AWEJ Volume.4 Number.2, 2013

Team of this issue

Editor
Khairi Obaid Al-Zubaidi
language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Reviewers

Prof. Manfred Malzahn, PhD
Director of Research and Graduate Studies Support, United Arab Emirates University, Al-Ain, UAE

Mere Kēpa, PhD
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Ching-yi Tien, PhD
Department of Applied English, I Shou University, Taiwan

Mohammed Al-Shormani, PhD
Department of English, University of Ibb, Yemen

Anwar Abdelrazeq, PhD
College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Birzeit University, Palestine

Joseph Benjamin Afful, PhD
Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Ronnie Goodwin, PhD
Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Kuwait

John Mckeown, PhD
English Education, Mevlana University, Konya, Turkey

David Palfreyman, PhD
Department of Language, Zayed University Dubai, UAE

Ferit Kilickaya, Ph.D
Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Kocaeli University, Turkey

Robert Arthur Coté
Second Language Acquisition and Teaching, University of Arizona, USA

Sahbi Hldri, Ph.D.
The University of Social and Human Sciences of Tunis, Tunisia

Li-chu Sung, PhD
Department of Applied English, Ming Chuan University, Taoyuan, Taiwan

Tsze Sun Li, Ed.D.
College of Economics and Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Choudhry Zahid Javid, PhD
Department of Foreign Languages, Taif University, Saudi Arabia

Weifeng HAN, PhD
Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Yen-Chi Fan, Ed.D.
General Education Center, I-Shou University, Taiwan

Niel Hunt, PhD
Education Faculty, Al Ain Women’s College, U.A.E

Mohamed Mekheimer, Ph.D
Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, KSA

David B. Kent,PhD
Graduate School of TESOL-MALL Woosong University, Daejeon, South Korea
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Article Title &amp; author/s</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Team of this issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Letter from the editor</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Research Paradigms: The Novice Researcher’s Nightmare Marwa Elshafie</td>
<td>4-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Framework for Developing the Basic Academic Competencies in ESL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Programs Manal Mohammad T. Qutub</td>
<td>14-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Culture and Approaches to Learning and Teaching Josephine O’Brien &amp; Sadia Ali</td>
<td>32-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Constructing a Dialogic ESL Classroom: Questioning the Standard Stephanie Sample</td>
<td>46-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Combating the Production of Stereotypes in Undergraduate Writing Alex Henry</td>
<td>59-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Project Works as Vehicles for Authenticity in the Graduate Business School of Sfax, Tunisia Soufiane Trabelsi</td>
<td>77-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Exploring the use of ARS-keepad Technology in English Vocabulary Beena Giridharan</td>
<td>93-105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Students’ Attitudes and Perceptions towards Learning English Amal Ali Alkaff</td>
<td>106-121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teaching the Regular and the Irregular Verbs through a Cultural-based Literary Discourse in an ESL Grammar Classroom Ream Fathi Odetallah</td>
<td>122-136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Closing Techniques for Face-to-Face Conversation in Saudi Educational Institutes</td>
<td>Khadija Abdullah Al-Amoudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vocabulary Development Strategies for the L2 Classroom</td>
<td>Elham Yahia &amp; Richard Sinatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Investigating the Impact of Constructive Planning as Both a Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategy: A Case Study of Third-year LMD Students of English at the University of Constantine 1, Algeria</td>
<td>Rania Boudaoud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Collaborative Student Writing in the Literature Classroom</td>
<td>Ayesha Heble &amp; Sandhya Rao Mehta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Assessing the Arabic-English Bilingual Reading Competences</td>
<td>Jessica Midraj &amp; Sadiq Midraj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Age Factor and Learning English as a Foreign Language at the Elementary and Intermediate Levels at Jarash Province Schools in Jordan</td>
<td>Ahmad Fayez Mutlaq Al-Zu’be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Personality Characteristics as Predictors of Affective Availability to Interact Across Cultures</td>
<td>Solodka Anzhelika Konstantinovna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Developing Students’ Writing Abilities by the Use of Self Assessment through Portfolios</td>
<td>Saliha Chelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Constructive Alignment Vs Experiential Learning for ESL Students</td>
<td>Ethel Reyes-Chua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Challenges of Conducting Research in a Digital Age</td>
<td>Jinjin Lu, Wei Fan &amp; Ruiting Wu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Communication Achievement and the Need for Language Reform</td>
<td>Mohammed Hiddas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tense and Aspect Acquisition in L2 English by Native speakers of Arabic Mahfood Alsalm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Promoting Literacy and Writing Proficiency through a Reading-Based Method</td>
<td>Nassira Boudersa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>The Linguistic Adjustments of the ACT-R Model to the Acquisition of the Simple Past Tense in the Arab Learners of English Context</td>
<td>Anwar Mourssi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Knowledge Construction and Gender in online Debates</td>
<td>Ines Khalsi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Letter from the Editor

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings,

It gives me great pleasure to announce the release of the AWEJ Volume 4 Number 2 issue for 2013. We can also update our readers about new international indexing recognition for the *Arab World English Journal* (AWEJ). AWEJ is now recognized and indexed also by:

- **Open Access Journal Repository (The Open Access of Journal Collection)** USA  

- **I-Shou University Institutional Repository**, Taiwan  
  [http://ir.lib.isu.edu.tw/handle/987654321/15514](http://ir.lib.isu.edu.tw/handle/987654321/15514)

- **TesolGames.com - Teaching English Through, Games USA**  

- **University of Warsaw Library, Poland**  

- **Dayang Journal System: Dy open Access (Korean)**  

- **California State University Monterey Bay, USA**  
  [http://library.csumb.edu/](http://library.csumb.edu/)

- **Florida Institute for Technology, USA**  
  [https://catalog.lib.fit.edu/Record/3113241/Details](https://catalog.lib.fit.edu/Record/3113241/Details)

- **Leipzig University Library, Germany**  

- **Emily Carr University of Art + Design Library**  
  [http://cufts2.lib.sfu.ca/CJDB/BVAVSA/journal/508531](http://cufts2.lib.sfu.ca/CJDB/BVAVSA/journal/508531)

- **MOBIUS, USA**  
  [http://mobius.missouri.edu:2082/record=b26627296~S0](http://mobius.missouri.edu:2082/record=b26627296~S0)

- **Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg - University of Education**  

- **OHSU Library - OREGAN HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY, USA**  

- **MyBookest**  
  [http://mybookest.com/awej_volume_2_number_2_april_2011_pp_5_39/](http://mybookest.com/awej_volume_2_number_2_april_2011_pp_5_39/)

- **biblioteca.universia, Spain**  

As well as others.
Furthermore, as part of AWEJ’s collaboration with our partners in the field of English learning and teaching we have recently published two refereed conference proceedings. One is the Sudan TESOL 2012 conference – go to http://www.awej.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=35&Itemid=134. The second is the English Language Teaching and Literature (ELTL) Conference hosted by Semarang State University – go to http://www.awej.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=36&Itemid=134. Finally, we would like to announce that AWEJ would be happy to discuss collaboration possibilities with other universities and associations. This might also include publishing similar refereed proceedings for conferences that are relevant to AWEJ’s scope.

Kind Regards,

Prof. Dr. Khairi Obaid Al-Zubaidi
Editor
Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)
editor@awej.org
www.awej.org
Research Paradigms: The Novice Researcher’s Nightmare

Marwa Elshafie
Training and Development Section
Ministry of Interior, Qatar.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of three major research paradigms (positivist, interpretivist and critical) and the philosophy underpinning them. It also present a simple explanation to some of the most used terms in educational research: epistemology, ontology, methodology, and methods. Understanding research paradigms is extremely crucial to any novice researchers who embark on the journey of researching for the first time and to any language teachers who are interested in reading research articles.

Keywords: critical paradigm, epistemology, interpretive paradigm, methodology, ontology, positivist paradigm
1. Introduction
Understanding the research paradigms is the first and most crucial step in any researcher’s journey. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define paradigms as “the basic belief system or worldview” which influence the researcher’s choice of epistemology, ontology, and methodology of the research.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994) mention that the ontological assumptions are concerned with the question ‘what is there that can be known?’ or ‘what is the nature of reality?’ Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge. In the words of Guba (1990), epistemology asks, “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?”

According to Crotty (1998: 7), methodology is the “strategy or plan of action” which influences the choice of methods. Guba and Lincoln (1994) point that methodology asks the question: how can the inquirer go about finding the known?

Methods in the words of Troudi (2010: 1) refer to “the particular technique or instrument employed in the process of data collection.”

Each research paradigm has its own ontological and epistemological assumptions that influence its methodology and methods used. The major research paradigms discussed in this paper are: the positivist, the interpretivist, and the critical paradigm.

2. The Positivist Paradigm

2.1 Origin
August Comete is considered to be the populariser of the term positivism (Crotty, 1998). Positivism was the prevailing and most trusted method of inquiry during the 19th century. Positivists share an aversion to metaphysics and for them, “Anything that cannot be verified by experience is meaningless” Blaikie (2009: 98). Some of the popular names associated with positivism are: Frances Bacon (1561-1626), August Comte (1798- 1857), The Vienna Circle (1920), Sir Karl Popper (1902-94), Thomas Kuhn (1922- 96) and Paul Feyerabend (1924-94). The scientific method and the quantitative approach are among the terms used to refer to positivism.

2.2 Theoretical Framework
Realism is the ontological position of positivism which states that, “realities exist outside the mind” Crotty (1998: 10). There is one tangible reality that exists “out there” and can be studied independently with prediction and control (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Guba, 1990 and Grix, 2004).

As for epistemology, the positivist has an objective epistemology which in the words of Crotty(1998: 5) believes that,“things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects.” Thus, there is a clear distinction between the researcher and the researched. The researcher adopts an observer role and treats the social world as the natural world where through prediction, control and careful methodological measures, “values and other biasing and confounding factors are thereby automatically excluded from influencing the outcomes” (Guba, 1990; Cohen et al., 2007). The aim of the research is to produce a “nomothetic body of knowledge” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Punch, 2009). In short, the positivist believes in the “facticity of the world” Scott and Usher (2011: 12).

The positivist believes that the natural world is similar to the social world and the same methods can be used to study both. Hence, the positivist’s methodology is, “experimental / manipulative” Guba (1990:20). In the positivists’ search for patterns and cause and effects in the social world,
they prefer experiments, correlational survey research designs and quantitative statistical analysis. As for methods, they use quantitative methods like tests and questionnaires (Guba and Lincoln, 1982; Crotty, 1998; Punch, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Scott & Usher, 2011).

It is worth noting that positivism with its shallow naïve realism is replaced by postpositivism which is according to Richards (2003:37), “built on recognition of the limitations of positivism and represents an attempt to come in terms with these.” The postpositivist’s ontology is “critical realism” (Guba, 1990) which believes that reality exists outside the individual’s mind, but can be discovered within “a certain realm of probability” Mertens (2010: 14). The aim of scientists is to not to prove a theory, rather to “try to prove it wrong” Crotty (1998: 32)

The postpositivist holds a “modified objectivist” epistemology (Guba, 1990) which still believes in the strict distance between the researcher and the researched, yet it can be “approximate” (Guba, 1990). The researcher should strive to be objective through following controlled standards and procedures (i.e. validity and reliability of the research).

The postpositivist’s methodology is according to Guba (1990): “modified, experimental / manipulative” where it can be done in a natural settings (i.e. quasi experiments) and allowing the use of qualitative methods.

As for Ethics, Mertens (2010: 12) notices that “In the postpositivist’s view, ethics is intertwined with methodology in that the researcher has an ethical obligation to conduct “good” research”. According to Nolen and Putten (2007) the researcher should follow the three ethical standards published by AERA (2000): informed consent, respect confidentiality and autonomy of the participants. Howe and Moses (1999) states that, “For both quantitative and qualitative research studies, the integrity of the research is determined by the authenticity of data, proper data representation, and the political issues surrounding research findings.”

### 2.3 Quality Criteria

Influenced by the scientific method in researching, research in the positivist paradigm is known for its rigor. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), there are four criteria for judging the quality of the positivist research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: The Quality Criteria for Judging the Positivist Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Internal Validity</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **b. External validity**                                     | In the words of Bracht and Glass (1968) external validity refers to “the extent and manner in which the results of an experiment can be generalised to different subjects, settings, experimenters, and, possibly, tests”, which can be increased through random sampling. |

| **c. Reliability**                                           | According to Cohen et al. (2007: 146), reliability “is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents.” In order to trust the quantitative instrument used, two kinds of reliability should be reported. |
The first is the stability of the instrument over time which can be examined using the test - retest technique. The second is the internal consistency of the items in the instruments which is reported by a reliability coefficient (see also Punch, 1998; Perry, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007).

d. Objectivity
Refers to the effectiveness by which the researchers are able to detach themselves from the researched phenomena.

2.4 Critique
According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) positivism is attacked on two levels: the internal or “intraparadigm” critiques (i.e. context stripping and exclusion of meaning and purpose) and the external or “extraparadigm” critiques (i.e. the theory-ladenness of facts and the underdetermination of theory) which they think can be avoided by the use of qualitative data. The positivism is attacked by the interpretivist for ignoring the role of the human actors in constructing reality. They attack the objectivity in the research and the use of scientific methods to study human behaviour as there is no “linear causal method” to understand human behaviour since it is neither stable nor uniform (Gage, 1989). In addition, the critical theorists attack the positivists’ claims of generalization and how they see the world as a “closed system” and totally ignoring its complexity (Blaikie, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007).

In short, positivism as Scott and Usher (2011: 27) note “can therefore be critiqued on the grounds that it fails to understand the multiplicity and complexity of the life world of individuals.” Hence, the interpretivist paradigm emerged.

3. The Interpretive Paradigm

3.1 Origin
Interpretivism emerged as an opposition to positivism. Among some of the popular names associated with this paradigm are: Max Weber, Wilhem Dilthey, George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, and Edmund Husserl. Interpretivism as a paradigm is often associated with other terms like constructionism, naturalism and qualitative approach. It is worth noting the difference between constructionism and subjectivism. While both are epistemologies (although some writers refer to constructionism as ontology i.e. Grix, 2004 and Bryman, 2012) constructionism sees meaning as interplay between the subject and the object as Crotty (1998: 9) states, “meaning is constructed out of something (the object)”. While according to subjectivism meaning, “is imposed on the object from the subject” (Crotty, Ibid). Interpretivism seeks to understand the researched phenomena from the point of views of the people involved. It accepts multiple interpretations and double hermeneutic. Unlike positivism, the research in this paradigm is inductive and emergent and it does not seek generalization as it is context bounded. It is also value laden and seeks ideographic knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Ernest, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Garrick, 1999; Richards, 2003; Grix, 2004; Owen, 2008; Scott & Usher, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012).

3.2 Theoretical Framework
Interpretivism is based on a “relativist and “anti foundationalist” ontology (Guba, 1990; Grix, 2004). Unlike positivists, interpretivists believe in multiple complex realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Cohen et al., 2007) and these realities do not exist independently but they are socially constructed. As for epistemology, it is “subjectivist” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Guba, 1990; Grix, 2004) where meaning is the product of interaction between the subject and the object. Thus, the
aim of interpretive research is to understand these complex realities through the eyes of the social actors as Richards (2003) notices:

Actors are individuals with biographies, acting in particular circumstances at particular times and constructing meanings from events and interactions. An understanding of this develops interpretively as research proceeds, so the relationship between the researcher and the object of investigation is of fundamental importance. (p.38)

In this approach generalisation is not sought and is impossible to achieve as the whole paradigm is based on the respect of the individuality where according to Guba and Lincoln (1982): “differences are as inherently interesting as (and at times more interesting than) similarities.”

And since ontology and epistemology influence methodology, the interpretivist has a dialectic and hermeneutic methodology (Guba, 1990: 27): “individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus.” Among the methodologies used in the interpretive approach are phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Crotty, 1998; Dornyei, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Owen, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Although different in their aim, the interpretive methodologies share some kind of observation, description and studying the phenomena in situ. The researcher’s role is emphasized and the interaction between the researcher and the researched is accepted as long as it is realised and noted.

Mostly qualitative methods are used in the interpretive approach i.e. interviews, field notes, diaries, and observation yet also quantitative methods can be used (Ernest, 1994). In the words of Owen (2008), the ethical dimensions in this approach are: “vast and are in constant need of negotiation throughout the research process.” He adds that the researcher should seek consent from the participant throughout the investigation due to the emergent nature of the interpretive research. In addition, the interpretive paradigm with its respect of the persona compiles the researcher to preserve the participants’ privacy and confidentiality during the research process and when reporting the findings (Howe & Moses, 1999; Willington, 2001; Wertz et al., 2001; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Fikfak et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2012).

3.3 Quality criteria

According to Holliday (2010) trustworthiness in qualitative research depends entirely on how “subjectivity is managed.” The three principles of good qualitative research are: transparency of methods, submission and making appropriate claims. Guba and Lincoln (1982) present four concepts to judge the quality of the interpretive research instead of the positivists’ labels: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability or consistency (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity). They argue that these criteria, “assure the consumer of such research that any and all appropriate steps have been taken to assure that data from human sources and contexts are meaningful, trackable, verifiable, and grounded in the real-life situations from which they were derived” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Guba, 1981; Sandelowski, 1986; Kirk & Miller 1986; Creswell & Miller 2000; Shenton, 2004; Perry, 2011).

3.4 Critique

The interpretive approach is mainly criticised because of its inability to create common judging criteria that matches all the qualitative methodologies as Sandelowski (1986) notes, “In short, the debate surrounding the methodological rigor of qualitative research is confounded by its diversity and by lack of consensus about the rules to which it ought to conform and whether it is comparable to quantitative research.”
Since the approach believes in interpretation and no interpretation is fully correct (Scott & Usher, 2011), the positivists constantly question the subjectivity in this approach and in turn its generalisability (Ceci, Limacher & McLeod, 2002). As for the critical theorists, they condemn the approach of ignoring the historical, social and environment affecting the researched experience.

4. The Critical Paradigm

4.1 Origin

The critical research paradigm is originated from the critical theory which is drawn from the work of different thinkers for example: Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Erich, Formm, Habermas, Friere and Foucault. Crotty (1998: 159) notices that despite the diversity associated with the critical theory, “critical inquiry remains a form of praxis a search for knowledge, to be sure, but always emancipatory knowledge, knowledge in the context of action and the search for freedom.” This search for change is the aim of the critical research. In the words of Mertens (2010: 21-22) the critical / transformative research paradigm, “arose partially because of dissatisfaction with the dominant research paradigms and practices and because of limitations in the research associated with these paradigms.” The two research paradigms were scrutinised by the critical theorists as they focused only on the technicalities and ignored the power and politics in society. They aimed at understanding not improving the researched context ( Gage, 1989; Cohen et al., 2007; Bronner 2011; Creswell, 2012).

4.2 Theoretical Framework

The ontology of the critical paradigm is historical realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which states that reality exists outside the mind, but is historically constructed. Social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender shape the reality. And since this reality is crystallized over time, the researcher needs to examine it critically bearing in mind the issues of power and politics (Guba, 1990; Ernest, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Lather, 2006). According to Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010), the critical theorists “view society as a human construction in need of reconstruction.” The critical paradigm epistemology is transactional and subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The knowledge is socially and historically constructed within a complex cultural context. The relationship between the researcher and the participant is interactive with acknowledging the issues of power and trust. The knowledge is value laden as the researcher might influence the findings (Ernest, 1994; Mertens, 2005, Mertens 2010).

The methodology of the critical paradigm according to Guba (1990: 25) is “dialogic, transformative; eliminate false consciousness and energize and facilitate transformation.” As the aim of this paradigm is to bring out change and improve the studied context, this can be accomplished through a dialectic dialogue between the researcher and the participants. The dialogue is transformative and accepts the historical and political backgrounds to bring about change. The critical theory has its own methodology, “ideology critique, action research and critical ethnography” (Cohen et al., 2007: 46).

As for methods, some qualitative methods are used like diaries, interviews and critical discourse analysis. However, others argue for mixed methods in this approach (Punch, 1998; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The reason is in the words of Mertens (2007), “mixed methods are preferred for working toward increased social justice because they allow for the qualitative dialogue needed throughout the research cycle, as well as the collection of quantitative data as appropriate.” I think this argument is valid as the critical
approach shares the positivist ontology with the interpretive epistemology thus mixed methods will yield better understanding of the research phenomena.

Like the other research paradigms the ethical dimension in critical research is very important. Along with the previously mentioned ethical dimensions, piloting the research is crucial in order to “establish trust and respect with the participants so that inquirers can detect any marginalization” (Creswell, 2009: 88).

4.3 Quality Criteria
The research in this approach is evaluated at two levels: First, if it achieves its overall critical aim (i.e. improvement) and second, if it follows the quality criteria of its data collection methods. Guba and Lincoln (1994) think that the critical research should be judged to, “the extent to which the inquiry acts to erode ignorance and misapprehensions, and the extent to which it provides a stimulus to action, that is, to the transformation of the existing structure” (see also Lather, 1986).

Depending on the kind of methods used (quantitative / qualitative) the appropriate quality control criteria should be sought.

4.4 Critique
The critical approach is always criticised for having a political agenda. According to Ernest (1994: 28), although the critical approach aims to improve the investigated context, “The disadvantage is that there are often hidden institutional sources of resistance to change, such as teacher and pupil ideologies, institutional structures, and so on, which may prevent the desired progress.” In addition, according to Cohen et al., (2007) the critics always question the following in the critical research:

a. The role of the ideology critique to emancipate people;
b. the assumed neutrality of the critical researcher;
c. the power of action research to change the situation.

5. Conclusion
This paper serves as an introduction to the major research paradigms in education. Bearing in mind the complexity of each research paradigm, the research should choose the adopted paradigm carefully to result in better understanding of the researched phenomena.

About the author
Marwa Elshafie is currently doing her doctorate degree in education at Exeter University in the UK. She has taught ESL, ESP and IELTS preparation in Azerbaijan, India, Oman, and United Arab Emirates. Her research interests include L2 reading, assessment and motivation.

References


A Framework for Developing the Basic Academic Competencies in ESL Programs

Manal Mohammad T. Qutub
English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
This paper aims to establish a research-based framework for developing the basic academic competencies that focuses on the core, academic survival-level skills students need to be successful in their university work. The paper takes as a central premise that developing the basic academic competencies is essential to education and to the development of linguistic proficiency among ESL students. The study is carried out in three phases, the first of which is the construction of the framework, based on an extensive literature review for the term "academic competence". Phase two consisted of a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies comprising six elements: listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking and studying. Phase three includes a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks underlying each element of the basic academic competencies which are needed for ESL learners. Subsequently, the paper contributes thirty-one suggested activities, intended to develop the basic academic competencies.

Keywords: Academic competence; basic academic competencies; linguistic proficiency; content course; mainstream courses
Introduction:

True academic competence depends upon a set of perceptions and behaviors acquired while preparing for more advanced academic work. Therefore, a description of abilities necessary for success in college must reflect what college educators recognize as the intellectual and practical dispositions of their successful students. Academic success depends upon students' exercising the stamina and persistence useful in other areas of their lives (Clark, et. al., 2002).

While education is clearly a collaborative effort, students must ultimately assume considerable responsibility for their own education. Successful students seek assistance when they need it and advocate for their own learning in diverse situations. Sowden (2003) remarks that college students and faculty do not think in isolation. They think with, around, and against other thinkers in a culture of academic literacy. Consequently, educators need to examine the habits of mind essential to successful participation in this culture.

The dispositions and habits of mind that enable students to enter the ongoing conversations appropriate to college thinking, listening, reading, writing, and speaking are inter-related. Students should be aware of the various logical, emotional, and personal appeals used in argument; additionally, they need skills enabling them to define, summarize, detail, evaluate, compare/contrast, and analyze. Students should also have a fundamental understanding of audience, tone, language usage, and rhetorical strategies to navigate appropriately in various disciplines (Clark, et. al., 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to establish a research-based framework for developing the basic academic competencies that focuses on the core, academic survival-level skills students need to be successful in their university work. This paper takes as a central premise that developing the basic academic competencies is essential to education and to the development of linguistic proficiency among ESL students. Learners' progress takes place over time as they encounter different contexts, tasks, audiences, and purposes.

Audience for the Framework

The primary audience for this framework is instructors who teach in ESL programs. Additionally, because academic success is of concern for those inside and outside education, audiences beyond the classroom—including parents, policy makers, employers, and the general public- also can use this framework.

Context for the Framework

To describe the basic academic competencies and related tasks that are central to success in college and beyond, this paper demonstrates theories and strategies from research in academic fields, and English education that focus on the development of listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, studying, and the academic abilities related to these competencies. At its essence, the framework suggests that the basic academic competencies should be obvious and clearly defined and supported with genuine purposes and practical teaching strategies that will enable ESL students to meet the language requirements in university programs, where the medium of instruction is English.

The study was carried out in three consecutive phases:

Phase I- Constructing the research framework.
Phase II- Presenting a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies.
Phase III- Producing a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks.
Phase I- Constructing the Research Framework

An overview of the term "Academic Competence"

Academic competence is defined somewhat differently depending on the instrument used to assess it. With reference to DiPerna and Elliott (1999), the notion of "academic competence" can be important in understanding college performance and helping differentiate between achievers and non-achievers.

DiPerna and Elliott (2000) propose the term "competence" as a means of describing both traditional and nontraditional academic factors. According to DiPerna and Elliott (2000), the construct of competence, although more comprehensive than traditional measures of academic success, is somewhat elusive. Those authors define academic competence as a multidimensional construct pertaining to the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that a learner needs to contribute to academic success (DiPerna & Elliott, 2000). Using this nomenclature, skills are considered traditional academic factors that are well-accepted predictors of college performance. Attitudes and behaviors are believed to represent nontraditional factors associated with academic performance.

Researchers (e.g., DiPerna & Elliott, 2000; Reynolds, & Walberg, 1991) demonstrate that prior academic skills are the largest single predictor of current achievement, regardless of other student, classroom, or home variables. As such, the first step in developing an intervention for a student experiencing academic difficulty must be to assess the student's current proficiency in core academic skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking). After determining the student's level of proficiency relative to the academic skill expectations in the classroom, academic enablers should be assessed to determine if they are contributing to the current problem. Motivation appears to be the first academic enabler that should be assessed given the strength of its relationship with current achievement (Hutto, 2004).

Academic competence in ESL/EFL context

One of the first researchers to call attention to the fact that ESL students need more than fluency in English to learn content material was Saville-Troike (1984), who observed nineteen ESL students, ages six to twelve, for one academic year, videotaping the students in their classes and on the playground. All of these students have very little or no exposure to English. At the end of the school year, the subjects took three tests of English proficiency and the Comprehensive Test of Basic, an achievement test that covers the areas of reading, language, social studies, science, and math. Saville-Troike finds that there are large differences in the achievement test scores: some students do well, but others do very poorly. She also finds that the students' scores on the tests of content subjects do not correlate with their scores on the English proficiency tests (Saville-Troike, 1984).

These findings support Cummins's (1984) and Collier's (1989) claims that proficiency in English is not the most important factor in school success and suggest that specific school-related knowledge and skills are important. Saville-Troike also finds that students' abilities in their native language have an influence on their test scores.

Saville-Troike's conclusions about what ESL students need to succeed in content courses are different from what many ESL specialists have conceived. It was common that the most important factors in academic success were general language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of how to interact in socially appropriate ways). But Saville-Troike (1984) shows that specifically academic factors are necessary as well, and she introduced the
term academic competence to include these factors. She did not attempt to define academic competence but gave some guidelines for preparing ESL/EFL students for content courses. These conclusions support Wright's (1998) claim that the initial support work for EFL students should concentrate on developing academic competence rather than linguistic proficiency.

Adamson (1993: 5) remarks that "Saville-Troike introduces a new direction in the schooling of ESL/EFL students by coining the term academic competence and suggesting some of the factors this competence includes".

Adamson's Model

The term "academic competence" coined in scholarly literature by Saville-Troike (1984) to call attention to the fact that EFL students' academic success does not entirely depend on their explicit grammatical knowledge in English but on their background knowledge of academic content, their academic skills, and the context in which such skills are employed. Ouellette (2004) asserts that the term itself can be seen as an extension of the Hymesian notion of "communicative competence".

The sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1972) used the term "communicative competence" to explain how individuals in a particular speech community are able to function communicatively using their cultural knowledge of the norms of interaction and interpretation. Communicative competence, in the Hymesian sense, involves not merely the explicit knowledge of grammatical rules but the knowledge of how the language is used in particular contexts. It is the knowledge that a speaker has concerning "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about to whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes, 1972: 277).

Building on both Saville-Troike's "academic competence" and Hymes' "communicative competence", Adamson (1993) presents a model to describe how ESL students accomplish academic tasks by drawing on basic knowledge and using strategies for academic success. This model particularly describes how ESL learners draw upon knowledge and abilities of three types: universal pragmatic knowledge (i.e., the pragmatic use of language in academic contexts), language proficiency in the target language (i.e., the use of typical structural features in academic discourse, both verbal and written), and background knowledge (i.e., the knowledge of the expectations of academic settings and strategies for meeting them) (Adamson, 1993).
As illustrated in Figure 1, the role of academic strategies is to enhance the student's understanding of content material and to allow the student to complete assignments as well as possible with less than a perfect understanding. However, when their level of understanding drops below a certain point, many of them resort to coping strategies. Adamson (1993) emphasizes that the use of coping strategies can result in acceptable and even highly praised academic work. Coping strategies are presented in Figure 1, as production strategies that bypass enhance understanding.

Concerning this model, Adamson states that, three abilities contribute to academic competence: (1) the ability to use a combination of linguistic, pragmatic, and background knowledge to reach a basic understanding of content material; (2) the ability to use appropriate strategies (which vary according to the degree of basic understanding) to enhance knowledge of content material; and (3) the ability to use appropriate strategies to complete academic assignments with less than a full understanding of the content material. Thus academic competence amounts to possessing a critical mass of understanding and appropriate strategies. When understanding falls below a certain point, the process of learning fails and the only alternative is to try coping strategies (Adamson, 1993, pp.106).

Both Adamson (1993) and Saville-Troike (1984) highlight language proficiency and pragmatic knowledge in social interaction as key elements to academic success. However, Saville-Troike offers three conclusions. First, she finds that vocabulary knowledge when learning content is more important than grammatical accuracy, and that both should be related to the immediate academic needs of ESL-EFL learners. Second, she further states that
communicative competence in social interaction is not a guarantee of communicative competence in academic settings. And, third, she asserts that the use of L1 enhances conceptual development in ESL learners (Saville-Troike, 1984).

What these conclusions highlight for Adamson's model is that academic competence involves cultural and social factors that ESL learners might draw upon, as well as the relevant abilities and strategies necessary for academic success.

Principles for helping ESL students develop academic competence:

The theory of academic competence suggests five general principles and two corollaries for preparing ESL students for mainstream courses.
1. Academic strategies should be explicitly taught on an individualized basis.
2. Students can best learn strategies in a language through content course that uses authentic texts.
   a. The content material should be studied in depth.
   b. The course should provide contact with native speakers.
3. Teaching should be interactive in ways that are compatible with students' learning styles and prior scripts for school.
4. Teaching should be experiential.
5. The content subject should be one that students will need to know when they are mainstreamed (Adamson, 1993, p.114).

Phase II- Presenting a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies

Basic academic competencies are developed abilities; they are the outcomes of learning and intellectual discourse. They are acquired when there are incentives and stimulation to learning and when there is an encouraging learning environment. Basic academic competencies are listening, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. These competencies are interrelated to and interdependent with the basic subject-matter areas. Without such competencies, the knowledge of literature, history, science, languages, mathematics, and all other disciplines are unattainable (Wentzel, 1993). They provide a link across the disciplines of knowledge although they are not specific to any discipline. Teaching that is done in ignorance of, or in disregard for, such competencies and their interrelationships to each of the subject-matter areas is inadequate if not incompetent (Reason, 2005).

The following is a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies comprising six elements; listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, and studying. (Mathematics will be excluded as it has no direct impact on language learning). The aim of this overview is to identify the specific academic tasks, underlying each element of the basic academic competencies. At the end of this phase, a list of the basic academic competencies needed for ESL learners is developed.

Academic Listening

Academic listening has distinct characteristics and places high demands upon listeners (Flowerdew, 1995). It requires listeners to have relevant background information on the lecture delivered. It also requires listeners to be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not relevant because an academic lecture contains both relevant and irrelevant information on the topic discussed. Academic listening contains long stretches of talk when listeners do not have the
opportunity to engage in the facilitating functions of interactive discourse, so it places high
demands upon listeners (Huang, 2005).

Flowerdew and Miller (1997) described some additional features that differentiate
authentic lecture discourse from written text or scripted lectures. An authentic lecture is often
structured according to "tone groups" and in the form of incomplete clauses. It is often signaled
by "micro-level discourse markers" such as "and" "so" "but" "now" "okay". What's more, in an
authentic lecture, speakers use many false starts, hesitations, corrections, and repetitions.
Speakers often organize their thoughts poorly and present their ideas in incomplete grammatical
sentences. This makes it difficult for the listeners to understand the information delivered in the
lecture.

Finally, Ferries and Tagg (1996) comment that there is frequent "give" and "take"
between teacher and students in an academic classroom situation. This includes formal, planned
lecture material, informal questions or comments from the students, and unplanned responses to
students by professor. During these give-and-take activities, students become more involved. On
the one hand, they have to actively participate in these activities; on the other hand they have to
comprehend what is going on in class and try to get the important points of the lecture. So
understanding lectures poses formidable challenges for ESL students, even those highly
proficient in English.

**Academic reading**

There is general consensus that reading involves the interaction of a vast array of
processes, knowledge, and abilities. These include basic decoding processes such as grapheme
recognition, lexical access, phonological representation, and linguistic structure processing, as
well as higher order cognitive processes such as the application of background knowledge,
processing strategies, text structure understanding, and some aspects of vocabulary knowledge.
Reading also involves interactional processes such as the application of evaluative skills, use of
metacognitive knowledge, and self-monitoring. However, a major issue in reading literature
relates to the specific relationships between these components (Hudson, 2000:3).

Early theories viewed reading as a bottom-up process in which the reader constructs meaning
in a sequential manner from letters, words, and sentences (Gough, 1972; LaBerge & Samuels,
1974). Other theories of reading stressed that the efficient reader makes the fewest text
processing, since that reader predicts the meaning of the text by applying knowledge of the world
and language (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971). More recent views acknowledge a strong interplay
between both of these processes.

Current theories emphasize the interactive nature of reading and accept the fact that good
readers make extensive use of printed information. In the interactive approach, some have argued
in favor of an interactive system strongly constrained by bottom-up processes, and have
consequently emphasized linguistic processing (Stanovich, 1990; Grabe, 1991; Perfetti, 1992).
Others have tended to place less emphasis on the bottom-up linguistic components and more
emphasis on the role of top-down processing (Hudson, 1991; Hill & Parry, 1992). Which
emphasis is given seems often to be influenced by how the researchers address – explicitly or
implicitly – the four issues of (a) how uniform the reading process is within any particular
individual reading across contexts; (b) the importance of background and culture in reading and
learning to read; (c) the extent to which reading skills are implicationally ordered in their
acquisition and application as opposed to being overlapping and compensatory in nature; and (d)
the extent to which an individual may avoid close linguistic processing and still comprehend a massage (Hudson, 2000).

Hudson (2000) highlights that success or failure in reading performance can be addressed in terms of the interactions between the reader's (a) automaticity, the extent to which the performance of procedures no longer requires large amounts of attention; (b) content and formal schemata, the reader's mental representations of facts and skills; (c) strategies and metacognitive skills, the reader's strategies for monitoring the selection and application of actions; (d) purpose, the goal striven for by the reader; and (e) context, the interactional environment in which the reading activity takes place. Thus, regardless of the approach to reading performance, there is a need to indicate how the interactive processes in reading involve both the underlying cognitive processing and the purpose or contextual aspects of reading.

Academic Speaking

Discourse competence is an important part of many courses of academic study. Lectures may involve question/answer interludes, and many courses of study involve tutorials and seminar type events in later years of study. Discussion-based classes and question/answer sessions within lectures demand a high level of proficiency in speaking for the participants. This demand is one which non-native speakers (NNSs) may feel themselves ill-prepared to meet.

Oral communication is a complex and multifaceted language process. The ability to speak coherently and intelligibly on a focused topic is generally recognized as a necessary goal for ESL students. Because the coming decade will see increasing pressure placed upon ESL high school, college, and university graduates to possess excellent skills in both speech and writing, ESL teachers of oral communication commonly turn to widely accepted L2 teaching methods and materials (Murphy, 1991).

In the L2 classroom, speaking activities can be planned to introduce everything from dyadic to small-group, to whole-class interaction patterns. Byrne (1987), Klippel (1987), and Golebiowska (1990), for example present teacher reference materials that are useful for getting ESL students to speak with one another in these different groupings. The L2 literature is rich in resources for engaging students in speaking activities such as rehearsing dialogues, completing information-gap activities, playing interactive games, discussing topical issues, problem solving, role playing, and completing speaking tasks (Hedge, 2000).

Students at higher levels of proficiency sometimes need to gain experience in expressing themselves in front of a whole class. Several writers take the position that more proficient L2 speakers benefit from generating and developing their own topics to present in class (Dale & Wolf, 1988; Meloni & Thompson, 1980). Students can develop their topics through classroom procedures that are parallel to ones advocated in the teaching of the writing process (Mangelsdorf, 1989; Zamel, 1987).

Academic Writing

Within the last decade, numerous approaches to the teaching of writing in programs for ESL college students have been tried, and much discussion has focused on the most appropriate approach to adopt. ESL writing researchers and teachers have generally agreed that the goal of college-level L2 writing programs is to prepare students to become better academic writers (Spack, 1988).

To learn to write in any discipline, students must become immersed in the subject matter; this is accomplished through reading, lectures, seminars, and so on. They learn by participating
in the field, by doing, by sharing, and by talking about it with those who know more. They can also learn by observing the process through which professional academic writers produce texts or by studying that process. They will learn most efficiently from teachers who have a solid grounding in the subject matter and who have been through the process themselves (Hedge, 2000).

Researchers have long noted that writing classes differ considerably from other academic courses in the emphasis placed on various aspects of writing. Bridgeman and Carlson (1984) note that writing classes emphasize linguistic and rhetorical forms more than content whereas in other courses the emphasis is reversed. In a survey of ESL students in the U.S. (Leki & Carson, 1993) indicate that they experience writing differently depending on the source of information drawn on in writing a text. The sources fall into three broad categories:

1- Information from writers own personal experiences.
2- A source text to which writers respond. In this type of writing, writers are not responsible for explaining or demonstrating comprehension of the source text but are using it as the springboard for their writing.
3- A text to which writers are exposed and required to account for in some way. In this type of writing, the writers are responsible for demonstrating an understanding of the source text. In other words, they must produce text responsible prose based on content acquired primarily from text.

The findings suggest that writing classes require students to demonstrate knowledge of a source text much less frequently than other academic courses do. The researchers argue that English for Academic Purpose classes that limit students to writing without source texts or to writing without responsibility for the content of source texts miss the opportunity to engage L2 writing students in the kinds of interactions with text that promote linguistic and intellectual growth. (Leki & Carson, 1997)

In their findings the researchers call for a deep interaction between language, personal interests, needs, and backgrounds. Thus, learners need to implement the three sources in their writing tasks with much emphasis on the third source; the text responsible writing.

**Academic Thinking (reasoning)**

Since the advent research into cognitive development, language teachers and linguists generally put emphasis on the close connection between language learning and thinking processes. In particular, ESL reading research has shown some correlation between reading comprehension and familiarity with the formal or content schemata of English texts (Carrell, 1987). Furthermore, noting the unreflective character of many languages teaching approaches that only encourage verbal output or passive input, Tarvin and Al-arishi (1991) have explored some methods to make language teaching more thoughtful. Similarly, Chamot (1995) argues from current educational trends promoting higher-order thinking that ESL teachers also need to turn the classroom into a "community of thinkers." As informal observations indicate, that thinking skills can indeed be taught in an ESL context.

A broad, general finding from the research base is that nearly all of the skills programs and practices investigated were found to make a positive difference in the achievement levels of participating students. Studies which looked at achievement over time found that thinking skills instruction accelerated the learning gains of participants, and those with true or quasi-experimental designs generally found that experimental students outperformed controls to a
significant degree. Reports with such findings include: Bass and Perkins (1984), Barba and Merchant (1990), and Freseman (1990).

**Various Instructional Approaches Enhance Thinking Skills:**
Research supports the use of several teaching practices as effective in fostering the development of thinking skills, including:

- **Redirection/probing/reinforcement:** known to increase students' content knowledge, these techniques also enhance the development of critical and creative thinking skills (Cotton 1991; Pearson 1982; Robinson 1987).
- **Asking higher-order questions:** (Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **Lengthening wait-time:** e.g., the amount of time the teacher is willing to wait for a student to respond after posing a question (Pogrow 1988).

**Academic Studying:**
Although the need for more research on academic studying in higher education context is great, there is a large body of related research that informs current understanding of studying in learning contexts (Butler & Winne, 1995; Mayer, 1996; Pressley et al., 1997; Slavin, 2003; Zimmerman, 1990, 1998). Most of this research has focused on the topic of self-regulation in academic studying. Although the concept of self-regulation is hard to define because of the many different theoretical perspectives on self-regulation available in the literature, Zimmerman (1990) has identified a number of common concepts that are typically descriptive of self-regulated learning.

Self-regulated learners are "metacognitively aware as well as motivationally and behaviorally active in their own learning" (Zimmerman, 1990, p.4). Students who self-regulate are aware of their success in learning efforts and constantly evaluate the need to modify their approach to learning. This is accomplished as students set goals and plan their learning activities, implement the learning activities and monitor their effectiveness, and then make changes based on the conclusions derived from the results of the monitoring.

A number of self-regulatory processes that are important to academic studying have been identified (Zimmerman, 1998). These include goal setting, task strategies, imagery self-instruction, time management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-sequences, environmental restructuring, and help seeking. A Number of studies have confirmed that these self-regulatory processes are important for academic achievement, and that high achievers engage in almost all of these processes much more frequently than low achievers (Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996).

**Phase III- Producing a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks.**
After presenting the theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies, the present framework contributes a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks needed for ESL learners, underlying each element of the basic academic competencies.

**Table (1) List of the specific academic tasks needed for ESL learners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Listening</th>
<th>Academic Speaking</th>
<th>Academic Reading</th>
<th>Academic Writing</th>
<th>Academic Thinking</th>
<th>Academic Studying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen and simultaneously take notes</td>
<td>Ask questions for discussions</td>
<td>Identify the purposes and types of texts</td>
<td>Conceive ideas about a topic for the</td>
<td>Sustain and express intellectual</td>
<td>Take accurate and useful notes from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Listening</td>
<td>Academic Speaking</td>
<td>Academic Reading</td>
<td>Academic Writing</td>
<td>Academic Thinking</td>
<td>Academic Studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., descriptive, narrative, argumentative...) before reading</td>
<td>purpose of writing curvature reading and lectures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-</td>
<td>Identify key ideas of speakers in lectures or discussion</td>
<td>Express information to individuals or groups taking into account the audience and the nature of information</td>
<td>Define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary</td>
<td>Organize, select, and relate ideas and to outline and develop them in coherent paragraphs</td>
<td>Prepare and ask provocative questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-</td>
<td>Identify the evidence which supports, confutes, or contradicts the thesis</td>
<td>Track audience responses and react appropriately to those responses</td>
<td>Summarize information</td>
<td>Write informational pieces (e.g., descriptions, letters, reports, instructions) using illustrations when relevant</td>
<td>Challenge their own beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-</td>
<td>Infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms</td>
<td>Speak clearly and confidently</td>
<td>Analyze information and argument</td>
<td>Write Standard English sentences with correct: Sentence structure, verb forms, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, and spelling</td>
<td>Compare and contrast own ideas with others'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-</td>
<td>Identify digressions and illustrations</td>
<td>Employ transitional language to show how various ideas are related</td>
<td>Retain the information read</td>
<td>Report facts and narrate events</td>
<td>Sustain and support arguments with evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-</td>
<td>Retain information</td>
<td>Engage in intellectual discussions and serious</td>
<td>Identify the main idea of a text</td>
<td>Competent use of vocabulary</td>
<td>Identify and formulate problems, and propose ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Listening</td>
<td>Academic Speaking</td>
<td>Academic Reading</td>
<td>Academic Writing</td>
<td>Academic Thinking</td>
<td>Academic Studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interrogation of diverse views</td>
<td>and structures to solve</td>
<td>for academic work in order to recall, comprehend, analyze, summarize, and report the main ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-</td>
<td>Ask questions as an aid to understanding</td>
<td>Recognize the spoken form of vocabulary including idiomatic expressions</td>
<td>Read texts of complexity without instruction and guidance</td>
<td>Good development of topic</td>
<td>Take notes from sources using a structured format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work collaboratively on reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-</td>
<td>Participate in class discussions</td>
<td>Demonstrate a full range of pronunciation skills including phonemic control, mastery of stress, and intonation patterns</td>
<td>Relate prior knowledge and experience to new information</td>
<td>Use revision techniques to improve focus, support, and organization</td>
<td>Enjoy the exchange of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-</td>
<td>Produce comprehensible speech</td>
<td>Answer and ask questions coherently and concisely</td>
<td>Identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and summarize the ideas in one's own words</td>
<td>Edit or proofread to eliminate errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling, using standard English conventions</td>
<td>Recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-</td>
<td>Attend to and understand directions to assignments</td>
<td>Effectively use eye contact and non-verbal expressions</td>
<td>Identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally</td>
<td>Critically analyze or evaluate the ideas or arguments of others</td>
<td>Exercise civility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggested activities intended to develop the basic academic competencies

In this final section, the paper offers thirty-one short suggestions in the form of classroom activities. The author hopes that after reading this paper, the ESL teacher will have a good idea of how the suggestions offered here apply to his or her own teaching situation and will be able to expand and adapt these activities to fit the needs of the students.

