words correct on the posttest with an average gain of 5.5 words.

Table 1

Control Group Scores

Participant	Pretest	Posttest	Delayed Posttest 1	Delayed Posttest 2
C1	0	10	1	1
C2	1	5	2	0
C3	1	7	3	1
C4	1	3	4	4
C5	0	10	4	3
C6	1	7	5	4
C7	2	7	5	7
C8	2	8	5	8
C9	6	9	10	9

Note: The highest possible score for all spelling tests is 10.

Table 2
Experimental Group Scores

Participant	Pretest	Posttest	Delayed Posttest 1	Delayed Posttest 2
E1	2	9	7	5
E2	0	3	2	3
E3	1	6	4	4
E4	2	7	6	6
E5	0	7	5	5
E6	2	8	6	9
E7	1	9	5	6
E8	5	10	10	8
E9	0	3	2	1

Note: The highest possible score for all spelling tests is 10.

Spelling Test: Delayed Posttests

Although the two groups were similar in their gains between the pretest and the posttest, there was a difference in the loss of words between the posttest and the two delayed posttests with the experimental group exhibiting slightly better retention. The control group went from an average of 7.3 words correct on the posttest to an average of 4.3 words correct on the first delayed posttest, an average loss of three words. The average dropped slightly to 4.1 for the second delayed posttest. In contrast, the experimental group went from an average of 6.9 words correct on the posttest to an average of 5.2 words correct on the first delayed posttest with an average loss of 1.7 words. The average remained the same, 5.2, with a slight change in the standard deviation for the second delayed posttest.

Conclusion

Outcomes

Based on the scores from the spelling pretest, there was only a slight difference between the experimental group and the control group. Although there was an increase in correctly spelled words from pretest to posttest, the control group who spent time independently studying the list produced comparable results to the CCC group.

However, the delayed posttests revealed some difference in losses in retention incurred between the experimental group and the control group. The numbers suggest that CCC helped the students retain words slightly better than the control group in both delayed posttests. Although both groups' scores declined, the control group declined slightly more than the experimental group for the first delayed posttest with a slight additional decline after the second delayed posttest. In contrast, the experimental group declined less for the first delayed posttest and maintained their average for the second delayed posttest.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study. First, this study was conducted with only one set of words. Questions remain about the effectiveness of CCC for EFL students if multiple sets were considered. It is feasible that the use of CCC over time with a larger cumulative list of words may produce better results. The effectiveness of CCC with more words tested warrants further research.

Another limitation is the size of the group studied. With only eighteen students involved in the study, nine in each group, the size of the group is not large enough to definitively make

conclusions about the implications for the larger population of EFL students. Future studies using larger groups of EFL students in different contexts are required to determine the effectiveness of CCC with EFL students.

Implications

This paper explores the effects of the spelling study method Cover, Copy and Compare. As revealed in the literature review, CCC has been shown to be a successful method with a variety of populations, yet the EFL context has not been thoroughly explored to date. Most current EFL spelling research focuses on error analysis, largely ignoring the research area of spelling instructional methods (Mahmoud, 2013). To the knowledge of the author, this study is the first to explore the CCC spelling teaching method in an EFL context and adds to the sparse research on EFL spelling instructional methods. Because of the importance of spelling for EFL students, more studies on CCC and other EFL spelling instructional methods are needed.

Although the scores of the experimental group did not rise substantially above the control group, the retention data suggests that CCC may still be useful in the EFL classroom. Fountas and Pinnell (2000) suggest a weekly sequence of spelling activities that includes CCC as one of the activities. Coupled with the additional spelling exercises that could help raise initial spelling ability, CCC could potentially be effective in helping to retain learned spelling words. However, further study would be required to confirm this assertion.

Unfortunately, the study did not produce the desired rise in EFL spelling scores for the group of EFL junior high students in the study, and questions still remain on the effectiveness of CCC on EFL spelling achievement. Further study is required to confirm these findings. If CCC is found by other studies to be ineffective with EFL students, further analysis would be required to determine why it had been successful with other populations and not with English language learners.

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Appendix A
Spelling Words

1. crust
2. dangerous
3. destroy
4. direction
5. plate
6. powerful
7. pressure
8. fault
9. earthquake
10. tsunami

Appendix B
CCC Study Grid

Spelling Word	Copy	Cover + Copy	Compare	Correction
crust				
dangerous				
destroy				
direction				
plate				
powerful				
pressure				
fault				
earthquake				
tsunami				

About *Language Education in Asia*

Background Information

Language Education in Asia (LEiA) presents well-researched aspects of language education and learning, innovative, practical approaches to classroom practice, discussion on language education issues, and reviews of books on research, practice, or issues in language education relevant to Asia, particularly the ASEAN region. Papers can be submitted by researchers, educators, educational leaders, and other language education professionals. All papers are blind-reviewed by members of the Editorial Board. Accepted papers are published on a biannual basis. The first issue of each volume will highlight exceptional papers presented at the annual CamTESOL Conference Series during that publication year. Each volume is online for public viewing and downloading at: http://www.camtesol.org/publication

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