1- Students make notes in the margins of a text and share them with other students. (Provide texts with large margins.)
2- Students formulate and write questions on a topic as they listen to a text read or a lecture delivered on this topic.
3- Students speak for three minutes about a topic without having prepared notes. Then they are allowed to have another topic with a three-minute period of note-taking preparation. After the second three-minute monologue, let them compare experiences.
4- Students take notes planning a weekend or a shopping trip.
5- Students take notes that summarize a movie they have seen recently. Have them read their summaries to the class.
6- Give students a two-sentence summary of a well-known story and ask them, in small groups, to expand it.
7- Students work in groups to contract a well-known story into three sentences. Each group passes its contraction on to another group, which expands on it.
8- Students evaluate one another's note-taking.
9- Students listen to a song and note its central ideas. It can be listened to several times for checking.
10- Start the reading of a dialogue, perhaps an opening scene from a play; plays by Oscar Wilde are very suitable. Ask students to take notes on how they might finish the dialogue.
11- Students make out a list of common speech markers used by lecturers. Examples include transitional expressions such as numbers (first, second, and third) and adverbs (moreover, nevertheless, however, although), as well as expressions of emphasis (I want to stress, it is significant).
12- Give students the first and the last lines of a text and ask them to predict the content of the text to be read.
13- In a text that contains several numbers, list them on the board and ask students to scan the article, finding what each number refers to.
14- On the board list key words and phrases from a text recently read. Write the words in the same order as they appear in the text. Ask students to retell the content of the text using the words on the board as clues.
15- Give timed readings lasting two minutes. Let students keep self-monitoring charts on which they mark how much they read each time.
16- Give students the central idea of the text they are about to read and ask them to brainstorm for content. Example: "Our next article is about turtles. What kind of issues do you think it might bring up?"
17- As a pre-reading activity, ask the class to brainstorm vocabulary they think might appear in a text on a certain topic. For example: "We are going to read an article about air pollution. What words do you think might appear in such an article?"
18- Give the class sentences from a text to be read. Tell them that these sentences are answers and ask them to make up the questions that could prompt such answers.
19- Ask students to complete, in writing, any evocative sentence, such as "My life will be a success if _____________," and then in pairs explain their completion to each other.
20- Students are asked to provide both positive and negative arguments for controversial topics.
21- Ask students to guess information about each other's countries, size of population, name of capital city, national food, and so on. Students verify information about their own countries.
22- Students guess information about one another – family, hobbies, and so on – which is then verified.
23- Students present information, and the rest of the class guesses where and how it was obtained.
24- Students interview locals about professions, marriage customs, life and job opportunities. This can be part of an I-search paper or report.
25- Students keep an alphabetized vocabulary notebook to go through before each test.
26- Before each test, students make out test questions and do a practice test.
27- Students mark and evaluate each other's test.
28. Students relate stories about their most or least successful test experience.
30. Students write lists of positive and negative aspects of testing.
31. Together with the class, make out a list of ten to thirty often repeated mistakes. Declare these the "terrible tens," "terrible twenties," and "terrible thirties." Students are allowed to keep the list in front of them during all exams.

**Conclusion**

Many ESL teachers lead sheltered lives. The goal of those who teach in public schools, colleges, and universities is to prepare students to take mainstream content courses such as history, science, and math, yet the teachers themselves may know very little about what is expected of students in these courses. One reason of this ignorance is that ESL teachers often have little chance to talk to teachers of content subjects. At colleges and universities, ESL instructors often teach at an English Language Institute, where their status and duties are different from those of other faculty members. In public schools, ESL teachers may be part of an isolated intensive ESL program, or they may be itinerant teachers moving from school to school. Such teachers have little time to find out what happens to their students when they join the academic mainstream.

Alternatively, many ESL students have great difficulty in content courses, a fact documented by studies of ESL students' achievement test scores. It follows that many ESL programs do not adequately prepare students for mainstream courses. The main reason for this failure is that ESL programs are usually isolated from mainstream programs. For example, many ESL programs attempt to prepare students for mainstream courses by using "theme-based" textbooks, which contain selected readings, lectures, and exercises from high school or college textbooks. These texts devote one or two chapters to a variety of subjects such as psychology, US history, and literature. Thus, the ESL students study bits and pieces of "canned" academic material, only some of which is relevant to their academic goals, while real academic material, including textbooks, lectures, and assignments, is available in the school all around them. In this framework it is suggested that before students leave the ESL program, they should have some access to the real academic environment while they still have the support of their ESL teachers and peers. In other words, the walls surrounding the ESL program need to be broken down.

**Manal Qutub** holds a PhD. in TEFL (2011). Currently she works at the English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, KSA. She is a member of Editorial Board of Arab World English Journal, and a member of TESOL International Association. Her research interests include teaching English for academic purposes (EAP), L2 motivation, and second language acquisition.
References:
A Framework for Developing the Basic Academic


Culture and Approaches to Learning and Teaching

Josephine O’Brien
Zayed University, Dubai
United Arab Emirates

Sadia Ali
Zayed University, Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates

Abstract

The focus of the current study is on approaches to learning and teaching rather than a study of learning styles and the impact of a particular style on how students perform. Arguably learning styles and the impact of a particular style on how a student performs has been a topic of discussion for years particularly in language learning; less attention has been given to how approaches to learning are influenced by cultural attitudes, beliefs and structures and the subsequent influence of these approaches on how students cope in education. The current piece of research was undertaken as an initial exploratory work to examine the question of whether or not learning approaches developed in early learning experiences and evolving from a particular cultural view impact on and prepare students for subsequent learning. Cultures differ in how they perceive knowledge and learning and in the expectations they have from the outcomes of learning. Background information is provided on approaches to learning within the cultural context and a tried and tested instrument used to measure learners’ approaches delivered through an online survey. Results are presented, discussed and the appropriateness of these approaches to the current university learning environment is considered.

Keywords: cultural approaches, individualism, collectivism, power distance, uncertainty
1. Introduction
Since the early 1980s, teaching and learning through the medium of English in foreign language environments have been influenced largely by the communicative approach to language acquisition. Consequently, little attention has been given to the context of learners and the prior linguistic and cultural approaches to learning that learners bring to the learning situation. It is assumed that if students are subjected to a learning approach based on principles that promise to make them analytical learners that they will metamorphose into efficient language users and critical thinkers. The current research considers students who take third level education through English in an environment where English is not their primary language of communication and where they are also expected to adopt an analytical discursive approach to learning. The participants are all Arabic speaking students in the UAE.

2. Literature Review
In the past four decades, much work has been conducted on students’ learning styles and the impact of these on the quality and quantity of learning. The focus is on an individual’s preferred learning style in terms of visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, what Manikutty et al (2007) refer to as learning through experience. The focus of the current study is not on learning styles but on approaches to learning, the difference between the two being one of individual style preferences as opposed to specific situational approaches. Manikutty et al (2007) explains that learning style is an individual issue and concerned with “a more general and higher level of preferences for particular modes of learning” while a learning approach is seen as referring to “more situation specific competencies required for effective learning” (72). The research explores the question of whether or not learning approaches developed in early learning experiences and evolving from a particular cultural view impact on and prepare students for subsequent learning. Culture, as Rebecca Oxford (1990:441) points out, “is not the single determinant, and although many other influences intervene, culture often does play a significant role in learning” as students adopt, often unconsciously, many of the practices from the culture in which they grow up. Cultures differ in how they present knowledge and the expectations they have of students. Most research on learning styles and approaches has been done from a “western, white, middle-class perspective and value system” (Claxton & Murrell, 1987, 71), particularly from the North American perspective and it is often assumed that this is the goal to which all educational systems should aspire. Even if we accept the validity of such an approach, can we achieve the desired objective simply by ignoring where our students come from? Guild & Garger (1985), argue that approaches to learning differ according to students’ cultural backgrounds. If this is the case, it is vital that we take these backgrounds and approaches into consideration when working with our students. Similarly, Fensham (1972) points out the significance of ‘prior knowledge for subsequent learning’. He claims that the available literature of the time paid little attention to the negative impact of prior learning and points to some negative aspects of prior learning. Rote memorization is identified, along with inclusion of irrelevant details and distortion of information as the main negative impacts. It is interesting that the same claims can be made about the influence of prior learning almost 40 years later.

It is not true to say today that little has been done in the way of research in the field of learning approaches as the 1970s saw the beginning of serious investigation but what one can say is that there has been little application of the findings in a meaningful way. Research in the area of learning approaches as impacted by culture dates back to the 1970s (Entwistle and Wilson 1970) and is ongoing. Work on defining different cultural approaches to learning occurs in the research of Pask (1976), Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle (2005). Some research has been done on third
level students who undertake post-graduate degrees in an English medium society. This work was motivated primarily by the observation of the difficulties some students meet while adapting to a new and western oriented educational environment. A 1993 study by Ken Hyland on Japanese learners in a New Zealand tertiary college suggests that Japanese schools do not rate independence, creativity or completion of imaginative tasks too highly. Classes were found to be teacher centered, traditional in teaching methodologies with success measured by examination outcomes and grades. Memorization and rote learning were found to be very important to the Japanese students and consequently these third level Japanese students in NZ were found not to be able to take advantage of a system that required them to do extensive reading and writing.

In his study on a group of Arab Muslim students at Canada’s University of Alberta, Mostafa (2006) refers to the perceived “infallibility” (40) of supervisors and teachers in some cultures, whose commands and directives students are expected to follow. He cites Wisker (2005, p. 192) who points to the fact that students move to foreign universities with this kind of “culturally-influenced constructions of knowledge.” Abukhattala (2004) as cited in Mostafa (2006) points out that Arab Muslim students found difficulties in “student-teacher relationship, teaching methodology, democratic dialogue in classrooms and classroom interactions” (49) in Western universities. Participants in Mostafa’s research pointed to the reliance on rational, objective knowledge, independent learning expectations, informal learning patterns, attitudes to authority and little scope for memorization as obstacles to their success in Western institutions.

In the UAE, approaches to learning research dates back to Farquharson’s 1989 analysis of Arab students’ learning styles and approaches to learning in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Later research (Barakat 1993; Bel Fekih 1993; Kaylani 1996; Richardson, 2004) has reinforced the early findings that general cultural factors and approaches to learning in early education affect subsequent learning. In her analysis of textbooks in use in UAE government schools, O’Brien (2010) points out that though there is abundant communicative material in the textbooks, the approach in terms of correct output of syntactic and grammatical testing is based on a repetition of a given pattern, a learning approach she claims leads to rote memorization tasks that are fine at lower language levels but not a successful approach for manipulating the complexities of a multi-layered text.

There has also been much criticism of reform that depends too much on importing ideas from outside just because they have proven to be successful in other countries. Al Reyes (1996:16) criticized educational reform that has focused only on curriculum and in his view, the adoption of a curriculum that is “based on theories that have proven their validity” in other educational environments is not good enough in the UAE. Bax (1999:505) points out that the UAE can take ideas from outside but suggests that two things should be taken seriously: “We need to look closely at the particular context we are working with, including all its cultural, social and political complexities and we need to tailor our approach to suit that context.” Harrison (1990) also criticizes the approach to teaching and learning in the UAE schools pointing out that a communicative syllabus is not really feasible in the learning environment because of the unavailability of properly trained teachers to deliver the curriculum in an effective manner. He argues that the lack of individual freedom along with an inability or reluctance to cultivate an individual learning approach has implications for the effective use of any communicative materials. The predominant methodology for the teaching of English in secondary schools is traditional memorization patterns (Osterloh 1986, McKay 1992, Wallace 1996, Mawgeed 1999) producing as Al Reyes (1996:18) explains “passive communicators rather than active participants” in the learning process. This is a learning approach that permeates all
subject areas in the school including classical Arabic but is now being addressed by the Ministry of Education in the UAE.

More recent research on the impact of cultural approaches to learning and language ability on students’ performance in an online course in Zayed University (Martin 2006, 10) concludes that “it is likely that students from this Emirati culture will feel more comfortable in a controlled and task oriented environment”. Nevertheless Martin also points out that students enjoyed the challenge of a new approach to learning when it was set up in the right way. Findings from the various studies both general and specific to the Arab and Emirati worlds inform the current study.

3. Theoretical framework of survey

Manikutty et al (2007) revived the issue of influence of prior learning in their article, ‘Does Culture influence learning style in higher education?’ and points to the importance of acknowledging the context in which learning takes place. They cite Hall who in 1990 explained that educational systems emerge from the cultures in which they are “embedded” (Manikutty et al, 2007, 71) and reflect the values of that culture. At tertiary level in the UAE, the system reflects more the values, approaches and methodologies of the North American system than any local Arab system. In that respect, there is validity in considering the issues raised by Manikutty et al (2007) about “the migration of students seeking higher education abroad” (71) but in this situation the migration is of a system into a country’s tertiary education sector.

Manikutty et al (2007) define the difference between learning styles and learning approaches at the outset. Learning styles research is based on the work of Kolb (1984) (Manikutty et al, 2007, 72) while learning approaches is seen as referring to “more situation specific competencies required for effective learning” (Manikutty et al, 2007, 72). Manikutty et al set out to develop a theoretical framework around approaches to learning that can be tried and tested. They argue that culture and cultural values of countries/societies influence approaches to learning and impact future learning. They base the framework on Hofstede’s (2001) definition of culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category from another.” (Manikutty et al, 2007, 73) The five dimensions along which one culture differs from another are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and individualism vs. collectivism.

- **Power distance** refers to how equitably power is distributed in a society and how willing members are to accept discrepancies in power distribution. This can be seen in teacher student relationships though, complicated in a Gulf environment by the perception of the distance between all guest workers and the local population.

- **Uncertainty avoidance** refers to the amount of uncertainty and speculation tolerated within a society. Societies with a very clearly defined interpretation of reality generally display a ‘low tolerance to ambiguity’ (Manikutty et al, 2007, 74) and have definite rules that may be rigidly enforced leading to a conformity and predictability in behavior among its members. Such a dimension may lead to demands for clear signposts for educational tasks and inability to undertake independent learning. Learner behavior in such an environment is often highly predictable.

- Hofstede uses the gender-laden terms of **masculinity and femininity** to describe aggressive versus passive roles of participants in the learning experience. Masculinity represents aggressive and active roles in learning while femininity defines passivity. Learners in some male dominated societies may display many of the features of
Hofstede’s (2001) femininity by producing passive learners, as is the case in Japan and Korea.

- **Long-term versus short term orientation** describes how long members are willing to wait for gratification of their material, social and emotional needs. In long-term oriented societies, goals are not with the here and now and this type of society reflects an adherence to tradition. Modern life has added its complications to this dimension as cultures, and students in particular, expect quite speedy gratification for effort while at the same time adhering strictly to existing traditions.

- **Individualism Vs collectivism** describes the extent to which individuals are independent and look after themselves or are still bound up with the family group and friends. Such differences in upbringing during childhood years have repercussions for adult behavior. In an educational context, a collectivistic oriented approach leads to the common belief that one should provide support for one’s fellow group members. This may lead to cheating, plagiarism and compromise in assignments and examinations.

These cultural characteristics combine with individual personalities and when applied to learning give rise to a theory of learning approaches that considers not just the personality and experiential learning of the individual but also the influence of the learning environment where learning takes place. The three main categories of learning identified by researchers (Entwistle & Wilson 1970, 1977, Marton & Saljo 1976, Entwistle 1992, Entwistle & Tait 1995, Tait, Entwistle & McCune 1998) and considered as influential in how learners learn are: deep, surface apathetic and strategic. These categories influence the learner by defining the factors that motivate him/her as either intrinsic or extrinsic. These in turn result from a vision within the society and culture of what learning and knowledge are about and how success and failure are defined and viewed in the society.

Deep learning (Marton, Hounsell, Entwistle, 2005) describes a learning process whereby learners seek knowledge for its own sake, are interested in ideas, are able to make connections between facts and ideas and use evidence as support for views and opinions. Such learners are more likely to emerge from a culture where they are encouraged to deal with discrepancies, can tolerate ambiguity and make independent learning decisions. Surface apathetic learners see no clear purpose in what they are doing, fail to comprehend and understand much of what they are doing, are limited by the syllabus and motivated primarily by a fear of failure. Such learners are likely to lack independence and intrinsic motivation and take a passive approach to learning. Strategic approach learners have an organized approach to learning, manage their time, are motivated, and able to monitor and direct their own progress and learning. Such learners are generally extrinsically motivated and learning has a functional value for them.

### 4. Study – participants and survey instrument

The current study was undertaken to investigate the approaches to learning and teaching manifested by groups of learners in a third level university in the UAE with a view to measuring the appropriateness of these approaches with the requirements of the university. Students (mostly aged between 17 to 24) enter the university after graduating from high school. Approaches to learning in the government secondary schools are still quite traditional with the emphasis on memorizing from notes for examinations, rote learning. The medium of instruction in schools is Arabic. A growing number of students attend English medium schools and though a small percentage display greater ability in writing, the major difference between these students and those from the government schools can be seen in their ability to communicate orally. When
students enter university they take a foundation English course to reach the required IELTS Band 5, followed by three semesters of academic writing courses leading to the selection of a discipline for their graduate studies. The medium of instruction throughout the university is English although students study courses in Arabic and Islam. A fundamental requirement to a university career is the ability to analyze, think critically, and make informed academic decisions through reading and writing. Overall, university requirements are a challenge for many of the students and it is of value to conduct an investigation into approaches to learning by students and to investigate the appropriateness of these approaches to the requirements of the university.

An inventory developed by Entwistle, McCune & Hounsell (2002) and available online (www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk) was considered suitable as an instrument of investigation to be adapted for the study, particularly as the developers cite research by Prosser & Trigwell (1997) who point out that “approaches to studying and perceptions of teaching are two of the most direct influences on the quality of student learning” (28). They argue that university students bring experiences and approaches with them that affect how they make sense of subsequent learning. It is essential to understand this in order to help students succeed at university and adapt to the approach required of them.

The adapted research instrument consists of three parts, the first of which asked a general question on what learning is with a range of suggestions and a second part of 52 questions designed to identify students as deep, surface or strategic learners based on their responses. A final question allowed students to give an opinion on their overall performance as learners. The instrument was presented in an online format through one of the commercially available survey sites and 300 students from foundation to the level participated in the study. It was presented in both English and Arabic to ensure participants’ comprehension of questions. It should be stressed here that the study is an exploratory work and requires more follow-up.

5. Results

It was hypothesized that the students were likely to display many more surface apathetic approaches to learning rather than deep or strategic. This, however, was found not to be the case and overall the responses indicate a more complex situation. The initial question on the students’ perception of what learning is, yielded two main interpretations: 1) to help a student develop as a person (84%) and, 2) to build up knowledge by acquiring facts and information (78%). The following discussion focuses on the main patterns that emerged from responses on the three approaches to learning identified by Entwistle et al.

Deep approach items

One set of deep approach items to learning seeks to probe the importance of understanding and meaning to students. Four items (4, 17, 30, 43) are employed to gauge approaches, the first of which is a general question on the importance of understanding the meaning of what is being learnt; two items look at the importance of meaning in reading and the fourth the need to understand what lies behind an assignment or project before tackling it. It is interesting to observe that the general question receives a high level of agreement from participants (Figure 1) whereas the more specific focus on how one seeks meaning in reading and assignments suggests that students are not fully engaged in these activities.
Figure 1: *Importance of understanding meaning in text*

![Importance of understanding meaning in text](image)

Figure 2: *Response details on understanding text meaning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Very close/ quite close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. When I am reading an article of a book, I try to find out for myself exactly what the author means.</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. When I am reading I stop from time to time to reflect on what I am trying to learn</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Before tackling an assignment or project, I first try to work out what lies behind it.</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second category of deep approach items explores how students try to relate ideas to each other. The following graph shows responses to one of the items (21) and the table provides evidence on the other three items (11, 33, 46).
It is clear from the results, that students work at understanding and connecting the ideas in a given assignment but appear not to be as capable of doing this when dealing generally with ideas and in particular with ideas from books.

A third deep approach category with four items (9, 23, 36, 49) generated a general response of around 68%. These items look at how students use evidence, question what they hear and examine ideas in detail. In terms of interest in ideas as outlined in the final category of deep approach, evidence suggests (figure 5) that engaging with ideas and following them up is important to around 58% - 62%.

Figure 5: Critical evaluation of and interest in academic ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Very close/ quite close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Regularly I find myself thinking about ideas from lectures when I am doing other things.</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I find that studying academic subjects can be quite exciting.</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I find some of the ideas I come across in lectures really gripping.</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Sometimes I get hooked on academic topics and I want to keep on studying them.</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Surface apathetic
Surface apathetic approach items are also organized into four main categories: lack of purpose, unrelated memorizing, syllabus boundedness and fear of failure. Items that appear to be significant are discussed here. The area that presents the most problems for students, it appears, is that of fear of failure. Many students appear to be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work to be done as indicated in the following table.

**Figure 6: Effect of amount of work on students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Very close/ quite close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Often I feel I am drowning in the sheer amount of work we’re having to cope with.</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I often worry whether I will be able to cope with the work properly.</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I often seem to panic if I get behind in my work.</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Often I lie awake worrying about the work I don’t get done.</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears from the results that about two thirds of the students suffer from anxiety attacks about the amount of work they have to do. Another interesting result is that of sense of purpose about the work students are doing.

**Figure 7: Sense of purpose in academic work**

Almost 70% of students question the purpose of the work they are doing at the university. Two other items related to syllabus boundedness are of interest.
Table: Dependence on instructions and examinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Very close/ quite close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38. I gear my study closely to what is required for assignments and exams.</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. I like to be told precisely what to for essays and assignments.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, the responses on the question of memorizing generated about 30% agreement among the participants. Though students are often seen as memorizing and repeating, this does not seem to be their perception of their approach. One reason might be that the required assignments do not allow much scope for memorization.

**Strategic approach**

This category looks at how students organize their learning, manage time, respond to assignment requirements, view achievement and monitor their effectiveness. The most interesting results in this section are in the responses to alertness to assessment as indicated in the following two graphs. Question 2 looked at how students feel it is important to impress the marker when doing an assignment.

Figure 9: Motivated by desire to impress marker

Question 15 shows the percentage of students who examine markers’ comments to figure out how they can get higher grades on the following assignment.
The other category that yields the highest results of all in the survey is that of achieving. Three of the items here generated responses of 80% to 90% as illustrated in the following table.

**Figure 11: Importance of achievement in courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Very close/ quite close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. It is important to me to feel that I am doing as well as I can on the courses here.</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I feel that I am getting on well and that makes me put more effort into the course.</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I put an effort into studying because I am determined to do well.</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However in terms of time management, it is clear from results in this category that, on average, about 50 – 55% students may face some challenges in this area. Similarly, monitoring effectiveness seems to be important to about 60% of students. Overall, less than 70% of students see themselves as doing well in their university courses.

**Summary of results**

The results show that the students, in general, view themselves as engaged with ideas though not necessarily able to effectively engage with ideas in reading texts and with those required in assignments. It also appears that students may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to cope with throughout the university and they question their purpose in doing this work which perhaps leads to fear of failure that is a real problem for students. Generally, less than 70% of students perceive themselves as doing well in their university courses. The majority also feel they need close guidance and support when undertaking essays and assignments. It is also interesting to note that rote learning or memorization does not feature greatly as a learning strategy, though much has been written about the prevalence of rote memorization as one of the...
main approaches to learning in the Gulf context. In particular, students can be said to show a strategic approach to learning as the focus in assignments is overwhelmingly on how to get a good grade. Motivation can be defined as of the extrinsic type as almost all students cite doing well and getting a good grade as of primary importance. If we want to classify learners according to one of the three accepted categories, it would appear that they have a strategic approach to learning. It is commonly acknowledged that this approach guides many students who do international MBAs and can have a positive impact on learning. Where students need quite a lot of support is in developing a more independent, self-reliant approach to learning and this should be in-built into materials and methods in any course.

6. Limitations

This short piece of research, as indicated already, is an initial exploratory work and needs extensive follow up. However, no formal research has been undertaken before in the UAE educational system on the effects of culture on learning approaches and hence this study is an original contribution in the area. Limitations of time and method of presenting the survey prevented the comparison of results across the three academic levels. Some of the results confirm perceptions about the presence of an approach or approaches to learning that may not always facilitate the approach required at the university particularly in terms of independent questioning, engaging critically with reading texts, exploring and developing academic texts based on analysis and evidence. There is clearly scope for further study as a valuable tool to inform revision of courses and learning approaches at the university and as a tool with great input potential for revisions to programs in primary and secondary schools.

About the Authors:
Dr Josephine O’Brien and Sadia Ali both work in the Department of Languages, University College, Zayed University, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Their interests are in Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, the impact of the L1 on subsequent language learning and the relevance of technology to the development of critical thinking skills in Academic Writing.

References


Retrieved from 


Constructing a Dialogic ESL Classroom: Questioning the Standard

Stephanie Sample
The University of New Mexico

Abstract
In English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms across the United States, international students are studying Academic English and absorbing American culture. This paper questions how ESL teachers respond to international students cultural questions about linguistic facets of American culture. This paper also confronts the ESL industry’s approach towards Standard English speakers and discusses benefits and pitfalls of measures taken in ESL teacher education to address teacher biases. The author also reflects on lessons learned from both early and later stages of her experiences as an ESL teacher.

Keywords: ESL teacher education, hidden curriculum, Standard English, world Englishes, Hip Hop pedagogy
Introduction

"To be involved in TESOL anywhere is to be involved in issues of liberation and domination everywhere." Julian Edge, 1996, p. 17

At the start of teaching English as a Second Language, reservations about my contribution to the international spread of English abounded. I questioned my role the slow depletion of world languages and cultures, one English class at a time. On darker days, the questioning would take the form of worries about indoctrinating students of English with my personal opinions and beliefs as I answered queries on topics in ESL text books such as: the IRS, marriage and obesity.

Multilingual students have complex perceptions about the power their languages possess and definite ideas about the value of English compared to their first languages. Many see English “an important tool for social, economic, and political advancement” (Norton, 2010, p.6). Some international students may experience internalized oppression or the belief that they are inferior to a dominant group. The student discourse about the high value of English as a global language mentioned above indicates the potential for internalized oppression by students who categorize their languages as inferior or less valuable than English.

Scholars, such as Johnathan Hall believe that in the United States multilingualism will become the norm. Johnathan Hall (2009) says “the Next America is a place where living one’s whole life in one language seems as odd as eating the same thing for dinner every day” (p. 35). Hall’s future America is an imagined space where the monolingual English speakers make up the minority. Yet, a palpable tension exists between the internalized oppression experienced by international students of English, the preservation of the right to speak whatever language and, dialect, one chooses, and a growing population of multilingual individuals in the United States. For example, statistics of language shift among Navajo speakers in New Mexico indicate that many in the youngest generation chose to speak English instead of their heritage languages (Lee & McLaughlin, 2001, p. 30).

Teachers and students in the ESL classroom experience what Giroux (1983) terms “hidden curriculum”, or unstated and otherwise unrecognized norms, values, and beliefs embedded in texts, lessons and also transmitted to students through rules and structure of classrooms. Furthermore, Widdowson (1994) writes that language is “culturally loaded” (p. 386). If teachers and students are both ignorant of hidden curriculum, what effectively masks it? How can it be uncovered in culturally loaded language?

The body of my inquiry is organized into four categories. First, I investigate who teaches what content in ESL classrooms through a reflection on my career start in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Next, I consider the construction of Standard English in relation to World Englishes, African American Discourse and Navajo English in both classroom practice and teacher education. Subsequently, I address the relationship between World Englishes and learner identity in formal learning environments. In conclusion, I discuss implications of the body of this inquiry for future ESL classrooms and teacher education programs, focusing on solutions without rigid prescriptions. Throughout this paper I reference my ESL teaching experience in hopes to better understand the schooling practices and hidden
curriculum, including inequality and discrimination that I have witnessed and participated in as a teacher in ESL classrooms.

In 1988, Lisa Delpit wrote “Those with power are least aware of-or least willing to acknowledge its existence. Those will less power are often most aware of its existence” (p. 283). In an effort to gain awareness, this inquiry marks my grappling with the most significant and perplexing issues I have encountered in TESOL. Why are white, native speakers more likely to teach English as a Second Language? Why are competent English speakers with certain accents or dialects fired or not hired? What is the relationship between inherent authority of a teacher versus earned authority? What did my initial teaching pedagogy look like and how was it connected to my experience as a student? How do I act as a cultural worker consciously and unconsciously? What hidden curriculum do ESL texts and classroom discussions promote? What is the connection between ESL student achievement or failure and cultural discontinuity and resistance?

Who teaches what in ESL classrooms?

“The problem lies in the tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white” Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 481.

Today, I use the term “unearned privilege” to describe the ease that I experienced entering the international TESOL job market. Multiple factors contributed to my privileged candidacy for teaching ESL including my whiteness, “nativeness” and femaleness. As Kubota and Lin (2006) remind us “the problem lies in the tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white” (p. 481). In two years of teaching, employers never questioned my authenticity, my education or my teaching credentials. Colleagues of mine who are fluently bilingual non-native English speakers did not experience this privilege. In my graduating class of ESL educators, only the most experienced, an older Russian woman, was flunked. She openly remarked that she was discriminated against because she was a non-native speaker. Since then, I have witnessed several capable and talented bilingual non-native speaking teachers fired for what I considered unsubstantiated reasons.

The reality of discrimination between native speakers and non-native speakers corresponds to the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Macedo, 2000, p. 21). Donaldo Macedo (2000) recounts a reaction to the hiring of a Puerto Rican teacher in Westfield, Massachusetts where “about 400 people there signed a petition asking state and local officials to ban the hiring of any elementary teacher who speaks English with an accent” (p. 21). In contrast, in my first two years of teaching I was hired over and over again, working for more than seven companies and subsequently recruited for nine more. Being a native speaker made me a commodity on the job market, increased my employability, and brought me status in the form of my choice of job contracts.

In her seminal work, The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children, Lisa Delpit (1988) identifies a culture of power in the classroom that varies across Black and white communities. She explains “many people of color expect authority to be earned...” (Delpit, 1988, p. 289). White, middle-class educators in Depit’s essay and native English speaking ESL teachers both purportedly possess authority by virtue of their position not competence. Delpit, in comparing teaching practices, claims the white middle-class teacher...
“…does not need to express any sense of personal power because her authority does not come from anything she herself does or says” (p. 290). In the case of native English speakers, authority comes from unearned privilege without necessitating awareness of the skills needed to acquire English.

Once in charge of ESL classrooms, I felt an entitlement that both weakened and emboldened me. As a new teacher, adult students questioned my cursory explanations like “it sounds right”. In my first few months of teaching, I relied heavily on the six weeks of intensive training where I had learned many previously unfamiliar components of English grammar. The initial TESOL certification also provided instruction in basic teaching methodology. As a native speaker, authenticity of birth language sanctioned my ad-hoc teaching methodology. Widdowson (1994) outlines the process wherein:

…If you give authenticity primacy as a pedagogical principle, you inevitably grant privileged status to native-speaker teachers, and you defer to them not only in respect to competence in the language, but also in respect to competence in language teaching. They become the custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but proper pedagogy as well. (p. 387)

My teaching practice consisted of underdeveloped and untested teaching methods. Native speakers understand the cultural context and idiomatic use of “naturally occurring language”, but they cannot recreate authentic cultural contexts by virtue of their understanding (Widdowson, 1994, p. 386). Without the methodological tools for teaching, this understanding cannot be transmitted. On the surface, I reflected my pedagogy from the recently completed TESOL certification course. However, my learned pedagogy echoed my history as a student of mostly white, female teachers in puritanical New England schools. I operated as a “cultural worker” who defined the appropriate language and classroom behavior for teacher and students from this deeper pedagogy.

Reevaluating my entrance into TESOL, the unearned authority of middle class white teachers in Delpit’s 1988 essay, resonated with my experience as a native speaker. Recollections of inequalities between English speakers who possessed the wrong accent, recall Macedo’s warning of the discrimination that teachers with certain accents face. Widdowson provides reassurance that culture and language are connected beyond an explanation rendered by any native speaker. Giroux would say that in hidden, but influential ways teachers are cultural workers promoting rules and norms they have consciously or unconsciously absorbed. In ESL classrooms specifically, the selection of a demographic of ESL teachers who are natives and much of the time, white, helps ensure the promotion of Standard English and World Englishes Education

“*You can, of course, persist in your nonstandard ways if you choose, but then do not be surprised to find yourself marginalized, perpetually kept out on the periphery*” Widdowson, 1994, p. 381.

Across various ESL classrooms, my students have questioned English language variation whether pointing to international accents or national dialects. Inevitably, the controversial question of who speaks “real” English arises. Instead of addressing this question, World
Englishes (WE) as a concept, promotes intercultural communication between speakers of different varieties of English or non-native speakers (NNS) (Kubota & Ward, 2000, p. 80). Proponents of WE endorse the teaching of English as an International Language (EIL) over English as a Second language (Matsuda, p. 719).

Braj Kachru (1992) developed the term, World Englishes and described three circles of English: the inner circle (the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand), the outer circle (regions that have passed through colonization), and the expanding circle (p. 356). Despite critiques of Kachru’s diagram, scholars such as Kubota and Ward (2000) have built Kachru’s idea stating:

It is also estimated that the worldwide ratio of nonnative speakers of English to native speakers is somewhere between two and four to one. These figures indicate that English no longer belongs only to "native speakers" of the Inner Circle—it is used by other people in bilingual/multilingual situations with various forms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse. (p. 82)

When the ownership of English by native speakers is challenged, by extension the myth of the purity of Standard English comes under question. At the same time that various forms of English are being spoken, scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994), claim that languages, cultures and “linguistic human rights” are endangered by the rapid spread of global English (p. 83). Linguistic human rights constitute “the right to use a regional or minority language in private and in public life…” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994, p. 83). Ironically, local forms of English, internationally known as World Englishes and national varieties of English should also be sheltered under the umbrella term linguistic human rights.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, local varieties of English represent more than linguistic systems; WE are interlaced with local history, ways of speaking, thinking and norms of behavior-all aspects of WE speaker identity. While Phillipson argues that English as a global language infringes on the linguistic human rights of speakers across international communities, the rebuttal stands that a language itself cannot act as a hegemonic power (Widdowson, 1998, p. 138). For WE speakers, the imposition of Standard English would represent a hegemonic force enacted through Standard English speakers, impeding on the local appropriation of English. Varieties of English, such as Navajo English, showcase adaptation and specific cultural expression (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 103). In the Navajo arts, Navajo English has been celebrated in many literary works (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 104).

In his writing, “Please Read Loose”: Intimate Grammars and Unexpected Languages in Contemporary Navajo Literature”, Anthony Webster describes Navajos’ appropriations and uses of English. Navajos who authored work in Navajo English have been dismissed by Standard English speaking critics as “confused”, but exert influence within Navajo communities (Webster, 2011, p. 79). Navajo English is “…based on the distinctive historical trajectory…a local way of speaking and writing that does not completely overlap with the historical trajectory of mainstream English” (Webster, 2011, p. 65). Dismissing Navajo English as invalid masquerades as an acceptable form of literary discrimination, which perpetuates linguistic inequalities. Webster (2011) concludes by saying “The recognition of American Indian Englishes as languages worth taking seriously, as ‘beautiful Englishes’ and intimate grammars, would be one useful starting point in destabilizing such inequalities” (p. 80). Instead of acknowledging Navajo English as a distinct and valid linguistic system, educators on and off the reservation postulated “they still do not have it right” (Benally & Viri, 2005, p. 103).

Deconstructing the idea of Standard English provides a platform to assess the validity of
World English education as an antidote to linguistic discrimination. The lexis of English defines the Standard; vocabulary delimits insiders and outsiders across disciplines like law, medicine, and the academy (Widdowson, 1993, p. 380). The difference between British English and American English rests in lexis and both are considered Standard. Instead, “…the communal rather than the communicative features of standard English that are most jealously protected: its grammar and spelling” (Widdowson, 1993, p. 381). According to this argument, the primary unchanging element of Standard English resides in graphological distinctions and not phonological distinctions.

How then, could World English education serve to enhance teacher education or ESL classrooms? In my teacher education experience, WE has not been considered as a core topic for teacher preparation. Still, Kubota and Ward (2000) have argued that if WE were to be included in teacher education, ESL teachers could be sensitized to what might otherwise be an uncontested, unquestioned promotion of Standard English. WE education might expose ESL teachers to political implications of privileging one form of English over another, such as linguistic roots of colonial legacies.

A study conducted by Brown and Peterson (1997) offered training in World Englishes for graduate students in a TESOL program (Cliett, 2003, p. 72). Two groups of ESL teachers in training were given four and thirty-four hours respectively of instruction on WE. The study showed that the former group classified English speakers into two categories: native and non-native speakers and the latter group “described English speakers in terms of sociolinguistic norms and language policies” (Cliett, 2003, p. 72). A case is made for incorporating World English curriculum into requisite ESL teacher education. But while teachers demonstrated a more complex understanding of multilingual learners’ background, the study failed to prove how WE curriculum would diminish notions of the centrality and correctness of Standard English.

Instead, incorporating World English curriculum into teacher education and ESL classrooms may engender the inverse response towards Standard English. McLaughlin (2001) terms English a “power language” in his discussion of language shift among Navajo communities. In bilingual schools where Navajo is taught, English remains the primary curriculum. As a result, teachers supplement the primary English curriculum with Navajo language instruction. Introducing Navajo like this creates the antithesis to reversing language shift “… thus reinforcing English as the 'real' language of the school” (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 35). Kubota and Ward’s (2000) advocate for the introduction of WE curriculum to teacher education programs; they suggest providing audio taped samples of English to be listened to for: “various accents, intonation, vocabulary and grammar” (p. 83). The focus rests on sharing “communicative responsibilities in intercultural communication”, but not on challenging the institutional stability upheld by written Standard English (Kubota & Ward, 2000, p. 85). While WE education might herald an increase in ESL teachers’ tolerance of dialects and varieties of English, it is dubious that WE can effectively combat Standard English by functioning as the antidote to the perpetuation of linguistic discrimination. On the contrary, WE education may reinforce the centrality of Standard English.

If World English education provides no solution for combating Standard English, another struggle presents itself. How and when do ESL teachers explain linguistic discrimination in the United States? Kubota and Ward (2000) claim, “it’s necessary for (ESL) students to become aware of biases and discrimination that these speakers of domestic varieties of English face” (p. 83). Is teaching about linguistic discrimination, the domain of ESL teachers? If so, what kind of classroom environment fosters or spurns student questions about linguistic discrimination and
what impact does this have on the acquisition of English as a Second Language?

The discussion of linguistic inequalities unquestionably benefits ESL students. In discourse communities within the United States, such as speakers of Navajo English (NE) and African American Discourse (AAD), the struggle against linguistic discrimination continues. Abroad, Cliett (2003) describes English teachers working in schools outside of the United States as “intermediaries between the hegemonic and global standard English and the local and marginal varieties of English” (p. 73). To expand her perspective, English teachers within the United States also act as brokers between Standard and marginalized varieties of English through discussion of discourses, curriculum choices and classroom conversations.

African American Discourse, the “n word” and the Dialogic Classroom

“One important shift is from recitation to something closer to ‘real discussion’ in order to treat topics that do not fit the lesson structure” —Cazden, 1986, p. 54.

In my years of teaching, I cannot count the times that international student have asked about the role and usage of African American Discourse. ESL students want to know the difference between how Blacks and whites talk and specifically, who can use the n word. Questions seem to appear from nothing, as if they had been patiently waiting for a convenient crack to slip through, often times arriving in a manner that I would consider tangential to our topic. In one instance, showing a video with a Black man from New York City speaking in African American Discourse, a discussion ensued about differences in “accent” and vocabulary. When the discussion ended, a student asked “What does the n word mean?”

Having addressed this question many times before, I relied on my standard answer: “don’t use it”. I wrote the word “derogatory” on the board. Later that evening however, in a teaching journal kept for a practitioner action research class, I reflected on our discussion. After ensuing conversations with my mentor, I read Thompson’s (2004) Through Ebony Eyes, and recognized my position, “an eradicationist stance” (p. 159). My intent in the class was not to shut down conversation, but that is what I had done. I began to investigate options other than my usual-eradicating all n word discussions. I believe that eradication is a strategy used by ESL teachers to label questions, topics or words inappropriate. How does this strategy keep teachers safely within the curriculum, including the hidden curriculum, under the guise of acting as moral arbiters?

I turned to the book Teaching for the Students: Habits of heart, mind and practice in the engaged classroom. Bob Fecho (2011) describes his experience when a student reading Shakespeare in his high school English class called Juliet “a ho, like all women” (p. 24). He relates that at one point in his teaching career his reaction was “…to banish what I construed as blatant misogyny from the room” (p. 24). My eradicationist stance had also attempted to banish my perception of racism from the classroom. Fecho (2011) reflects on the dialogue in his English class:

But then I decided that all my banishment had done was to drive ideas underground where they wouldn’t be turned over, examined, and perhaps, reconsidered. Nor could I come to some understanding of the set of experiences that produced that opinion. Without that understanding, I was little prepared to suggest the construction of other realities. All I had done was to provide a space in which we could avoid the issue staring us in the face. (p. 24)

In my case, contrary to Fecho’s experience, students would not let their ideas be driven underground. International ESL students have had a variety of experiences with the n word from
popular culture and hip hop and rap songs, to discriminatory speech and conversations in the 
dorms. My students resisted my oversimplified, eradicationist dismissal of the n word and 
pressed on, seemingly yearning to know the rules for using it and what it means to African 
Americans.

As an Anglo ESL teacher, dismissing all usage of the n word as inappropriate may 
reproduce societal norms in my classroom. For one, Bonilla-Silva (2006) writes about the 
emotional nature of talk about race in America (p. 71). In his chapter “The Style of Color 
Blindness”, Bonilla-Silva recounts that many whites that he interviewed have clever semantic 
moves to protect themselves from accusations of racism (p. 57). None of the respondents in his 
surveys used the n word in their interviews. Clearly, the absence of that word was not a 
guarantee of the absence of racist ideologies. He notes that by focusing on overt racial epithets, 
survey respondents used projection as a rhetorical tool, drawing attention away from more subtle 
forms of racism. Projection coupled with a defensive stance serve as linguistic maneuvers to 
convince others that “they”, not I, “are the racist ones…” (Bonila-Silva, 2006, p. 63). In 
retrospect, I fancied myself a neutral teacher who focused on minimizing harm, by giving 
however short amounts of time to discussions of racial epithets. I can no longer deliver an 
eradicationist message without questioning my motives and the impact of this strategy on 
lessening racial discrimination.

After examining my approach to questions about racist speech, I am no longer inclined to 
tell students they are wrong, or banish topics without discussion. Fecho (2011) asks the question: 
“If students uttered racist, sexist, or homophobic statements in our discussion, was it my jo 
to tell them they were wrong or to ask them to further examine and explain their stance?” (p. 23). I 
choose not to stop dialoging with students about the politics of the n word, because I want to 
understand students’ perceptions and I agree that discussions of race are sensitive in America. 
Total dismissal of the n word warrants deterioration in the fight against obliterating racist 
ideologies while potentially reproducing sensitive societal norms in America around discussions 
of race.

In conjunction with questions about the n word, students asked me about variations in 
speech between Blacks and whites. As the teacher, the voice of expert authority, I was expected 
to give explanations of African American Discourse in relation to the English that I speak. My 
standard answer would vacillate between minimizing differences that I could not explain and 
validating the speakers’ credibility. Understandably, my explanatory efforts left students 
confused. Emphasizing that AAD is a distinct linguistic system would confirm students’ reported 
experience with difficulty communicating with AAD speakers. Yet, I was trying to dismiss the 
differences between discourses and convince students that they could in fact understand speakers 
of AAD.

In the future, I will work to create a dialogic classroom, where linguistic 
discrimination and complex use of African American Discourse can be discussed without 
bowing to pressure to be the expert. More than an explanation of phonological differences, 
students may be asking about discourse and elements of African American Discourse like I 
witnessed with questions about who can use the n word and when. Rahman (2011) writes:

The semiotic value of features eliciting feelings of familiarity and shared cultural 
experiences and knowledge works to build solidarity and makes the features amenable to 
use in constructing identity as an African American aligned with and participating in the 
African American community. (p. 4)

Explaining features of African American Discourse merely as a linguistic system cannot explain
the cultural experiences shared by speakers of AAD. Most importantly, ESL teachers should not avoid distinguishing between discourses or minimize the complex nature of their relationships. Students endeavor to make sense of the myriad of English discourses they hear in United States, while struggling to construct and choose their English speaking identity.

**Cultural Incongruities in Schooling and Resistance**

“*Learning is as much about shifts in participation in social and cultural practices and activities as about shifts in ways of thinking*” Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 41.

What happens to students who want to appropriate the English language, but not American cultural practices? How many failing ESL students are capable of language acquisition, but unwilling to lease the social practices or shifts in thinking that accompany the shift in discourse? Jenkins (2002) reports “some countries wish to learn the English language for instrumental purposes while maintaining local heritage and culture”(p. 460). Many international students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) focus on learning English while distancing themselves from American culture. Do ESL students from KSA who engage in social practices uncommon to their culture enjoy greater success in their classrooms and acceptance from their teachers? Are students who distance themselves from American culture, but still seek to appropriate the language labeled as troublemakers or non-achievers?

While some students may explicitly resist enculturation, others may unconsciously resist subtexts of ESL classrooms, or hidden curriculum, resulting in refusal to comply with classroom or language norms. Fordham (1999) reminds us “the underachiever’s refusal to lease the discourse practices that they view as foreign and hostile to their own identity is influential in marking them for academic and social failure” (p. 282). International ESL students, like Native American students in the English speaking classrooms, make choices about which parts of their identity need to be protected, which classroom rhetoric or practice should be rejected and when noncompliance is paramount.

A look at Joseph Suina’s personal narrative, recounting his departure from Cochiti Pueblo illustrates the jarring changes as he transitions into his first English learning environment. From his young vantage point, Suina (1998) remarks of his English teacher that “I didn’t think she was so smart because she couldn’t understand my language” (p. 57). The discomfort and pain that Suina felt as he adopted new behaviors and a new language culminated in a transitional moment where he knew that he had to “give up part of my life” (p. 57). The disparity between home and school discontinuity speaks to ESL students transitioning between cultures.

**Conclusion**

*“Which pedagogical practices are both appropriate and desirable in the teaching of literacy and which will help students develop the capacity for imagining a wider range of identities across time and space?”* Norton, 2010, p.1.

What began as a line of inquiry questioning global implications for teaching English as a Second Language, transitioned into an investigation of hidden curriculum and power relations in ESL classrooms. Recently, as a teacher in a program that purportedly educates students on the English language and American culture many subsequent queries arose. How do I teach American culture in my ESL class? How do language use and discussions of language forms such as Standard English reflect or perpetuate the hierarchy of power relations between dialects and discourses?

As an ESL teacher, multilingual and multicultural students surround me daily. Have I felt defensive or shied away from discussions of the plurality of identities in American culture
because of my monoculturalism? How many other ESL teachers have felt this way and what impact does it have on the classroom? Tanaka’s (2009) recounts implementing a research grant at a University striving to develop intercultural behavior or “learning and sharing across difference where no culture dominates” among a highly diverse student population (p. 83). The University where he worked benefited enormously over two years, but during a public forum, outcries came from one particular white student who lacked a ‘repertoire of identities’ (Tanaka, 2009, p. 84). What forums in ESL teacher education exist for unpacking intercultural behavior and self-reflection for ESL teachers?

The promotion of English Only in the ESL classroom contradicts requirements for an intercultural space. Disallowing other languages in the classroom thwarts students from negotiating and connecting the layers of multilingual identities. As Jenkins (2002) notes “constantly reprimanding a student for using his/her native language sends the message that L1, and by extension L1 culture, is not welcomed in the class” (p. 459). When students guard against using their L1, they may experience difficulty accessing memories, anecdotes and facets of their L1 cultural experience. Furthermore, English Only classroom policies directly oppose global cultural relations or “the local take up of cultural forms across the globe” (Pennycook, 2005, p. 33). In reality, banishing L1 from a classroom hardly ensures its total disappearance. “From a multicompetence perspective, all teaching activities are cross-lingual…the difference among activities is whether the L1 is visible or invisible, not whether it is present or altogether absent” (Cook, 1999, p. 202). Superficially, banning student’s L1 from the classroom may foster resistance among students who seek to maintain their cultural heritage and view English Only policies as a threat. Teachers must allow first languages to be spoken for the foundation of building a dialogic ESL classroom. As a dialogic classroom develops, however, further actions must be taken to maintain an intercultural environment. When students ask about American culture in the classroom, valuable material ripe for discussion has been introduced. This material is relevant and rich, a window into student experiences that should not be ignored.

Prior to coming to the United States, or in some cases, prior to entering an ESL classroom, students have amassed knowledge and experience of American culture from everyday life and global pop culture. Norton (2010) writes that second language learners create imagined communities through deliberate planning processes which include envisioning what life with an unfamiliar community will be like (p. 3). As students invest time and energy in imagining their entrance into the community of English speakers, they envision their future identity as an English speaker (Norton, 2010, p. 3). ESL teachers validate this experience in part by including pop culture materials that students are familiar with, as real curriculum. Actualizing student experience means validating their perceptions even those formed during the imaginary stage. In all likelihood, not all ESL students will foresee themselves joining white, Standard English speaking language communities. Nor will all students imagine English speaker identities that precisely mirror those of their teachers. Decentralizing Standard English generates space for ESL students to cultivate the English speaker identity of their choice.

The use of pop culture texts occurs in some ESL curriculum, but student-generated and student lived pop culture constitutes an opulent and unwritten curriculum. To accept pop culture (and pop questions) as curriculum, teachers must pass through the discomfort of not knowing and move away from initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) sequenced classrooms. Fecho (2011) describes tension or the recognition of cross-cultural differences without needing to resolve or categorize them, as one component of a dialogic classroom (p. 38). Tension, he says is “…the trampoline most educators don’t want to jump on” (Fecho,
Incorporating Hip Hop and Rap into curriculum answers a triad call for incorporating student lived pop culture curriculum, providing role models with a plurality of identities and incorporating an element of African American Discourse and linguistic markers into the ESL classrooms. Pennycook (2005) says “Rappers are interested in a plurality of identities” (p. 34). Many international students are aware of American Hip Hop artists, or global Hip Hop. Ibrahim (1999) argues that “to identify rap and Hip Hop as curriculum sites in this context is to legitimatize otherwise illegitimate forms of knowledge (sic)” (p. 366). Building from the idea of Hip Hop as curriculum, Pennycook (2005) writes “to teach with the flow, then, suggests not so much an incorporation of Hip Hop texts into the curriculum but an opening up of possible identities” (p. 40). The foundation for opening the possibility of identities must, at a basic level, include welcoming the students’ L1 and their curiosities about identities and perceived inequalities.

Undoubtedly, the question will be asked: What service is being provided to students who are not taught Standard English? In the ethnographic research of Shirley Brice Heath, students were trained as ethnographers who investigated the language used in their communities. Teachers and students crafted a meta-narrative about the relationship between contexts and linguistic choices (Brice-Heath, 1988, p. 317). This research trajectory suggests that ethnographic studies of communication in ESL classrooms are needed to interrogate teacher methodology and treatment of linguistic inequalities. With further research, the power relationship between native and non-native speaking teachers may change, opening the ESL job market to more non-native speakers. ESL students need more examples of non-native English speakers to provide new frames of reference for American culture and to inform their developing English speaking identities.

Ethnographies of communication in ESL classrooms should investigate practices developed by students with the aim of protecting their identities. Classroom practices could be developed that allow more flexibility for students to engage with the curriculum, texts and questions of their choice. Further research could aid students attaining specific goals for language acquisition, as in the case with Saudi students, while the absence of such studies perpetuates misunderstanding of such students.

References


Diversity in the Classroom: From intention to practice (pp. 67-75). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.


Tanaka, G. (2009). Reflection from the field: The elephant in the living room that no one wants to talk about: Why U.S. anthropologists are unable to acknowledge the end of culture. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 40(1), 82-95.

Thompson, G. L. (2007). Can they call each other the “N” word? In Through ebony eyes: What teachers need to know but are afraid to ask about African American
students (pp. 149-166). New York, NY: Jossey-Bass Education.


Combating the Production of Stereotypes in Undergraduate Writing

Alex Henry
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Universiti Brunei Darussalam
Brunei Darussalam

Abstract
Although there has been a lot of research into stereotyping in published materials, such as in magazines and children’s books, there has been little investigation of stereotyping in student writing in a tertiary setting. This paper sets out to identify and categories the stereotypes found in the examination scripts of 110 first year Bruneian students studying at the University of Brunei Darussalam. It was found that stereotyping occurred in 60 out of the 110 scripts. An investigation of the race and gender of the 60 scripts containing stereotyping found that there was no significant difference in the amount of stereotyping between the various racial groups or gender of students. The paper identifies four possible reasons for the production of the stereotypes: a lack of linguistic knowledge of how to develop an argument; a possible misunderstanding of their own national philosophy; the use of circular argument as a form of argument; and the possibility of actual prejudice. The paper concludes that the compulsory courses in academic writing and logic and thinking taken by the students were not effective in imparting the necessary knowledge, or developing the skills necessary for appropriate academic communication. The paper suggests the types of activities which may help prevent the production of stereotypes.

Keywords: Argument, stereotyping, second language writing
Introduction
The idea for this paper came from the marking of first year undergraduate examination scripts from an English language course held at the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD). The scripts revealed a large number of stereotypes (e.g. girls are bad at memorizing history, girls are more studious than boys, USA girls like fame with easy cash). While stereotyping is acceptable in films and TV shows, except in reality TV, it is definitely not acceptable in an academic context. Indeed part of the academic culture which we try to instill in first year students at UBD is the development of their communicative competence which includes, among other skills such as avoiding plagiarism and avoiding stereotyping. In order to discuss stereotyping in terms of academic writing we have to first distinguish it from an argument. According to the online third edition of the American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, a stereotype is ‘[a] generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group’. An argument on the other hand is generally considered to be a series of reasons or facts which are used to prove, support or rebut an idea. Thus an argument in an academic context often consists of two parts: a generalisation, usually with a degree of hedging, followed by support for the generalisation. The difference between an argument and a stereotype when referring to people is therefore quite easy to identify: an argument is formed based on a rational and objective study of facts while a stereotype is not. When dealing with inanimate objects such as, in a scientific context, then obviously the term stereotype is not used as inanimate objects cannot be offended. In science an unsupported claim is called just that.

Although research into stereotyping has a long history (e.g. Kratz & Braly, 1933; Allport, 1954) prejudice and stereotyping is still a very active area of research in a number of fields. Sociologists and psychologists for example, have identified a whole range of stereotypes (many related to race, religion, gender, profession and age) described their causes and suggested ways to control (e.g. Stewart and Payne, 2008) or reduce (e.g. Weyant, 2007) it. However, in ESL/EFL there seems to be very little mention of stereotyping. There has been work in the closely related field of applied linguistics, more specifically sociolinguistics, where the relationship between certain language features (dialects, accents, pronunciation, grammar and even punctuation) and the stereotypes they induce has been well researched and documented (see Garrett, 2010). An early example is Ball (1983) who found that Received Pronunciation in English was related to efficiency and unsociability while regional accents were related to a whole host of characteristics including warmth (Liverpool), having a good nature but being lazy and ineffectual (Australian), being attractive (German and French), being incompetent, lacking in confidence and not being attractive (Italian).

In language education the Council of Europe (2002) has recognized the importance of developing ‘communicative competence’ by trying to raise awareness of what they term the ‘intercultural dimension’. They aim to ‘to prepare [learners] for interaction with people from other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours . . ’ (p.10). While the Council of Europe is obviously looking at communication between different ethnic groups, their advice is equally relevant to the teaching of communication within different groups within an ethnic group. The Council of Europe also point out the importance of teaching language learners to talk about cultural diversity and they recommend teaching vocabulary items such as human rights, equality, dignity, gender, bias, prejudice, stereotype, and racism (p.22).
The main issue concerning stereotyping in education seems to be who is responsible for teaching it. In EFL/ESL the problems is seen in terms of grammar and discourse rather than as a social problem. It is assumed the producers of ‘overgeneralizations’ and ‘unsupported argument’ are not intentionally stereotyping rather they simply lack the grammatical tools and discourse knowledge to create appropriate language. Base on this assumption, the problem of stereotyping can thus be overcome by the teaching of the grammar of modality (e.g. Crompton, 1997) and stance (e.g. Biber 2006) or of discourse patterns such as the generalisation – support pattern. In subject areas like science such an approach is probably effective as there are no social ramifications for the production of overgeneralizations. Flowerdew (2000) for example reports that her science students in Hong Kong made overly strong claims in their scientific reports because they overused and misused phrases such as ‘This is because . . ’ and ‘This is due to the fact that . . ’ when the explanation of their results should have been hedged. In this case the student would simply be considered guilty of making claims about inanimate objects (e.g. about seawater treatment plants) that were to strong. However, if such phrases are used to describe a particular nationality, race or ethnic group then the effects and implications would be considerably stronger.

Given this propensity to see the problem mainly in terms of grammar and discourse and the potential seriousness effects of stereotyping, perhaps EFL/ESL could make more effort to consider overgeneralizations and stereotypes in terms of their social implications and explore overcoming the problem not just with grammar and discourse solutions but with social and psychological solutions.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the problem of stereotyping in undergraduate examination papers. To date, the EFL/ESL literature has tended to see the issue of stereotyping as a linguistic deficit and has offered a linguistic solution. This paper aims to take a wider approach and will take the view that stereotyping might possibly be the result of prejudice and/or ignorance. The paper will recommend the types of classroom activities that will make language learners aware of the notion and dangers of stereotyping while promoting language learning.

The Study

**Aims**

The aims of the study were to answer the following questions:

1. How prevalent was stereotyping in the examination answer scripts of the class; and was one group (race, gender) within the class more likely to stereotype than the whole group?
2. Which particular stereotypes were most commonly found in the scripts of the males and females scripts and in the Malay and Chinese scripts?

**The language course**

The language course that produced the examination scripts containing stereotypes was a first year English language course LC 1508 English II for Business, Finance, Economics and Policy Studies, a follow on course from LC 1507 English I, both required courses for all students studying in the business faculty. The aims of the course were: to provide students with the necessary skills to write academic reports; to improve students’ ability to read research articles in their discipline; to improve students’ ability to distinguish between popular and specialised research reports; and to improve students’ oral presentation skills.
Participants

The makeup of the 110 students by race and gender is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Students by gender and race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of Males (%)</th>
<th>No. of Females (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 (11%)</td>
<td>29 (26%)</td>
<td>41 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 (21%)</td>
<td>46 (42%)</td>
<td>79 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>35 (32%)</td>
<td>75 (68%)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, the largest group by race and gender is Malay females while the smallest group is male Chinese. All the students were in the 18-20 age category and had attended schools where the bilingual Malay and English national curriculum of Brunei Darussalam was followed. The students had obtained the minimum entry requirement of the University: an O Level in English language at Grade 6 or above and had passed at least two A levels.

The part of the course being tested in the examination

The section of the course that was being examined was report writing and in particular, writing the findings and discussion sections. The report writing section of the course was taught using a genre-based methodology based on theory developed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), and on practice developed at the University (Author 1998, 1999). The students were told that in the findings section they should present data using graphs, tables, etc., and then describe only the general trends. For the discussion, they were told they should comment whether the findings were expected or unexpected, provide an explanation of the findings, and compare and contrast the findings with other similar studies. It was made clear to the students that they could use all these moves or only those that were applicable to any given set of data. During their class time they were given a series of exercises to practice and were given intensive feedback on their work. The teaching materials used in the classroom are shown in Appendix A.

The examination question

The examination question which generated the scripts under study is shown in Appendix B. The data for the question was modified from the original which was downloaded from www.girls-inc.org.

Methodology

The examination scripts from all 110 first year Bruneian students from the Business faculty who were majoring in Economics, Public Policy, Finance or Management were examined for instances of stereotyping in Question 3 of the May 2009 exam paper (see Appendix B). This question required students to discuss the data from the Brunei study, compare it with the USA data, and offer an explanation for any similarities and differences between the two sets of data. A script was deemed to contain stereotyping if it contained a generalisation which was not...
sufficiently hedged and/or which was not supported by any evidence and referred to a group of people. A script was considered to be appropriate if it contained generalisations which were appropriately hedged and/or were sufficiently supported by facts. For example, one script contained the unhedged sentence ‘Girls are more studious than boys’ and was not followed by any facts to support the general idea was considered to be a stereotype. If the sentence had been followed with some support such as ‘This is shown by the fact that 75% of students in the national university are female’, it would not have been considered as a stereotype.

All the instances of stereotyping which were identified were underlined and the race and gender of the students marked on the outside cover of the exam answer booklet. These data were then collated and analysed. A chi-squared test was used to determine if one group – based on race or gender – among the students was stereotyping significantly more than the group as a whole. In order to try to explain the results, an interview was held with the then Director of the Academy of Brunei Studies to determine if the local Bruneian context could in some way account for the findings.

Results

The data in Table 2 answers the first research question concerning the prevalence of stereotyping in students scripts.

Table 2: Number of students with instances of stereotyping in script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Males (% of total occurrences)</th>
<th>Females (% of total occurrences)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>14 (23%)</td>
<td>19 (31%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>11 (18%)</td>
<td>30 (50%)</td>
<td>41 (68%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 (27%)</td>
<td>44 (73%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 110 student answer scripts, 60, or 55%, were found to contain instances of stereotyping. As the table shows, most of the occurrences were found in transcripts of female Malay students although this is a little misleading as the majority of the students were in this group. By applying a Chi-square test (Hatch and Lazaraton, 1991: 396) we can use this data though to determine if stereotyping equally prevalent across races and gender. To do this two null hypotheses were set up as follows:

i) There is no significant difference between Malays and Chinese in the distribution of stereotyping; and

ii) There is no significant difference between Males and females in the distribution of stereotyping.

After applying the Chi-square test, using the data in Table 1 and Table 2, it was calculated that the p value for the first null hypothesis was 0.59 while the p value for the second was 0.67. As
these p values do not represent a probability level of any significance, neither null hypothesis could be rejected. Thus we can say that there is no significant difference between the two races or between males and females. In other words being male, female, Chinese or Malay is not a factor which can account for stereotyping.

We now move on to the second research question which aims to determine which stereotypes were found among the different groups. The data to answer this question is presented in a series of tables in Appendix C. In summary, male Chinese students thought that males were much better at speaking in public, were more athletic and had more fighting spirit, while females were bad at memorizing, did not want a challenge, but were better at helping people. Americans were influenced by TV and tabloid newspapers.

Female Chinese students thought males were righteous, had a strong competitive spirit, had more technical knowledge, liked to play computer games, were more active, were physically strong, sporty and were going to be the head of the family. Females read more, were more studious and enjoyed theory but did not take risks, preferred secure jobs and were going to end up being housewives. They also thought Americans were influenced by Hollywood and just had to be good entertainers to be successful.

The male Malay students thought that males liked sports and challenges and were critical thinkers while females were hard working, made impressions on young minds and had a ‘softness’, had household responsibilities but were not good at taking risks. They thought American girls had natural talent and liked fame and easy cash. They considered America to be a place where it was easy to gain fame and money but where there was serious corruption, dissatisfaction and assassination.

Female Malay students thought that males had a higher mentality and stamina, were good at speeches and negotiation, were tech savvy, had more charisma, could solve problems, were interested in challenging roles, wanted to be their own boss, took risks, were more sporty, spent more time gaming but were not patient with children. They thought that women in general were more intelligent, patient, caring, sympathetic and had a sense of humour. They also claimed females studied harder, spent a lot of time reading, wanted to help people and had ‘soft’ senses. They wrote that women in Brunei were family oriented, were responsible for housework, were shy, liked children and staying indoors, but didn’t like debating or mathematics, didn’t have management skills, and did not like facing challenges or take risks. They claimed women in America were feminist, outspoken and revealing but were more likely to have talent. As with most stereotypes there is a gain of truth in some of their generalisations, but in an academic context a grain of truth is not sufficient to allow for a generalisation.

We now try to explain the causes of the stereotypes found in the study and then look at solutions to the problem. There are four possible areas worth exploring to explain the stereotypes: a lack of understanding of appropriate language patterns associated with making claims; beliefs about career choices available to women in the local context; a problem of logic; and genuine prejudice. These areas are not exclusive and it is possible that a combination of these factors resulted in the stereotypes.

If we look at language first of all, it is clear that the students did not hedge their propositions appropriately nor did they make use of the standard discourse patterns used in this academic context. If the students were speaking about generalisations of a group it would be expected that they would have used hedging language and made use of the standard discourse patterns used in this academic context.

A second factor may be that the local environment in Brunei somehow influenced the students’ thinking. The national philosophy of Brunei, Melayu Islam Beraja (Malay, Islamic, Monarchy) or MIB for short, which all Bruneians are expected to follow, is based on a blend of
Malay culture and traditions, the teachings and practices of Islam and a political system based on monarchy. In order to explore the influence this philosophy may have had, an interview was held with a local expert on MIB, Dr Siti Norkhalbi Hj Wahsalfelah, the then Director of the Academy of Brunei Studies at the University on 19th October, 2009. At the beginning of the interview Dr Norkhalbi made it clear that in Islam there were very few black and white rules to be followed in every context. With regard to the various careers options mentioned by the students, Dr Norkhalbi provided the facts and opinions summarised in Table 2.

**Table 3: Malay Islamic Monarchy and the Professions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Comments concerning MIB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Both men and women can be lawyers in both Shariah and Civil courts. Generally speaking women are not judges in Shariah court but can provide input for rulings on women’s personal matters. Women can become judges in the civil courts. The country’s Attorney General is female, Datin Paduka Hajjah Hayati binte Pehin Orang Kaya Shahbaandar Dato Seri Paduka Hji Mohd Salleh. In terms of being a witness in the Shariah court the two women witnesses are equivalent to one male witness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>Women are free to take part in all sports except in cases where they might risk damaging their reproductive systems. In addition, they must dress appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>The guiding principle in this industry is that entertainment should not make the audience forget their responsibilities (e.g. prayers). Entertainers should wear appropriate dress even female entertainers for an all female audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from this interview would suggest that MIB does not support any of the stereotypes found in the student writing with regard to career choices for locals. Except perhaps the case of women in sports where it might not be permissible for women to play contact sports. However, the prompt the students were responding to mentioned athletics rather than a contact sport.

We now look at the possibility that the problem was caused by the students’ ability to think critically. The University is aware that students need to develop academic thinking and writing skills. To develop these crucial skills, the students in this study were required to follow four compulsory courses, two in logic and thinking (Logic and Thinking I and Logic and Thinking II) and two academic English courses mentioned above. The aims of the first of these courses Logic and Thinking I, which the student in this study had taken in the previous semester course are clearly shown by this excerpt from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Handbook (2007, p23).

> An "argument" occurs whenever someone makes a claim, and attempts to back this claim up by providing evidence. Producing and evaluating arguments is a (if not "the") central feature of all intellectual endeavors — we produce arguments in order to try to convince others of our opinions, and we try to distinguish between good and bad arguments when deciding...
which opinions to take seriously. But what makes one argument "good" and another "bad"? This course will develop a systematic and objective answer to that question.

The course Logic and Thinking II, which the students had completed by the time they had written their examinations, had as one of its aims:

The aim of this course is also to introduce the students to inductive logic. We will deal with "risky" arguments, that is, with arguments in which the truth of the premises does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion. Instead, the conclusion is derived with certain degree of probability. The goal of the course is to understand and evaluate this kind of arguments.

(Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Handbook, p.25)

Thus the students in this study had access to the kind of knowledge that should have prevented the type of stereotyping so prevalent in their examination scripts. According to their lecturer, they were exposed to the idea of ‘hasty generalisations’, “argument that draws a conclusion about all members of a group from evidence that pertains to a selected sample” (Hurley, 2008, p.134). In order to probe further into the logic employed by the students we now look a bit more closely at any patterns that emerge from the data in Appendix C. As can be seen, the majority of the statements concerning Bruneians themselves attribute positive qualities to a particular gender. One example of this trend is when trying to account for the fact that more males than females in Brunei have computer programming as a career goal, one student claimed ‘Boys are more tech savvy’. This positive stereotyping occurred in 29 of the statements concerning males in Appendix C while only two statements used a negative attribute as in ‘Boys don’t have patience’. The same type of unsupported generalisations appears when the students stereotyped girls: 21 statements described their characteristics in a positive way for example ‘Girls like to read more than boys’, while 10 described negative characteristics such as ‘Girls do not want to take any challenge’. One possible explanation for these data could be that the students simply worked out which characteristics were necessary for each career and then assigned these characteristics to the group that was most interested in following that career. For instance, they may have decided that wanting to become a doctor would require patience and the desire to help others, and so if more females than males wanted to become doctors it was because they must have these characteristics and therefore that was their explanation. If this was the case then the students are guilty of circular reasoning. To form an argument they would have to establish a definite link between ‘having patience and a desire to help others’ and becoming a doctor and then to complete the argument they would have to prove that females had more patience and were more caring.

When it come to how the Bruneians students stereotyped America and Americans, they tended to make generalisations either about Americans in general, in four statements, or about American women, four occurrences. As the prompt made most of the fact that American females were much more interested in a career in entertainment than American males or Bruneians of either sex, it was not unexpected that the students commented on this. However, their unsupported arguments concerning Americans in general and American females could be interpreted as prejudice as in the examples ‘In the USA individuals are far more influenced by Hollywood’ and ‘In the US girls . . . are encouraged to be more outspoken and revealing’. These opinions may well have come about through a lack of knowledge about the USA and my even have been fostered by exposure to such programmes as American Idol which are available in Brunei through satellite TV which most students have access to. This possibility is supported by some of the earliest work on stereotyping involving students at Princeton University which
concluded that contact with individual members of a group was not necessary for the group to be stereotyped (Kratz & Braly, 1933). In addition, although no studies have been done in Brunei regarding stereotyping, it is possible that stereotyping does exist since, as Moore (2006, p.36) states, it ‘is pervasive throughout multiethnic societies’ and Brunei is a multiethnic society.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it would seem that students have made a series of unsupported arguments when writing discussion sections of reports which could be interpreted as being stereotypes. It would appear that there are four reasons why they did this: a lack of linguistic knowledge of how to hedge an explanation or reason; a possible misunderstanding of their own national philosophy; the use of tautology as a form of argument; and a possibility of prejudice formed from television programmes or newspapers. It would seem then that the students need help to develop the important academic skill of being able to differentiate between an academic argument and a stereotype.

**Pedagogical Implementations and Applications**

Although we cannot be sure of the exact reasons for the stereotyping found in student writing, it is possible to design teaching materials to help students develop a set of academic thinking and writing skills which might prevent them from producing stereotypes in future. Rather than teaching thinking and academic writing skills separately, which in our context has been shown to be ineffective, it may be possible to combine the two. In terms of logic and thinking, the development of the ability to distinguish an argument from a stereotype, as Zevin (cited in Moore 2006) points out, also assists in the development of dealing with facts and figures, encourages critical thinking and allows opportunities for thinking about attitudes, values and beliefs. In addition, we must include the development of the necessary language skills which go hand in hand with development of these cognitive skills. The exercises in Appendix D are examples of activities which may enable us to reach these goals.

The first exercise is designed to familiarize students with the language associated with the problem. Moore (2006) working with native speakers of English simply asks them to use dictionaries to define the most important terms. However, in an ESL/EFL context a more language focused inductive approach could be used depending on the language ability of the students. This could range from a simple matching exercise to the more demanding use of corpora as shown in Exercise 1. Data from corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC) can also be used to teach the syntactic patterns of the word and terms involved but this is not the focus of the activities described in this paper. Exercise 2 is a reading, thinking and language exercise, again using real data from the BNC. Exercise 3 aims to improve students’ ability to distinguish between a stereotype and a valid argument. This is not a simple thing to do and is not achievable in an exercise or two; what is achievable is providing students with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills by considering the truth of a particular statement. This type of activity needs some background knowledge of research methods and so students may need some guidance.

While the activities in Exercise 3 help learners to understand the discourse structure of argument, it is equally crucial for students to be able to interpret the grammar and lexis of generalization, evaluation and stance. Although the area is immensely complicated (see Biber, 2006), Crompton (1997) has made a good attempt at making it accessible to classroom language teachers. The activities in Exercise 4 are intended to provide some examples of the type of work that can be done in class to highlight the grammar and lexis of developing argument. In addition
to variation within the noun phrase as seen in Exercise 2, a number of words and phrases are
commonly used in English to hedge (Crompton, 1997). These include modal verbs such as may,
might, could, etc.; hedging verbs such as appear, seem, etc.; hedging adverbs such as probably,
perhaps, necessarily, etc.; the verb suggest followed by that and a clause; and the adjectives
likely, expected, etc. followed by that and a clause. The first set of activities in Exercise 4 aim to
make learners aware of these words and phrases. In addition to the grammar and lexis associated
with hedging an idea, language learners need to be made aware of the discourse structure of
argument. The last activity in Exercise 4 aims to show learners how a strong commitment to an
idea can be made provided supporting facts are provided. In this sense the activity reinforces

Even in a predominantly language learning environment, exercises which encourage the
development of independent research skills are important. Exercise 5 aims to do this in a variety
of ways ranging from the searching for facts to the replicating of research.

Finally we have to consider if EFL/ESL teachers would be responsive to these types of
activities? One study that mentions the idea of introducing materials to combat stereotyping the
language classroom was carried out by Bruggeling (2008) Although her sample size was quite
small she found support for what she call ‘stereotype-oriented teaching’. She concluded that
more research was needed before this type of teaching could be included in secondary schools in
the Netherlands. However, as the notion of stereotyping is so closely related to hedging and
generalization, it would seem eminently suitable for inclusion in any academic writing course.

About the Author:
Alex Henry is a senior lecturer in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics
at the University of Brunei Darussalam. He has taught EAP/ESP in Japan, Malaysia, Saudi
Arabia and New Zealand. He has published in international journals in the areas of ELT, ESP,
corpus linguistics and genre analysis.

References
with the matched guise technique. Language Sciences 5 (2),163-183
116.
Council of Europe, (2002). Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for
teachers. Strasbourg.
21-287
Flowerdew, L. (2000). Using a genre-based framework to teach organizational structure in academic writing. ELT
Journal, 54, 4, 369-378
Heinle and Heinle Publishers
Appendix A

Exercise 1
Students are given a published paper to read.
Read the short research paper and identify the following:
i) description of the general trends identified by the authors
ii) comments as to whether the findings were expected or unexpected
iii) an explanation of the findings
iv) a comparison and contrast of the findings with other similar studies

Exercise 2
Find a data driven research article in your own subject area and try to identify the following parts in the results and discussion section:
i) description of the general trends identified by the authors
ii) comments as to whether the findings were expected or unexpected
iii) an explanation of the findings
iv) a comparison and contrast of the findings with other similar studies

Exercise 3
Write some sentences which show general trends (or complementary facts) in the table below from the nasi katok (rice with chicken wrapped in banana leaf) report. Questions a) to h) may give you some ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Rice (g)</th>
<th>Vegetables (g)</th>
<th>Chicken Skin and Batter (g)</th>
<th>Chicken Meat (g)</th>
<th>Egg (g)</th>
<th>Sambal Cilli (g)</th>
<th>Total Energy (Kcal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (480)</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a) What was the average weight of a packet of nasi katok? What was the range of the weight of nasi katok (give the heaviest and the lightest)?
b) What was the average amount of energy per packet of nasi katok?
c) Which individual food made up most of the nasi katok?
d) How many nasi katok packets contained vegetables?
e) How many nasi katok packets contained egg? What percentage of egg was found in those nasi katok packets which contained egg?
f) How prevalent was chicken skin and batter in nasi katok?
g) How much of the nasi katok was chicken?
h) How much of the average nasi katok packet was healthy food?
i) Is there any additional information you would add to the table if it were your report?

**Exercise 4**

Write some discussion for each of the general trends you noted in Exercise 16. Some of the topics you could include are:
- how healthy do you think nasi katok is
- how does the energy contained in a packet of nasi katok compare to our daily energy needs
- the importance of vegetables in our diet
- the effects of an energy dense diet
- why there is so little egg in nasi katok
- were the results expected or unexpected (+ give reasons)
- how do these results compare or contrast with other similar studies

**Exercise 5**

Use your work in Exercises 16 and 17 to write a findings and discussion section for the nasi katok report. One way to do this is to write each finding and then comment on that finding. Then go on to the next finding and comment on that.

**APPENDIX B**

**Question 3**  (15 marks)

You are part of a team which is investigating the career goals of pupils in Forms 5 and 6 in the Bruneian secondary schools. The data in Table 1 is from your study. The data in Table 2 is from a similar study in the USA. Write one or two paragraphs (for the Findings and Discussion section of your report) in which you:

i) discuss the data from the Brunei study;

ii) compare it with the USA data; and

iii) offer an explanation for any similarities and differences.

*Remember to include in-text references where necessary.*
### Table 1 Pupil’s career goals by sex in Brunei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor, Singer, Musician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a business</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Athlete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No of Pupils</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2 Pupil’s career goals by sex in the USA (from Hyland and Butcher, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor, Singer, Musician</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Athlete</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Pupils</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX C

Stereotypes found in male and female Chinese students’ scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Chinese</td>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>Boys are much more daring to speak in public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are bad at memorizing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Due to the fighting spirit of male Bruneians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>Boys are more athletic in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>Girls tend to be more into helping people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainers</td>
<td>Pupils in USA are directly influenced by the glamorous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combating the Production of Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Malay</td>
<td>Career Choice</td>
<td>Boys naturally like to do sports and boys tend to do work which is more challenging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>This confirms that the softness of females is more suitable in situations that a patient is in pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>Girls are more hardworking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer programmers and lawyers</td>
<td>Boys choose these as they require more time and a vast amount of critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Most girls like to work hard. Girls are likely to have a greater impact and impression on young minds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Own a business</td>
<td>Girls are usually not that good at taking risks. Running a business might be too hectic and might disrupt girls’ household responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainers in the USA</td>
<td>USA girls like fame with easy cash. It is easy to gain popularity and money. More girls have natural talent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career choice: a risky job</td>
<td>In the USA anything can happen like serious corruption and assassination due to dissatisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyles of entertainers portrayed on TV and in tabloids.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own a Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer programmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stereotypes found in male Malay students’ scripts
### Stereotypes found in male Malay students’ scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Boys are good at speeches and negotiation. Boys have more charisma. Due to their ability to solve problems. Boys are interested in challenging roles. Bruneian women are family oriented, they prefer light duty jobs and as they are responsible for housework and being a mother. Girls are shy. Girls don’t like life matters and debating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>- Brunei</td>
<td>This profession requires higher mentality and stamina. Boys are good at speeches and negotiation. Boys have more charisma. Due to their ability to solve problems. Boys are interested in challenging roles. Bruneian women are family oriented, they prefer light duty jobs and as they are responsible for housework and being a mother. Girls are shy. Girls don’t like life matters and debating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>- USA</td>
<td>In the USA girls are mostly feminist and thus are encouraged to be more outspoken and revealing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>and Scientists</td>
<td>Girls are more patient when dealing with problems. Girls have soft senses and want to help people. Girls are expected to be soft, caring and more sympathetic. Girls tend to have a sense of helping. Girls have the sense of humour to face people. To show their femininity. Because it is a female kind of job. Girls know their way in sharing love with others and curing the sick. Girls are more intelligent academically. (x4) Girls study hard to achieve their ambitions. (x2) The study of science that involves human parts does not interest boys to participate in this field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>programmers</td>
<td>Boys are more tech-savvy. Boys are more likely to be good in technical activities. Because boys are known to be gamers. Boys are more expert in computers. Boys are interested in gaming from childhood while girls like reading story books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a business</td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys have the mind set to become their own bosses (x2) Boys are more risk takers. (x2) In Brunei, girls don’t like to be involved in mathematics. Because in Brunei, girls lack management skills and are not up to the challenge. Girls in Brunei do not want to take risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>– Brunei</td>
<td>It is the easiest job they can get. It is easiest among the careers. Girls like kids and their personalities fits the career as well. Boys don’t have the patience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls in the USA are more likely to have talent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls tend to stay indoors and be comfortable. Boys probably have more talent in doing sport than on the academic side. Boys are naturally athletic and love physical challenges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX D

The data sets in this paper have been extracted from the British National Corpus Online service, managed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. All rights in the texts cited are reserved. The codes in the data are the references to texts in the corpus.
Exercise 1
Based on the data below decide:

i) whether the word stereotype has a positive meaning, a negative meaning or is neutral

ii) the meaning of stereotype

iii) use your dictionary to check your meaning

**Data Set 1**

AAE (148) Born in the North at Cesena 56 years ago, he fits the stereotype of rational northern European much more comfortably than that of fiery Latin.

CHT(1386) The word 'training' implies a moulding, a conformity to a stereotype, and is applied more usually to technical apprenticeships where rote learning of facts, routines and technical data is essential to enable a trade to be carried out efficiently.

CLH (271) The acquisition of a stereotype by a subgroup of the population usually works to its detriment, and although perhaps preserving a grain of truth in relation to the subgroup's activities, it is also misleading for members of the whole population who use the stereotype.

Other terms associated with the problem (sexism, sexist language, ageism) could also be taught in this way with students making use of the British National Corpus.

Exercise 2
Identify the characteristics associated with particular groups in the data below.

**Data Set 2**

CGF 286 Finally, then, let us consider the stereotype of women as co-operative and men as competitive.

CGF 681 Phoneticsians like Caroline Henton have shown in painstaking detail that the stereotype of women as ‘shrill’ and ‘swoopy’ is actually — on average — false.

EBR235 Gossip may not be a female prerogative, but it certainly is so in the social stereotype of women.

BLW 598 In spite of a wardrobe bulging with clothes, most women complain that they haven't a thing to wear when any invitation arrives in the post.

CCN 1568 Most women care intensely about the surroundings in which they live, and their sense of security is tied up with the home;

G4W 143 Except that if women were deferential to other speakers they would allow themselves to be walked over in conversation but at the same time you had this stereotype of women who talked too much.

B1L 605 Like so many Scots of his social background, Jimmy Johnstone liked a drink.

B1L 1870 McMurdo never made the grade but like many Scots his early interest in the game ignited a flame of passion for football that has never been extinguished.

ATE 49 Like all Scots, Jock had a very high regard for education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Characteristic associated with the group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scots</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ii) Identify the noun phrases which were used to make stereotypes in the above data. How would you modify the noun phrases to reduce the impact of the stereotype on the group?
Exercise 3
i) How do we decide if a statement is a stereotype or a valid generalisation (i.e. how do we prove that a stereotype does not apply to the whole group)? Hint: Consider the statement ‘Most women have greater life expectancy than men’. How can we show that it is a valid generalization? Why is it not a stereotype?

ii) In groups decide on the criteria we might use to determine the truth of a statement.

iii) Apply your criteria to the statements in Data Sets 1 and 2 above and make any necessary changes to your criteria.

Exercise 4
i) Which of the sentences below are hedged? Underline the hedge items.

Data Set 3

A50 202 Mr Justice Jowitt told the jury that previously it had been shown in cases of alleged sexual misconduct that women may be tempted to exaggerate or fabricate.

HJ2 101 whereas men have tended to migrate out of Guanacast, at least on a temporary basis, many women appear to have moved permanently to towns within the region itself.

FST 318 In this respect, unemployed married women probably find their circumstances significantly different from those of unemployed men, many of whom are likely to have their wives at home to provide company (Martin and Wallace, 1984).

FS6 413 However, there is evidence to suggest that women may have fewer problems in adjusting to retirement than men.

B72 1537 Certainly it seems likely that women will find themselves ever more firmly trapped at the bottom of the office hierarchy as a result of the introduction of information technology.

ii) Rewrite the sentences to show less commitment to the ideas expressed.

Data Set 4

FST1139 By the year 2025, some one in seven older women will be divorced (Joshi and Davies, 1991).

EVS 1826 Women will no longer accept that they are relegated to the kitchen or are treated as machines for the production of children.

KLS 662 women will be the main losers in adult education cutbacks.

Exercise 5

i) Searching for evidence

What kind of evidence would you need to find to determine the truth of the following statements? Where would you find this evidence? What search terms would you use?

Data Set 5

CH2 12325 Most women reckon they're clever with cash.

H07 1875 Even though most women know that smoking in pregnancy is bad for their baby's health, being linked with low birthweight, premature birth and miscarriage, 25 per cent of pregnant women carry on smoking.

KRH 595 A lot of women do this, they're very tolerant about boys' mess in the home and untidiness generally, and in a sense they, they lay the foundations, right from the very beginning, of boys' growing up to think of women as kind of household servants.

ii) Replicating research

One area of research in the social sciences which seems to interest students is in how boys and girls are represented in children’s literature. Sugino (1998) for example found that in children’s books in Japan and America, boys were represented as being more active than girls and more willing to take risks. Girls were depicted as being sweet, careful, and able to make decisions but dependent on men. Students can be asked to carry out their own investigation, using a simple content analysis and convenience sampling, if they have access to a library with children’s literature from the 1980s, or 1990s. Nair (2005) describes doing this successfully with a class in a university in Malaysia using traditional fairy tales including Rapunzel and Snow White. His students found for themselves that women were stereotyped as being dependent on men and that finding a husband was necessary for a happy life. Nair asked the student to create their own fairytale using language that was gender neutral. Another genre, likely to be popular with students, for investigation into gender representation would be advertisements in magazines or music videos.
iii) Original research
Rather than replicating research, students can be asked to list a stereotype and carry out research to investigate the truth of a stereotype. They can use a methodology they are familiar with and could involve using secondary sources to compile a literature review, gathering qualitative data through interviews or quantitative data using questionnaires. They can then, write a report, or make a presentation to the class which may simply be a set of graphics, which has been suggested as an effective method to combat stereotypes (Verlinda & Thompson, 1999).

iv) Writing sections of research papers
Two other ways in which stereotyping may be combated is through the provision of information that will contradict a particular stereotype and by making contact with stereotyped individuals or groups, provided of course the contact is positive (Allport cited in Moore, 2006). An interesting study which brought together these two solutions was carried out by Koch, Turner, Smith & Hutnik (2010). They interviewed 16 healthy centenarians who were living in Britain and asked them questions about their lives. The interviews were then collated to produce a storyline which showed that contrary to the stereotypes of old people being ‘physically and mentally incapable and intellectually frail’, their participants were keen to talk about being independent, their ongoing growth and development and their current personal relationships. This study produced stories that not only combated ageism but also made the participants feel personalized. Students can be given the report by Koch et al (2010) with the conclusion or abstract missing. They are then asked to draw their own conclusions and/or write the abstract. Alternatively, the teacher can modify the original conclusions to include (hedging) choices for student to make and justify. They can then compare the original language in the paper and discuss the similarities and differences.
Project Works as Vehicles for Authenticity in the Graduate Business School of Sfax, Tunisia

Soufiane Trabelsi
Sohar University, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract
The objective of the present study is to explore the extent to which the project work (PW) approach, which is one application within Content Based Instruction (CBI), can be a producer of authenticity in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and more particularly in a Business English (BE) course. The researcher assigned group projects to two classes of 25 third year university students studying BE at the Graduate Business School of Sfax, University of Sfax, Tunisia. A questionnaire was given to them in order to get their feedback. The first major finding is that most of the students reported gaining strong interest and a high degree of motivation in using language in the classroom. They also reported great benefits in terms of language and research skills. As for the researcher, he confirms that the project work approach is of great efficiency in ESP and BE. The article concludes with some evaluation and implications of the project work approach.

Key words: CBI, CLT, Project work, ESP, Business English, Authenticity
I Introduction

The field of study of the present paper is ESP and more precisely BE. It addresses the notion of authenticity which is a frequently debated theme in these two areas which are under focus in the paper. Authenticity is differently interpreted in different contexts and by different language theorists and practitioners in the ELT area. Related to authenticity is CBI which is a recent approach within CLT (Communicative Language Teaching). In the ELT community, CBI has been given a lot of interest (Grabe and Stoller, 1997; Fried-Booth, 1986; Haines, 1989) as being a fundamental tenet within CLT. For example, Stryker and Leaver (1997) argue that CBI implies the total integration of language learning and content learning. It represents a significant departure from traditional foreign language teaching methods in that language proficiency is achieved by shifting the focus of instruction from the learning of language per se to the learning of language through the study of a subject matter. Some other researchers (Peachey, 2003; Benitez and Robles, 2009) argue that there are many advantages provided by CBI in language teaching-learning settings.

Similarly, according to Richards (2006), content refers to the information or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language rather than the language used to convey it. It is certain that any language lesson involves content, be it a grammar lesson, a reading lesson or any other kind of lesson. Content of some sort has to be the vehicle which holds the lesson or the exercise together, but in traditional approaches to language teaching content is selected after other decisions have been made. In other words, grammar, texts, skills, and functions are the starting point in planning the lesson or the coursebook and after making these decisions, content is selected. It should be pointed out, however, that CBI has a different starting point. Decisions about content are made first, and other kinds of decisions concerning grammar, skills, and functions are made later. CBI is, thus, based on the following assumptions about language learning:

i- People learn a language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information rather than as an end in itself.
ii- CBI better reflects the learners’ needs for learning a second language.
iii- Content provides a coherent framework that can be used to link and develop all the language skills (Richards, 2006, p.25).

CBI can, then, be used as the framework for a unit of work. CBI need not necessarily be the framework for an entire curriculum but can be used in conjunction with any other type of curriculum. For example, in a business communication course a teacher may prepare a unit of work on the theme of sales and marketing. In conjunction with a sales and marketing specialist, he can first identify key topics and issues in the area of sales and marketing to provide the framework for the course. Then he can proceed by developing a variety of lessons focusing on reading, oral presentation skills, group discussion, grammar, and report writing, all of which are developed out of the themes and topics which form the basis of the course (Richards, 2006).

It sounds that the argument made above about CBI has many benefits for the ESP students and teachers. For the students they learn their specialised courses in English, so they are expected to acquire knowledge of the subject matter course as well as the English skills and some communication strategies, certain types of discourse and genre thanks to the CBI approach which prioritises both the content and the form of the language. I think this is very appealing as a teaching approach and we, as teachers, have to adhere to it and develop it further. Apart from the benefits for the students, the teachers will welcome this theory of teaching and learning ESP. In other words, this pedagogical way of doing things will facilitate their tasks. This is because
teaching a subject matter through English entails using a context. Accordingly, vocabulary and grammar are covered through that context and this may provide an incentive for the students to learn more clearly, easily and efficiently.

As an example of a CBI application within the language classroom is the project work approach (Fried-Booth, 1986; Haines, 1989; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993) which is at the centre of focus of this article. This approach is particularly of great efficiency in ESP, in general and BE, in particular as it lends itself to: a) text authenticity, b) learner authenticity, c) task authenticity and d) learner involvement and independence (Robinson, 1991). By integrating project work into content-based classrooms, educators create vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement, stimulate higher-level thinking skills, and give students responsibility for their own learning. When incorporating project work into content-based classrooms, instructors distance themselves from teacher-dominated instruction and move toward creating a student community of inquiry involving authentic communication, cooperative learning, collaboration, and problem solving (Stoller, 2002).

II The rationale for Content-Based Instruction

In recent years, CBI has been turned to by language educators and practitioners in order to promote meaningful student engagement with language and content learning. Through CBI learners develop language skills while becoming more knowledgeable citizens of the world. Stoller (2002) states that CBI has been used in a variety of language learning contexts, though its popularity and wider applicability have increased dramatically since the early 1990s. Numerous practical features of CBI make it an appealing approach to language instruction. In such an approach, the activities of the language class are specific to the subject matter being taught, and are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the use of the target language (ibid).

Unlike traditional approaches to FL teaching which focus on accuracy through teaching discrete grammatical points and vocabulary items, CLT emphasises a CBI approach which tends to concentrate on the communicative use of language and content rather than form. CBI is likely to set up a context for learning to learners. Such an approach lends itself to the integration of the four skills, the use of authentic materials and students’ motivation and involvement (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989). It has been empirically proved that CBI allows for the natural integration of sound language teaching practices such as alternative means of assessment, apprenticeship learning, cooperative learning, integrated-skills instruction, project work, scaffolding, strategy training and the use of graphic organisers (see Grabe and Stoller, 1997 for a developed debate on CBI).

According to Candlin (1987), there is empirical evidence that CBI, in general, and project work, in particular, can be helpful in providing contexts where learners are encouraged to react actively and engage in "purposeful communication". This is because of many reasons: First, this type of work entails the teacher’s and students’ focus on the communicative use of language and content rather than form unlike traditional approaches to EFL which rather lay emphasis on accuracy i.e., discrete grammatical points and vocabulary items. Second, when learners work on the same topic for some time, they will learn better than when they have reading or writing materials on a different topic every time. Third, it is assumed that that when learners recycle their knowledge by reading from different sources on the same subject, they develop a sense of self-confidence in the project work (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993) and go deeper in the processing
of the materials (Anderson, 1990). Project work, as this study will show, can be associated with real-life preoccupations as well as to the range of academic tasks students will encounter in their future academic and professional life. It is likely to enhance students’ interests and motivation and provides them with hands-on experience.

All the factors mentioned above stimulated the researcher to use this particular approach. So, before implementing the project work approach, the researcher was aware of the potential benefits of it.

II Project work as a natural extension of CBI

1-What is project-based learning

Thomas (2000) proposed a definition of project-based learning (PBL) from PBL handbooks as being “a teaching model that organizes learning around projects” and projects as being complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision-making, and/or investigative activities, that give students opportunities to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time, and culminate in realistic products or presentations (Jones, Rasmussen, and Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, and Michaelson, 1999). As an extended illustration, Stoller (2006) defines PBL as: (1) having both a process and product; (2) giving students (partial) ownership of the project; (3) extended over a period of time (several days, weeks, or months); (4) integrating skills; (5) developing student understanding of a topic through the integration of language and content; (6) students both collaborating with others and working on their own; (7) holding students responsible for their own learning through the gathering, processing, and reporting of information gathered from target-language resources; (8) assigning new roles and responsibilities to both students and teacher; (9) providing a tangible final product; and (10) reflecting on both the process and the product.

Beckett (2006) adds that the integration of project-based learning into second and foreign language instruction is considered a natural extension of content-based instruction. It originates from Dewey and Kilpatrick’s work. According to Stoller (2006), for effective project-based learning to take place, educators need to make sure that project-based learning has a process and product orientation, requires student involvement in topic selection in order to encourage active participation and a sense of ownership in the project, extends over a period of time, is structured in such a way that integration of skills is natural, makes students work both in groups and on their own, requires learners to assume responsibility for their own learning through the process of selecting, gathering, processing and reporting of information acquired from a number of sources (e.g. the World Wide Web, library), results in a tangible end product (e.g. a theatrical performance or multimedia presentation), and concludes with an evaluation of the process and the end product.

2-Benefits of PBL

The modern focus on student-centeredness in language learning has led many teachers to investigate the benefits of incorporating PBL into their English-language classes. A PBL approach enables students to develop and improve their language fluency and accuracy, and at the same time build personal qualities and skills such as self-confidence, problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration (Fried-Booth, 2002; Stoller, 2006; Beckett and Slater, 2005). Another frequently reported benefit of project-based learning is authenticity of experience, since when students participate in project work, they “partake in authentic tasks for authentic
purposes—both conditions sadly absent from many language classrooms” (Stoller, 2006, p.24). Moreover, in the relevant literature it has been argued that authentic materials, including authentic tasks, help students to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, which are very important, since they are life-long, transferable skills to settings outside the classroom (Allen, 2004). Such materials also promote participation in meaningful activities which require authentic language use and can lead to improved language skills (Levine, 2004; Haines, 1989), increased motivation, linguistic development and cultural understanding (Taylor and Gitsaki, 2004). Similarly, in using PBL in their classes, many practitioners often report that students demonstrate increased motivation and engagement, less foreign language anxiety and positive attitudes toward language learning (Lee, 2002; Brophy, 2004; Fragoulis and Tsiplakides, 2009).

3- What project work is
It is argued by many language professionals that we can equate project work with in-class group work, cooperative learning, or more elaborate task-based activities (Stoller, 1997). Hutchinson and Waters’ model (1987) of ESP materials design is an excellent proof of that. It is the purpose of the present paper, however, to demonstrate how project work represents much more than group work itself. It is worth noting in this context that project work is considered “not as a replacement for other teaching materials” but rather as an “approach to learning which complements mainstream methods and which can be used with almost all levels, ages and abilities of students” (Haines, 1989, p 1). In the classroom context, after committing oneself to content learning as well as language learning (i.e., content-based classrooms), the project works have proved efficient as they represent a natural extension of what has already taken place in class (see Appendices 1 and 2). For example, in a BE course, where students are exposed to themes pertaining to the business world, the development of a brochure introducing different departments of a company or describing its products would be a natural outgrowth of the curriculum (the design of a presentation reporting an evaluative study on the company present performance manifested through the SWOT Analysis would be a natural by-product of the lesson) (see Appendix 2).

Throughout my modest experience of teaching BE to undergraduate Tunisian students for five years (at the time of carrying out this action research or case study if it is suitable to call it so), I noticed that most of the students favoured group or team work. This is because they know that individual efforts are not enough and that strength can only be obtained through synergy of efforts. For these reasons, the idea of having some practical research such as a group project work appealed to them. They welcomed it with satisfaction and excitement. These are some of the factors, among others, that stimulated them to positively respond to the challenges of the project work by trying their best to make of it a success.

III Project work as a source of authenticity

1- Authenticity
The notion of authenticity in the language classroom is much debated, but even a cursory reading of the literature will bring to light a confused and contradictory picture (Taylor 1994). It is not surprising that many educators and researchers are themselves completely confused. In part this is because there are different types of authenticity, and these are not always clearly distinguished. In many cases, it is not clear whether we are dealing with authenticity of language, task, situation or learner. For this reason, the present paper will try to clarify each type of
authenticity previously mentioned with the focus led on authenticity of ESP teaching materials round which the central argument of project work revolves.

Breen (1985) distinguishes between four types of authenticity: a) authenticity of texts which is considered as input for learners, b) authenticity of learners’ own interpretation of such texts, c) authenticity of the tasks conductive to language learning, and d) authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom. Many scholars seem to ignore all these different types of authenticity assuming that there is some sort of global and absolute notion of authenticity which is likely to exist if all the above types of authenticity are simultaneously present. Yet, authenticity is clearly a relative matter and different aspects of it can be present in different degrees. It may be helpful at this point to review a few definitions of authenticity:

i- “Authentic texts (either written or spoken) are those which are designed for native speakers: they are real texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question” (Harmer, 1983, p. 46).

ii- “A rule of thumb for authenticity is any material which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching” (Nunan, 1989, p. 54).

iii- “Authenticity is not a characteristic of a text in itself: it is a feature of a text in a particular context. Therefore, a text can only be truly authentic, in other words, in the context for which it was originally written...we should not be looking for some abstract concept of authenticity, but rather the practical concept of fitness to the learning purpose” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 159).

iv- “Authenticity is not a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. We do not recognise authenticity as something there waiting to be noticed, we realise it in the act of interpretation” (Widdowson 1979, p. 165).

It should be pointed out that it is beyond the scope of this paper to present an extensive and deep review of the literature on authenticity (for an extensive survey of the authenticity trends see Trabelsi, 2011).

As seen from these definitions of authenticity, some think of it as essentially residing in a text while others think of it as being, in some sense, conferred on a text by virtue of the use to which it is put by particular people in particular situations. The other deduction that can be made is that authenticity of texts or materials can be clearly defined, but when we go beyond the text, authenticity is very much a matter of interpretation or interaction with language and it has to do with the appropriate response of the learners

1-1 Text authenticity

Wilkins (1976) argues, in speaking about authentic materials, saying that “such materials will be the means by which he (the learner) can bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and an effective capacity to participate in real language events” (1976, p.79). In other words, the learner should be exposed and be encouraged to deal with similar materials that he will have to encounter in the real world. This is the case for ESP as it demands real-life language use as its model and its goal. Robinson (1980) confirms that by stating that “the use of authentic data is seen as an essential component of an ESP course and also of any communicative syllabus” (1980, p. 35). In the same respect, Lee (1995) argues that a textually authentic document is the one which is not written for teaching purposes, but for real-life communicative purposes. He
adds by saying that “because of their intrinsically communicative quality, textually authentic materials tend to have greater potential for being made learner authentic” (1995, p. 324).

For the case of the project work, it lends itself to the use of authentic data especially in the ESP field. With reference to the present project model, students made use of actual data from many sources such as a company archives, the internet, and interviews with real business people, etc.... These served as an input for the students to process the SWOT Analysis applied on a given company. By carrying out such a project, students started being familiar with in-house materials of companies that they might use in their future career.

1-2 Learner authenticity

As another type of authenticity, learner authenticity is worth reviewing in this respect. Recently there has been considerable interest in the learner’s response to teaching materials irrespective of their nature. Widdowson (1979) argues that authenticity does not reside solely in the text itself, but it is rather created by the ‘appropriate response’ of the learner. He puts it plainly while saying “the learner may simply not feel himself in any way engaged by the text being presented to him and so may refuse to authenticate it by taking an interest” (p. 80). That is to say, text authenticity is created only if the learner identifies with the materials to which he is exposed to and involves himself in responding to them appropriately or rather favourably.

The argument regarding learner authenticity may be clarified by Lee’s (1995) assumption that there four factors involved in establishing it. Pedagogically speaking, these factors can be defined as (a) text factor (materials selection), (b) learner factor (individual differences), (c) task factor (task design) and (d) learner setting factor (learning environment). To these a fifth factor could be added which is teacher factor (teacher’s attitude and teaching approach). All these are interrelated. From another perspective, Clarke (1989) contends that as users of the materials, the needs of the learners should play a central role, and govern factors of text, task, teacher, learner and learner setting. He also points out that learner influence on the language teaching process is potentially significant, both at the macro level of syllabus design and at the micro level of what is done within each lesson or unit.

As the project works entail an engagement from the part of the students in dealing with a particular theme, they did show their willingness and determination to assume their responsibility to proceed with a series of tasks leading them to the creation of a project. This is the case of our sample projects in which students proved positive and ready to undertake them especially that they considered them useful and complementary to their studies, interests and future prospects, hence the authenticity of the documents was somehow ensured.

1-3 Task authenticity

Having ensured text and learner authenticity, project work has another third merit which is the achievement of task authenticity. This results from the attempt to engage the learners’ interest by relating the task to their own life and by providing a purpose for undertaking the activity. This can be manifested implicitly in the information gap or problem solving, role play and simulation. Accordingly, learners may be asked to play themselves in familiar or rather unfamiliar situations or to adopt roles new to them (Breen, 1985). According to Lee (1995) if we like to make tasks be accessible to learners, like materials, then they should be learner authentic, that is, we should make sure that they are both learner and textually authentic. Practically speaking the crucial task design stage may involve the following consideration in order to ensure authenticity:
i- In reality more than one language skill is employed in order to achieve communicative purposes, hence the recommendation to have an integrated skills approach.

ii- There should be a context in which the skills are to be practised naturally and meaningfully.

iii- Task validity must be ensured, that is, both the content and the nature of the task should develop the expected language ability in learners (Bachman, 1990).

iv- The content of the task should be relevant to the selected authentic materials which are supposed to be used as springboard for the task.

v- It is the course objectives, the practised skills and learners’ preferences which determine whether the task is used as a pre-, practice or post-activity (Lee, 1995).

In fact, the project works reported in this paper entail the sequencing of a series of tasks that students have to go through in order to fulfil the requirements of the project. For example, students have to interview top managers in a company with regard to its present performance, to collect data from its press, navigate in its website to get extra information, compile and analyse the collected data as well as synthesise the whole work in preparation for the presentation stage. These different tasks prepare students for future career needs and requirements.

What the researcher noticed was that the students liked these tasks very much because they were involved in something practical from which they were learning a lot. In other words, they were gaining many skills and a great deal of language.

2- Learner involvement and independence

Robinson (1991) argues that project work is an effective approach especially in an ESP setting because it enhances learner centeredness, that is, it requires personal involvement on the part of the students as they must decide “what they will do and how they will do it” (Fried-Booth, 1986, p. 5). This is the case especially for unstructured projects which are student-based (see Henry’s model 1994), but for the case of the present projects, they are rather joint undertakings between the teacher and the students, i.e., semi-structured projects. The effectiveness of this type of projects is guaranteed especially when teachers temporarily relax control of their students and assume the role of guide or facilitator. The teacher can intervene by diligently overseeing the multiple steps of project work, establishing guidelines, monitoring the process and providing instructions in the language when needed.

Stoller (2002) reviewed the literature on the different forms of project work, and concluded that there are particular features that characterise project work, including focus on content rather than language, being student-centered, cooperative and not competitive, integrating skills, being product as well as process oriented, helping students to be attentive to both fluency and accuracy. Last but not least project work is "potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. It usually results in building student confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy as well as improving students' language skills, content learning, and cognitive abilities" (p. 110).

Giving the students freedom to immerse themselves in projects can lead them to become motivated and independent learners (Sheppard and Stoller, 1995). With reference to the present project works, it is the students who chose their themes, their data collection instruments, favoured the application on a particular company and followed the steps of developing the projects but always under the supervision of the teacher who provided his feedback especially in terms of language and not content (this is to remind that the students have been already theoretically tutored on the designing, sequencing and presenting of project works).

In the whole scene, the researcher tried to be a mentor for the whole process. He intervened when things became complicated for the students or when he was called for help. This was done on purpose in order to elicit the students’ autonomy and self-responsibility.
IV The characteristics of project work

Many language educators proposed different models of project work and each of them approached it from a different perspective (Fried-Booth, 1986; Haines, 1989; Legutke, 1985; Sheppard and Stoller, 1995), but most of their models share the following features as argued by Stoller (1997):

i- PW focuses on content learning.
ii- PW is learner-centred.
iii- PW is cooperative rather than competitive.
iv- PW leads to an authentic integration of skills and processing information from several sources reflecting real-life tasks.
v- PW process is crowned by an end-product (oral presentation, poster session, report...).
vi- Its value lies in the processing of accomplishing it and not its final product. It enhances students’ fluency and accuracy.
vii- PW enhances students’ motivation, stimulation, empowerment and challenge. It leads to students’ confidence, self-esteem and autonomy. It improves students’ skills and cognitive abilities.

1- Potential configurations of project work

Projects may differ in terms of the degree to which teachers and students decide on the nature and the sequencing of project work activities as delineated by Henry (1994). Projects can reflect real-life concerns and real-world issues. Similarly, they can be linked to students’ interests (Legutke and Thiel, 1983). Projects can also differ in data collection techniques and sources of information (see Haines, 1989; Legutke and Thomas, 1991). Projects are also characterised by their difference in the ways that collected findings are reported (See Haines, 1989). According to Stoller (1997), whatever format the configurations may take, projects are generally fulfilled intensively during a short period of time or extended over a few weeks or a full semester. They make be accomplished by students individually or in smalls groups or as a class. They can take place entire within the classroom setting or extended beyond its walls into the community or with others via different forms of correspondence.

Regarding the configuration of the projects of the present case study, the students chose performance projects. These are shaped in the form of staged debates, oral presentations, theatrical performances, food fairs or fashion shows. The students also chose oral presentations as one way to report their findings.

2- The project work steps

Project works, whatever configurations they may have, require many stages of development to succeed. Although recommendations as to the best way to develop projects in the classroom vary (Fried-Booth, 1986; Haines, 1989; Katz and Chand, 1993) most are consistent with the eight fundamental step model as suggested by Sheppard and Stoller (1995) who propose it for an ESP classroom. Their model has been refined as a result of being tested in a variety of language classrooms and teacher training courses (Stoller, 1997). The modification of the former model mainly introduces some language intervention steps from the part of the teacher. These additional steps serve to help students complete their projects successfully. They may be summarised as the following:

Step 1: Students and instructor agree on a theme for the project.
Step 2: Students and instructor determine the final outcome.
Step 3: Students and instructor structure the project.
Step 4: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of information gathering.
Step 5: Students gather information.
Step 6: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of compiling and analysing data.
Step 7: Students compile and analyse information.
Step 8: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of the culminating activity.
Step 9: Students present the final product.
Step 10: Students evaluate the project.

3- A Case study about some projects

3-1 Background

The students reported in the present research study Accounting Sciences at the intermediate level at the Graduate Business School of Sfax, University of Sfax, Tunisia. At the time of carrying out the study, they were in their third year of university study, so they were generally taught 3 hours of English per week. They were exposed to English during two sessions, each lasting one hour and a half on a two semester basis. The English course was taught in the form of TD (“Travaux Diriges”) which means practice work, that is, a kind of lecture integrated- into- practice work session.

The idea to undertake such project works by all the students in both classes during the English course was motivated by their strong desire to improve their proficiency and their consideration of projects as a tools or means towards their mastery of linguistic structures and pronunciation in English. The second motive was that they would sit for an oral exam which would be a final one at the end of the year, more particularly at the end of the second semester. So, the students of Accounting Sciences showed much more interest and determination than others to be prepared for that occasion. I can confirm, being one of their teachers and one of their future examiners, that particular factor motivates most of them to participate in undertaking projects. They thought that the project would prepare them for the test as it would enhance their oral fluency. The third motive was that these students would have to use English in the workplace after graduation. The students were conscious enough of the challenges awaiting them in the future. They were residents in a very hectic and dynamic economic pole of the Tunisian country, namely, Sfax. This was a very commercial and industrial city in the southern area of the country and considered as the second big city after the capital city of Tunis. Most of its commercial and business transactions were made in English, especially that they would always involve foreigners, hence the necessity of BE.

To present more details about the present project works, students were exposed in class lectures in theory to the theme of Top Management. Actually, this was the second theme after the Manager’s Role. Within this context, the students dealt with SWOT Analysis which was one of the duties of top managers undertaken in order to evaluate the present performance of their company. As a post task to the lesson, all the students were divided into groups of 4 and given the choice to apply SWOT Analysis to any company they may think of (whether locally or universally).

3-2 Procedures
After being introduced to the theme unit of Top Management and its most fundamental vocabulary and concepts, the teacher made a theoretical session on the formation of project works. Meanwhile, he suggested potential topics that may be made into projects such as SWOT Analysis, Top Managers’ Roles, The Company Hierarchy, The Company Departments, Business Organisations, on so on. These were dealt with intensively during the course sessions. The students were exposed to these through worksheets including reading comprehension, language and writing tasks. The students were given full freedom of what to choose as a topic for their projects. However, since it was a new experience to them and to the teacher and for the sake of encouragement and empowerment, the teacher promised to help them the students. Semi-structured types of projects were chosen so as the teacher could intervene and monitor the process of the projects’ formation in order to stimulate the students’ interest and motivation in the process. Adopting Stoller’s (1997) model of project work, a ten-step project was followed (see the same steps on page 10 of this paper).

V Evaluation and implications

1- Evaluation

In order to evaluate the whole undertaking of project works as activities in class and adopting a new task-based material design approach, and in conformity with the tenth step of the project, the teacher assigned a questionnaire to the students (see the questionnaire in Appendix 3). The questionnaire was put in French (L2) so as to avoid any ambiguity of words or any misunderstanding. In response to the first question, the students expressed their motivated feelings of strong interest in the communicative language use of English and their desire to break up routine of the class. They were driven by their adherence to proficiency improvement and getting accustomed to research works (investigation, methodology, reporting skills, statistics, data analysis, etc…) and most of all they tried hard to prepare themselves for the final year oral exam of English.

For the second question, the students reported that they had access to language in use in many contexts as they got acquainted with companies’ staff and managers. They learned the distinction between what was theoretical and practical (class vs. reality). They acquired presenting skills (in terms of quantity, quality, timing, pronunciation, planning, organising, etc…). They learned how to and what to select among a plethora of documents and data in order to give only the essential and needed output (i.e., only appropriately sufficient information). Lastly, they satisfied their teacher, thus establishing a good rapport with him and suiting his expectations (material reward). Regarding question 3, the students discovered new lexis, phrases and expressions within business English. They enhanced their communication, research skills and strategies. The project work was an exercise in managing, organising and planning one’s data.

In response to question 4, they reported some encountered obstacles. These were mainly technical terms and their translation which were not available in ordinary dictionaries. Some parts of the projects lacked sufficient information (especially data about weaknesses or threats). They lacked internet skills and even if they knew a little, it was time and effort consuming. Students did not have the habit of presenting work in English (that was new to them). They were not also used to working within particular time constraints. They had structural problems (tense/functions/forms/grammar/vocabulary/pronunciation). As far as questions 5 and 6 are concerned, the students addressed some tips for their future peers who would be involved in such an activity. They advised them to limit themselves just to necessary information (not caring
about quantity but quality) and to optimise the use of time. They also recommended consulting many sources of information for the sake of reliability and using realia while presenting their works (brochures/ folders/ posters, etc…) in order to impress and attract their audience attention. They made it essential to consult the teacher for feedback. The most essential thing raised was to have self-confidence and work in a group and exchange feedback all the time.

Concerning question 7, the students advised the teacher to assign feasible project topics and especially formerly treated ones in order for students to follow the same principles and guidelines. They wanted the teacher to elicit much more student involvement and motivation in the undertaking. Students recommended having some mini-workshops or mini-seminars so as to sensitise the students to the importance of projects as well as how to deal with them. They asked for more time devoted to presenting and discussing projects. Lastly, they recommended making of projects a necessarily regular class activity within the course or the curriculum. For question 8, the students argued that they were in favour of the teacher’s presence as this would facilitate their tasks (a monitor/ guide/ supervisor/ regulator) and would bring harmony to the group with his consultation and feedback when necessary (he clarified what was required from them), i.e., he would set them right. His presence reduced their anxiety and mystery. Yet, it was only a minority who expressed their unwillingness to work with teacher simply because it would disturb their way of thinking and not foster their self-reliance.

Responding to question 9, the students recommended using dictionaries and reading in English and focusing on phonology and morphology. Lastly, they required the consultation and the help of others especially advanced colleagues. For the last item of the questionnaire, which was a kind of a general feedback concerning the PW, most students, despite the obstacles and constraints met, stated that PW was a good oral exam preparation. It was a good initiative that helped them to acquire new different types of skills. It enhanced their self-esteem and personal pride (because of the achievement itself) as for some it was source of self-satisfaction. It was a good method, however challenging it may be, which engaged students in a pleasurable task of presenting a project reflecting students’ efforts. It improved their language level and helped them to become operative and not merely recipient language learners. Finally and this was mostly shared by all, English as an international language in the world deserved such an undertaking of PW.

Such experience of the PW was were rewarding but very challenging at the same time, especially on the part of the teacher. It required a lot of preparation, commitment, intervention, monitoring, control, and feedback. However its success would rest on the determination of the students to undertake it. This is because if they are voluntarily persuaded to do it, they can never be urged to experience it. So, one can deduce that it depends on what type of students in order to see if PW can be a worthwhile or not in a certain context.

2- Implications

The implications that can be extrapolated from the present ESP project work approach experience are the following: First, teachers are advised to consider their students’ long-term language needs. Second, they are also invited to identify the social and professional contexts where their students are likely to operate after graduation. Third we, as instructors, have to think of similar projects that require the use of language that our students will be asked to fulfil in the future while considering what is feasible, i.e., what is within our students’ reach. Fourth, there is no point in insisting that our students necessarily interview native speakers of English and we should not abandon the idea of forming a project if ideal circumstances are not available as most professional conversations in English may be carried on among non-natives. Fifth, we should not
give up simply because a pool of native speakers or authentic printed materials are unavailable close to hand. Last, but not least, we should be involved in a lot of planning, in other words, before introducing the project, we have to identify topics of possible interests, the educational value of the outcome, corresponding activities and students’ material or cognitive needs in conducting the project. In a nutshell, planning is critical.

VI Conclusion
The present paper reports the rationale, the procedures and the findings of a CBI by-product which is a PW undertaken by business English intermediate students in a Tunisian tertiary education context. The thrust of argument is that an ESP project work can be considered as a vehicle for authenticity as it is a source of learner, text and task authenticity, each of which contributes to the ESP learners’ involvement and independence which are two advanced steps towards learner autonomy.

About the Author
Dr. Soufiane Trabelsi is a Lecturer in the General Foundation Programme at the University of Sohar, Sultanate of Oman. He holds a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from Leeds Metropolitan University. His areas of interest include authenticity, ELT, ESP, Business English, and reading-writing convergences.

References


Appendix 1

Figure 1. Materials Design Model (borrowed from Hutchinson and Waters (1987))
Appendix 2

Figure 2. A refined materials design model adapted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

Appendix 3

The Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions below concerning the importance of project works in improving students’ level of language proficiency. We can assure you that your answers will remain confidential. In case you are interested in the findings we can share them with you.

Question 1: Why did you choose to undertake a project work? (give your reasons)
Question 2: What have you gained from this experience?
Question 3: What are the new acquisitions you got from it? (on both form and content levels)
Question 4: What obstacles have you encountered while working on your project with reference to language, methodology, information availability, information sources, information sufficiency, time constraints and the project presentation)
Question 5: If we propose on you to redo the work, what would you do?
Question 6: What kinds of tips you could address to you future peers?
Question 7: What kinds of tips you could address to your teacher of English?
Question 8: Are you in favour of the teacher’s intervention in PW formation?
Question 9: How to surmount the language while undertaking the PW? What strategies and skills you recommend others to do?
Question 10: What is your general feedback concerning the PW experience? Justify your answer.

Thank you for your Cooperation
Exploring the use of ARS-keepad Technology in English Vocabulary Development

Beena Giridharan
Curtin University, Sarawak, Malaysia

Abstract
The lexical approach towards second language (L2) teaching focuses on developing learners’ proficiency with lexis, or words and word combinations. Language teachers and researchers are cognizant of the significant role of vocabulary in different pedagogical tasks and of the fact that mastery of vocabulary is an essential component of L2 learning (Mohseni-Far, 2008). An important aspect of L2 vocabulary learning is the capacity to comprehend and produce lexical phrases. This explorative study investigated the role of (Automated Response System) ARS-keepad technology as a pedagogical tool in the second language classroom for L2 vocabulary recognition tasks, and examined whether the technology could be used to utilize a higher level of interaction in the classroom and permit vocabulary comprehension to be assessed in real-time. Studies by cognitive scientist, Pinker (2000) assert that principles of language acquisition can be compared to a branch of theoretical computer science called Learnability Theory, which acknowledges the role of environment in language learning. This premise posits that an interactive instructional environment could play an important role in language learning including vocabulary development. A social learning theory such as the Constructivist theory is also explored in the study to explore whether ARS-keepad technology can promote a higher level of interaction among learners. Initial results from the study illustrate that the knowledge gains, through the use of ARS-keepad technology came firstly from the almost instantaneous feedback from learners to the instructor that facilitated development of relevant vocabulary learning tasks. It further assisted measurement of comprehension through well-designed questions, and by getting each learner to respond. The use of emerging technologies like ARS-keepad in the classroom allows for veering away from traditional teaching paths and learning practices and encourages a more integrated and participative engagement of learners.

Keywords: ARS-keepad technology, vocabulary recognition, L2 language teaching, lexical approaches, vocabulary comprehension.
Introduction

In the lexical approach to language teaching, the lexis is given a more prominent role than grammar. It is based on the idea that an important part of L2 acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases (Lewis, 1993). Vocabulary knowledge has been identified as the most identifiable component of the learner’s ability to read (Nation & Coady, 1988). For this study, the function of an interactive technology such as ARS-keepad technology is analyzed as a pedagogical tool in the second language classroom. The practice of using technology to improve second language (L2) education has a long history (Salaberry, 2001). An appropriate balance of face-to-face teaching and use of technology is recommended in the second language classroom (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Keepad technology is part of audience response systems or ARS. Keepad-based systems provide group participants with small numeric keypads linked by wireless or infra-red and help participants to key in their responses to questions posed to them by the instructor or facilitator. Although in general, the technology performs a relatively simple function, often limited to a multiple choice pop-quiz, research has revealed that there is more to this technology than meets the eye. Early researchers of ARS-keepad systems have frequently described the technology as a catalyst for a significant, powerful shift in the classroom climate, pedagogy and resulting learning (as cited in Rochelle, 2003). Although the use of personal response technology has increased in in the last decade, it still has not been used extensively in teaching in higher education (Albon & Jewels, 2007). However, more English language teachers have been utilising the use of technological tools, referring to them as significant drivers of social and linguistic change, as it meets both visual and auditory senses of the students (Shyamlee, 2012).

In this study, ARS-keepad technology was applied for advancing vocabulary recognition learning tasks and to validate if it could be used to gain understanding of student vocabulary comprehension in real-time. It is anticipated that this knowledge would enable the instructor to structure appropriate vocabulary development tasks for the learners. This chapter reports on an explorative study conducted to investigate the use of ARS-keepad technology in the language classroom for assessing vocabulary tasks such as word recognition and for developing efficient tasks that assist L2 learners in vocabulary development.

Aims and objectives of the study

The study aimed to investigate the role of keypad technology for the following purposes:

(1) as a diagnostic tool to assess L2 vocabulary recognition;
(2) to explore if ARS-keepad technology can assist instructors to increase vocabulary production in L2 learners through structuring academic activities based on responses to recognition tasks.

There were two objectives of the study. There were to:

- investigate the role of keypad technology as an interactive device in the classroom for L2 vocabulary recognition tasks;
- investigate the role of keypad technology to utilize a higher level of interaction in the classroom and allow vocabulary comprehension to be assessed in real-time.
Context of second language vocabulary acquisition

Studies conducted on L2 lexical acquisition in formal instructional settings indicate that the learner benefits from input tuning from the teacher (Krashen, 1981; Ellis, 1994). The present study conducted at an Australian offshore campus in Malaysia reinforces the belief that increased interaction between the learners and the instructor assists in enhanced knowledge and skills. Interaction refers to the communication between individuals, particularly when they are negotiating meaning in order to prevent a breakdown in communication (Ellis, 1999). According to Singleton (1999), formal L2 instruction is likely to give the learner more insights into individual lexical items than a naturalistic acquisition environment. The present study is positioned in a formal learning environment.

Word knowledge is an essential component of communicative competence, and it is important for word production and comprehension in a second language (Coady & Huckin, 1997). Learners often lack the capacity to find and use context clues to infer word meaning and may easily discount unfamiliar words or low frequency words. It is also noted that an increase in lexical density of the text may cause learners with low language proficiency to give up trying to construct meaning. The lexical density of a text refers to the proportion of the content words (lexical) in the total number of words in a text (Halliday, 1985). In texts that have a high lexical density, there is an occurrence of more content words. Texts with a lower density are more understood by learners with lower L2 language proficiency and, generally when there is a high concentration of content words, L2 learners tend to comprehend less and may lose interest in reading. Consequently, the less learners read, the fewer the opportunities to acquire new vocabulary. Learning a word requires learning the diverse characteristics of its meaning, and inferring word meaning from context requires the learner to be aware of the diverse characteristics of the context (Mohseni-Far, 2008). Mohseni-Far (2008) believes that the key is to encourage learners to infer meanings of words and provide opportunities to encounter unfamiliar words through multiple exposures to the words. The present study attempts to provide multiple exposures of low frequency words through the use of ARS-keepad technology for better word recognition and learning.

The process of reading texts for meaning undeniably promotes a measure of vocabulary acquisition but, in addition, a whole lot of tasks also need to be developed to utilize written text in a vocabulary learning perspective (Singleton, 1999). The L2 learning process has been identified as a mediated process and it is assumed that students generally benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction in conjunction with reading (Hulstijn, 2000). Hulstijn (2000) also contends that until recently, empirical research on language acquisition and use was restricted to the observation and measurement of language input and output. However with computer-aided tools, researchers have the resources to get closer to the processes of language attainment and application. In this study, the researcher has carried out explicit teaching of vocabulary and has attempted to introduce word recognition tasks to the learners through the use of technology b espouse creating meaning from experience (Jonassen, 1991). Constructivist theories of learning advocate that learners create their own knowledge by analyzing concepts based on experiential knowledge and applying these to new situations integrating the new knowledge gained with pre-existing intellectual constructs or schemas. In the process of (mediated) learning the learner is the active agent (Webb, 2002). Constructivist proponents believe that instruction depends on learners and environments and emphasize the interaction between these influences more than any other learning theories (Schunk, 2000). In the present study, the learners’ prior knowledge of
vocabulary is considered significant, and it is premised that learners develop vocabulary in a constructivist manner.

Research studies conducted by cognitive scientist, Pinker (2000) assert that the principles of language acquisition can be compared to a branch of theoretical computer science called Learnability Theory, which acknowledges the role of environment in language learning. This assertion posits that the instructional / interactive environment could play an important role in all aspects of language learning including vocabulary development. Learn ability theory describes learning as a setting involving four parts: a class of languages, one of them being the target language that the learner needs to acquire, an environment in which the learner has to acquire information in the world, a learning strategy in which the learner tries out hypotheses about the target language and a success criterion by which learners may arrive at a hypothesis - identical to the target language after some fixed period of time (Pinker, 2000). This theory is tested in the current study to establish whether L2 learners benefit from a social constructivist classroom environment in which there is interaction between peers and between peers and facilitators in order to develop vocabulary.

In cognitive theory, learning is an active constructive process where the learners select and organize input, relate the input to their prior knowledge, retain what is important and reflect on the outcomes of their learning efforts (Chamot & O’Malley,1993). This theory is similar to constructive theories of learning, the principles of which can be attributed to Jean Piaget, who stated that knowledge is constructed actively by the learner and is not passively received from the environment (von Glaserfeld, 1987). The belief that the learner constructs knowledge vigorously emphasizes that there is a need to raise awareness in learners regarding their prior knowledge of vocabulary which is essential in order for them to actively construct new vocabulary. In the constructivist learning approach, the teacher is a facilitator of collaborative learning. The above discussion establishes the foundation for the current study. The study places importance on the prior knowledge of vocabulary of L2 learners and its motivation on L2 learners to recognize words already familiar with, which in turn influence the acquisition processes in vocabulary development.

In studying vocabulary acquisition, the distinction between knowing a word and using a word needs to be made (Mohseni-Far, 2008). Vocabulary teaching must incorporate tasks that develop in learners the skill to recall words, and the ability to apply them in a wide range of language contexts, when the situation demands it. It is essential for L2 learners to learn a large number of words and make them part of their mental lexicon for successful word production in context. Academic writing is a challenging skill and absorbs a large proportion of students’ study time. It is critical that the students are well-supported in the development of the various tasks assigned to them in the unit and that they develop vocabulary that is pertinent to the needs of the unit and the program. Vocabulary learning and teaching link to reading for receptive understanding of language and writing for its productive use. Studies report vocabulary learning as the most challenging of tasks for students (Jordan, 1997). Given that the researcher’s expertise is in vocabulary development, it was deemed significant to employ ARS-keepad technology in the classroom for vocabulary development as part of the students’ developmental progress in academic writing as a whole.
Research Methodology

The research methods employed for the present study include three elements: design for data collection, measurement of variables and analysis of data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study. The study employs a mixed-method to obtain the relevant data required for analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon being studied. The use of mixed methods is considered most valid for this study as using more than one method allows the researcher to benefit from the strengths of each method. Educational research has been categorized as a systemic process of collecting and analyzing data for a purpose (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The research data was gathered initially through ethnographic methods, namely classroom observations and student questionnaires, with provision for open ended responses. Ethnography accepts that human behaviour occurs within a context and that educational activities take place against a background of premises, interests and values concerning teaching and learning and knowledge (Burns, 2000). The researcher maintained a diary for keeping an audit trail of academic activities and for recording the response behaviour of study participants to the introduction of ARS-keepad technology. Chapelle (2004) postulates that qualitative research always involves the study of people and therefore it is invaluable to instructional technology in education, which has to take into account the characteristics of different types of people and communication between different types of people. It is important for an instructional designer to analyze learners and contexts before designing an instructional system (Putney and Green, 1999). Qualitative research provides insights into the emic or insider; the knowledge needed by members of a group to participate in socially and academically appropriate ways (Chapelle, 2004). The present study has considered the background of the learners and the context of learning in order to enhance the rigour required for a research study. Ethics approval for the study was granted through applications made to the R & D office at the university.

The strengths of quantitative research are that it tests and validates already constructed theories about how and why phenomena occur. To strengthen the findings from the qualitative approaches, data was also gathered quantitatively. Triangulation is defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in a study that focuses on an aspect of human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). A triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The audience response system- (keepad) was further used to elicit responses about student perceptions on the use of technology as a pedagogical tool in the L2 classroom, contributing to a quantitative analysis of students’ vocabulary proficiency and attitude towards the use of keepad. Data collection using quantitative methods are quick and provide precise, numerical data. The data collected was analyzed to gain an understanding of the efficacy of using ARS-keepad systems as a pedagogical tool for vocabulary recognition tasks, for interactive student engagement and to create tasks that would facilitate comprehension and vocabulary development in learners. A purposeful sampling method was used to select study participants as the groups who participated in the study were allocated to the researcher as part of the workload at the beginning of the study periods and was considered to be the most suitable for the study. A purposeful sample is selected for the specific needs of a study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The duration of the study in which ARS-keepad technology was utilized as a diagnostic tool for vocabulary recognition tasks comprised 14 weeks.
How ARS-keepad system was employed

Academic writing entails students to advocate their positions on various issues, be it environmental, social or ethical, which necessitate them to read journals and relevant articles. Writing expository and argumentative type essays call for analysis and require students to read and understand ideas and key points presented by authors to support theses, and later in their own writing, persuade readers to believe in their viewpoints using logic and reason. In the study, the meanings of words tested for meaning were selected from readings that had been introduced in earlier sessions to the students. Vocabulary questions drawing out word meanings were posed to students using a stem followed by alternative response choices. The stem consisted of an incomplete sentence that elicited meaning of words from a set of four alternative choices. When the question was posed to students on a slide with multiple choice alternatives, they were able to press the alphabet on the handset, from a choice of A,B,C or D to indicate their preferred response. Waring (1999) claims that multiple-choice tests and matching tests are standard ways of carrying out measurement of vocabulary. “Vocabulary assessment in the history of the twentieth century is associated with the development of objective testing” (Read, 2000, p.22). Successfully completing a multiple-choice item is mentally challenging, according to Waring (1999). For example, in order to correctly answer a multiple-choice item, the respondent needs to identify the form and match the form with an entry in the mental lexicon. There is also the process of retrieval and matching process that involves paradigmatic or syntagmatic associations (Waring, 1999). Therefore the selection of multiple-choice questions to measure vocabulary recognition was deemed suitable for the study.

The researcher set up the audience response or keepad system in the classroom that used infra red transmitters, an infra red receiver that collected student responses, and turning point software integrated with PowerPoint. The students were given small handsets with response pads showing alpha-numerical guides (Figure 1). The graphical interface display showed how many students had responded and indicated when all the students had responded. The responses were collated quantitatively and displayed graphically on the screen in real-time showing students how they responded.

![Figure 1: Image of a keepad response pad (Source: Jones, 1999).]
Participants and instructional modes
The participants in the study came from two academic writing classes for pre-tertiary engineering and business courses. The groups comprised a total of forty students, both male and female. No attempt was made to differentiate or distinguish between the responses of either gender. The participant responses were analysed as a collective group. An exploratory study was carried out by the researcher for a period of 14 weeks (one semester) to investigate if the ARS-keepad technology could be used as a diagnostic tool for measuring vocabulary recognition tasks and also to study if it could assist instructors to increase vocabulary production in L2 learners, through structuring academic activities based on responses to recognition tasks. The researcher met the groups (involved in the study) twice a week and employed a seminar mode of instructional teaching. Expository and argumentative genres of writing were the main genres introduced to the students and tasks involved writing academic essays using citations in the Harvard Referencing Conventions. Students were also required to write research essays of about 2000 words, in the argumentative genre using a minimum list of eight references comprising journals and relevant literature, both print and electronic. Reading activities entailed identifying main ideas from texts, selecting expert views to substantiate student opinions and also developing the standard vocabulary required for academic writing at a tertiary level of learning. Writing tasks often involved paraphrasing sections of texts to demonstrate understanding of ideas from journal articles and writing perceptions from a pre-tertiary student point of view on various issues that were globally challenging. In essence, the unit was designed to engender proficiency in the English language for academic purposes and professional capabilities. Students were required to comprehend and interpret a variety of academic texts which were often introduced to them and standard reading and vocabulary developmental activities encompassed the learning processes.

Discussion and Analysis
ARS-keepad technology was used as a pedagogical tool in the classroom with the aim of increasing students’ attentiveness and participation and to increase recognition of key vocabulary. Students were introduced to the ARS-keepad technology in an initial trial session, where the equipment was set up and students given instructions on how to use the response sets. In this session, students were given trial questions to respond to. No data was collected from the trials. However, observations were made regarding their enthusiasm and interest in the technology. One of the challenges in using this technology was the time required in setting up of the equipment. It took approximately 15 minutes to set up the equipment. In subsequent sessions, when the meanings of words were tested for recognition/recall, the equipment was set up ahead of class commencement so that classes could proceed without any delays. The following instructions were provided to the students on a MS PowerPoint slide prior to task allocation.

- In this session you will be asked to look at words from readings given to you during the semester on several occasions and asked to select the answer you think best describes the meaning of the word.
- Please look at the word shown on the slide and select your answer from a choice of four multiple choice answers.

Figure 2 shows a sample slide on the query posed to study participants prior to their selection of responses.
Students were observed to be enthusiastic and interactive during the learning tasks that employed ARS-keepad technology and also seen to be more attentive and participative in their discussions with peers. They appreciated the instant display of answers on the slide once they had selected their answers and presentation of the responses of the class as a whole to the vocabulary recognition questions, as indicated in the open-ended statements provided by them. They also favoured the ability to discuss the correct answers immediately after making their choice, as expressed in their comments. It was found to create a mutual awareness of the group as a whole through the presentation of questions and the distribution of responses displayed.

The use of turning point integrated PowerPoint slides in the classroom to introduce the words that learners had encountered in their reading texts allowed for self-evaluation of students’ vocabulary knowledge against a standard after the learning had been completed. In addition, it facilitated self-monitoring of their vocabulary proficiency during the learning activity through the instant visual feedback on the screen to the multiple choice questions. Students needed to deliberate on the choices provided to them in order to guess the correct response. The immediate responses were used to promptly obtain understanding into the levels of vocabulary proficiency of the students and to create learning tasks to further enhance their vocabulary development. Students were observed to be motivated and participative during these activities and this is validated in their responses when asked about the method of learning. A quantitative analysis was also carried out in the study to assess participants’ satisfaction and attitude to the use of technology in the classroom through displaying the statements using ARS-keepad technology using the Likert scale of analysis. The participants were asked to respond to each statement on a scale ranging between strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). Figure 3 illustrates a sample slide to elicit responses from students on the comparative use of ARS-keepad technology in the classroom as opposed to traditional approaches.
Figure 3. Query on the use of ARS-keepad technology

Table 1: Summary of student responses to statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement posed to participants</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This type of approach is more useful than traditional methods</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was useful to compare my responses with others</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARS-Keepad helps me to learn better</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARS-Keepad should be used more in the classroom</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARS-Keepad has not been a barrier to my learning</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 provides a quantitative analysis of students’ responses to ARS-keepad technology use in L2 vocabulary learning. Results from the students’ responses conducted at the end of the study showed that students appreciated the increased interaction during the classroom learning activities achieved through the use of ARS-keepad technology and indicated that their level of understanding had improved considerably.

Most students perceived the technology as easy to use and reported that it was not a barrier to their learning (76%); the teaching approaches used with ARS-keepad technology was more useful than traditional teaching methods (100%); it helped them learn better (78%); that it should be used more in the classroom (81%); and that it was useful to compare their responses with that of others in the classroom (83%).

All participants agreed that they enjoyed their vocabulary learning experiences through the use of ARS-keepad technology (100%). The responses to other statements indicated that the participants had perceived the use of ARS-keepad in technology in the classroom positively with most participants recording high satisfaction rates.
The following responses were gained through the open-ended sections of the questionnaire administered to participants:

When asked whether the learning gained through using keepad technology was durable and if the students would remember the information later, students stated that:

“It is definitely valuable and durable to me, the experience is so rare and I am able to remember it”.

When asked if students discussed any of the questions posed to them later with their friends or classmates and what the focus of discussions was, they responded that:

“When one of my friends or classmates gave a wrong response, we will discuss the reason why the answer is wrong and explain the correct answer to them. This makes us learn from our mistakes”.

The majority agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced deeper learning as a consequence of the discussion that followed the questions.

Others commented that:

“Sometimes when the vocabulary is related to the terms in our engineering field we discuss about (sic) it.

This is an affirmation of students advancing learning strategies following the use of technology.

When responses were elicited about the value of keepad technology in the classroom, students commented that:

“Using Keepad in the classroom can make the learning process enjoyable and fruitful”.

When asked whether keepad had served as a diagnostic tool, they responded in a positive manner:

“Definitely, yes, because it allows a quick revision and focuses on the important parts of the subject” referring to vocabulary learning and development.

When asked whether they enjoyed using keepad as a diagnostic tool, that is, the lecturer used it to plan tutorials etc. they commented that:

“Definitely, yes, because it is an easier way to learn and to enjoy learning”.

Table 2 shows the key concepts and dimensions explored in the study. Essentially, students had valued the use of technology in their L2 vocabulary learning and had perceived it as an augmentation to instructor engagement. Their responses indicate that the use of technology in the L2 language classroom assists in cognitive processing of information. They had clearly enjoyed the interactive environment created with the use of technology. The students also affirmed that using ARS-keepad technology in the classroom had motivated them greatly and improved their competence and confidence in learning. Furthermore, they acknowledged that ARS-keepad technology use in the classroom had not posed any barriers in their learning and that using multiple choice questions had had the greatest impact on their vocabulary learning as the results were displayed instantaneously on the monitor and this had served as an impetus for them to use analysis to select more accurate answers. One of the desirable features of keepad technology that appealed to the students was the user friendly interface and the graphical statistical analysis which motivated students to be attentive. This is validated in their responses. All the students agreed that using ARS-keepad technology in the classroom had helped them to be more competent and help them gain confidence in their own abilities with regard to vocabulary proficiency.
Table 2. *Key concepts and dimensions explored in the study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Do students value the use of ARS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of learning</td>
<td>What are students' perceptions of ARS on their learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Processing</td>
<td>Are the dual coding channels being used to process information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Strategies</td>
<td>Which behaviours are effective after using ARS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>What occurs as social learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Are students supportive of this technology?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

From the aforementioned analysis and discussions, it is compelling to assume that introducing new technologies alongside standard and valid instructional approaches assist vocabulary learning and development in students in the L2 classroom. The applications of technology which encourages, or requires students to interact on a regular basis throughout the class times effectively engender a difference in the teaching strategy. These findings have implications for both instructors and learners in L2 language acquisition and more importantly for L2 vocabulary learning and teaching, as the analysis from the study show that there is an increased awareness towards L2 vocabulary recognition tasks when learning tasks are integrated with ARS-keepad technology. It appears that the use of technology spurs awareness and interest in L2 learners regarding vocabulary learning tasks. The instant response collection and the ability of ARS-keepad via turning point and MS PowerPoint graphical slides to produce images, allowed for shared mental pictures among the students, and contributed to student engagement. It was discerned that the use of ARS-keepad stimulated discussions of the vocabulary choice answers displayed on the slides which further encouraged the recognition of vocabulary. It also helped establish an interactive teaching/learning environment in the classroom which was enjoyable as well as educative.

The responses gathered from the study participants were used to promptly obtain understanding into the levels of vocabulary proficiency of the students. Therefore, confirming that these procedures could be used for formative assessments of vocabulary. Another advantage of using the ARS-keepad technology was the anonymity it accorded the learners to provide their responses. It also allowed for a much interactive engagement of learners in the classroom, especially in situations where the students were from a more reserved cultural background. One of the most valuable benefits for the students in using ARS-keepad technology is an increase in interactivity and class participation. Additionally, by eliciting response questions intermittently in a class session, instructors are accustomed to the level of student understanding. It also provides a self-evaluative feedback to the students regarding their learning.
To conclude, the use of ARS-keepad technology allowed for a more integrative and participative approach and helped in the development of appropriate learning tasks for vocabulary learning and confirm that ARS-keepad is an effective technology to be used in the L2 classroom for vocabulary development.

Limitations and Recommendations
The study acknowledges the limitation in the relatively small number of participants, as it had been carried out only in two groups comprising a total of forty students. It is recommended that further studies using multiple groups and varied levels of ARS-keepad approaches be carried out in future in order to validate the function of new technologies in L2 classroom environments.

About the Author:
Assoc. Prof. Dr Beena Giridharan is the Dean, Teaching and Learning at Curtin University, Sarawak. She attained a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics and Education from Curtin University, Western Australia. She has been a fellow of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) since 2006. Her research expertise is in ESL, higher education practices, transnational education (TNE), internationalization of curriculum, work-integrated learning, and ethno-linguistic studies in indigenous communities.

References
Exploring the use of ARS-keepad Technology

Giridharan


Students’ Attitudes and Perceptions towards Learning English

Amal Ali Alkaff
English Language Institute
King Abdulaziz University
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper studies the attitudes and perceptions of Foundation Year (FY) students towards learning English, at the English Language Institute (ELI) of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. English is one of the required courses, the rest of which are primarily taught in Arabic. The researcher attempts to find out the students’ opinions regarding the importance of English, whether they think it is difficult or not, and where the difficulty lies. The author also endeavors to examine the ways by which they try to improve their English and the frequency and areas of their use of the language. After the selection of a random sample of 47 female students of levels 3 and 4 (pre-intermediate and intermediate levels), who represent the largest majority of the students during the time of the study, a questionnaire was developed and students’ responses were tabulated and analyzed. The study shows that most students have a positive attitude towards learning English and that they try to improve their English and to use the language even though there are a lot of demands on their time and few opportunities to practice their English. The study also reflects on the obstacles confronting the students and their suggestions to facilitate the learning process.

Key words: attitude, EFL, learning English, perception
Introduction
With the increasing need and ceaseless interest in learning English as a second language, it is important to study and understand the factors that can affect the learning process. Among some of the most prominent factors are participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards the foreign language. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, attitude is a “settled behaviour, as indicating opinion”, or a “settled mode of thinking” (Sykes, p.56). Baker (1992, p.10) defines attitude as “a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour.” Similarly, İnal, et al. (2003, p. 41) state that “attitude refers to our feelings and shapes our behaviors towards learning”. Thus, behavior is tied to attitude, as the latter highly affects and manifests itself in the former. Hence, attitude plays an important role in second language learning as it determines to a large extent the learners’ behaviors, i.e., action taken to learn, or efforts exerted, during the learning process.

Attitudes can be instrumental, utilitarian and pragmatic; or integrative, social and interpersonal; or both (Baker, 1992). Most importantly, Baker (1992, p.10) declares that the fact that “attitude is an important concept lies in its continued and proven utility. That is, within education and psychology, it has stood the test of time, theory and taste”. Likewise, several researchers stress the significance of attitude in language learning. For instance, İnal, et al. (2003) assert that identifying the attitude of the students is important for both the learner and the academic program.

In the same way, Abu-Melhim (2009, p.686) concludes that although there is a lot that the teacher can do, “at the end of the day, it is all up to the students whether or not to participate positively in the lesson. In other words, it all boils down to your attitude.” Agreeing, Al-Tamimi, et al. (2009) state that attitudes towards a certain language affect a learner’s motivation in learning that language. Buschenhofen (1998) affirms that educators not only hold attitudes highly accountable for the degree of learners' responses, but they also believe that they predict achievement and contribute to it.

Closely related to attitude is perception, which can be defined as regarding something “mentally in [a] specified manner” (Sykes, p.761). Despagne (2010) elaborates on the relation between perceptions and attitudes, explaining that perceptions are centered on the inner unconscious feelings from which students’ attitudes towards learning a language emanate. Thus, attitudes can be defined as the behavioral outcomes of perceptions.

In light of the consistent emphasis of former research on the importance of attitudes in language learning, and driven by the need to understand the local students’ attitudes and perceptions towards learning English, the researcher hopes to contribute to the body of previous research on these vital issues in language learning. The researcher also hopes to fill the gap in present research by studying the attitudes and perceptions of FY students at the ELI of KAU in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, as no similar study targeting this population has been found.

The study tests four hypotheses:
H1: It is expected that most students like English and think it is important.
H2: It is also expected that students find English language difficult.
H3: It is likely that students attempt to improve their English, but their efforts are affected by some factors.
H4: It is likely that they rarely have a chance, if any, to practice their English.
Literature Review
Attitudes and perceptions in second language learning are evidently lively topics, which have attracted the interest of many researchers. For example, Al Mamun, et al. (2012) examine the attitude of the undergraduate students of the Life Science School of Khulna University towards English language and conclude that their attitude is generally positive and instrumental. Similarly, in a study on 40 Saudi students, learning English at an American university, Alfawzan (2012, Abstract) finds that “instrumental motivation” is the main “driving force” for those students. Also, Al-Tamimi, et al. (2009) find that instrumental motivation plays a primary role in learning English, and that students have positive attitudes towards the English language and its culture, and the use of English in social and educational contexts.

Negative attitudes towards English or its courses appear in some studies. For instance, Abd Aziz (1994, p.98) declares that “UKM [Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia or the National University of Malaysia] students had shown positive attitudes towards speaking English in general….但在 their university]”. Likewise, Abu-Melhim (2009) examines the reasons behind choosing English as a major by Jordanian college students at Irbid University and concludes that unexpectedly about half of the students hold negative attitudes towards learning English. Also, Despagne’s study (2010, p.55) on students learning English at two Mexican universities show their negative perceptions and attitudes which he associates with “Mexico’s colonial past and the effects of linguistic imperialism.”

As for factors affecting attitudes, Dennis Soku, et al. (2011, p.22) state that “gender had a significant effect on students’ attitudes to the study of English” while “background had a significant effect on students’ attitude to the study of French”. Also, Buschenhofen (1998) compares attitudes towards English between 12-year-olds and final year university students, and his study indicates that both groups have a generally positive attitude towards English. However, there are some expected differences of attitudes regarding language context which mirror the changes in society, education and language that students go through as they grow up.

In their paper, “Greek Young Learners’ Perceptions about Foreign Language Learning and Teaching”, Joycey and Sougari (2010) conclude that there are differences in these perceptions that teachers should observe in order to achieve the learning outcomes. On the other hand, Thornton (2009, p.84), in a study of the perceptions of college students and their instructors, uncovers the reasons behind teachers and students’ beliefs about second language learning and arrives at the conclusion that “all beliefs are inhibitive and facilitative, at the same time, because they are dependent on the individual’s needs.”

Some studies connect attitude to achievement. For example, in their study on final year high school students in eastern Turkey, İnal, et al. (2003, p. 49) emphasize the idea that “there is a high relationship between attitude and achievement”. Likewise, Al-Mansour (2007) concludes that having positive attitudes towards Arabic speakers and spending enough time in an Arabic-speaking country are factors that help to acquire the best pronunciation in Arabic.

The present study contributes to previous research by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of the FY students at the ELI of KAU. It also attempts to identify the areas of difficulty for the students, and the ways they improve their English. Moreover, it encourages the students to give their suggestions to as what can make them learn English better in an attempt to find solutions and recommendations that can help enhance their achievement in learning English.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Do students like English and think it is important.
2. Do they think it is difficult? If yes, where does the difficulty lie?
3. Do they try to improve their English?
4. Do they use English outside the classroom?

The Study

English, in addition to other subjects, is compulsory for FY students at ELI, KAU. The students must pass four levels of general English courses in one year, or one and half year maximum, if needed, before they are allowed to enroll in different colleges. These intensive courses are taught in four six-seven-week modules, which translate into 18 hours a week. A placement test is administered in the summer prior to the beginning of the academic year to place the students in their appropriate levels. Therefore, students can be exempted from one to three levels, according to a set of cut scores that are carefully designed to match the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). They can also be totally exempted if they score the required marks in IELTS, or TOEFL.

The study included 47 FY science and arts students. The sample was randomly selected from levels 3 and 4, as these represent the majority of the students in the module when the study took place (module 3). The participants answered a questionnaire which was carefully developed to address the research questions. Some of the statements/questions were adapted from previous literature and the rest were devised by the researcher.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part, which had 17 statements, utilized the Likert scale, asking the students to choose one of the following responses as appropriate for them: Strongly Agree, Agree, Don’t Know, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The second part had four questions and an open-ended question in the form of a statement that required completion. Questions 18-21 allowed the students to choose one or more from a list of responses. Also, in questions 18 and 21, the option ‘Other, specify.’ gave the students the chance to add their own responses. Statement 22 asked that the students complete the statement with their own ideas about what could make them learn English better. The questionnaire was translated into Arabic to ensure optimal understanding among all students and to eliminate any potential language barrier that could prevent them from expressing their full opinions. A pilot study was carried out on a small scale to make sure that the questions were clear and elicited proper responses.

The data collected were of two types, i.e. quantitative (statements/questions 1-21) and qualitative (statement 22). For the quantitative part of the data, the responses were analyzed, tabulated and the percentages were calculated. As for the qualitative part of the data, which consisted of students’ completions of a statement, responses were translated into English, listed, then categorized into sections, according to the theme to which they are related. The qualitative method was chosen for this part because its main purpose was to explore students’ ideas and suggestions to enhance their achievement in learning English.

Results

For the purpose of analysis, statements and questions in the questionnaire were divided into four parts on the basis of their relation to the research questions.

Research question 1: Do students like English and think it is important?

As shown in Table 1 below, most of the participants agreed that learning English is fun (93.62%); only a very small percentage of the students disagreed, while the percentage of those who strongly disagreed, or said that they did not know was 0%. Similarly, the percentage of the
participants who agreed that they like to listen to people speaking English (91.49%) was much larger than the percentage of those who disagreed (2.13%), or said they did not know (6.38%). Moreover, no student strongly disagreed. Likewise, a large percentage (76.60%) of the participants strongly agreed that they really wanted to learn English; 19.15% agreed, and an equal percentage of 2.13% said that they did not know or disagreed. Furthermore, as in the responses to the previous statements, strong disagreement remained 0%.

The statement “I dislike English” elicited 21.28% of agreement (an equal percentage of those who strongly agreed and those who agreed), compared to 70.21% of disagreement, while 8.51% of the participants said that they did not know. The statement “I only learn English because its courses are compulsory in the Foundation Year” elicited more disagreement (65.96%) than agreement (17.02%). Interestingly, the total number of those who agreed and those who strongly agreed matched the figure of those who said they that did not know (17.02%).

As for the image of those who spoke English, 48.94% agreed that when someone spoke English, it showed that he/she is educated, while 36.17% disagreed. The 12.77% difference was equal to the percentage of those who stated that they did not know. However, most of the participants strongly agreed, or agreed, that speaking English well could create a good impression with the total high percentage of 82.98%. The percentage of those who did not know or disagreed was only 17.03%. As for strong disagreement, the case was similar to that in questions 1-3 (0%).

Moreover, all participants either strongly agreed, or agreed, that learning English was important for their future, with a higher percentage of those who strongly agreed (87.23%). Similar to the responses of the previous statement, virtually all the participants agreed that learning English could help them find better job opportunities, with a higher percentage of those who strongly agreed (93.62%) and a total percentage of 97.88% representing general agreement. Only 2.13% said that they did not know, and no disagreeing responses were registered. Also, a large proportion of the students (80.85%) strongly agreed that learning English was essential for their undergraduate and post graduate studies, which made the total high percentage of 95.74% agreement. On the other hand, only 4.26% disagreed; there was no strong disagreement, or did not know responses. Furthermore, there was an overall agreement among participants that they needed English when they travelled abroad, and the percentage of those who strongly agreed (76.60%) exceeded that of those who agreed (23.40%). However, the total number of the participants who expressed disagreement to the statement ‘I need English when I search the internet’ (31.92%) was virtually half the number of the participants who chose agreement (61.70%). A small number said that they did not know (6.38).

Table 1. Responses to statements 1-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning and speaking English is fun.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55.32%</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like to listen to people speaking English.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.55%</td>
<td>48.94%</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I really want to learn English.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76.60%</td>
<td>19.15%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I dislike English.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>31.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I only learn English because its courses are compulsory in the Foundation Year.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question 2: Do they think it is difficult? If so, where does the difficulty lie?

Table 2 below shows that the total percentage of the participants who strongly agreed, or agreed only, that English was difficult, was 36.17%. A slightly higher percentage disagreed (42.6%), while 21.28% said that they did not know. Noticeably, the figures were somewhat balanced: the percentage of those who strongly agreed was close to that of those who strongly disagreed. Also, the percentage of those who agreed was close to that of those who disagreed; and they were both close to the percentage of those who did not know. However, when it came to grammar and structure, more than half of the participants (57.54%) either agreed, or strongly agreed that English grammar and structure were difficult for them. The total percentage which represented disagreement in general was 29.89%, about half of the percentage that reflected agreement in general. The percentage of those who did not know added to that of those who generally agreed made up 70.22% of the participants. A large proportion (74.47%) of the participants either strongly agreed, or agreed that lack of vocabulary made understanding and communicating in English difficult. The rest of the participants (25.53%) represented both strong disagreement and disagreement. Noticeably, the percentage of those who said they did not know was 0%.

Table 2. Reponses to statements 14, 16 and 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Learning English is difficult.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>21.28%</td>
<td>29.79%</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I find English grammar and structure difficult</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td>46.81%</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Lack of vocabulary makes understanding and communicating in English difficult</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>48.94%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for skills, it can be seen in Table 3 that most participants thought that speaking was difficult (59.57%); writing came second (38.30); listening came third (27.66%); while reading came last.

**Table 3. Responses to Q.19 (What do you consider as a difficult skill in English? You can tick more than one.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>27.66%</td>
<td>59.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research question 3: Do they try to improve their English?**

As can be seen in Table 4, almost half of the participants (48.94%) strongly agreed that they could improve their English. A slightly smaller proportion also agreed (42.55%), which made the percentage of general agreement 91.49%. Only 8.51% did not know and no disagreeing responses were found. Almost half of the participants (48.93%) agreed that they did not have time to improve their English. The number of those who disagreed was slightly smaller at 34.05%, while those who did not know represent 17.02% of the participants.

**Table 4. Responses to statements 13 and 15**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I think I can improve my English.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>48.94%</td>
<td>42.55%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I don’t have time to improve my English</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>31.91%</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>21.28%</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Tables 5 and 6 below, when the participants were asked to choose the option(s) that suit(s) them, or write their own responses, most of them said that they looked up new vocabulary and checked pronunciation (68.09%). A slightly smaller proportion said that they watched English programs (61.70%). The third popular choice was reading simplified English books (42.55%), while the fourth was practicing the correct pronunciation and new structures with friends and/or family. The percentages for choices number 3 (I keep a notebook with all new vocabulary and practice writing them in sentences.), number 4. (I review the new grammar points after class.), and number 9. (I take extra English courses.) were close, 25.53%, 23.40 and 27.66%, respectively. The highest percentage was for choice number 9 and the lowest was for choice number 4. The number of those who said that they read articles on the internet was equal to that of those who wrote other options (6.38%). The options that were written by the participants were the following: 2 participants said: “I watch English movies.”; while 1 participant said: “I read English novels.” The percentage of those who said that they did none of the above was only 4.26%.

**Table 5. Responses to Q. 18 (What do you do to improve your English? You can tick more than one, choices 1-6.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I read simplified English books.</th>
<th>2. I watch English programs.</th>
<th>3. I keep a notebook with all new vocabulary and practice writing them in sentences.</th>
<th>4. I review the new grammar points after class.</th>
<th>5. I practice the correct pronunciation and new structures with my friends and/or family.</th>
<th>6. I read articles on the internet.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 6. Responses to Q. 18 (What do you do to improve your English? You can tick more than one, choices 7-11.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I listen to native speakers reading and/or speaking on the internet.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I look up new vocabulary and check pronunciation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I take extra English courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. None of the above.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Other, specify.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.22: I think I can learn English better if……

Five participants did not complete the statement; while many wrote several suggestions, and some elaborated, providing examples and/or explanations. The responses were translated into English, analyzed, and compiled into the following main themes.

1. The need for more practice
2. The need for an English speaking environment/community
3. The need for more speaking practice, in particular
4. The KAU system of teaching English to FY students
5. The intensive nature of the English courses
6. Supplementary materials and facilities
7. Teacher and teaching methods
8. Personal efforts, attitudes and problems

Research question 4: Do they use English outside the classroom?

As shown in Table 7, most of the participants said that they “sometimes” used English (44.68%); about a third of the participants said that they “rarely” used English (31.91%). Those who used English “a lot” outside the classroom were 12.77% of the participants, a figure that was slightly higher than the one which represented those who “never” used it outside the classroom (10.64%).

Table 7. Responses to Q. 19 (How often do you use English outside the classroom?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
<td>44.68%</td>
<td>31.91%</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it, but outside class” and two participants wrote similar responses: “When I talk to my family sometimes,” and “At home, sometimes, with my family”. The choice that attracted the least number of responses (one participant, 2.13%) was number 5 (At the hairdresser’s and/or the dressmaker’s).

**Table 8. Responses to Q. 21 (Where do you use English? You can tick more than one, choices 1-5.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. In cafes and restaurants in Saudi Arabia.</th>
<th>2. When I go to the hospital and/or at the doctor’s.</th>
<th>3. When I travel abroad.</th>
<th>4. In some shops and malls.</th>
<th>5. At the hairdresser’s and/or the dressmaker’s.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.06%</td>
<td>53.19%</td>
<td>61.70%</td>
<td>51.06%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9. Responses to Q. 21 (Where do you use English? You can tick more than one, choices 6-9.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.28%</td>
<td>57.45%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion of Results**

**Research Question 1: Do students like English and think it is important?**

The responses indicate that students have a positive attitude towards learning English. They like to listen to people speaking English and they really want to learn the language (statements 1, 2, 3), a finding that supports the literature which the researcher found on this topic. Statement 4 (I dislike English) and statement 5 (I only learn English because its courses are compulsory in the Foundation Year), which were used to counter check students positive responses towards learning English, elicited 70.21% and 65.96% of disagreement, respectively. Although the researcher expected to find even smaller percentages of agreement to these statements, especially since the percentage of strong disagreement to the first three statements was 0%, this can be explained, in the case of statement 4, by a general dislike of the English courses themselves. As for statement 5, the total percentage of agreement, which is 17.02%, can also reflect students’ aversion to having to take four intensive courses in one year. Both justifications can be supported by students’ responses to question 22, which will be discussed later. This finding is similar to that of Abd Aziz’s study (1994) on UKM undergraduates.

When it came to the social image of those who spoke English, statement 6 generated a general agreement of 48.94%, while statement 7 generated a total of 82.98% agreement. This noticeably large difference reflects an awareness between students that speaking English does not necessarily reflect an educated person. However, the responses show that most of the students realize that speaking English well does create a good impression (statement 7).

Moreover, students had no doubt that English was important for their future, and that it was a necessity when one travelled abroad, as seen in the responses to statements 8 and 11. Also, virtually all of them realized that English could help them get better job opportunities (statement
9); and that it was essential for their undergraduate and post graduate studies (statement 10), with agreeing rates of 97.88% and 95.74% respectively. The small percentages that said that they did not know in response to statement 9, or disagreed in response to statement 10 are expected. The former (2.13%) may represent students who do not plan to work in the future. The latter (4.26%) may represent those who intend to specialize in fields that do not require much proficiency in English, especially since the sample in the study included arts students, who will not need to have high proficiency in English, at least not in their undergraduate studies, or for those who do not intend to go on for post graduate studies. Nevertheless, a comparatively smaller number agreed that they needed English when they searched in the internet (61.70%). This can be due to the fact that Arabic remains the first language at KAU for most of the subjects and to the availability of translations and information in Arabic on the internet, covering most of the knowledge fields needed by the students.

A comparison of the responses of statements 6 and 7 with those of statements 8-11 shows that the social motivation is not as important as the utilitarian one and that students’ positive attitude towards learning English is mainly instrumental. This finding is consistent with several of the previous studies, some of which are cited in the literature review of this paper. All in all, the findings prove the first hypothesis: students like English and think it is important.

Research Question 2: Do they think it is difficult? If so, where does the difficulty lie?
The responses to statement 14 show that the percentage of those who disagreed (42.60%) did not reach 50%, and that there was only 6.43% difference between it and that of those who agreed (36.17%). Thus, a considerable number of the participants stated that learning English was difficult, and so, one can say that some students consider learning English difficult, while some do not. Therefore, the hypothesis that students find learning English difficult is only half true.

In answer to the second part of the research question, more than half of the students (57.45%) found English grammar and structure difficult (statement 16). However, when it came to vocabulary (statement 17), the percentage of general agreement was much higher (74.47%), and interestingly, the percentage of those who said they did not know was 0%, which means that the issue is much clearer to students. Lack of vocabulary does pose a more serious and prevalent problem than grammar and structure. It impedes communication and the students are aware of it.

As for the difficult skills, expectedly the productive skills were considered more difficult, than the receptive ones, with speaking coming first and writing second. This finding connects to the lack of vocabulary issue, which most students acknowledged as a problem, and to the difficulty that more than half of the participants faced in grammar and structure, since productive skills demand sufficient active vocabulary and competence in grammatical structure. As for the receptive skills, which were considered less difficult, listening came first and reading second, which means that reading is the least difficult skill among all.

Research Question 3: Do they try to improve their English?
Students’ responses show that most of them believed that they could improve their English with a general agreement of 91.49% to statement 13 (I think I can improve my English). Interestingly, the percentage of disagreement/strong disagreement is 0%, while only 8.51% said that they did not know. This reflects students’ general confidence in their ability to improve their English language. Nevertheless, while this can be encouraging to English teachers, a considerably large percentage of the students (48.93%) said that they were challenged by the lack of time, which
hindered their efforts to improve their language, as seen in their responses to statement 15. This is understandable as FY courses, including English, take up their time from early morning to late afternoon.

However, most students do attempt to improve their English, as seen in the responses to question 18. Only two students (4.26%) said that they followed none of the options mentioned to improve their English. These two also did not write any alternatives which they used to improve their English. A fair number (27.66%) actually took extra classes to improve their English (option 9).

As for the ways students follow to improve their English, most of them (68.09%) chose option 8 (I look up new vocabulary and check pronunciation). Option 2 (I watch English programs.) came second with a slightly lower percentage (61.70%). The first choice connects to the finding in research question 2, which indicates that vocabulary is one of the main difficulties that students confront as they learn English. The second is expected as learning is mingled with entertainment when watching programs, particularly if the program is of interest to the student, and especially with the easy access to some interesting English programs on TV and the internet. Therefore, expectedly among the three students who chose option 11 (Other, specify), two (4.26%) wrote: “I watch English movies.”, which is in line with students’ general preference of option 2.

Eliciting 42.55% of the responses, option 1 (I read simplified English books.) came third. A similar response to option 1 was written by one (2.13%) of the students (I read English novels). Moreover, 6.38% of the students said that they read articles on the internet (option 6). Thus, the total percentage of students who used reading to improve their language is 44.68%. This result shows that a considerable number of students do read and/or enjoy reading in English. It also matches with the findings of Question 19 where most students regarded reading as the least difficult skill. However, there is an obvious preference to reading from books than from the internet.

Option 7 (I listen to native speakers reading and/or speaking on the internet.) generated a percentage that was close to the one of option 1 (40.43%). This relatively high percentage fits with the results of Question 19, as listening came third in the scale of difficulty, considered as a relatively easier skill.

Around one third of the students (34.04%) said that they practiced the correct pronunciation and new structures with their friends and/or family (option 5) and though this is not a high percentage, it still reflects a generally positive attitude towards learning English, especially given the fact that they live in an Arabic-speaking atmosphere. Furthermore, this connects to students’ responses to statements 16 and 17 regarding the difficulty of English grammar and vocabulary as students followed option 5 to support their grammar knowledge in realistic situations and practice the pronunciation of new words in an effort to add them to their reservoir of active vocabulary.

Options 3 (I keep a notebook with all new vocabulary and practice writing them in sentences.) and 4 (I review the new grammar points after class.), which are also relevant to statements 16 and 17, attracted 25.53% and 23.40% of the responses, respectively. These results not only fit with the findings of the previous statements, but they are also comparable with them in another aspect as the percentage is higher when the issue concerns vocabulary than when it deals with grammar, emphasizing students’ conviction that vocabulary is more of an impediment to learning English than grammar.
Students’ responses to the incomplete statement, “I think I can learn English better if …”, revolved around several inter-related factors that they viewed as vital to the success of the learning process.

1. **The need for more practice**

Most of the students believed that what could really help them learn English better was more practice, highlighting the problem of the need of getting sufficient practice of the language. Key words in their responses were “everyday life,” “daily,” “vocabulary” and “new words”. They were convinced that their English would improve if they could practice English in their everyday life with others, especially those who spoke English well, and if they were trained in understanding people who spoke English, which in turn means that they need more listening practice. Vocabulary appears once more as one of the areas of high concern for the students. They emphasized their need to expand the range of their vocabulary, learn good pronunciation and have sufficient drilling and practice on using the new words.

2. **The need for an English speaking environment/community**

Students’ need to practice English is very much linked to their need for an English speaking environment/community for this practice. Thus, a considerable number of the participants believed that they could learn English better if they travelled abroad, lived in an English-speaking country, used English on a wider scale, and interacted with native speakers in real life situations. This, they said, could train them to “think” in English which would facilitate the use of the language. Of course, they also thought that having a foreign friend with whom they could speak English would be very helpful.

3. **The need for more speaking practice, in particular**

Although it goes without saying that the “speaking” skill is part of the needed practice and use of the language which the students mentioned in the previous points, some of the students’ responses focused on specific suggestions for improving the speaking skill, in particular, which they said that they needed the most. For instance, students proposed that the institute devote more classes for teaching speaking together with its closely related problematic component, vocabulary. They expressed their regret that they were mostly evaluated on grammar and suggested that more marks were given to speaking.

4. **The KAU system of teaching English to FY students**

Some students maintained that one of the hindrances to learning English was the KAU system for FY, where the main purpose of learning English was passing exams and achieving high marks, not practicing the language and using it for educational development. Thus, they believed that they could learn English better if marks were not the first and main concern. Moreover, they also suggested that a special period of university years was devoted exclusively to learning English, the whole first year, for example, before they started other subjects.

5. **The intensive nature of the English course**

A significant number of the students expressed their dissatisfaction with the intensive English courses and the long lectures. They thought that they could learn English better if the curricula were spread over a longer period of time, for example, if each level were taught in six months, as one student suggested, because this would give them more time to learn. Most importantly, many respondents complained of the long hours and said that they pressurized and exhausted them. For instance, one of the students declared: “Frankly, the time assigned for English lectures is too long and exhausting. It makes us hate English. It’s unbearable and tiring.” Another confirmed: “more attention” should be “paid to the time assigned to learning English at the institute. Daily
lectures should not take longer than an hour or two maximum, so that negative effect, which turns joy to boredom, is avoided."

6. **Supplementary materials and facilities**

A small number of students said that they could learn English better if they had special English labs. This may stem from students’ conviction that they need more interactive exposure to the language. Taking some of the classes in labs could also provide useful variation in learning activities. Some suggested adding some extra-curricular imaginative stories and assigning a special time to read “inside” class, a suggestion which shows that they realize that reading is important and that they are willing to read in order to improve their language if they see the relevance of the material. The ELI curriculum includes reading circles in which the students discuss a certain story in groups, but the reading is done at home and the choices of the stories are restricted by several factors like culture, time, topic, etc. It seems that these circles/stories neither satisfy the needs of the students, nor trigger their interest.

7. **Teacher and teaching methods**

A few of the responses were related to the teacher and teaching methods, stating that the learning process could be more successful if there were more fun in the class, if the teacher had a good rapport with the students and if there were more time for open discussions between the teacher and the students. These suggestions partially echo the findings of Al Noursi (2013, p.26) who asserts that it is not teacher’s nativity, but rather “teaching methods” and “learning atmosphere” that can really affect “the type and the degree of attitude”.

8. **Personal efforts, attitudes and problems**

A relatively large number of the responses focused on students’ own personal efforts, attitudes and problems. Some students said that if they exerted more efforts (reading, studying, watching English movies and programs, and practicing), their English would improve. Others admitted that they could learn English better if they had the motivation/desire to learn, or had they loved/liked the language. Some, however, explained that they needed to overcome personal problems that prevented them from practicing and learning English, such as shyness and lack of confidence and being unable to concentrate in the lecture. The latter problem could be due to the long teaching hours and the number of classes that are required, which students complained about in point 5.

Thus, the hypothesis, which states that students try to improve their English, but their efforts are affected by some factors, is true. Despite the lack of time, most students attempt to improve their English, but they are faced with a number of various obstacles, which they pointed out in their responses to question 22. The fact that all students, except only 5 (10.64%), responded to this statement (some of them wrote more than one suggestion) actually shows the students’ eagerness to improve their English and their awareness of those obstacles.

**Research Question 4: Do they use English outside the classroom?**

The responses to question 20 (How often do you use English outside the classroom?) indicated that the highest percentage of the students (44.68%) “sometimes” used English outside the classroom, which certainly does not provide enough practice of the language. Moreover, a glaring figure of 31.91% “rarely” used English while 10% “never” used it. Students who used the language “a lot” outside the classroom made up only 12.27% of the participants.

When asked where they used English (question 21), option 3 (When I travel abroad) came first (61.70%). Travelling abroad as an opportunity to practice and improve English was mentioned in several of the responses to question 22, as well, which is not surprising as being in a English-speaking country pushes the student to learn and use English. But also options 1, 2 and 4 which
mentioned cafés and restaurants, hospitals, and clinics, and shops and malls inside Saudi Arabia elicited relatively high percentages (around 50%). In contrast, option 5 attracted only 2.13% of the responses, expectedly because Saudi Arabia is after all an Arabic speaking country and foreign employees at the hairdresser’s and/or the dressmaker’s tend to learn Arabic quickly to be able to understand and satisfy all customers. Therefore, regrettably students do not need to use English in these feminine settings which would be a good opportunity if they did. Nevertheless, the percentage of students who chose option 7 (57.54%) reflects the importance of English in their other subjects.

The percentage of the students who had friends with whom they could practice English was comparatively small (21.28%), a finding that echoes one of their responses to question 22 (if I had a foreign friend to speak English with). Nevertheless, the percentage of those who used English only in the classroom was small (8.51%).

The other options which the students wrote include “with my family” and “on the internet.” The former supports the findings of research question 3 as it reflects their attempts to improve their English while the latter emphasizes the need for more internet-based learning activities to be implemented. One of the students declared that she spoke English and enjoyed it, but outside the classroom. This attitude can be explained by some of the responses to question 22 as students complained from the long hours, intensive course and the pressure of marks.

Therefore, research hypothesis 4 (It’s likely that they rarely have a chance, if any, to practice their English.) is very close to reality since about a third of the participants rarely used the language outside the classroom, a finding which, in turn, connects to students’ responses/suggestions to improve their English as they emphasized their immense need for practice and for an English-speaking atmosphere/community.

Limitations of Study
The study covered 47 female students from the FY of the ELI at KAU. Its results are context-specific to some extent. There are, of course, other private and government institutions, colleges and universities in Jeddah and Saudi Arabia that teach English as a foreign language, following different systems and utilizing a variety of curricula. Most other universities follow a semester-based system. Some teach general English, then introduce English for Special Purposes (ESP), in which the curriculum is geared towards students’ needs in their future majors.

Conclusion
Students generally have a positive attitude towards learning English. Although some of them find it difficult, they are willing to improve their language. Yet most of them, unfortunately, do not have the sufficient time required, especially with the pressure of the intensive course, long hours and the demands of other subjects. The large number of vocabulary items and grammatical structures that need to be taught in the English courses during a short period of time leave very little room for practice. Furthermore, although the science students’ tests in math, chemistry, statistics and biology are in English, the courses are primarily taught in Arabic. The students concentrate on the terminology and they are tested on their information, not their language, through multiple choice questions. All in all, despite the limited chances of practicing the language, students attempt to use it and their responses reveal an interest in improving their English.

Recommendations
The findings of this study suggest that it would be helpful if the institute adopted a more flexible, less intensive curriculum and reconsidered the teaching hours to arrive at a maximum of two-three-hour-daily lectures in order to preserve students’ positive attitude and render it effective in
learning the language, and allow teachers’ sufficient time for reflection, creativity and adjusting to their students’ needs. These recommendations coincide with Bassyony and Cooper Jr.’s (2012, 149) advocacy of the use of “flexible course content” which allows “more creativity, more teacher observations, and more learning opportunities”. They also agree with Zainol Abidin’s (2012) recommendations as he believes that in order to rectify students’ negative attitude, curriculum should be reviewed to accommodate the needs of the learners and teachers should adopt a more communicative approach and utilize more attractive teaching methods and supplementary materials.

The researcher also recommends that more emphasis be given to teaching vocabulary and speaking, allowing students sufficient time for practicing and recycling the new words. Helping the students build a solid base of vocabulary will hopefully not only give them more confidence in speaking, but it will also improve their writing skill. The ELI has a forum for speaking and another for reading, in which students present a topic, or talk about a book, but what students need is more practice on realistic, everyday interactions. In other words, they need conversations, not presentations.

**Suggested Research**

Further research can be conducted to compare the attitudes and perceptions of arts and science students. Also, research can be done comparing the attitudes of samples of students as they progress from one level (module) to the other, or comparing the attitudes of different levels of students in one module. Such studies can help in identifying and differentiating the expectations and the needs of the students, and devising a suitable curriculum for them, a separate one for each major, if needed.

**About the author:**

Mrs. Amal Alkaff is a language instructor at the English Language Institute of King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She has a BA in English language and literature and an MA in English literature. She is also a member of the ELI Testing Unit. Among her interests are test construction and analysis and conducting and analyzing feedback on assessment.

**References**


Teaching the Regular and the Irregular Verbs through a Cultural-based Literary Discourse in an ESL Grammar Classroom

Ream Fathi Odetallah
Al Ain University of Science and Technology
United Arab Emirates

Abstract
This paper provides examples of learning the two forms of the past simple tense through literature that expose pragmatic learning outcomes without the need of grammatical rules during the early to mid-learning stages. Simultaneously, the learners get to learn the English culture, which broadens their perceptions of the language since culture and language are intertwined with one another. Taken as an account, the popular English story, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, provides useful examples of exercises on the regular and irregular verbs, bringing language to the level of enjoyment to the learning experience. In addition, the learners would have the opportunity to appreciate the culture and civilization of the target language. To determine how these outcomes can be implemented in ESL classrooms, this paper manifests a new emergence of understanding literature by emphasizing on innovating challenging and enthusiastic teaching methodologies to extrinsically motivate today's learners. Examples of the use of literature for teaching grammar in an ESL class are provided throughout the research.

*Keywords*: past simple tense, regular and irregular verbs, ESL learners, target language, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.
Introduction
This paper examines the role of literature in teaching practical grammar to ESL learners by using various literary texts for language practices. It will also cover how literature can be an asset in learning the culture of the target language for the means of communication, as Alptekin (2002) states that bilinguals require a profound perception of the language's culture for professional communication. It may be durable to acquire the target language without the full understanding of the target's culture because according to Hymes (1972), Kitao (1991) and Alpetkin (2002), culture and language must be equal with one another for a full language competence and communication. In this case, a literary material is selected, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which has a 'set to the message' Selden, Widdowson, Brooker (2005) in its literary meanings that will help the learners to grasp an idea of the story in its form and culture as they practice on the two forms of the past simple tense in context.

The importance and the quick spread of the English Language have prompted the Emirati Higher Ministry of Education force university learners to pass an official language proficiency exam such as the Academic IELTS or TOEFL. Nevertheless, many university learners encounter difficulties in understanding the language and its culture due to the lack of the vocabulary of the target language and language practice during their growing years that have led to their vulnerable knowledge of any foreign culture, whether the British or the American culture. These obstacles have not only troubled the university learners, but also the language instructors who, occasionally, have to expose them to the cultures of the language in use in prior to language instruction.

For many learners enrolled in English courses in the universities, the suggestion that they can achieve better grades when understanding the culture may seem at best unusual. Most of them view the courses as means of assisting them in completing the university mandatory courses instructed in English, to pass a language proficiency exam and to correspond suavely. They may find it difficult to see that culture has a great impact upon grammar because, when younger, they have studied grammar as a set of rules detached from the origins of these rules and their cultural meanings. In other words, they have not learnt how to mingle with the target language through the socialization process - "the process in which children are socialized both through language and to use language within a community has been largely examined without regard to the dynamics of grammatical development, focusing, rather, on culturally relevant communicative practices and activities" (Ochs and Schieffelin, 2009, p.303 - 304).

Consequently, it is crucial for the learners to acquire the language and its culture at earlier stages to have them as a habitual practice during their growing years as based in the Behaviorist Theory of Skinner (1957) and Chastain (1976) where language learning is perceived as a matter of habit formation through strengthening the associations between stimulus and response through reinforcement because human language is considered as a sophisticated response system that can be acquired through drilling and repetition. For instance, in the case of the story, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it will be to no avail to teach its lingual contents without conceiving the literary meanings and the cultural background of the story. The integrated lingual and cultural factors of the era would be enhanced through various drilling and repetition techniques by exploiting a number of grammar exercises. Moreover, these techniques could be applied to other stories, and with time, the learners, would be more or less, in their first-rank mastering the language as they learn to socialize with the language.
Learning culture through grammar

The concept of using literature in a modern language classroom is to arise the learners' cultural awareness from stories that have been long forgotten or not known to them, like (Long, 1987, p. 280) who suggests that literature should be involved in classes of English for non-native learners but in another pedagogical approach...“the teaching of literature is an arid business unless there is a response, and even negative responses can create an interesting classroom situation.” Nevertheless, it is a barrier for any ESL primary teacher who decides to use literature in a language classroom by galling to find a suitable text relevant to the grammar exercise, which means that the exercise and the selected text must be connected to the objectives of the lesson. For instance, the past simple tense must be "related to content" (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001, p. 44) that provides sufficient practical exercises of the tense to use in the classroom.

Before commencing a grammar exercise, it is crucial to introduce the learners to the story's protagonists, antagonists, settings and some major literary traits. The benefits of this introduction are; firstly, when exercising on texts from the story, they would have some ideas of what they are reading about, and secondly, the literary traits already discussed by the teacher will be analyzed and criticized for a better understanding of the English culture. In this case, it will be easier for the learners to perceive the vocabulary as they predict the story's happenings. Exemplified is a brief illustration of the story that could be presented during a warm-up session:

Figure 1. The Start, Climax and the Resolution of the story, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Alice was rebuffed and threatened by many strange creatures

CLIMAX

Alice was reading a book

RESOLUTION

Alice came back to reality

START

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is loaded with an ocean of grammar lessons from passages that can quite easily attract the attention of young learners that are, in their natural stages, eager to understand what is happening to 'Alice'. The three main aims when a teacher chooses a literary text are: firstly, teaching the learners the language of the text (the most common lexical items); secondly, relating the text to the target grammar lesson and thirdly, introducing to them, indirectly, the culture of the language in use such as the concept of loneliness felt by 'Alice' in Chapter One. In this case, the teacher explains where have her feelings of loneliness led her and why has she felt lonely. An answer to this will open up a class discussion about the risks of being adventurous, and that, it is more acceptable to appreciate a normal life with friends and families. Successively, comparisons and contrasts of the story's and the learners' cultures emerge as the teacher triggers them with minor questions such as "How do you spend your free time?" The teacher will explain that 'Alice' was reading a book without pictures and will compare her reading activity to other actual activities performed by the learners during their free times. Such a
comparison may lead to a suggestion of reading an English story for the purpose of motivating them to learn about the other culture in an entertaining manner.

With regards to these aims, pictures accompanied with the texts are more convivial by the learners since they assist them in better understanding the text(s) they will be working on. Furthermore, pictures reinforce the young learners' imaginations which will help get the staple of the story as they try to tie certain events discussed through grammar exercises. In this case, some pictures unrelated to the current reading text may imply or foreshadow what the learners are about to read for the purposes of analyses or critical thinking. However, the target here is to exercise on the two forms of the tense through an English story to bridge the gap between language and culture to the ESL learners.

Choosing a picture is not as simple as when choosing a text. The teacher does not only have to make sure that the picture and the text match, but also that there are sufficient exercises to work on to develop the learners' language skills. For example, the text following the picture of the 'Rabbit' on the next page can offer various grammar exercises. The first two exercises are simple grammar lessons, as for the last, it is a cultural grammar exercise that introduces the synonyms of the words in context. It is like paraphrasing the actual text for the purposes of reinforcing the learners' grammatical skills and acquiring vocabulary. The target words from the original text are, respectively, i) took out; ii) occurred; iii) wondered and iv) rushed.

Furthermore, the picture presents exactly what the text talks about and this method helps the learners to perceive the story better in addition to reinforcing their grammatical skills in an entertaining manner.

---

**Figure 2.** The 'Rabbit' holding a waistcoat pocket

Exercise 1: Underline the past simple verbs in the following text.

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, "Oh, dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" (when she thought it over
afterward, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on.

Exercise 2: State how many regular and irregular verbs are there in the text.

a. There are __________ regular verbs.
b. There are __________ irregular verbs.

Exercise 3: Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb in the past simple tense.

The strange animal ________________ (remove) its watch from his coat. The girl ________________ (happen) to show that she ________________ (question) what the Rabbit did as it ________________ (hurry) down the rabbit-hole.

Choosing a text in practice that best describes a picture will ease the flow of the lesson by getting the most of the story and learning new words that are from the culture of the studied story such as waistcoat pocket. The chosen text does not satisfy the learners' eagerness because they would be wondering about the peculiar 'Rabbit's destination and why it was in a hurry. The teacher can supply them with some answers through assigning different class or home work on the past simple from subsequent texts.

Consequently, teaching language through literature is useful in many ways, as Collie and Slater (1987) state the reasons for a language teacher to use literary texts with ESL learners:

- Literature is a valuable authentic material because readers have to deal with language intended for native speakers (different linguistic uses, forms and conventions)
- Cultural enrichment. The imagined world of literature reveals thoughts, feelings, customs, and other features of life of the country where English is spoken.
- Language enrichment. Literary texts offer many features of written language that can broaden learners' skills.
- Personal involvement. Engaging imagination with literature helps learners to change their attention from language system to the story itself. Sometimes the readers are drawn into the development of the plot." The language becomes 'transparent' – the fiction summons the whole person into its own world. (p. 8)

Activities on the regular and the irregular verbs

Teachers always taught that regular verbs take –ed and –ied, and the irregular verbs change within their forms, and which they have to learn by heart. In this case, the learners are required to learn grammar and then develop their grammatical knowledge into practice, whereas, if they get
trained from their early years to be indirectly exposed to vocabulary and grammar exercises that are learned and developed by constructing a set of rules which will characterize the language that surrounds them, it will enable them to use it for both speaking and understanding Chomsky (1969).

Grammar is “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (Ur, 1996, p.75) to make speaking and understanding possible. So, teaching grammar in contexts is important since it promotes the learners' English Language to advanced levels without the concerns of encountering challenging situations that require using the language such as taking official language proficiency exams, studying majors that are instructed in the target language or for their career promotions. Moreover, language develops within human individuals and within human culture to ensure maximally successful communication (Tomlin, 1994), so learning grammar the traditional way is a matter of who can learn it smoothly or not, and most of the ESL learners will not process it for a long time due to the nil or almost nil of language practice outside the classrooms and within their social contexts.

Therefore, analyzing the language itself seems to be a productive step during the early learning process if a teacher uses specific skills to familiarize the language to the learners. In other words, if the learners are introduced gradually to the culture of the story in study through discussion and class activities, the grammar lessons would start building up on its own without going through the heaps of the grammatical rules. (Rutherford, 1987). Many ESL teachers acknowledge that teaching and learning grammar are never easy. The teachers must be well-equipped to be able to teach a certain lesson to a multi-level class, and the learners must study these rules over and over again until they can confidently construct sentences smoothly. However, teaching grammar the literary way is like deconstructing the language into simpler terms, so that not only the learners with good command of the language can understand, but also the ones that lack confidence in speaking and writing the language will be encouraged to use it more often to improve their English.

In order to be able to use the language vividly and properly, it is better for learners to understand more about the usage of grammar rather than telling how it is used through a set of fun class activities. It is stated that "A study of grammar in texts is a study of grammar in use," (Carter, 1997, p. 34), and based on that some suggested activities have been designed on the regular and irregular verbs. Such activities would allow the learners to investigate the grammar rules without going through the big humps of a book of rules.

The focus of this paper is creating productive exercises on the regular and irregular verbs from the selected story without the need to state the title of the grammar lesson to young ESL learners. Hence, five pragmatic activities are suggested on the two types of the past simple verbs that a teacher may use in his or her lesson.

**Activity 1 – Veiled wonder words**

Aim: To look up the regular and the irregular verbs.

Description: The teacher explains the regular and irregular verbs on the board. Next, the learners look for the regular verbs and the irregular verbs from the text.

| Ready or not! Find the regular and the irregular verbs. |  |
Down the Rabbit-Hole

Chapter 1

Suddenly she came upon a little three-legged table, all made of solid glass; there was nothing on it except a tiny golden key, and Alice's first thought was that it might belong to one of the doors of the hall; but, alas! Either the locks were too large, or the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them. However, on the second time around, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high: she tried the little golden key in the lock, and to her great delight it fitted!

**Figure 3. Alice holding the key**

(p. 6)

a. There are __________ regular verbs.
b. There are __________ irregular verbs.

**Activity 2 – What verbs are the Gangnam Style and what are not!**

Aim: i) To identify the action and the state verbs. ii) To use the verbs in sentences.

Description: The teacher plays the song and moves with the rhythm. She or he then pauses the song and stops moving. The learners must try to guess why the teacher is dancing. The teacher explains that any physical activity is expressed with an action verb like *dancing*.

Read the text below. Get into the groove as you underline the state verbs and circle the action verbs.
A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale

Chapter 3

Alice thought the whole thing was very absurd, but they all looked very grave that she did not dare to laugh; and, she could not think of anything to say, she simply bowed, and took the thimble, looking as solemn as she could.

The next thing was to eat the comfits: this caused some noise and confusion, as the large birds complained that they could not taste theirs, and the small ones choked and had to be patted on the back.

Figure 4. Alice being granted her own comfit by the chief bird

Use a state verb and an action verb in sentences.

State verb:
______________________________________________________________________________

Action verb:
______________________________________________________________________________

Activity 3 – The Englishwood Stars

Aim: To act out the past simple verbs.
Description: The learners in teams look up the verbs and act them out. The most points go to the best performing team by acting out the meaning of the word.

You think you are a star! Look for the past simple verbs and get on stage!

**Pig and Pepper**

**Chapter 6**

"If you're going to turn into a pig, my dear, said Alice, seriously, "I'll have nothing more to do with you. Mind now!" The poor little thing sobbed again (or grunted, it was impossible to say which), and they went on for some while in silence.

Alice was just beginning to think to herself, "Now, what am I to do with this creature when I get it home?" when it grunted again, so violently, that she looked down into its face in some alarm.

**Figure 5. Alice holding the nagging baby pig**

---

**Activity 4 – Time up!**

Aim: To match the rhyming past simple verbs from each passage.

Description: The learners are in teams. Each team will be assigned one to two minutes to look for a pair of rhyming words in each paragraph.

Look for a pair of past simple verbs that rhyme in each paragraph. What do the
rhyming verbs mean?

The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill

Chapter 4

(A) "That you won't!" thought Alice, and after waiting till she fancied she heard the Rabbit just under the window, she suddenly spread out her hand, and made a snatch in the air.

Figure 6. Gigantic Alice trying to grab the annoying Rabbit

 Pig and Pepper

Chapter 6

(B) The Fish-Footman began by producing from under his arm a great letter, nearly as large as himself, and this he handed over to the other saying, in a solemn tone, "For the Duchess. An invitation from the Queen to play croquet."

The Frog-Footman repeated, in the same solemn tone, only changing the order of the words a little, "From the Queen. An invitation for the Duchess to play
croquet."
They both bowed low, and their curls got entangled together.

Figure 7. The funny royal messengers exchanging salutations

Activity 5 – Use me right!
Aims: i) To work together to create a text. ii) To practice or revise the past simple verbs.
Description: A text with blanks is written on the board. A picture about the text is hung next to the board. The learners in teams guess the missing words.
The teacher informs the learners in brief about the chapter of the text, *The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill.* Then, she or he explains to the learners that they should fill in the blanks with past simple verbs (written on the board) that best complete the sentences.

'Hardly knowing what she ______________, she ______________ up a little bit of stick, and ______________ it out to the puppy; whereupon the puppy ______________ into the air of all its feet at once, with a yelp of delight, and ______________ at the stick.'
Why is a lesson plan important?
The learners can feel displaced when starting the story in grammar by missing the target of the lesson. So, the teacher must give them the confidence they need by preparing before class to state the lesson's objective(s) and to be able to assess what have the learners learnt or missed, and the reasons behind them. The suggested lesson plan should include five main steps. The first four are to be implemented during the lesson, within forty-five minutes (a standard school lesson), whereas, step five is a feedback that a teacher recommends after giving a particular class:

**Step 1 – Warm-up**

Before exposing the first text from the story to the learners, the teacher introduces the story to them by presenting some main themes. This could be done by demonstrating some colorful humorous and attractive pictures using the smart board, wall posters or a projector.

**Step 2 – Group work**

The learners will be given a text along with the intended grammar exercises. The learners are divided up into small groups and each group is given the same text, for example, they will be
doing Activity 3. Together they should highlight the past simple verbs, explain what do they mean and act them out in front of the class.

**Step 3 – Class work**
To provide some variety, the teacher can suggest a whole class work. If Activity 2 is in use, the teacher can be cool and play the most music liked by the learners, which the Gangnam Style by the South Korean musician PSY. This will make them titter and try to understand the teacher's purpose, and that would be listing the state and action verbs. For example when playing the song, the learners will be asked to look for action verbs, whereas there will be no music when looking for the state verbs.

**Step 4 – Individual work**
Depending on the time left for the end of class and the learners' abilities, the teacher will decide whether to assign the individual work as class or homework, which will be graded. Activity 1 is the suggested activity to be done individually, thus, after the teacher corrects every learner's work, he or she may decide how many more lesson(s) do the learners need in order to distinguish between the regular and the irregular past verbs.

**Step 5 – Feedback**
This step varies from one lesson to another depending on the norm of the class. Feedback is usually done after evaluating particular learners' work, whether, written audial or orally. According to Wilbert, Grosche, Gerdes (2010), the individual norm of reference provides beneficial instructional methods since it allows the learners to self-evaluate themselves in the classrooms. In other words, the exercises suggested in this paper all trigger self-motivation among the learners because such action leads to high competency and encourages them to evaluate themselves. Thus, based on these learning strategies, the teacher comments on what have been performed by the learners, and tries to create other self-motivated exercises to allow the learners to see their own work and to learn from their mistakes before the teacher invites them to any graded work. However, it is recommended using a variety of learning strategies that account different level of understanding. For example, Activities 4 and 5 were not practiced in previous classes, so the teacher may use them in the next class to reinforce the learners' grammar comprehension before wrapping up this lesson or evaluating them. In this case, the teacher would be providing a genuine feedback that would fairly reveal what the learners have gained, misunderstood and how to run the next class(es).

**Conclusion**
This paper has suggested that teaching the regular and the irregular past verbs through literature can help bridge the cultural gap between the ESL learners and the target language community. Moreover, Ömer and Ali (2011) argue that using literature in ESL classrooms has advantages:

- That students learn that the target culture is a cause for them to learn the target language;

- Although course books used in foreign language education contain so-called logical examples from daily life, these examples can be perceived by students as fictional ones. In this context, learners can associate language forms and its abstract voices with natural persons and places by learning target languages’ culture;
Cultural studies not only increase students’ concerns on target language’s country but also raise students’ motivation towards learning.

Teaching cultural features in education plays an important role in general education process of students as well as its advantages for foreign language education at the same time. With cultural studies, students can learn the target country’s history, geography, cuisine and etc. These points emphasize on the fact that learners get the opportunity to acquire the language more effectively as they gain vicarious understanding of the culture of the language and learn to act in accordance with its norms and potentials during their growing years. The paper has emphasized that literature offers learners an entertaining and practical method of acquiring the lesson without the need of going through a prolonging series of intensive grammar lessons. Moreover, literature shows how language and its cultural features interact as well as providing the learners with examples of social roles such as the performances done for Activity 3. Not to mention, literature allows learners to think critically and to analyze characters, events and speeches that will steer them to extrinsically motivated learners as they proceed with their studies.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* offers a great deal of grammar exercises that a teacher can use from many other texts for other lessons such as the past continuous, the past simple vs. the past continuous, modals, infinitives and the passives. Naturally, as the learners acquire several lessons from the same story, they will be enriched with the culture of the target language leading to stronger communicative approaches. Moreover, the teacher may look for other stories that are rich in particular grammar exercises of the targeted lessons, and by enabling the learners to indirectly experience the foreign culture, the teacher can also experience their pros and cons to evaluate how the successive lessons should be.

Teachers are required to be in a good stand as they are the grammar teachers, cultural mediators and assessors. The teacher must act according to the levels of the learners and present the materials in ways that may suit them best, so the texts and the accompanied pictures need to be carefully selected to teach them on what can be clearly explained. However, this does not mean that they cannot perceive texts that are filled with sophisticated lexical items or show depth of analyses. The teacher can motivate the learners to advance their learning abilities to the level of the complexity of the language as they proceed with the text-in-story exercises. Nevertheless, choosing the right text for a particular exercise will positively busy the learners as they engage themselves with the language. Thus, a teacher will have done more than what is expected from young ESL learners to acquire by bridging their cultural awareness and language abilities in a mutual harmonic relationship.

**About the Author:**

**Ream Odetallah** was born in Kuwait in 1977. She completed her education in Jordan with a Masters degree in English Language and Literature. She is currently an English Language Instructor at Al Ain University of Science and Technology in UAE.
References
Closing Techniques for Face-to-Face Conversation in Saudi Educational Institutes

Khadija Abdullah Al-Amoudi
King Abdulaziz University
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of techniques used by English Language Institute teachers at King Abdul-Aziz University to end their face-to-face conversation. In recent years, conversation analysis trends have been the focus of much research. A considerable number of studies have been conducted on conversation closing strategies and techniques (e.g. Stenström, 1992; Dwi-Nugroho, 1993; Schegloff & Sacks 2000; Marlina, 2001; Stockwell, 2002; Saptiana, 2004; Sambo, 2005); yet, due attention is not given to this linguistic phenomenon in Saudi society. In an attempt to fill in this gap in the literature, this research utilizes Saptiana’s (2004) method of closing functions and techniques which proposes twenty techniques based on three theories: five techniques from Albert and Kessler (1976), nine techniques from Wardhaugh (1985), and six techniques from Stenström (1992). The data in the current study is taken from a recording of open informal conditioned conversations between two faculty members. The findings demonstrate that ELI teachers utilize eighteen different techniques. This proves the hypothesis that well-educated people use a wide range of closing techniques. Dismissing oneself and giving reasons are found to be the most frequent closing techniques. In addition, the findings reveal that six techniques in Saptiana's (2004) study are found to be irrelevant to our data. Her classification is also found to be insufficient for the purpose of analyzing all the data in this research. Thus, additional expansions were required.

Keywords: Conversation analysis, closing strategies, closing functions, closing techniques, ELI teachers' conversation closing techniques
1. Introduction
As a social activity, conversation involves "two or more participants who talk about something" (Stenström, 1992, p. 189). Hatch (1992) assumes that in every conversation, there must be ways to show that communication is about to begin and then begins, and ways to show that it is about to end and then ends. Thus, good cooperation is required amongst the participants to make the conversation go well. Wardhaugh (1985) argues that cooperation "should also be done in closing a conversation in order to achieve a satisfying ending for all participants" (p. 151).

In fact, ending a conversation is not simply a matter of saying goodbye. Additionally, Labov and Fanshel (1977, cited in Owen, 1990) suggest that ending is a more complicated act than beginning. Thus, speakers should not leave a conversation before negotiating a closing which is a delicate matter both technically and socially. According to Laver (1981, cited in Dwi-Nugroho, 1993), there are routine formulae of parting or farewell, which reflects what Button (1987) calls closing conventions. Those conventions must be carefully placed so that their function to close a conversation does not force any party to exit while they still have something to say (Levinson, 1983).

This paper aims at exploring the closing strategies, the most closing functions used in those strategies, and the techniques that represent the closing functions of face-to-face informal conditioned conversations amongst ELI teachers at King Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia.

1.1. Selected Literature Review
Closing a conversation has been the focus of a considerable number of studies in the field of discourse analysis. Conversation closing strategies, techniques, and processes are the focus of much of the research such as Albert and Kessler (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1992). Closing signals also have been taken into consideration by other linguists such as Goffman (1976, cited in Hatch, 1983) and Stockwell (2002). Moreover, many researchers shade some light on closing sectioning. This might include Clark and French (1981), Levinson (1983), and Schegloff and Sacks (2000, cited in Ten-Have, 2000). Also, terminating telephone conversation is discussed thoroughly by Dwi-Nugroho (1993). Furthermore, an important study entitled "Strategies to End a Conversation Used by Betra Christian University Students in An Open Role-Play Situation" is offered by Saptiana (2004) to discuss closing strategies and techniques. Sambo (2005) also presents a study on the closing utterances in conversation used by young people in Rantepao, and Tana Torja in Indonesia.

Albert and Kessler (1976) propose a theory on processes in ending a social encounter. They find that closing a conversation is done in an order. This order in ending a conversation is a strategy that can be applied. Therefore, they divide the closing section into five parts. Wardhaugh's (1985) theory is concerned with face-to-face conversation. He assumes that there are some techniques for closing an ongoing conversation. Stenström's (1992) theory also suggests several strategies to indicate that a conversation is about to reach a closing section. (see table 1 below)

In her significant study on closing strategies, Saptiana (2004) combines the previous three theories. Her findings reveal the type of strategies used in ending a conversation, the most closing functions used in those strategies and the linguistic signals representing the closing function in those conversations.

1.2. Statement of the Problem
The research problem of this study is "How do English Language Institute teachers at King Abdul-Aziz University end their face-to-face conversation?"
1.2.1. Research Question
To get the answer for the research problem, a set of research questions are formulated as the following:
1. What are the strategies used by ELI teachers in negotiating a closing?
2. What are the closing functions used in those strategies?
3. What are the closing techniques used in these functions?

1.3. Purpose of the Study
In this study, the researcher aims at revealing how ELI teachers end a face-to-face conversation, and what strategies they use in negotiating an end. The writer also aims at investigating whether there are particular techniques that are commonly used by ELI teachers and the functions that are represented by those techniques.

1.4. Significance and Hypothesis of the Study
Since due attention is not given to conversation closing in Saudi society, this paper is intended to fill in the gap in the literature by examining the assumption that well-educated people (presented by ELI teachers) use a wide range of closing techniques to end their conversations. By setting an example of well-educated people informal face-to-face conversations in Saudi Arabia, the research may also give a number of ideas for the readers about ways of closing a conversation. The study also can help people recognizing closing signals sent by their addressee in order to give an appropriate respond cooperatively.

2. Theoretical Framework
Strategies used in closing a conversation by Saptiana (2004) are used as basis of analyzing the data in this research. Theories for additional expansion from Albert and Kessler (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1992) are also required.
In her study, Saptiana (2004) demonstrates that bringing a conversation to an end is not simply a matter of saying goodbye. There has to be at least other closing functions that do not terminate the conversation straightforwardly. The five closing functions identified in her study are the following: showing no desire to continue, asking for an excuse to stop, maintain good relationship, keep future contact, and terminating the conversation. In order to represent these closing functions, a number of techniques from Albert and Kessler (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1992) are used. Those techniques include: giving silent pause, ignoring what is said, giving many repetition, summarizing the content, giving pre-closing expressions, diminishing eye contact, shifting position, and using leave-take behaviors. Saptiana (2004) classifies those techniques under the function of showing no desire to continue. Moreover, giving reason, offering other to stop, and dismissing oneself are classified as techniques to ask for an excuse to stop. For as maintaining a good relationship, it can be expressed through some other techniques such as: thanking the addressee, apologizing, giving compliment, and using phatic talk. Furthermore, making arrangement, and re-emphasizing arrangement are techniques to keep future contact. Finally, terminating the conversation can be represented through giving termination markers, giving well wishes, and taking a distance. However, some of the techniques used by the respondents in this study cannot be categorized in to Saptiana's (2004) closing functions. Thus, her methodology requires additional techniques that are found in Albert and Kessler (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1992).
Albert and Kessler (1976) found that closing a conversation is done in order: summarizing the content, justifying ending contact, expressing pleasure about each other, making reference, and finally wishing each other well. Wardhaugh (1985) assumes that conversation closing techniques may include: giving reason(s) to leave either for the speaker or the addressee, giving compliments, summarizing, giving dismissal formulas, and giving ritual leave takings either verbally or non-verbally (diminishing eye contact, taking distance, etc.). According to Stenström (1992), there are several strategies to indicate that the conversation is about to reach a closing section. Conversationalists can bring their conversation to an end either by: using silent pauses, using winding-up talk, using polite phrases, thanking, apologizing, giving reasons, or by using termination markers.

The closing functions of Saptiana's (2004) method of the three synthesized theory can be summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing Functions</th>
<th>Albert &amp; Kessler</th>
<th>Wardhaugh</th>
<th>Stenström</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing no desire to continue the</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Diminishing eye contact</td>
<td>Using silent pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Shifting position</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Making leave-taking behavior</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Giving pre-closing expression</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for an excuse to stop</td>
<td>Justifying ending</td>
<td>Giving reasons</td>
<td>Giving reasons to stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintaining a good relationship</td>
<td>contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Giving dismissal formulas</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping for future contact</td>
<td>Expressing pleasure</td>
<td>Giving compliment</td>
<td>Apologizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thanksing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>Using phatic talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminating the conversation</td>
<td>Making reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wishing each other well</td>
<td>Giving ritual leave-taking</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Taking a distance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Research Methodology
To conduct this research, a conversation analysis approach is used. The work is mainly based on the process of analyzing the closing parts of the conversation. In order to get the natural closing, I used a tape recorder to collect the data which consist of three conditioned conversations carried out by myself, who conditioned them, and three of my colleagues, or the respondents/informants who did not know about the conditioning of those conversations till it was over. The situation was that I initiated the conversation and after a while I did not intend to close it. The respondents tried to lead the conversation to its end and desired to leave the conversation using various closing techniques while I tried to prolong it. I focused on analyzing the utterances made by the
participants rather than those made by me for two main reasons: they contain the closing techniques, and they are more natural since the informants do not know about the recording.

In order to get an answer for the research question, I took a number of steps. First, I listened to the conversations from the tape recorder and transcribed the data using Wood and Kroger's (2000) transcript notation. Second, out of one hundred forty three utterances, fifty six were identified as closing utterances. Third, I clarified the techniques used in those utterances using criteria based on Saptiana's (2004) method and some other expansions based on techniques from Albert and Kessler (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1992). In addition to the previously mentioned classifications in the three theories, a new technique is developed in this study for our data which is the use of smiles. All the techniques were classified into the five closing functions. Fourth, I deduced the three strategies used by ELI teachers to close their conversations. Finally, I interpreted all the findings and drew a conclusion.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. The Strategies Used to End a Conversation

It has been found that there are three strategies used by ELI staff members to end a conversation. Those three types of strategies are determined by the variation of closing functions and their techniques in each strategy. The first one is the strategy that uses five closing functions and fourteen techniques. The next one is the strategy which uses five closing functions but only nine techniques. Then, the last is the strategy that uses only four closing functions with about seven techniques. Details of strategies used in the conversation between the two staff members will be explained later. These findings; however, can be summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: The Functions Used in the Three Conversations and Their Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Functions &amp; their Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Showing no desire to continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore what is said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give pre-closing expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave-taking behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Asking for an excuse to stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismiss other party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismiss oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Maintaining good relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank the addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give compliment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use polite phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use phatic talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Keeping future contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table illustrates that all of the respondents used variations of not less than four closing functions in all the three conversations as a strategy to bring their conversation to its end. It means that speakers try to end their conversation politely by making use of almost the whole closing functions that are there along with variations of their techniques. In addition, three closing functions or less seem to be insufficient in making an ending. Those findings reveal that ending is not a mere exchanging pairs of goodbye and they also demonstrate the need for the variation of strategies in ending a conversation.

4.1.1. Five Closing Functions and Fifteen Techniques

The conversation that used this strategy of five closing functions and fifteen techniques has a distinctive feature of having a long closing section. Possibly, the long closing section shows that it was difficult to negotiate a closing. The long closing section also can be a reflection of the design of the researcher to pro-long the conversation. In consequence, it requires a strategy that consists of the whole closing functions. However, the focus is not in keeping future contact and maintaining good relationship. Instead, the stress is more in showing the unwillingness to continue the conversation. This can be explained through the following conversation:

**4.1.1.1. Conversation 1**

A: (30+, Saudi female, university teacher, MA student, B’s colleague, the first speaker)
B: (30+, South-African female, university teacher, MA holder, A’s colleague, C’s teacher, D’s friend, the respondent)
C: (20+, Saudi female, university student, B’s student)
D: (40+, south-African female, university teacher, PHD holder, B’s friend)

Time: 12:30 pm.

Situation: B is sitting at her office at KAU and has to leave in few minutes. While B is collecting her belongings preparing to leave, A starts the conversation with B. C inter the room and has a short talk with B. Then, D inter the room to tell B about the money D received the same morning. It is a long conversation with many initiations from different parties.

A: Opening up until 3 times

1 A: (Opening up until 3 times)

2 (2) Give reasons before my class (0.5) in let’s say: half a minute. (Sitting and collecting her papers)

B: Ok, but I have to go to the H. R. (Looking at "A")

A: So, you are leaving.

3 (2) Dismiss oneself (Looking at "A")

B: Yes, (0.8)>I’m leaving right now< (no eye contact with "A")

A: May I ask you just few questions before you leave?

C: (20+, Saudi female, university student, B’s student)

D: (40+, south-African female, university teacher, PHD holder, B’s friend)
9 A: Opening up 1 time

10 B: First, (0.5) you have to know that I'm speaking ONLY English. (1.4) Do you want it in English? (Smiling), (glancing at "B")

11 A: Sure, I prefer it to be in English.

Opening up 3 times

15 C: Teacher. (Holding a paper)

16 B: Yes, where were you this morning? (To "D")

(2) Dismiss oneself (It's one o'clock) and I have to go. (To "A")

(1) Leave-take behavior (Standing up and collecting her belongings)

17 D: Hi. (To "B")

18 B: Hi.

Opening up 11 times

(4) Make arrangement (We will have a MEETING and another talk tomorrow.)

(1) Shift position (Standing up and collecting her belongings)

30 B: We will have a MEETING (0.4) and another talk tomorrow.

(3) Give compliment I'm happy for you. (0.6) You take them and enjoy.

(5) Take a distance (Leaving)

33 D: Ha ha ha

34 B: Ha ha ha

35 C: Teacher, excuse me can I do it now? (Still holding the paper)

36 B: Why don't you say it in front of the class?

(1) Leave-take behavior (Still standing, collecting her belongings)

Opening up 3 times

(5) Give ritual leave-taking (Ok, let's go to class and you will talk in FRONT of the class? (To "C")

(2) Give reason <I have a class now Khadija>

(3) Give compliment I'm lucky to meet you. (To "A")

41 A: Me too, but I also have some other questions.

(Still sitting)

(4) Make arrangement (Ok, you can bring them tomorrow; (0.8) I don't have a class on Tuesday. (smiling)

(3) Smile

Opening up 3 times

(1) Pre-closing expression Alright?

47 A: Ok, how about your phone number, may I have it?

48 B: Yes, sure 050……

(1) Pre-closing expression (1.2)

(5) Give ritual leave-taking (Let's go right now. (To "C")

51 B: Oh, (0.8) I need a tape recorder. (Opening here drawer and taking it)
Closing Techniques for Face-to-Face Conversation

The above conversation shows that the respondent attempted to bring the conversation to an end by asking for an excuse to stop (Giving reason in turn 4, 40). Then, she showed her readiness to leave (Leave-taking behavior in turn 4, 16, 36). This can reflect her negotiation in closing though her co-participant did not agree to end. Thus, she tried not to pay much attention to her co-participant (Diminish eye contact in turn 8). She also tried many times to dismiss both herself and the other party (In turn 6, 10, 16, 53). However, she still maintained good relationship between them by giving compliment (In turn 32, 40) and using phatic talk (In turn 59). The ending mostly contains maintaining good relationship by giving compliment (In turn 40, 57) and phatic talk (In turn 59). Moreover, by knowing that her partner was not interested in bringing the conversation to an end, she was being cooperative in giving pre-closing expressions towards the end of the conversation (In turn 46, 49). However, she was still having difficulties to close the whole conversation. Thus, she chose to dismiss herself (In turn 53) and to make reference (In turn 55). Finally, she gave a termination marker (In turn 61) at the very end of the conversation before leaving the room.

The strategy in Conversation 1 is more likely to use verbal acts to show the lack of enthusiasm in continuing the conversation in most of the turns. The closing functions used in this first strategy are: showing no desire to continue, asking or giving an excuse to stop, maintaining good relationship, keeping future contact, and terminating the conversation.

4.1.2. Five Closing Functions and Ten Techniques

The conversation that used this kind of strategy has a relatively long closing section; however, it is much shorter than the first one. This strategy shows that in ending a conversation, the focus is not only in asking for an excuse but also in maintaining good relationship. It stresses more in showing the reasons for the unwillingness to continue the conversation. The following conversation is an example of this strategy:

4.1.2.1. Conversation 2

A: (30+, Saudi female, university teacher, MA student, B's colleague, first speaker)
B: (40+, Pakistani female, university teacher, MA holder, A's colleague, respondent)
Time: 1:30 pm.
Situation: while B is sitting at her office waiting for her husband to take her home, A enters the room and starts the conversation with many initiations.
In this conversation, the respondent started by giving a complement to negotiate the closing and to maintain good relationship (Three times in turn 18). She asked then for an excuse to stop by giving reasons to terminate the conversation, and by trying to dismiss herself (Twice in turn 18). Making an arrangement in the conversation above shows the cooperation of the second speaker or the respondent. She did not want to continue the conversation at that time, but she offered the compensation to continue the conversation some other time (In turn 18). In order to maintain good relationship, she used the technique of apology (In turn 18) followed by showing no desire in continue the conversation by gathering her belongings. She also used some other techniques to show her desire to stop the conversation such as: ignoring what is said (In turn 29) and shifting position (In turn 39). Recognizing that the first speaker was not interested in bringing the conversation to a close, she used the strongest technique, which is taking a distance (In turn 41) until she finally succeeded in ending the conversation.

4.1.3. Four Closing Functions and Seven Techniques
This strategy shows that the focus is not in terminating the conversation but to bring it to a close. It stresses more in maintaining a good relationship and asking for excuses to stop the conversation. As a result, the respondent was signaling her readiness to end the conversation and also giving reasons as excuses to stop. Conversation three is an example of this strategy.

4.1.3.1. Conversation 3
A: (30+, Saudi female, university teacher, MA holder, B's colleague, first speaker)
B: (30+, Indian female, university teacher, MA holder, A's colleague, respondent)
Time: 2:00 pm.
Situation: while B is sitting at her office helping one of her friends, A enters the room and starts the conversation of many initiations.

1 A: Opening up until 17 times

(1) Pre- closing  
(2) Dismiss oneself  
(2) Give reason > after helping another friend of mine,< 
(1) Pre- closing  
(3) Polite Phrase I hope this much was helpful.
19 A: Opening up until 7 times

27 A: Fine.
(3) Polite Phrase  
29 A: Sure it was.

18 B:↓ Ok, 

I’ll get going 

> after helping another friend of mine,< 

so::: (0.8)

19 A: Opening up until 7 times

28 B: I wish that wa::s ↓ helpful.

29 A: ↓ Ok?

30 B: Now, (0.2)

> I really need to go ↑ back > to my friend,<

31 A: Sorry, but I have one more question, please.

(1) Pre- closing  
(2) Give reason  
(1) Pre- closing

32 B: ↑ I’m ↑ really rea::lly > very sorry<. (1.2)

(3) Apology  
(4) Make arrangement  

I ↑ really need to get back to you some other time.

33 A: Why not now?

(3) Apology  
34 B: ↑ I’m ↑ really ve::ry sorry.

35 A: A very small question.

(2) Give reason  
36 B: ↑ She’s really getting la::te,(0.8) and I really don’t want to take a > lot of her time<.

(4) Make arrangement  
↑ You can email me if you want. (0.4) Email me your question (0.2) and I’ll write you a lo::ng ↓ answer. (smile)

37 A: M:: mm

(3) Smile

38 B: ↑ That will be ↑ more helpful, (0.8) > I have

39 A: Ok

(2) Dismiss oneself  
40 B: But I ↑ really need to get back to her ↑ right now.
In this conversation, the respondent did not terminate the conversation. Instead, she gave many pre-closing expressions (Twice in turn 18, and once in 30). When she used a pre-closing expression, she did not just expose her reluctance to keep the conversation going on, but also asking the other party whether it was the right time to stop the conversation or the other speaker still had something else to talk about. She also asked for an excuse to stop by giving reasons (In turn 18, 30, 38) and by dismissing herself three times (In turn 18, 40, 42). The respondent also tried to maintain good relationship with the speaker by using many techniques such as: thanking the addressee (In turn 44), apologizing (In turn 32, 34), and using polite phrases (In turn 18, 28, 42). Keeping future contact in the above data (In turn 32, 36) can also be regarded as maintaining good relationship because the function of the utterance is not only to keep a future contact but also to compensate the conversation at that moment with another conversation in the future.

5. Discussion
The findings demonstrate that the strategy used in each conversation consisting of at least four closing functions. This may illustrates that the speakers did not tend to end their conversation by direct termination using any of the termination markers or taking a distance. It has been confirmed that bringing a conversation to an end is not simply a matter of saying goodbye. There has to be other closing function that helps bringing the conversation smoothly to its end. Therefore, speakers usually give some of the closing techniques that may show cooperative attitude or maintain relationship between both speakers before terminating a conversation. It has been also proved that speakers tend to use strategies of five or four closing functions despite the fact that using strategies with less than four functions is acceptable. This strengthens the concept of conversation as a cooperative activity and of participants as polite parties.

5.1. Most Frequent Closing Functions and Techniques
It can be inferred from (Figure 1) that asking for or giving an excuse is the most frequent function utilized in ending a conversation in the data under consideration. In most of the cases, as illustrated by (Figure 2), respondents tend to give reasons (In 9 turns) in order to justify the negotiation of the closing. Hence, when the speaker stops or leaves the conversation, the other speaker does not get confused and misunderstood. In some other cases, participants show a great tendency to dismiss themselves (In also 9 turns) over than dismissing the other party (In 1 turn only).
Dismissing the other speaker is probably considered not a cooperative way to end a conversation. All the conversations were initiated by the first speaker, and the respondents are those who are supposed to end them. For this reason, the respondents felt that they might offend their addressee if they forced a closing by dismissing her. Furthermore, dismissing the other speaker cannot be categorized in to Saptiana's (2004) closing functions. Thus, her methodology requires additional techniques from Wardhaugh's (1985) closing techniques in order to identify the type of technique used in this particular turn.

The second frequent function is showing no desire to continue a conversation (In 14 turns). By showing no desire or less desire to continue the conversation, the speakers tried to make their
addressee understand they did not want to talk anymore and want to inform that it was time to close the conversation. The most used techniques are: pre-closing expressions (In 6 turns), leave-taking behaviors (In 4 turns), shift position (In 2 turns), diminish eye contact (In 1 turn), and ignore what is said (In 1 turn).

Third, maintaining good relationship is also used as many as the previous function (In 14 turns). In fact, maintaining good relationship while ending a conversation is one strategy in maintaining the speakers' relationship. The findings illustrate that all the respondents pay attention to maintain a good relationship while they were ending their conversation. Giving compliments is the most used technique in this respect (In 6 turns), followed by apologizing (In 3 turns) and using polite phrases (In 3 turns). It seems that thanking the addressee and using phatic talk are the least frequent techniques (In 1 turn for each). It is worth mentioning that Saptiana's (2004) closing functions do not account for using polite phrases which is accounted for by Stenström's (1994) theory of conversational strategies.

Fourth, keeping future contact is also significant in its function as to end a conversation though not much utilized by the respondents (In 6 turns only). Making an arrangement is the most frequently used technique in the data under consideration (In 5 turns). As a result of being not able to pro-long the conversation, the participants offered compensation in the future to keep the contact with the first speaker. Another technique used to keep future contact is making reference (In 1 turn). This technique is not specified in Saptiana's (2004) methodology; thus, additional expansion from Albert and Kessler's (1976) processes in ending a social encounter is required to improve her methodology.

Fifth, terminating the conversation is the least frequent closing function used in the discussed closing strategies (In 5 turns only). In fact, a conversation is rarely ended with termination markers (In 1 turn only). However, this does not affect the plan of ending a conversation since most speakers must have agreed to close their conversations before the termination is given. Giving ritual leave-taking (In 2 turns) can be said as an effective strategy because the other speakers usually could only make few opening up after the initiation of this strategy. Taking a distance (In 2 turns) is found to be the strongest technique in forcing a closing and the speaker could not open another new topic and finally agreed to end the conversation. In Saptiana's (2004) closing methodology, ritual leave-taking is not taken into account as in Wardhaugh's (1985) closing techniques.

In ending a conversation, terminating is used almost in all final stage of the conversation. However, the most important and preferable closing function that can be used as a strategy in ending a conversation is asking or giving for an excuse to stop.

6. Conclusion
This paper has examined the strategies used by ELI teachers in ending their conversations, the most closing functions used in those strategies, and the techniques that reflect these functions. It has been shown that ending a conversation requires closing techniques that bring the conversation gradually to its end. Although ending can be easier to be done in some conversations than in others, strategies are always needed. Moreover, it is not precise to assume that a short conversation is more likely to need a strategy with less closing functions.

With regards to the closing functions, the five functions suggested by Saptiana (2004) to reach a conversation end are used in the current study. It is found that asking for an excuse to stop seems to be the most important closing function amongst the five functions. Saptiana's (2004) findings demonstrate that the respondents mainly used a range of two to four functions. However, the
findings in this research reveal that the participants used a range of four to five functions. This difference between the two findings is due to the different type of informants in both studies in view of the fact that teachers (the participants in this study) are known to be more polite and skillful than students (the respondents in Saptiana’s, 2004 study) in ending their conversation. This confirms the hypothesis that well-educated people who are presented by ELI teachers use more closing techniques to end their conversations.

Concerning the closing techniques, giving reasons and dismissing oneself are found to be the most frequent techniques used to close the conversations. Despite the fact that the twenty techniques suggested by Saptiana (2004) are used in this research, her classification is found to be insufficient for the purpose of analyzing all the data in this research. Four other techniques from Albert and Kessler’s (1976), Wardhaugh (1985), and Stenström (1994) have been added to the method used in this work. They are: ignoring what is said, using polite phrases, making arrangement, and giving termination markers. On the other hand, six of her techniques were found to be irrelevant to the data namely: using silent pauses, justifying ending contact, summarizing, giving compliment, expressing pleasure, and wishing each other well.

Suggestions for Further Research
Since this study is based on conversation analysis of closing utterances in informal face-to-face conversations used by ELI teachers at KAU, the analysis and findings are mostly not the same as using different informants. Changing the respondents will be appropriate to make further research in closing techniques and strategies. Also, the conversation will be more natural if both speakers are talking spontaneously without bearing prolonging the conversation in mind. Therefore, the chance to conduct a research using more natural conversation will be a good offer to those who want to make a further research in the field of conversation analysis. Finally, some further research can be carried out to investigate the factors that influence the chosen strategies through gender differences, status differences, and social distance differences.

About the Author:
Mrs Khadija Abdullah Al-Amoudi is a lecturer at the English Language Institute in King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She obtained her Master degree in English Linguistics. Currently, Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages is the main area of her research interest.

References


Vocabulary Development Strategies for the L2 Classroom

Elham Yahia
St. John’s University, Queens, New York
United States

Richard Sinatra
St. John’s University, Queens, New York
united States

Abstract

This paper presents some important considerations in word instruction and learning for the English Language Learner (ELL). Specific strategies and techniques are provided for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to assist others to apply in home and classroom situations. The two broad areas of direct, sequential instruction and incidental learning of vocabulary through contextual experiences are discussed and word list sources are presented of high utility English words. The key throughout instruction is for the ESL/EFL teacher to be word-conscious or word mindful of the power of vocabulary to enrich thinking and understanding. Vocabulary knowledge has been identified as one of the best predictors of reading comprehension and fluency while facilitating the learning of a second language (L2). Specific techniques such as the use of concept maps, word webs, and word sorts are presented to help students learn content-specific, academic vocabulary.

Keywords: Vocabulary development; L2; EFL/ESL instruction; academic vocabulary; word-conscious teaching; modeling
Introduction
In the EFL/ESL world, there are commonly-held assumptions among teachers that vocabulary acquisition is a challenging task for ELLs. Yet, the same challenge holds true for teachers of monolingual students. Vocabulary is the amount of words any one person can use and understand in a language. When a new meaning for a word is learned, the meaning becomes connected to a person’s knowledge base, can increase the person’s ability to speak or write in a more sophisticated way, and can help the person understand a new topic at a deeper level (Adams, 2009; Blackowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2008; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). For instance, the ELL student may fully understand and use the word *walk*, but when the word *saunter* is encountered in a reading and the EFL teacher demonstrates and models the meaning of *saunter*, the ELL student has become enriched in understanding and can display a deeper way to express meaning when speaking or writing. This paper presents ways for the EFL/ESL teacher to be “word-conscious,” meaning a teacher who understands the importance of enhancing vocabulary acquisition and uses strategies to achieve such acquisition in both the oral and written language systems (Lane & Allen, 2010).

Vocabulary, as presented in this paper, refers to word meaning knowledge and the ability to both understand and use words appropriately in the four language systems of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Development in vocabulary understanding also includes comprehension extensions when a known word is used differently in another context, such as when the known word “nose,” is associated with a human being’s face, is heard in the meaning “to nose around” (i.e. to explore, investigate). Thus to communicate effectively while attending to new word meanings encountered in new topics or concepts, ELLs respond to receptive vocabulary (words understood when listening or reading) or expressive/ productive vocabulary (words used during speaking and writing). A general agreement exists among educators, especially those who monitor and teach young children, that receptive listening vocabulary is the most extensive of all vocabularies, in that one recognizes more words in the spoken language than one can produce (Kamil, 2004). However, this belief may be tempered by an older L2 student who can read in his/her native language and is learning the new language through instructional use of the printed language system. Such a learner then transfers the learning of new words, phrases, and sentences to the L2 oral language system, often resulting in mispronunciations, but allowing the L2 learner to predictably recognize advanced, sophisticated words in the receptive language system. In this paper, the L2 student refers to those whose first, home-based language was not English (Ferris, 2012).

Important Considerations for Word Instruction and Learning
For the EFL/ELL teacher, there are two important considerations to realize during L2 vocabulary acquisition instruction. The first regards the L2 learners themselves; who they are and their level of oral L1 language proficiency. Children who come from households of low socioeconomic status (SES) generally have limited oral vocabulary knowledge. Research conducted with English-speaking children has indicated that children raised in lower-SES conditions develop language skills and word understandings more slowly than children raised in high income families (Hart & Risley, 1995, 2003; Hoff, 2003; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). The most essential aspect for the development of vocabulary during the early years appears to be the quality of conversation children experience as they grow up in their homes and communities and interact with family members and others. Thus, the teacher needs to realize that for some learners word understanding during L2 instruction may not connect with a word meaning in the first language.
Secondly, words themselves may be divided into two broad categories—function words and content words. Function words, generally the high-frequency words of a language, are articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns which allow sentences to be meaningfully composed in the oral and spoken languages. Facility with function words needs to occur early in language learning so that talk can occur and sentences can be composed. Different from function words are the vast amount of content words of a language, and these words are what many consider to be “vocabulary.” Content words are meaning-bearing words which name, label, or describe an action. EFL/ELL teachers would recognize these words as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and many adverbs.

The teacher may wish to consult and use published word lists and word counts that would assist them in noting frequency of usage in the English language. The General Service List of English Words (West, 1953), with a corpus of roughly 2000 words, contains highly frequent words repeated throughout the oral and written languages. Dale and O’Rourke’s (1981) Living Word Vocabulary matched the grade levels at which monolingual English students knew the meanings of 44,000 words. Thus, this list would assist the EFL/ESL teacher with words that English-speaking children would predicably encounter at particular grade levels and that ELLs would face in more advanced reading materials. The Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) is a compilation of 570 word families that appear across four academic disciplines and whose familiarity would assist ELLs when reading academic texts. More recently, Lane and Allen (2010) have provided three lists of sophisticated words which can be used by teachers in classroom contexts. One list pertains to words used during daily routines, such as dispense, pause, and elaborate; another list with classroom performance and behavior, such as considerate, rectify, and invalid; and the third, with words related to specific content topics, such as flourish, remote, and dominant. The teacher may also wish to use Word Count (http://www.wordcount.org/main.php) which ranks the frequency use of words in the English language from a pool of 86,800 words. For instance, the English preposition by has a frequency rating of 19 while the vocabulary word feasible has a rating of 8,030. The teacher may find it more useful to focus students’ learning on more frequently appearing English words than those which are used and appear less frequently, such as teaching the meaning of coax before cajole (40,751).

A more recent viewpoint of how words could be categorized in the English language is by levels or tiers, based on the work of Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002). Tier one words, incorporating the words of function, are those words that speakers often use in the spoken language, are frequently and necessarily found in reading materials, and whose meanings are generally known. Tier two and three words are, once again, what many consider to be “vocabulary,” but there is a distinction between the two levels. Tier two words are found in more advanced reading materials, are used by more mature speakers in the oral language, and, most important, have high utility and visibility across topics and disciplines. For instance, the words perform, maintain, and diverse could appear in readings of a literacy, science, or social studies text. Tier three words are generally specific to a content topic and, as such, appear less frequently in the oral and written languages. So such words such as isotope, chlorophyll, and ecosystem would be used and read as they are encountered during a specific topic. However, the distinctions between tier two and three words can sometimes be narrow. For instance, during the topic learning of deserts, the student might face words such as barren, arid, unfertile, parched, and inhabitants. While in the context of the topic instruction the words might be considered to be at the tier three level, the words meanings are quite transferable during other oral and written
language situations. The tier two and three word concepts are becoming somewhat collapsed in an even more recent notion of “Academic Vocabulary” (National Governors Association for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This is the vocabulary students need to increasingly build as they advance in school so that they can access and understand more and more complex texts.

Thus, when considering which vocabulary to teach, the teacher needs to recognize and evaluate the language background, range of life experiences, and written literacy levels of the students in any one instructional setting. This is not an easy task. A general rule would be to focus on words that have high meaning utility and frequency in the English language, so that when these words are used in other contexts, students are assisted with understanding and production. This concept was followed by the second author as he prepared to offer new vocabulary to hundreds of inner-city low socio-economic status students of whom 30 percent were second language learners of English. From informational books dealing with the topic of conserving earth’s resources, teachers in a summer program were asked to focus on words such as *erode*, *obligation*, *fragile*, *adjourn*, and *unique* since such words would predictably be found in readings offered in school subjects and used orally by their teachers.

**How Students Learn Vocabulary**

There are two broad views of how children learn new vocabulary in school settings. Biemiller (2001) recommended that vocabulary should be taught and enforced at an early age followed by direct and sequential instructional approaches. He believed that most children (90 percent of them) can acquire new vocabulary to reach grade level standards if given the opportunity to use new words through adequate instruction. In his study he found evidence that suggests vocabulary is acquired in basically the same order by most children and that the majority of new word meanings, especially during the younger years, are learned through explanation and exposure by others. Therefore, he strongly recommended employing a teacher-directed and curriculum-directed approach to promote vocabulary and language growth. Such an approach may be achieved by the EFL/ESL teacher by examining the published word lists and word counts mentioned earlier in this paper and relating, these high utility, high frequency words with vocabulary that will be introduced in forthcoming readings and course topic discussions.

In their book, *Teaching Word Meanings* (Stahl & Nagy, 2006) numerous teaching ideas and research findings about vocabulary instruction are offered. The book brings to the forefront how critical vocabulary attention and instruction is for students. They found that vocabulary size is related to comprehension and conceptual understanding and confirmed that vocabulary understanding is the main predictor of reading ability as well as overall academic achievement. Additionally, they found that students can add approximately 2,000 to 3,000 words a year to their vocabulary understandings. Students who read more, have the opportunity to learn more words; and those who know more words can predictably understand text better. If a textual reading is enjoyed, then they continue reading more. Stahl and Nagy (2006) named it the circular relationship between reading, comprehension, and vocabulary. Reading will increase vocabulary; and growth in vocabulary will increase comprehension and reading amount. Therefore, incidental learning of vocabulary from context can contribute a large amount of a student’s vocabulary growth.

Not only has vocabulary knowledge been identified as one of the best predictors of reading comprehension and of reading fluency, but also as a means of enhancing second language acquisition. Hence many vocabulary practices have been recommended for teachers to...
apply in their classrooms: such as modeling sophisticated vocabulary use, avoiding temptation to “Dumb Down” their language of instruction, and to be a word-conscious teacher (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Scott & Nagy, 2004). In addition, there are five other practices recommended such as identifying words for instruction, considering the type of word learning required, identifying appropriate strategies, having a plan, and infusing words into the classroom.

Strategies for the L2 learner

Many strategies can be used to foster the acquisition of new vocabulary words. The majority of these strategies call for a rich classroom environment in which words are visually displayed. One of these strategies is “modeling sophisticated word use” during class instruction. This concept was introduced by Mrs. Baker (pseudonym for Kindergarten teacher), who tended to follow certain routines during classroom instruction. At the end her kindergarten children were all able to comfortably use words that were beyond their grade levels. Consequently, their advanced vocabulary will serve them well as they begin to read (Lane & Allen, 2010).

Sinatra (2008) called this natural word building activity “talking up vocabulary.” Talk takes place between adults and children/students in natural ways and in natural contexts as young people are engaged in activities. “Talking up vocabulary” means replacing a more sophisticated word with a known word during instruction and then modeling and having learners practice with the new word in some meaningful way. For instance, with his young grandson instead of saying “Let’s play with your toys” on subsequent days he said, “Let’s make a display with your toys” and then, “Let’s make an arrangement with your toys.” As the toy arranging was proceeding he said “I like the way you connected ‘this to that’ and ‘why did you arrange’ this to that. Finally over days of conversation and toy arranging comes the child utterance, “Look grandpa! Look at my display! Look at how I arranged my toys.”

In the same way, but in the setting of a university campus, Sinatra (2008) asked his staff of literacy teachers, coaches, counselors, student athletes, science and computer lab teachers to be vocabulary conscious and use sophisticated words as they engaged hundreds of low-income 7-12 year old children in learning activities during a summer program. Staff members introduced relevant topic vocabulary during book readings, science experiments, computer projects, and sports activities; had children verbalize these words as they engaged in the activity; wrote the words on large cards to be displayed for reading purposes; and some had children write the words and their meanings in their project notebooks.

In order for these strategies to be correctly applied, teachers should carefully plan which words they will introduce and spend time thinking about how these words will be used throughout the school day. Making a list of words with their synonyms and antonyms is always a good idea. For each word on each synonym list, teachers would search for more sophisticated substitutes and provide the words they believe to be manageable for their students. Accordingly they would introduce more sophisticated words of similar usage, such as moving from glad, to cheerful, to delighted (Lane & Allen 2010). Teachers would start from simple to more difficult words and provide multiple examples for each.

In the EFL/ESL classrooms, students are in great need for explicit instruction especially during content instruction where uncommon tier three, content-specific words do appear. Therefore, avoiding simplistic and oversimplification of language use during class instruction may not benefit English language learners as teachers may end up using words that students already know. Hence, exposing students to more mature terminology as suggested by Lane and
Allen (2010) will help them to be more confident as they progress to more complex and more multifaceted words during content reading.

Promoting incidental learning and word consciousness through frequent and deliberate modeling of sophisticated vocabulary can add a significant amount to an ESL/EFL learner’s vocabulary acquisition. To successfully use such a strategy, students need to be given ample opportunity to practice new words in different forms, such as linking new words to familiar concepts, introducing words clearly during classroom routines, and having students say the words repeatedly while continuing to use them particularly during writing activities.

A good way to display new content-specific and academic vocabulary is by creating a concept map with the assistance of your students. With a concept map, the teacher plans ahead to help students arrange new concept vocabulary in a logical way so that they can see the connections among topic ideas. For instance, suppose students were studying another of earth’s land regions, that of the arctic. Instead of randomly arranging known and read words about the central idea of Arctic Life, displayed in a figure such as a circle or box on a screen, a poster, or chalkboard, the teacher would plan to arrange new words in a conceptual way. Thus from the central figure, the teacher or a student would add a figure for “Animals of the North,” for “Land Conditions,” and for “People’s Lifestyle.” New word such as caribou, arctic fox, glacier, tundra, permafrost, igloo, harpoon, and kayak would be connected by lines or arrows to the appropriate descriptive figure.

Other strategies, such as teaching vocabulary as a pre-reading step with the aim of activating students’ prior knowledge to link to new words, are highly useful. Here a “word web” could be used to organize details about one word. The teacher would write the target word in the center of the board in a circle, and then draw lines outside of the circle to write meanings and characteristics of the word. The teacher should elicit what students know about the word so that their prior understandings are recognized and that new insights about the word are offered by students. Students can follow up by creating illustrations for words and then writing sentences or a short paragraph linking the words’ meanings. Excellent activities like “word sorts” and “word walls” have been successfully used in the classroom. For instance, words printed on paper or cards and amassed on a “word wall” can come from any number of sources, such as from content topics, literary readings, visitors telling or sharing life experiences, or from words learned during field trips or excursions. Words can then be arranged under topic headings to make a “word sort” (such as with the concept map discussed earlier) on designated wall space in the classroom. During writing activities such as stories, personal narratives, or reports, students may be allowed to borrow words from the wall if they plan to use them in their writing. A pocket envelope could be hanging near the word wall for children to return the words they borrowed.

The practices and specific strategies noted in this paper have been successfully used with monolingual English students across the grade levels (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Yet, as argued by Biemiller (2001) since limitations in vocabulary knowledge affect the educational success of second-language learners and less advantaged children, we have suggested that the same practices and strategies can be successfully used by the EFL/ESL teacher to expand the knowledge and concept horizons of the L2 student.

Conclusion

Considering what educators know about word learning for all levels of students, successful vocabulary instruction has an immense effect on learning progress. Since vocabulary
development is crucial in promoting a student’s comprehension and learning, the vocabulary instructional strategies and activities we provided in this paper, will assist the L2 learner in enriching language usage and understanding. For the EFL/ESL teacher, we have provided examples of ways to create a word-rich environment and have suggested that deep and rich vocabulary learning will occur if it is maintained by multiple practice and exposure. It is also essential for the EFL/ESL teacher to be word conscious and creative in fostering vocabulary development for their range of learners and be responsive to what research reveals regarding successful vocabulary practices for the L2 learner.

About the Author:
Elham Yahia is a Ph.D. in Literacy Candidate at St. John’s University School of Education, New York, USA. Her research efforts focus on literacy and language learning, student’s self-efficacy, learning styles, and motivation. Her dissertation paper is in Literacy education with emphasis on English as a Second/Foreign Language Education. She presented in several international conferences and also a member of well recognized organization such as TESOL International, TESOL Arabia, TESOL Sudan, IAFOR, and NCTE.

Dr. Richard Sinatra is Associate Dean of the School of Education at St. John’s University School of Education, New York, USA. He is also the Director of the Reading and Writing Education Center, and teaches Literacy courses in the Department of Human Services and Counseling. He has been an educator for over 45 years. His writing, research, and literacy projects are grounded in the theoretical constructs of reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, narrative and expository text structure, and writing instructions. His contributions to the field of education have been widely recognized, and he served as an “outside committee member” for doctoral candidates in different universities. One dissertation he mentored won a first place prize supported by the College Reading association in October 24, 2001.

References


Investigating the Impact of Constructive Planning as Both a Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategy: A Case Study of Third-year LMD Students of English at the University of Constantine 1, Algeria

Rania Boudaoud
Department of Letters and English Language
University of Constantine 1, Algeria

Abstract
The capacity of expressing oneself effectively in the written language is very important in learning languages, and it is only by mastering the different crafting skills, namely textual organization, that student writers can produce acceptable compositions. Through the use of two different research instruments, the ultimate goal of this study is to investigate the position of constructive planning in writing instructions and to emphasize the importance of knowing both the What and How of outlining. Through the use of students’ questionnaires, we found that poor content organization is the most common writing problem that Algerian EFL undergraduate students come up against. Despite teachers’ efforts to teach constructive planning strategies to their students, students do not effectively grasp the fundamentals of the process. The results collected from the writing test demonstrated the effectiveness of constructive planning as both a cognitive and metacognitive strategy where an overall improvement in students’ writing performance was demonstrated.

Keywords: textual organization, undergraduate composition, constructive planning, writing process.
Introduction
The ability of expressing oneself effectively in writing in English demands a particularly wide range of sub-skills relative to the different aspects of writing including content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics. Part of this ability is to articulate the writing content in coherent pieces where ideas are logically developed.

As students start writing, ideas come to them at random without any organizational frameworks. One of the factors that seem to be impeding students from achieving good performances in writing is that they fail to fit their generated content in well structured texts. Worries about what ideas to include in their essays and how to put them together in order to have a finished product are among other things that overwhelm these writers when starting to write. If students do not generate a scheme to organize their prewriting notes, they might revert to unproductive strategies of padding, contradictions, unnecessary repetition of ideas, and even plagiarism.

Another factor preventing students from achieving good performances in writing is the fact that most of them have the assumption that writing can be done in one sitting and not the result of a set of activities. In the light of a process teaching approach, writing is viewed as a reflective and an inventive activity that involves the intentional use of different techniques such as the constructive planning strategy. As a potential solution for underdeveloped textual organization, this outlining strategy is used to bridge the gap between students’ disconnected prewriting notes and finished products.

The Department of Letters and English Language University of Constantine 1, Algeria, offers students a three-year college training that enables them either to be secondary teachers of English or to enroll for postgraduate studies at the university. Throughout these three years, writing is given great importance to as well as outlining which is taught as both a study skill and a writing strategy. In the present article we aim to:

• Explain third-year students’ incapacity to write effectively with some degree of acceptability relative to textual organization;
• Study their attitudes towards writing and constructive planning;
• Uncover students’ actual writing practices vis-à-vis the different stages of the writing process in general and constructive planning in particular;
• Study the impact of constructive planning as both a cognitive and a metacognitive strategy.

Review of Literature
As noted by Flower and associates (1989), the planning stage as a whole is constructive, but they distinguish the effort writers spend when outlining or writing rough plans as a more constructive effort. They consider constructive planning as a strategy that writers use when facing tasks that “require adaptive use of knowledge or for tasks which are more complex than available scripts” (5). In other words, generating ideas may not be enough for tasks which need synthesized use of knowledge that can only be achieved through selecting and organizing ideas.

The structured representation of prewriting notes is known as the outline. In effect, an outline “is a working plan for a piece of writing. It’s a list of all ideas that are going to be in the piece in the order they should go” (Grenville, 2001: 69). This definition implies that outlining is a strategy that is employed just after generating ideas and before drafting, and it is the case in most of the times, but in fact some writers outline after writing their drafts. The type of outlining that is of our interest in the present paper is the plans writers sketch before composing that would predict the entire structure of the text and get all of the generated ideas in shape. The sort of outlines that
are created from the drafts are not used to help writers getting started but to check the progress writers have made so far in the writing process just like “a strategy for revising” (Smith, 2003: 18).

Writers have different attitudes towards outlining. Some of them think that outlining is a waste of time; they like to start writing right away and then see which way the wind blows their train of thought (Gramlich et al., 2009). Others think that outlining would restrain their freedom in exploring ideas and it would be better to write freely without following a predetermined plan. Still others cannot involve themselves in writing until they draw a scheme for achieving their final written text (Gough, 2005). Among those who believe that outlining is an effective tool for organizing texts, we distinguish two outline building styles. Novice writers, when outlining, if ever, use rigidly established plans and stick to them from the beginning till the end of their writing without making any amendments. According to Hedge (2005), this inflexible use of outlines will prevent writers from discovering new ideas prompted by the writing process. She points:

… it is the poorer writers who see plans as straitjackets and who follow the original plan through rigorously without deviation and without allowing the interplay between writing and thinking that can create new ideas and lead to improvements. (53)

On the other hand, experienced writers seldom use outlines in such a rigid way but rather as a guide to clarify their train of thoughts and to refine their ideas. They outline to delimit the range of their generated ideas and put them in shape and then feel free to cross out, add, and reconstruct whatever is needed (ibid). The gist of outlining is to find a theme for the text according to which ideas are going to be grouped. Grenville (2001: 69) suggests that writers should “follow” their ideas and not “direct” them because after all ideas are not randomly generated but rather automatically attached.

Outlines provide a visual organizational pattern for the text. The way ideas are plotted in these patterns differentiates between two types of outlines: formal and informal. Formal outlines follow special requirements. They provide a detailed description of the text by “subdividing larger ideas into smaller ones. This, of course, means that every subdivided idea must have at least two categories” (McCuen-Metherell and Winkler, 2009: 87). In a formal outline, main ideas, which represent paragraphs, and sub ideas, developing details, are presented in a sort of a hierarchy using roman numerals and capital letters, for example (Garrison, 2004). It is all up to the writer to decide on how many main ideas and sub ideas adequately describe the topic and the order of their importance.

As noted by Fowler (2006: 26), formal outlines are “meant for another reader” that is why they need to be so conventional. By contrast, he points that informal outlines are not meant for submission to the teacher but for the student writer’s personal use. The working or informal outline is a rough plan that provides a brief overview of the main points to be covered in the text. It uses words and phrases to represent ideas without giving details. When writing informal outlines, student writers can drop the numbering system and just use dashes for each idea. Writers in this type of outlining can also make use of shortened forms of words and symbols that they can only understand (26). Informal outlines do not always take the form of lists but they can also take the form of graphic organizers under the shape of rectangles or circles where every shape can represent an idea.
Outlining: A Learning Strategy per se
Since the 1970’s, researchers increasingly started to be interested in describing good language learners’ abilities to succeed, and the use of strategies represents one of the main characteristics to which success can be attributed. The term “learning strategies” refers to the “specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information” (Brown, 2000: 113). They are also referred to as study skills, learning practices, or contextualized actions used to solve learning problems. No matter how they are referred to, strategies are used to make learning more effective and the achievement of learning goal easier (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007). Learning strategies are sub-divided into four main types: cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies (Dörnyei, 2005). In this way, constructive planning is seen from both cognitive and metacognitive perspectives.

Cognitive strategies have to do with processing knowledge by practicing, analyzing, and summarizing it in order to tackle a specific learning task (Dörnyei 2005). However, metacognitive strategies have to do with the control learners have on their own learning. The distinction between learning strategies can be made in terms of the way they contribute to one’s learning. Cognitive strategies allow learners to operate knowledge directly through categorizing, practicing, deducing, and many other processes while metacognitive strategies indirectly contribute to learning through directing and monitoring the different cognitive activities (169). That is to say, the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies overlaps. If cognitive strategies involve manipulating the material to be learnt in order to achieve a particular learning goal, metacognitive strategies help learners make sure that the learning goal is brought about.

Outlining: A Cognitive Strategy
Outlining is a strategy that involves both cognitive and metacognitive development. One way to look at the cognitive nature of outlining is to consider the processes of grouping, ordering, and labeling information. Cognitive strategies involve a direct “manipulation or transformation of the learning materials/input (e.g., repetition, summarizing, using images)” (Dörnyei 2005:169). Writers when planning constructively directly operate on their prewriting ideas and set semantic and linguistic relationships among them. They also hypothetically foresee the text’s organizational pattern through building mental connections between their major concepts and subcategories. Therefore it is evident that student writers can use constructive planning as a cognitive strategy just by writing an outline.

Outlining: A Metacognitive Strategy
As seen by O’Malley and Chamot (cited in Vandergrift, 2008: 85), learning strategies have “an executive or metacognitive function (metacognitive strategies) and an operative, cognitive processing function (cognitive strategies).” Metacognition “refers to the idea of an individual’s considering, being aware of and understanding their own mental (cognitive) processes and ways of learning. It is cognition about cognition” (Pritchard, 2009: 27). Such metacognitive knowledge allows for the intentional use of the cognitive strategy.

The general aim behind writing outlines is not to get a sense of the text as a whole and then abandon them but to follow them when writing. If student writers just write outlines and do not write texts from them, then they have just theoretically devised a scheme for the text and never put it into practice. Metacognition is then the deliberate application and regulation of cognitive knowledge that would ensure the best execution of the strategy (Skehan, 1998). Thus, in order
for student writers to take full advantage out of outlining, they need to know both the What and How of constructive planning by not only writing outlines but also by using them when writing to regulate and monitor the whole writing process with some degree of flexibility because textual organization is not engraved in stone. As writers review their outlines when writing, they can edit big portions of their text (Hyland, 2003).

**Potential Effects of Constructive Planning on the Writing Performance**

Constructive planning, if properly used, may provide for student writers a useful organizational and time management writing tool. Starkey (2004) notices that constructive planning has two salient advantages: to help writers gain a sense of direction in proceeding throughout the writing process; and, secondly, a projection of the writing on readers. Planning constructively will give texts a semantic and linguistic orientation by guaranteeing knowledge of purpose before writing and knowledge of content which hopefully would be satisfying for both the reader (supposedly the teacher) and the writing intention.

Equally important, an “outline gives you a wonderful sense of security” (Board, 2003: 4). Student writers who outline for their texts get less frustrated and know for sure that they are going to finish their texts. Outlining can be also beneficial for writing long texts in the sense that it allows writers to get distant from the text without losing track of their ideas and have always something to get back to, especially if it is a detailed outline (4).

**Methodology**

**Tools of Research**

To meet the aforementioned aims, two types of research instruments were used: a questionnaire and a writing pretest/posttest experiment. The questionnaire examines students’ attitudes towards planning constructively before drafting. The writing pretest-posttest examines the impact of constructive planning on students’ writing quality and demonstrates the utility of knowing the What and How of outlining as a planning strategy.

**Subjects**

The research population is third year students of English as a foreign language in the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine 1. From the parent population of 3rd-years, we have selected to work with a group of twenty students. The reasons behind choosing to work with these students are the following:

- They have been studying writing for three years which makes us assume that they are relatively aware of the different stages of the writing process, namely the planning stage.
- They are supposed to write extended essays, not only for their writing classes but also to answer some of their content-area subjects’ synthesis essay questions, where the effects of constructive planning can be best observed.

**The Students’ Questionnaire**

**Administration of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaires were given to twenty third-year students at the Department of Letters and English Language at the University of Constantine 1. This questionnaire was administered to students before the writing test during one of their regular writing
sessions.

**Description of the Questionnaire**

This questionnaire consists of twelve multiple-choice questions. The first four questions are meant to gather information about students’ attitudes toward the writing skill, its different aspects, and their most common writing problems. Then, questions from five to nine investigate students’ writing habits vis-à-vis the different stages of the writing process. Finally, the last three questions focus on the planning stage and students’ outlining practices.

**Table 1: The Importance Given by Students to the Different Language Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>First Position</th>
<th></th>
<th>Second Position</th>
<th></th>
<th>Third Position</th>
<th></th>
<th>Fourth Position</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen from the table above, the skill that students regard as most important is speaking. It was the most classified first by respondents with a rate of 35%, followed by listening with 45% and reading with 35%. In the last position is writing with 55%. This latter which is a key variable for the present research has been classified the first by only 15% of our students. Given this rank order, we wanted to know how our students perceive themselves as writers. 80% of students think that they have an average level in writing while 15% of them think that they have a low level. Only 5% believe that they are good writers.

Writing in English demands a wide range of sub skills that writers should give great importance to. Of the total number of respondents, 35% attach great importance to correct grammar in writing, followed by content with 30% and organization of ideas with 20%. The least cited as important by students are vocabulary with 10% and mechanics with 5%. Among the different aspects of writing, 25% of our respondent students think that they have frequent difficulties with the content of their writing; 70% of them claim that they occasionally find vocabulary and the different rules of grammar troublesome, and 65% say that they never had difficulties organizing their ideas.

**Table 2: What Students Do after Reading the Topic they are supposed to write about**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Start writing instantly</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Think for a while and gather as much ideas as possible</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Write down any idea relevant to the topic/ draft</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Make a plan and follow it</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the table exhibits, the majority of students plan before starting to write. (65%) of students dedicate some of their time brainstorming, followed by 25% who plan constructively. Thankfully, only 5% of students write without planning by starting to write instantly their final product or drafting.

Given the process-based syllabus for Writing followed in the Department of Letters and English Language, 95% of our student respondents confirmed that they are encouraged by their teachers to proceed throughout the different stages of the writing process, and only 5% of them claimed the opposite. Within the different stages of the writing process, the planning stage was deemed challenging by 55% of our surveyed students while the remaining 45% of students think that the composing stage is most problematic. As far the revising and editing stages are concerned, none of our students has troubles with these two stages.

Fortunately, 85% of the students think that outlines can be really helpful in selecting and putting in shape their prewriting notes while only 15% of them think the opposite. The present study investigates not only students’ perception towards constructive planning but also their actual practices. The obtained responses reveal that the majority of students (60%) plan constructively before drafting with different frequencies. 45% of students occasionally use outlines when writing; 40% never opted for this constructive planning strategy, and only 15% of them regularly organize their prewriting notes in outlines.

**Table 3: Students’ Constructive Planning Habits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) write the outline only to get a sense of the text as a whole, and then abandon it as you write</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) keep the outline throughout the entire writing process and modify it as you go along</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) strictly follow the outline as you write without making any modifications</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the 60% of students who plan constructively, 30% of them strictly follow the outline as they write without making any modifications; 20% flexibly use them by respecting their organizational decisions and feel free to recast them whenever needed, and only 10% of the students keep outlines at the beginning of their writing an then forget about them.
Table 4: Students’ justifications for not using outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) you don’t know how to outline</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) you don’t have time to outline</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) you think that outlining is a waste of time</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) you think that outlining limits your discovery of ideas</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>08</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the 40% of students who never outlined for their essays, 25% of them justify their answers by saying that outlining restrains them from discovering new ideas prompted by the writing process; 10% of them claim that they do not have time for outlining, and only 5% think that the constructive planning strategy is worthless and just a waste of time. Finally, no one of our respondents said that he/she does not know how to outline.

Discussion of the Results

The analysis of the students’ questionnaire reveals that students still have the traditional tendency to center their attention on the speaking skill at the expense of the writing skill which is a key variable in the present research. The little importance students attach to the writing skill makes us expect them to be less motivated to improve their writing performance which clearly explains why only 5% of students perceive themselves as good writers.

Logically thinking, what is problematic should be given more importance. When we asked students about their common writing problems, 25% of them answered that they have frequently troubles with the content of their writing and 70% of them claimed that they occasionally find vocabulary and grammar troublesome. This positively correlates with the fact that the majority of students (35%) attach great significance to correct grammar in writing, followed by content with 30%. Poor content organization was regarded as less problematic by 65% of students. Thus, the question to be asked is whether students are really aware of their own writing problems, a question which we intend to answer by examining students’ essays in the pretest-posttest experiment.

The fact that only 5% of students, as shown in Table 2, start writing instantly without respecting the different stages of the writing process is really promising and reflects the efforts teachers spend in raising their students’ awareness about the writing process. When speaking about the writing process, we find that the students who answered the questionnaire seem to regard the planning (55%) and drafting (45%) stages as the most difficult. This finding is reasonable since the planning stage is the stage where students work out what ideas to communicate and how to articulate them, and the drafting stage is the actual act of writing where students put their planning decisions into practice.

Despite the fact that 85% of our respondents think that outlines can be really helpful in selecting and putting in shape their prewriting notes, only 15% of them regularly organize their prewriting notes in outlines. The reason behind students’ reluctance can be traced back to the fact 30% of students, as shown in Table 3, strictly follow the outline as they write without making any...
modifications which would, according to Hedge (2005), restrain student writers’ discovery of ideas, and make them feel unwilling to opt for this planning strategy all together as demonstrated in Table 4.

In effect, among students who actually plan constructively, regularly and occasionally, 50% of them (Table 3) write from their outlines and respect their organizational decisions throughout the entire writing process, which allows us to think that they are metacognitively aware of this strategy and its benefits. Students who put their prewriting notes in organizational frameworks and then follow them throughout the writing of their essays are not only aware of the operative nature of the constructive planning strategy but also of its executive functioning.

**Description of the Writing Pretest- Posttest Experiment**
The purpose of this pretest/posttest, which took place at the end of students’ three-year training, is to see the impact of constructive planning on students’ writing performance. This test took place in three regular writing sessions which our sample attended. Since it is a pretest/posttest experiment, we had to make sure that our sample attended all these three sessions in order to examine their performances comparatively under the two different experimental conditions.

During the pretest, our third-year subjects were asked to write an essay, say of about five to six paragraphs, without giving them any hints about the experiments’ aims, on one of the following topics: the inconveniences of watching television and the benefits of planting trees in dry areas. We have suggested these topics for the following reasons:

- This kind of topics is, often, dealt with in writing classes.
- They require an expository type of writing which “includes personal observations, knowledge, and experiences” that might make students feel comfortable to write about (Starkey, 2004: 86). We expected students to list either the advantages of planting trees in dry areas or the inconveniences of watching television from the most to the least important in separate paragraphs (deductive and inductive reasoning), or vice versa.

Given the fact that the outlining strategy was already taught and practiced with our students, something that we made sure of, our instruction was more like a revision session were we tried to raise our students’ awareness of the importance of constructive planning in achieving good textual organization and its impact on the quality of their writing. We reminded the students about the constructive planning strategy starting by telling them what outlines are all about, their different types and uses, when they can use them, and how they can benefit from them. It is important to note that the instruction was followed by a classroom practice where the students and the researcher tried to generate ideas and organize the prewriting notes in a careful outline about the benefits of running.

Finally, on the posttest day, students were asked to write another essay on the same topic they have written about on the day of the pretest, but the only difference this time is that we asked them to keep an outline for their essays. Throughout this entire process, the researcher was walking around observing students’ writing practices and taking notes about who was and was not using outlining as a planning constructive strategy.

After collecting the students’ essays of both the pretest and the posttest, we analyzed them by only considering the organization of their ideas and without any consideration of the grammar mistakes, poor content, or vocabulary. We analyzed students’ textual organization at the level of
the text as a whole and the level of its constituent paragraphs by checking how the different sentences cohere logically without any repetitions or contradictions, and how these different paragraphs are tightly organized to serve the general thesis of the essay. In other words, we have checked how the thesis statements of each essay, together with the topic sentences correspond to the supporting details and bring about an effective organization pattern.

**Description of the Results**

**Pretest Results**

In order to create a baseline, we examined the general characteristics of students’ organization of ideas under the pretest conditions. Of the total number of subjects, 70% of students displayed ineffective textual organization where ideas did not seem to flow logically; only 30% showed tighter organization of ideas.

**Posttest Results**

When we assigned the post-test writing task and asked students to keep outlines for their essays, we did not specify the type of outlines, but we asked them to opt for the type that they generally use when planning constructively- if ever- and would be more helpful for them. It is interesting to note that 60% of students opted for formal outlines and only 40% used scratch outlines. Classroom observation allowed the researcher to signal students who wrote their outlines from their drafts and those who wrote outlines to put in shape their prewriting notes. The largest number of respondents, 80% of interest in the present study, used outlines as a constructive planning strategy, and only 20% of them outlined after drafting. Also, among students who used outlines as a planning strategy, 55% wrote their essays **from** the outlines. In other words, outlines’ organizational decisions were respected and applied by students when writing the essays. However, 25% of our students abandoned the outlines when they started writing their essays. Of the total number of subjects who planned constructively and wrote from their outlines (N=11), 40% of them displayed a better content organization comparing to their pretest performance, and 15% did not show any improvement in arranging their ideas.

**Discussion of the Results**

One of the key factors to an effective piece of writing is good textual organization. If ideas are randomly displayed in texts, meaning becomes obscure and the writing purpose is lost. When we decided on students’ organization quality, we did not only consider the macrostructure of the essay but also the patterns used in its constituent paragraphs, i.e. the microstructures. What we considered in our analysis essays of a good textual organization displayed the following general characteristics:

- Ideas organized around the basic essay shape of introduction, development, and conclusion;
- The global organization answered “the assertion support structure” where every main idea should be supported with enough details and examples (Chesla, 2006: 49);
- Indented paragraphs;
The thesis statement clearly indicates what the writer intends to develop in the paragraphs;

- Topic sentences are written in relation to the thesis statement and reflect the general goal of the essay;
- The ideas in the paragraphs are arranged in an effective pattern where all the sentences flow logically without any repeated or irrelevant information;
- The most effective way to organize an expository essay is by order of importance (Smith, 2003);
- Given the fact that organizational patterns are also relevant to paragraphs, we considered the paragraphs organized using order of importance or cause-and-effect as well organized paragraphs;
- The concluding paragraph must clearly restate the major points discussed in the essay.

In the pretest, only 30% of the tested students wrote essays which met the aforementioned requirements, and 70% of them were unsuccessful in building adequate organization patterns. Most students’ organizational troubles were at the level of paragraphs and not in organizing content around the introduction, body, and conclusion pattern. Given that the students who answered the questionnaire are the same students who underwent the pretest-posttest experiment, it was possible for us to draw inferences from the questionnaire. Despite the fact that 65% of our students claimed that they do not have problems with content organization, only 30% displayed a relatively good textual organization. In light of these findings, we can trace students’ serious problem organizing their content back to the fact that students do not really know what a good essay structure is and its significance in achieving effective writing since only 20% of them gave importance to this particular writing aspect.

In the aim of improving students’ content organization, we asked students to keep outlines for their essays in the posttest. What we find interesting is in spite of the sophisticated nature of formal outlines and the time required to write them, 60% of students opted for this detailed type of outlines—where they gave complete sentences to all entries. Given that we requested students to use the constructive planning strategy, it was expected to find students who write outlines just for perfunctory purposes. 20% of students outlined after finishing their drafts which we do not think they used them to revise their content organization but out of obligation.

Since we are investigating the impact of outlining as a planning strategy on students’ textual organization, we needed to refine the number of students who did not only write outlines before drafting but also who wrote their essays from the outlines. Among the 80% of students who used outlines as a planning strategy, 25% of them did not follow outlines’ organizational decisions. Taking into consideration the fact that 10% of our students when asked about their outlining habits, claimed that they write outlines only to get a sense of the text as a whole and then abandon them as they write (see Table 3), and considering also the fact that students might have written the outlines as a matter of duty—explains why not all students followed their outlines.

By emphasizing the need to differentiate between students who wrote from the outlines and those who abandoned them, we wanted to highlight the utility of constructive planning as both a cognitive and a metacognitive strategy. When the 25% of students arranged their prewriting notes in outlines regardless of the quality of the ideas and the outlines themselves, they only made a cognitive use of this strategy. However, when the 55% of students structured their ideas in patterns and then followed the outline guidelines, they metacognitively ensured a better application of this strategy. In other words, when student writers group their ideas under
particular headings and label them and then respect their arrangement of ideas, the operative and executive functions of this strategy are secured.

Among the 55% of students who met the adequate requirements for testing the impact of the constructive planning strategy, the majority (40%) showed remarkable signs of improvement in their textual organization. The results obtained from comparing students’ pretest and posttest textual organization demonstrates that if student writers bridge the gap between the cognitive and metacognitive functioning of constructive planning by writing outlines, respecting their organization decisions and getting back to them as a way of monitoring the writing development, they will not only achieve better textual organizations but also better overall writing performances.

**Conclusion**

From what we have seen, writing is a complex activity that requires from learners to have knowledge about the different features of writing. Whether writers write for themselves or for others, writing is conceptualized as a very important social, cultural, cognitive, and recursive process that involves many stages rather than a product of correct language structures. Constructive planning was highlighted in this paper as a strategy that students can use to ensure a better textual organization and therefore a more effective writing.

This paper has been concerned with demonstrating a connection between the two variables of this research, namely, the adequate use of the constructive planning strategy and students’ writing performance. The results yielded enabled us to conclude that there is a gap between the What and the How of outlining. Despite the fact that students know what constructive planning is, they fail to follow through and execute the strategy. The effect of outlining was best seen when students made a cognitive and metacognitive use of the strategy by keeping outlines for their essays and writing from them which did not only result in a more logical organization of ideas but also in a better overall writing quality. Therefore, this outlining strategy should be incorporated in writing instructions given its plausible effects in making students’ writing more effective.

In the light of our findings, we recommend the following:

- Teachers of Writing should encourage their students to start writing beyond the word and sentence level and focus more on arranging their content in structured patterns that best fit the various types of writing.
- Teachers need to urge their students to spend more time planning, specifically outlining, in order for students to produce more meaningful papers.
- Teachers need also to promote the proper cognitive and metacognitive use of writing strategies for better results.

**About the Author:**

**Rania Boudaoud** is a teaching assistant of English at University Constantine 1, Algeria and currently pursuing her doctoral studies in Language Sciences. Her research interests include: reading and writing convergences, foreign language teaching, and learning self-regulation.
References:


Collaborative Student Writing in the Literature Classroom

Ayesha Heble
Sultan Qaboos University

Sandhya Rao Mehta
Sultan Qaboos University

Abstract
Many schools and colleges today encourage collaborative work in disciplines such as science or geography projects, but the study of literature generally seems to discourage the collective process, perhaps because literary production itself is seen as an act of individual creativity. Could one apply the principles of collaborative work to writing about literature, and if so, would it increase both the understanding and appreciation of the literary text, and also improve the writing skills of students, especially in the case of second-language learners? This paper is a study of two groups of Arts major students at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman, to discover whether the same sets of students, at two different levels, perform better in an individual or a collaborative writing exercise on literary topics, and also to compare their experiences of the two different types of writing. It was found that although some students did express reservations about collaborative writing, most were enthusiastic about the experience, and felt that it had improved not only their understanding of the literature but also their academic writing skills. However, as there were so many other variables involved, in terms of differences in the linguistic competence and personalities of the members, it would be difficult to come to any final conclusion about the benefits of collaborative writing and language improvement.

Keywords: academic writing, collaborative writing, literature, second-language learning, Sultan Qaboos University
Introduction

Collaborative work is usually associated with the sciences. As Natalie Angier (1988) observed in her review of David Hull’s book, *Science as a Process*, “Modern science has become too broad and complex a venture for any one researcher to go it alone; scientists need other scientists”. Writing, on the other hand, is normally considered a solitary activity (Bruffee, 1973; Ede and Lunsford 1990; Le Fevre, 1987); this is especially true of writing in the Arts and Humanities, and particularly writing for literature. The novelist Paul Coelho once famously said, "Writing is one of the most solitary activities in the world” (The Zahir, 2005) and he was probably talking from personal experience. This image of the solitary writer locked away in his/her study has unfortunately also spilled over into the academic world and especially the teaching of writing and composition. As Le Fevre (1987) notes, “In contemporary composition theory, rhetorical invention is commonly viewed as the private act of an individual writer for the particular event of producing a text, typically a theme or an essay” (p.1). Most writing composition classes focus on individual student performance; there may be collective brainstorming of ideas, or peer-review and editing of preliminary drafts, even peer-evaluation of finished tasks, but the actual act of writing is most often done alone, either in class or in even greater isolation as a homework assignment, with individual students grappling with their own solitary attempts to put down in words what exactly they want to say on the subject. Ede and Lunsford refer to James Moffet’s “theory and method in his influential *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* [which] rest largely on the assumption that ‘the most critical adjustment one makes [in learning to write] is to relinquish collaborative discourse, with its reciprocal prompting and cognitive cooperation, and go it alone’.” (Moffet, 1968 as cited in Ede and Lunsford, 1990: p.7).

As Hill (2003) has pointed out, it was only in the early 1970's that English and composition professor Kenneth Bruffee began arguing that students produced better work when they wrote essays and fiction in groups than when they worked alone, but by and large the teaching of writing, and especially writing about literature, has remained an individual exercise. A lot of schools and colleges nowadays do encourage collaborative work in other disciplines, such as science or geography projects, and individual instructors may also give their students opportunities for oral group presentations, but the study of literature generally seems to discourage the collective process, perhaps because literary production itself is seen as an act of individual creativity. Could one apply the principles of collaborative work to writing about literature, and if so, would it increase both the understanding and appreciation of the literary text, and also improve the writing skills of students? This is what we set out to discover with our two groups of Arts major students at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman, one a 6th semester class studying a course in Modern Drama and an American Survey course, and the other a graduating class studying courses in World Literature and the Modern Novel. All of them were, needless to say, second-language learners of English. In the two earlier courses they were asked to write term papers on texts provided by the instructors, and on topics of their own choosing in the two advanced courses, the crucial difference being that, at each of the levels, they would have to write the actual essays individually in one course and in groups the other. The aim was to discover whether the same sets of students, at two different levels, perform better in an individual or a collaborative writing exercise on literary topics, and also to compare their experiences of the two different types of writing.

Literature review
In his seminal work on collaborative learning, *Collaborative Learning: Some Practical Models* (1973), Bruffee makes the point that although collective functioning was replacing more traditional ways of working in many social and political fields in the early '70s, this was still not the case in the field of education; "[i]n deed, classrooms remain today one of the few places where people do not organize themselves for collaborative activity" (Bruffee, 1973, p. 634). In fact, students were encouraged to compete rather than collaborate with each other, and interact almost exclusively with the teacher; very rarely were students expected, or indeed even permitted to interact with each other, such instances often being penalized as "cheating": "We do not ordinarily recognize collaboration as a valid kind of learning. Traditionally, indeed, collaboration is considered irresponsible; in the extreme, collaboration is the worst possible academic sin, plagiarism" (Bruffee, 1973, p. 636). He goes on to cite various examples of successful collaborative learning experiments, mainly in the teaching of literature, and then to see whether these principles (of collaborative learning) can be applied successfully to the teaching of writing, where "the possibility that collaborative learning is a case of the blind leading the blind is more apparent" (Bruffee, 1973, p. 640). Here again most of the case studies he describes were all successful to a marked degree, because by helping each other the students were also improving their own skills; "p eo ple themselves learn, when they teach others" (Bruffee, 1973, p. 641). In a later work, written more than ten years later, he goes deeper into the philosophical implications of collaborative learning and concludes that the main reason for its success is that it is, in a way, an extension of conversation, which in itself is closely related to thought, and further, "[i]f thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized….Writing is a technologically displaced form of conversation" (Bruffee, 1984, p. 641).

It must be noted that the students Bruffee was talking about in the examples he mentions were mainly "native speakers of standard English"; we wished to examine whether these principles would work with second language learners, as most of our students are. But before we can go into this question it is necessary to define what exactly we mean by collaborative writing. Hill (2003) refers to David Farkas' "limited but practical" definitions as a working model to start from: "David Farkas offers four possible definitions useful in approaching collaboration through an analysis of processes. For his purposes, collaboration is:

- two or more people jointly composing the complete text of a document;
- two or more people contributing components to a document;
- one or more person modifying, by editing and/or reviewing, the document of one or more persons; and
- one person working interactively with one or more person and drafting a document based on the ideas of the person or persons. (Farkas, 1991 cited in Hill, 2003, p. 14)

Whereas all the above possibilities imply "synchronous and fully consensual group work", Hill himself goes on further to see all literary writing [i.e. "literature" rather than writing about literature] as "collaborative" in an asynchronous manner, in that "it implies connections between, and unity among, different written works over time and between authors in a way that "writing does not" (Hill, 2003). We must make it clear that in our case we are talking specifically about students writing collaboratively about literature rather than collaboratively creating literary pieces of writing in this later sense, and it will be interesting to see which of the above strategies they use.
Apart from the question of logistics in the actual process of writing, i.e. who does what, another very real problem in collaborative work of any kind is undoubtedly the human element involved. Sapsomboon et al (1997) have observed that as collaborative writing includes all "activities involved in the production of a document by more than one author, then pre-draft discussions and arguments as well as post-draft analyses and debates are collaborative components. Based on this definition, the collaborative authoring process includes the writing activity as well as group dynamics" (Collaborative Writing section, para. 1). The authors further elaborate:

The acts of collaboration and writing as they relate to collaborative authoring include: … identifying writing tasks and dividing those tasks among group members, tracking individual idea generation, defining rules for document management, identifying roles for group members, communicating ideas, and managing conflict. Collaborative authoring, therefore, requires effective communication between members of the writing group. (Sapsomboon et al, 1997, Collaborative Writing section, para. 2)

Farrah (2011) emphasizes the psychological as well as the cognitive benefits of collaborative writing by pointing out that "[c]ollaborative learning is an efficient learning process as it helps students to learn by discovery. It encourages them to take a more dynamic role in their own learning, develop their interpersonal skills and collaborate with other learners to accomplish certain tasks" (p. 139).

We will also be addressing some of these issues and examining how our students managed the interpersonal aspects of group work, whether there were any conflicts among group members and how they dealt with these. We were interested in finding out about the students' perceptions of collaborative writing as a whole, not only in terms of their actual achievements but also in terms of the process involved. A similar study was carried out with ESL students by Neomy Storch at the University of Melbourne in 2005 where students were given a choice to write in pairs or individually. Although most chose to work in pairs, some chose to work individually. The conclusions she came to were that "[c]ollaboration afforded students the opportunity to pool ideas and provide each other with feedback. Most students were positive about the experience, although some did express some reservations about collaborative writing".

The third aspect of collaborative writing that many researchers have talked about is whether it actually leads to better learning. Quoting studies done by Collins and Guetzkow and Le Fevre, Hill (2003) concludes, "These researchers have demonstrated that collaborative writing could, at least in ways that can be tested empirically, produce better work and teach people quantitatively more than in situations where the same individuals write alone" (Chapter 1, Introduction). We were also interested in examining whether collaborative writing would lead not only to better understanding of the texts, but also to better writing among our students, our hypothesis being that while it would certainly result in the former, we weren't too sure about the latter. As all our students are second-language learners the development of their language skills is always an underlying component of all their courses, and as instructors who also teach language development courses in academic writing to the same students, we often despair at how many of them seem unable to transfer the skills they learn in these courses to their literature assignments. Would the act of collaboration perhaps encourage them to be more careful about aspects of academic writing such as formatting, referencing, organization of ideas, as well as improve their basic language skills of grammar and vocabulary?
More recent studies in collaborative writing (Kessler, Bikowski and Boggs, 2012; Sapsomboon et al., 1997; Ward, 2009) have focused on the impetus given to such projects by Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs and online tools like Google.docs. Elola and Oszoz (2010) conducted a study at the University of Maryland focusing specifically on the use of wikis and chats in the writing class, coming to the conclusion that although 'learners’ opinions about the benefits of wikis for grammar improvement were evenly divided between agree and disagree … [w]ith regard to content development, all the learners agreed or strongly agreed about the usefulness of the wikis (p. 60). Kessler, Bikowski and Boggs (2012) have observed that "[c]ollaborative practices are increasingly being advocated in second-language classrooms largely in response to the collaborative potential of Web 2.0 tools" (p. 91) and they demonstrate through a detailed case study how their "highly proficient non-native English speaking students who were engaged in a collaborative writing project using Web-based word processing tools … successfully collaborated in groups and developed their own process towards writing" (Kessler et al., p.106). Today's students being "digital natives", to use Mark Prensky's (2001) expressive phrase, the ease with which they are able to use such networking tools no doubt facilitates the act of collaboration; we will not, however, be focusing on this aspect, taking it, instead, as a given. Within our overarching research question – Does collaborative writing improve students' understanding of literature as well as their academic writing skills? – we will be focusing mainly on three aspects: their understanding as well as implementation of the process; the interpersonal problems, if any, they encountered and how they overcame these; and whether they benefitted academically from the exercise in terms of understanding and performance.

Methodology

As stated earlier, we had two groups of students – one from the 6th semester and the other an 8th semester graduating class – many of whom are doing the same two courses at each level with the same two instructors. As one of the instructors had asked her class to write individual term papers in the two courses she was teaching - American Survey (6th semester) and the Modern Novel (8th semester) – and the other had asked her class to do group projects and write collaborative term papers in her courses – Modern Drama (6th semester) and World Literature (8th semester) – this provided us with an opportunity do a comparative study of the two strategies. We had a total of twenty-six respondents, all girls, all Omani, all majoring in English from the College of Arts at Sultan Qaboos University. Most of the students were the same in both classes at each level, though a few of them in the World Literature class had done the Modern Novel course in an earlier semester. We gave them a questionnaire at the end of the semester, focusing on each of the aspects mentioned earlier, and followed this up with interviews with individual students to get a more complete picture of their assessment of the experience. We asked them to submit their earlier drafts of the essays along with the final versions, and also compared the grades they achieved at the end in the two courses.

In keeping with the three aspects mentioned earlier that we wished to focus on, the questions asked in the questionnaire [see Appendix 1] were divided into background information about their earlier experience, if any, of collaborative work, their experience while doing the project, and their achievements at the end. The background questions dealt with any previous experience they might have had of collaborative work, either in Arabic or English as we wanted to find out whether it was an entirely new concept. Of the second set of questions were about the organizational strategy they followed; they were asked to choose from five alternatives, adapted
Collaborative Student Writing

from the seven strategies suggested by Ede and Lunsford (1990, cited in Sapsomboon et al., 1997):

1. the group discussed the topic, divided the various aspects and then each member wrote his/her part; the group compiled the individual parts, and revised the whole document at the end
2. the group discussed the topic and outlined the writing task, then one member prepared a draft; the group edited and revised the draft
3. one member of the group planned and wrote a draft, the group revised the draft
4. one person assigned the tasks, each member completed the individual task, one person compiled and revised the document
5. Any other? (Please specify)

Some of the other questions dealt with group dynamics, whether they felt the work was divided fairly among the members, whether they felt they had done more than their fair share, or whether any other member had not contributed enough, and how they had dealt with these problems. Finally, the third set of questions were about their achievements; whether they felt their writing skills had improved through this exercise, and comparing their grades for the individual term paper and the collaboratively written one. The last question asked them which type of writing they preferred and the reasons for their choice.

Findings

Of the twenty-six respondents who answered the questionnaire, only six said they had no experience of collaborative study at any time in their education; of the twenty who said they had, most said that they had done group work in subjects like Art or Arabic – two students had written a collection of Arabic folk tales in Arabic - but only four had done any actual collaborative writing in English, and that was in linguistic courses. One student said that she had done some collaborative writing in English outside her courses – “I wrote booklets, part of a research paper and some cover stories for newspapers”. None of them had ever done any collaborative writing in literature; in another literature course they had done a group project which involved doing research and discussing various, but the actual writing was done individually. In terms of the method they employed in dividing the work among group members, of the four possible alternatives, nineteen (73.07%) chose a., the most democratic method, while only two (7.69%) chose d., the least democratic one.

The responses regarding group dynamics were interesting. On the question of whether they felt the work had been equally divided among the group, only five (19.23%) out of the twenty-six felt that it had not, and interestingly all of these were from the junior group – i.e. from the 6th semester – one student went so far as to say, “I had to do all the work regardless waiting [sic] for my team. I just did it. I need to score a high grade, so I do not care if I did the job as the most or not [sic]”. There were also comments about one particular member of the group not doing their fair share: “One of the members did not care when we put a deadline for handing the work. She kept giving excuses and she gave us the work after asking her several times”. The instructor had told them that needed to work these problems out by themselves - which also resulted in a feeling of being unfairly treated – “All of us kept silent and never told the instructor about it and all of us got the same mark”. Interestingly, out of these five respondents, two still said they preferred the collaborative writing exercise to the individual writing one and would like to do such a project again, “even though this idea, of collaborative paper, has many
disadvantages. One of them: not all the students work hard in the paper”. Most of the students in the senior group, i.e. from the 8th semester, on the other hand, seemed to have ironed out these difficulties among themselves and to have divided the work fairly in their groups, which could be because they had been together for longer and knew each other better.

Regarding the question about whether they felt that their writing skills had improved as a result of collaborative writing, an overwhelming majority (80.76%) said they had, mainly because of the process of reviewing and editing each other’s writing. Most of them said they had benefitted from working together; one of the students elaborated on this: “For me, whenever I revise my work, I hardly notice my grammatical or spilling [sic] mistakes, so the cooperative work allows the chance to get the help from my friends and checking my mistakes which really help[ed]”. This was very much in line with the findings of Elola and Oskoz (2010) in their study conducted at the University of Maryland: "when working collaboratively, learners realized that the analysis and critique of their ideas enhanced not only the content but also the overall quality of their essays. Learners became aware that everybody brought to the projects a unique set of skills and that often they could learn more from correcting their partner’s grammar and critiquing their ideas than from their own work” (p. 59). Three students, on the other hand, said their writing had not improved, though one qualified this by saying “I saw others writing and shows [sic] me how they work”; one said she did not know yet, adding quite frankly that it “depends somehow on the grades we get in each of the works [sic]”. However, the general impression was that they had benefitted from the process mainly because it required them to reread and revise their writing – something that we urge them to do in their writing assignments anyway, but which they usually neglect to do.

Chart 1. Comparison of final grades in individual and collaborative writing exercise in 6th semester courses.

It must be pointed out that we have not attempted any detailed linguistic or quantitative analysis of the errors in their final essays but rather, have compared them in terms of their final grades. In the 6th semester class (see Chart 1.), we found that out of seventeen students, an overwhelming majority (82.35%) got higher grades in the collaboratively written paper than the individually written ones, marked by the same instructor; only two (11.76%) got lower grades,
and one (5.88%) got the same. This was further corroborated when we compared their grades in individually written term papers in the other course, marked by a different instructor. Of the twelve students who were in both classes, only three (36%) did better in the individual essays, one (12%) got the same grade, and nine students (84%) got higher grades in the collaboratively written paper. A closer analysis of individual student grades revealed that while the weaker students benefitted from the collaborative writing exercise, some of the better students unfortunately fared worse – two of the students who had received an A- (90–94%) in the individually written paper came down to a C+ (77-79%) in one case and a B+ (87-89%) in the other, and the third came down from a B+ (87-89%) to a B- (80-82%). In the 8th semester courses, there were only five students who were common to the two courses, and a comparison of the final grades also revealed that the two better students did better in the individual writing exercise, while the two weaker ones benefitted from the collaborative process. Only one student, who could be called a middle level student, got exactly the same grade in both term-papers.

When asked which type of writing they preferred, individual or collaborative, and whether they would like to do such a project again, seventeen out of the twenty-six (65.38%) respondents said they would, although some of them were rather equivocal in their appraisal of the two methods:

I benefit from collaborative work more than individual work but I don’t feel the paper is mine because there are many modifications by other students. On the other hand, the individual work gives me the opportunity to write freely without restriction.

Some of them felt that the collaborative writing exercise was better because “it lightened the work burden” or “because I found it easier to conduct and [it] needs shorter time and effort”, but quite a few remarked that it helped them “understand the topic more than individually”, and “each one can come up with new ideas and think critically about the plays or poems”. One student remarked, “I prefer the collaborative term paper, because it is easy for us to discuss the topic from different perspectives if we are in a group”. This was in keeping with Farrah's (2011) findings that "the general attitudes of the students revealed that collaborative learning enhances communicative skills, critical thinking skills and motivation. Furthermore, it makes students responsible for their own learning, thus it makes them autonomous learners" (p. 156).

On the other hand, eight students (30.76%) said they preferred to work individually, but this was mainly because of the problems they had with their other group members. One student said,

I prefer to work individually because I will do whatever I want without any argument. All what I like in cooperative work is the sharing of ideas and correcting some mistakes which in fact I can get by asking my friends anytime to check my works without any cooperative in works [sic].

Another respondent commented, “writing individually is the good one because I can finish it in less than two days unlike the term paper that we did collaboratively…”, but she went to say, “to do a presentation with a group is good”. One student also commented on the unfairness of the assessment process: “I do not think that students are evaluated fairly because some work harder than others”. Two students felt that their identity/voice was lost in the collaborative paper: “Because everybody has his/her own style of writing which makes it hard to decide [on a ] thesis statement when doing collaborative work” and “individual writing gives more freedom to us, and
[we] write according to our point of view”. This was in line with the observations of Elola and Oskoz (2010): "[r]egardless of how useful or valid the collaborative exercises may have been, there is no doubt that learners still feel more comfortable when writing individually for several reasons: they retain more control over their writing, they establish their own personal style, and they are not dependent on the input of others (p. 64). One student also felt that language develops when worked on individually, which was in marked contrast to most of the other respondents who felt that their language skills had improved in collaborative writing, whether they preferred it as a process or not. One respondent did not answer this question at all, but did say, in response to the earlier question, that she felt her writing skills had improved “somehow yes because we have different ideas and skills and we tried to share them during the editing [sic]”. Two students were equivocal about the two types of writing, but leaned towards the collaborative effort; one said, “I prefer two [sic] of them. I gained more benefits from the collaborative writings”, while the other was more specific:

I prefer both depending on the topic ... If the topic can have a wide discussion and carries many ideas then collaborative writing is useful because one person cannot cover all points and he/she may not come up with new points that others have.

She later clarified that she included literature as being one of the subjects that would benefit from this process.

**Conclusion**

It seems from our findings that most of our students did benefit from collaborative writing on purely literary topics, especially in terms of sharing ideas and pooling resources, even though some of them expressed reservations about the process. Even in terms of their writing skills, most seem to have benefitted, mainly because the process forced them to re-read and revise their own as well as others’ writing. This was reflected in the final grades they achieved for their writing assignments in the two courses, especially at the 6th semester level, although this was more so in the case of weaker students who obviously benefitted more from the process of collaboration. The reservations that some of them had about the process were more due to the practical problems of arranging meetings, time constraints etc, but also in some cases due to inter-personal problems between members, which can probably be said of group dynamics in any situation. This corresponded largely with the conclusions that Storch (2005) came to in her experiment at Melbourne University mentioned earlier. However, although we could say that writing collaboratively on literary topics is possible and can also be beneficial, especially for second-language learners in terms of improving their understanding of literary texts and also forcing them to be more critical about their writing skills, there are so many variables involved in terms of personality/linguistic competence/group dynamics, that it is difficult to come to any conclusive understanding about the benefits of collaborative writing for actual language improvement. The main benefit seems to be terms of making students more conscious about the writing process itself and therefore more likely to be careful about correcting their mistakes and producing a better final product, but whether this would be true only for this particular paper, or would spill over into work done on their own at a later stage is not clear at this stage. Further research into the long-term benefits of collaborative writing needs to be done to examine whether it does indeed result both in deeper understanding of literary texts and in fundamental language improvement.

**About the Authors:**
Dr. Ayesha Heble is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. She has a doctorate in English Language Teaching (ELT). Her research interests include the role of technology in enhancing classroom teaching, and teaching academic writing.

Dr. Sandhya Rao Mehta is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. Her Ph.D on post-colonial literatures has led to an interest in the areas of ELT and emerging Englishes. She has most recently co-edited a collected anthology entitled Language Studies: Stretching the Boundaries published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

References
Appendix 1

Collaborative Writing on Literature

Questionnaire

We are conducting a survey to find out whether collaborative writing on literary topics helps students to understand the topic(s) better and also to improve their academic writing skills.

We request you to answer the following questions as honestly as possible. We assure you that the answers will be confidential and will not affect your grades in any way.

Background information:

Semester: ___________ No. of literature courses completed: _______

What do you understand by collaborative writing?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever done any form of collaborative study during your education? Y/N

If Yes, describe what you did (It may have been a school project, in English/Arabic):

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever done any collaborative writing (in English/Arabic) before this? Y/N

If Yes, describe what you did:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

You were asked to write a term paper collaboratively with your group. Please answer the following questions about your experience.
1. How many people were there in your group? _____________

2. How did you divide the work among yourselves? (Choose from the options)
   i. the group discussed the topic, divided the various aspects and then each member wrote his/her part; the group compiled the individual parts, and revised the whole document at the end
   ii. the group discussed the topic and outlined the writing task, then one member prepared a draft; the group edited and revised the draft
   iii. one member of the group planned and wrote a draft, the group revised the draft
   iv. one person assigned the tasks, each member completed the individual task, one person compiled and revised the document
   v. Any other? (Please specify) ________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you feel the work was divided equally between all members?  Y/N
4. Do you feel you had to do more than the others?    Y/N
5. Do you feel that one of the members did less than their share? Y/N  If Yes, how did you deal with this problem? ___________________________________________________________________________  ___________________________________________________________________________

6. What were some of the other problems you faced in doing this exercise? How did you overcome these? ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you feel your writing skills improved at the end? In what way? ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________

8. You have written one term paper individually and one collaboratively in two of your courses this semester. Which did you prefer? Give reasons for your choice. ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________________
Assessing the Arabic-English Bilingual Reading Competences

Jessica Midraj  
Zayed University  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Sadiq Midraj  
Zayed University  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Abstract  
This study investigated the relationships between students’ reading ability in their native and second languages. The researchers assessed the Arabic-English bilingual reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of 186 male and female grade four Emirati students from four primary schools. To assess students’ reading fluency and accuracy, students read aloud grade appropriate reading passages in Arabic (L1) and English (L2). The read aloud tests were used to measure reading accuracy which was determined by the number of syllables read correctly in one minute and reading fluency which was measured by the Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Silent reading comprehension tests were used to measure the students’ competence in reading comprehension. The reading comprehension tests involved students reading grade appropriate passages in Arabic and English as determined by analyses of the curriculum and textbooks, and answering comprehension questions. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to ascertain the relationships between the variables. The research results showed significant positive correlations between the students’ L1 (Arabic) reading competencies (accuracy, fluency and comprehension), between their L2 reading competencies, and between their L1 & L2 reading competencies.

Keywords: Bilingual reading, reading assessment, Arabic-English bilinguals, UAE
Introduction

Arabic is the official language of the United Arab Emirates (UAE); however, a high level of English proficiency is of great importance to the academic future of Emirati students in the UAE as English has become the medium of instruction in government and private higher education institutions. One of the English skill areas that many Emirati students face difficulties with is reading. The ability to comprehend and interact with university-level texts is a vital skill for academic success. Reading is a complicated skill that is not acquired naturally like other aspects of language but has to be learned and practiced. Reading skills are crucial to all learning activities in school, hence, acquiring them is regarded as a cornerstone for academic success. Research demonstrates that it is important for children to learn the basics of reading early and failure to do so may result in difficulty in acquiring knowledge and mastering other skills. Thus, supporting effective Arabic-English bilingual reading development is vital to the academic success of Emirati students.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationships between students’ reading competencies (accuracy, fluency, and comprehension) in their L1 (Arabic), in their L2 (English) and between their L1 and L2. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the relationships between Emirati fourth grade students’ ability in Arabic (L1) reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension?
2. Is there a relationship between Emirati fourth grade students’ ability in English (L2) reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension?
3. What are the relationships between Emirati fourth grade students’ achievements in Arabic (L1) and English (L2) reading competences (accuracy, fluency and comprehension)

This study was limited to participants from two male model schools and two female model schools in Abu Dhabi, and it was limited to investigating the relationships between Arabic and English reading competence in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Other literacy skills were not investigated in this study. Model schools are public schools that parents pay additional school fees. The class sections used for the study were randomly selected, but the selection of the four schools was based on the convenience method. Other limitations may include extraneous variables such as learning environment variables (teacher efficiency and experience, exposure to quality literature, parental involvement, parents’ level of education, and socioeconomic status) and/or learner variables (ability, attitude, and motivation to learn L1 and or L2).

The Reading Competence

The reading competence can be assessed by measuring reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Reading accuracy is the speed with which the reader decodes letters and words into spoken language (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001; Midraj & Midraj, 2011a; Midraj & Midraj, 2011b; Rasinski, & Padak 2005). Reading accuracy can be measured by calculating the average number of words read aloud accurately per minute (Jackson & McClelland, 1979; Rasinski, & Padak 2005).

Reading fluency is the ability of the reader to read with enthusiasm, expression, phrasing and pace that reflect understanding of what was read (Allington, 1983; Rasinski, & Padak, 2005). Fluency is measured through accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. A fluent reader decodes words accurately with minimal interruption, uses appropriate phrasing, and shows expression and enthusiasm. The Multidimensional Fluency Scale can be used to measure reading fluency (Rasinski, & Padak 2005; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).
Reading comprehension is the ability of the reader to understand a written text based on knowledge in and outside the text. Measuring young learners' reading comprehension involves the reader decoding and understanding written text. The learner can show the level of understanding by telling/retelling what was read and answering oral or written questions about the text (Midraj & Midraj, 2011a; Midraj & Midraj, 2011b; Rasinski, & Padak, 2005).

L1 and L2 Associations and Interaction
The literature shows significant associations between L1 and L2 literacy skills (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2000; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Dweik, Abu Al Hommos, & Muslim, 2007; Geva and Yaghoub Zadeh, 2006; Van Gelderen et al., 2004). The associations are correlational, not causal. In addition, the relationships are directional from L1 to L2 and/or bidirectional. The magnitude and the effects of interaction are very complex and depend on various variables (Bell, 1995; Cook, 2002, 1991; Hornberger, 1989; Laija-Rodriguez, Ochoa & Parker, 2006; MacSwan; 2000). Research supports the notion that L1 literacy skills can be transferred to L2 literacy skills. Dweik, Abu Al Hommos, and Muslim found positive and significant relationships between high school students’ writing skills in Arabic and their writing skills in their L2 (English). The authors assumed that the participants transferred their writing skills in Arabic to English (2007). Geva and Yaghoub Zadeh found that accurate word recognition concurrently predicted reading fluency in their study of L2 and L1 students in Grade 2 (2006). In addition, reading accuracy and reading comprehension skills were highly correlated in L1 and L2 learners, reading fluency correlated with reading comprehension, and L1 reading comprehension significantly contributed to L2 reading comprehension (Van Gelderen et al., 2004). This positive impact on L2 and the proficiency transfer from L1 to L2 needs motivation to learn and exposure to the L2 (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2000; Cummins & Swain, 1986). Cummins maintains that L2 learners may develop reading skills in L2 when they have a minimum level of L1 linguistic knowledge and a certain threshold (1981).

On the effects of L1 interaction with L2, Lesaux, Lipka, & Siegel’s study compared the reading comprehension ability of grade 4 children who entered kindergarten as ESL learners to those who were native English speakers. They found no differences in reading and phonological processing when comparing ESL and native English learners. However, the syntactic awareness and verbal working memory of the ESL students was significantly lower than the native English speakers (2006).

The literature also shows that Cummin’s threshold hypothesis may be intangible as the relationships between L1 and L2 literacies are very complex and numerous studies reported correlational rather than causal relationships (Bell, 1995; Hornberger, 1989; MacSwan; 2000; Laija-Rodriguez, Ochoa & Parker, 2006). The interaction between L1 and L2 can be bidirectional and might have both positive and/or negative impacts on L1 and L2 learning. Cook (2002) suggests that the degree of separation, integration, and interaction vary between languages due to the magnitude of relationships between L1 and L2. Cook (1991) introduced the L1 and L2 multi-competence language system where L1 and L2 are not separate in the language learner’s mind. Ringbom hypothesized that L2 learning may contribute to L1 metalinguistic awareness (2007 cited in Djigunovic, 2010). On the other hand, Bell (1995) and Hornberger (1989) maintain that L1 literacy skills may aid in the learning of L2 literacy skills to some extent, but it may also impede L2 literacy in other complex aspects of language learning. Dual language learning has directional and/or bidirectional metalinguistic awareness that may impact L1 and L2 learning. This impact most likely reinforces language learning when there is
adequate motivation and exposure to the languages learned. Several complex variables determine the magnitude and the direction of this transfer and awareness. Relationships and interaction between dual language literacy skills are correlational, not causal. The level of L1 transfer and interaction between L1 and L2 depend on the degree of separation and integration, learner’s motivation and exposure to L2, and the level of bilingual competence-dominant, balanced, or limited.

Research Method
The purpose of the non-experimental, correlational design of this study was to determine whether, and to what degree, relationships exist between fourth grade Emirati students’ reading in their L1 (Arabic) and their L2 (English). Areas of reading achievement assessed in both Arabic and English include reading accuracy (number of syllables read correctly in one minute); reading fluency (as measured by the multidimensional scale—expression, phrasing, smoothness and pace); and silent reading comprehension (as measured by paper-pencil silent reading tests). Data was collected in the form of researcher-constructed reading tests. Correlational statistics were used to compare the variables.

Sample
The subjects who participated in this study were fourth grade Emirati students from four model primary schools in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. The research subjects, whose first language was Arabic, studied in both English and Arabic. English was used as the medium of instruction in math, science and computer sciences while Arabic was learned as a subject and was used as the medium of instruction for the remaining subjects in the curriculum. Convenience sampling was used to select two model schools for boys and two model schools for girls. After the schools agreed to participate in the study, the researchers randomly selected three to five sections of fourth grade students for the study. The study took place at the end of the students’ academic year. One hundred eighty-six students (85 male and 101 female) completed both the silent reading comprehension tests and the read alouds in Arabic and English.

Instruments
For the purposes of this study, researcher-constructed comprehension and fluency assessments were utilized to measure the students’ reading comprehension, fluency, and accuracy in Arabic and in English. The researcher-constructed reading exams specifications were based on an analysis of the curricular documents (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2006) and the Grade 1-4 textbooks. Reading comprehension in Arabic and in English was assessed by students taking Arabic and English silent reading comprehension tests. Both tests had two reading passages: one written at Grade 2 level and one written at Grade 4 level, and each test had 25 questions. The question types included multiple-choice, fill-in the blank with a word bank, short answer, and ordering of events. Two versions of each test were created with the only differences being the order of the questions and/or distracters. The method of rational equivalence was used to estimate the internal consistency of the reading comprehension test. The reliability coefficient obtained from the Kuder-Richardson 20 on the Arabic Test Version A and Version B was .91. The reliability coefficient obtained from the Kuder-Richardson 20 on the English Test Version A was .92 and .91 on Version B. To assess students’ reading accuracy and fluency in Arabic and English, students read aloud
shortened versions of the Grade 4 reading texts that were used on the silent reading comprehension tests. Students’ reading accuracy was determined by the number of syllables read correctly during a 60-second time period. The use of syllables instead of words was due to the nature of the two languages being investigated and the expected level of proficiency in each language (L1 versus L2) as described in the curriculum and manifested in the materials. Moreover, the Arabic text was vowelized for the participants which is typical in reading texts at the primary stage. Short vowels were added to make the text easier to read in Arabic. Students’ reading fluency was measured using the Multidimensional Fluency Scale which rates reading expression and volume, phrasing and intonation, smoothness, and pace (Rasinski & Padak, 2005; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). One-minute reading tests have been used to assess students’ reading accuracy and fluency (Wessam, Elbert, & Landerl, 2010; Rasinski, N.D). A grading sheet was constructed to record the aforementioned information for each student. Silent reading comprehension tests in Arabic and English were used to measure participants reading comprehension.

**Data Collection**

The researchers along with representatives from the schools administered the reading assessments after training the invigilators. In the students’ classrooms, the students completed a practice silent reading comprehension test with examples of the question types found on the tests used to assess their reading comprehension. After the researchers discussed the answers of the practice test with the whole class, the students took the English reading comprehension test and then the Arabic comprehension test.

In order to ensure reliable marking of the short answer portion of the written exam on both the Arabic and English comprehension tests, the tests were double-marked by the researchers using a common key. Student answers on the reading comprehension tests were transferred to bubble sheets and graded using Remark Office OMR Version 6 to allow for consistent marking and easy statistical analysis. Students’ overall percents on the Arabic and English reading comprehension tests were used to represent their Arabic and English silent reading comprehension and were entered on the spreadsheet.

The research team administered the final part of the reading assessment, the read aloud, in quiet areas of the school after the silent reading comprehension test. During this portion of the assessment, the researchers recorded the students reading in Arabic and English using digital voice recorders. All number-coded sound files were stored on a password-protected portable hard drive. Two English teachers and two Arabic teachers were trained to use the scoring sheet and the Multidimensional Fluency Scale. After the raters marked consistently on the practice recordings, they marked the recordings. The English teachers rated the English sound files and the Arabic teachers rated the Arabic recordings. The raters were instructed to first mark the accuracy per minute. After they completed all of the accuracy marking, the raters listened to and marked the recordings again using the Multidimensional Fluency Scale. The recordings were double-marked and the average of the two scores was used unless there was a discrepancy of more than two points out of a total of 16 points. In this case, the recording was third-marked. Twenty-one Arabic sound files (16%) needed to be third-marked while seventeen English sound files (13%) needed to be third-marked. This aspect of the marking yielded the scores for the students’ accuracy and fluency in Arabic and English, and this data was entered on the spreadsheet.
Results
The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between fourth grade Emirati students’ reading in Arabic (L1) and English (L2). The researchers sought to find out if there were relationships between students’ reading accuracy as measured by the number of syllables read correctly in one minute, reading fluency as measured by the Multidimensional Fluency Scale, and reading comprehension as measured by their percent score on the silent reading comprehension tests. In order to explore these areas, students’ scores in reading comprehension, reading fluency, and reading accuracy were compared using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. SPSS Version 19 was used, and the level of statistical significance needed to reject the null hypotheses was .05.

Arabic Reading
The first research question examined the relationship between Emirati fourth grade students’ ability in Arabic reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The following hypothesis was analyzed: There are no correlations between reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension in Arabic of fourth grade Emirati EFL students. To investigate the hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to ascertain the relationships between Arabic accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between Arabic accuracy and Arabic fluency, $r (184) = 0.90$, $p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Arabic Accuracy and Arabic Fluency

There was a significant positive correlation between Arabic accuracy and Arabic comprehension, $r (184) = 0.72$, $p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 2).
There was a significant positive correlation between Arabic fluency and Arabic comprehension, $r(184) = 0.71, p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 3).

There were strong positive correlations between the Arabic reading variables as higher scores in any of the reading areas were correlated with higher scores in the other Arabic variables. Specifically, higher scores in Arabic accuracy were correlated with higher scores in both Arabic fluency and comprehension; higher scores in Arabic fluency were correlated with higher scores in both Arabic accuracy and comprehension; and higher scores in Arabic comprehension were correlated with higher scores in both Arabic accuracy and fluency. Although all the relationships were significant, the relationship between fluency and accuracy was noteworthy. (Table 1).
### Table 1. *Pearson Correlation – Summary Arabic Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arabic Accuracy</th>
<th>Arabic Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Fluency</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.90**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Comprehension</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.72**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.71**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=186

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**English Reading**

The second research question investigated the relationship between Emirati fourth grade students’ ability in English reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The following hypothesis was analyzed: There are no correlations between reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension in English of fourth grade Emirati EFL students. To investigate the hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationships between English accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between English accuracy and English fluency, $r (184) = 0.96$, $p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. English Accuracy and English Fluency**

There was a significant positive correlation between English accuracy and English comprehension, $r (184) = 0.74$, $p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 5).
Figure 5. English Accuracy and English Comprehension

There was a significant positive correlation between English fluency and English comprehension, $r (184) = 0.75$, $p = 0.000$. The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 6).

Figure 6. English Fluency and English Comprehension

There were strong positive correlations between the English reading variables as higher scores in any of the reading areas were correlated with higher scores in the other English variables. Specifically, higher scores in English accuracy were correlated with higher scores in both English fluency and comprehension; higher scores in English fluency were correlated with higher scores in both English accuracy and comprehension; and higher scores in English comprehension were correlated with higher scores in both English accuracy and fluency. Although all the relationships were significant, the relationship between fluency and accuracy was noteworthy. (Table 2).
Table 2. Pearson Correlation – Summary English Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Accuracy</th>
<th>English Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Fluency</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.96**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Comprehension</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=186
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Arabic and English Reading

The third research question investigated the relationship between Emirati fourth grade students’ ability in reading in their L1 (Arabic) and their L2 (English). For descriptive purposes, the respective means for the students’ scores in accuracy, fluency, and reading comprehension are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics – Arabic and English Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arabic Mean (L1)</th>
<th>English Mean (L2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy (Syllables read correctly per Minute)</td>
<td>159.81</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency out of 16 points using (Multidimensional Fluency Score)</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension (Score on silent reading test out of 100 points)</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To analyze the following hypotheses, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used:

1. There is no correlation between EFL grade four students’ reading accuracy in their L2 (English) and their reading accuracy in their L1 (Arabic).
2. There is no correlation between EFL grade four students’ reading fluency in their L2 (English) and their reading fluency in their L1 (Arabic).
3. There is no correlation between EFL grade four students’ reading comprehension in their L2 (English) and their reading comprehension in their L1 (Arabic).

There was a significant positive correlation between Arabic accuracy and English accuracy, \( r (184) = 0.76, p = 0.000 \). The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 7).
There was a significant positive correlation between Arabic fluency and English fluency, \( r (184) = 0.76, p = 0.000 \). The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 8).

There was a significant positive correlation between Arabic comprehension and English comprehension, \( r (184) = 0.68, p = 0.000 \). The scatterplot below illustrates the data (Figure 9).
There were strong positive correlations between the Arabic and English reading variables: Higher scores in Arabic accuracy were correlated with higher scores English accuracy; higher scores in Arabic fluency were correlated with higher scores English fluency; and higher scores in Arabic comprehension were correlated with higher scores English comprehension (Table 4).

**Table 4. Pearson Correlation – Summary Arabic Reading / English Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Reading Competence</th>
<th>English Reading Accuracy</th>
<th>English Reading Fluency</th>
<th>English Reading Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Reading Accuracy</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Reading Fluency</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=186
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationships between fourth grade students’ reading competencies in L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) languages. The study explored the relationships between Emirati fourth grade students’ competence in L1 and L2 reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The results of the research study demonstrated strong positive correlations between each of the L1 reading variables (accuracy, fluency, and comprehension), L2 reading variables, and L1 & L2 reading variables. The study results are correlational not causal. However, the significant positive correlation between L1 and L2...
reading components support the interdependence and the threshold hypothesis due to the strong correlations between L1 and L2 reading variables. The results of this study support the notion of linguistic interdependence which suggests that language skills developed in one language can be transferred to another (Cummins, 2000, 1981, 1979; Cummins & Swain, 1986). A well-constructed bilingual education program that supports L1 linguistic competence might contribute to increasing reading proficiency in both L1 and L2. As such, it is recommended that support should be given to Arabic-English bilingual programs in the schools that place importance on developing Arabic literacy skills along with English language skills. Not only will this have a positive impact on the acquisition of both L1 and L2, it can also assist in the preservation of the Arabic language while assisting Emirati students in becoming active contributors to the diverse, multicultural, and dynamic global society.

Based on the findings of this research study, there are implications on classroom pedagogy, program curriculum and assessment, and government education policy. At the pedagogical level, it is important for teachers to employ various strategies that develop their students’ dual language reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Reading comprehension and reading fluency draw on similar learning processes in the primary grades. Careful alignment and amalgamation between L1 and L2 reading may reinforce the students reading competence (Wiley & Deno, 2005).

The curriculum, materials, and assessments should be designed to support and assess all reading competencies. Schools need to implement ongoing bilingual assessments at the primary stage and establish bilingual literacy programs to provide opportunities for differentiated learning (remediation and enrichment). Assessment results should inform policy makers for ongoing curriculum reform. Moreover, schools should work towards successful school-parent-community partnerships and establishing biliteracy programs for their students’ parents. These programs have the potential to empower parents to assist their children in becoming successful readers (Midraj & Midraj, 2011a; Midraj & Midraj, 2011b).

As this study was limited to fourth grade participants from two male model schools and two female model schools in Abu Dhabi, conducting similar studies with different types of schools (public schools, model schools, and private schools) and different age groups may shed light on more factors that contribute to reading achievement in L1 and L2 and the relationships between L1 and L2. In addition to researching the relationships between the reading competencies in L1 and L2, it might be worthy to correlate those results to other learner and learning environment variables. Correlational studies are not causal, and correlational relationships that are related to language learning are very complex to explain. There is a need for more research that investigates the relationships between Arabic-English dual language skills to support and consolidate L1 and L2 positive transfer to develop the desired bilingual reading competence.

Acknowledgement
This study was funded by the Zayed University Research Incentive Fund. The authors wish to thank the student participants, teachers, school administrators, Abu Dhabi Education Council, Mr. Ahmad Al-Hulaisi, Dr. Mary Sengati-Zimba, Dr. Mohammed Ameen, Dr. Mokhtar Boularawi, Dr. Sael Shadid, Dr. Salah Darawsheh, and Dr. Rasha Al-Khateeb for their valuable contributions to the study.
About the Authors:

Dr. Jessica Midraj holds a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction-English Education from Indiana State University, USA. Currently, she is the Assessment Supervisor of the Academic Bridge Program at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi. She has extensive experience in the field of English language education as a teacher, mentor, researcher, and manager. Her professional interests include curriculum design, testing and alternative forms of assessment, bilingualism, and learning strategy instruction.

Dr. Sadiq Midraj holds a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction-English Education from Indiana State University, USA. He is currently the ELL Program Lead Faculty and he teaches in the undergraduate and graduate programs in the College of Education at Zayed University, United Arab Emirates. He has published in the areas of the affective factors, Arabic and English reading competences, and he gave numerous presentations at international conferences.

References


Age Factor and Learning English as a Foreign Language at the Elementary and Intermediate Levels at Jarash Province Schools in Jordan

Dr. Ahmad Fayez Mutlaq Al-Zu'be

English Language Department, Faculty of Science and Humanities
Ghaat, Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
The main aim of this study is to investigate the consequence of age on studying English at the elementary and intermediate levels at Jarash province schools in Jordan. The process of teaching English as a foreign language has always been a challenging task, especially in the Arab countries. English being extremely important for technological as well as social development, its teaching, particularly in Arab countries, has captured the attention of many researchers. In most of the Arab countries, English learning begins at the elementary and Intermediate school level; however, in spite of the good overall planning, qualified teachers, integrated textbooks, and a purposive curriculum, the expected achievement is still below the expectations. The study established that learning English as a foreign language is affected by age since early exposure to various language instructions constantly ensures improved outcome in performance. The results illustrate that English learning at an earlier age is one of the most important factors that improve the skills of various English language learners, save for other variables such as motivation to learn, learning opportunities, attitude, and individual differences.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, Critical Period Hypothesis, English learning, Proficiency.
Introduction
Age is one of the greatest concerns that affect learning English as a foreign language in Arab countries. There has always been a widespread belief that younger individuals have got a better chance in acquiring foreign or second language, partly based on several observations of lots of experts and teachers all over the world. In order to prove this, a research was performed on a majority of children who were enrolled in some schools and therefore began learning English at an early age (Alcantara, 2005). It was noted that individuals who began learning the English language at an early age in their lives generally obtained higher levels of proficiency than their counterparts who opted to begin learning at later stages. Though it was assumed in the other studies that the age at which students begin to acquire English as a foreign language will have the same influence on students who are only exposed to one speaker of that language, in only a particular setting, and specifically during a restricted amount of time.

The Critical Period Hypothesis suggests in its definition that there is a time period, probably between child birth and the time when one enters puberty, when second language acquisition can be easily and rapidly accomplished, than times possibly falling outside this period. In this study, the focus is on age factor and the acquisition of English as a foreign language in Arab countries. The researcher considered the starting period for learning English as a foreign language of different age groups. The settings of the research are both private and public schools involving both males and females bounded by their indigenous Arabic environment (Cunningham & Reich, 2009).

Age has been considered as one of the greatest factors that affect learning English as a foreign language in Arab countries. Acquisition of English language in most schools and colleges in the Arab countries serves two purposes; for strengthening English foundation, and for using it in later years during the students’ specialties that include health, business, and computers. Some researchers have stated that most learners of English do encounter certain problems in speaking and writing the language. An earlier researcher purported the Critical Period Hypothesis, which suggested that there is a period when learning a foreign language is more successful and efficient than any other time in an individual’s life (Mehdi, 2003).

Problem Statement
The problem of this research is the age factor and learning English as a foreign language in Jordan. Most of students, in the past, began learning English language at intermediate secondary schools in the age of 13 up to 18 years. They dedicated their time and study for four periods weekly on an average school year calendar that extends from 30 to 32 weeks, for a period of six years. It is expected that by the end of the six years the students should have been able to learn the language successfully. However, their achievement is below expectation as they still perform weakly (Benmamoun, 2002). The general belief is that the younger learners have certain advantages over their older counterparts in the acquisition of English language. The main acknowledgement is that younger learners are able to learn English as a foreign language easily and quickly as compared to the older children.

Audience
This study is intended to serve a diverse audience who may be directly or indirectly affected, ranging from the teachers who are engaged in teaching individuals the English language, students who strive to acquire English as a foreign language, parents who should assess and
encourage their children to do their best in learning English language, and the government which should encourage its citizens to readily learn the English language at an early stage of their lives.

**Limitations of the Study**

- A lot of money is required to sufficiently carry out the whole research as it involves lots of travelling between Saudi Arabia where I currently work and the research which was carried out in Jordan.
- The researcher was faced with some obstacles in dealing with the female students who were learning English as a foreign language and the female supervisors concerned with English learning.
- There is much of time spending during the research as it involves a lot of communications and dealing with various individuals, some of whom are not sufficient enough in the English language.
- This study is exclusive carried out at Jarash province schools in Jordan.

**Research Questions**

- Is there any difference between students who start learning the English language at the age of five years compared with those who begin their learning at 12 years?
- What are the best ways to develop speaking and reading skills with ESL learners?
- How do adults learn to speak and read English as a second language?

**Significance of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to provide findings that can be of help to various education ministries and various concerned individuals in improving English education amongst individuals. The study aims at targeting English students, teachers, syllabus designers, and the decision makers.

**Literature Review**

This section will aptly review issues affecting age factor and learning English as a foreign language in Jordan and Arab countries in general. Age has been one of the major issues in the Arab countries when exploring English language acquisition and learning amongst individuals ever since; and therefore the age issue has received lots of attention and research since it is a very controversial factor (Alcantara, 2005). It is argued that children find the acquisition of English language skills easier and faster than the adults, hindering the adults from attaining the appropriate native like proficiency. However, there is still a great debate as to whether learners of the same age group are able to pursue a similar pattern of English language acquisition (Battle, 2012).

It is of wider belief that younger individuals have got a variety of advantages over the older learning individuals, in English language learning. The shared view is that those who start learning at an earlier age are in a better position of acquiring the second language more easily and quickly than the individuals who begin learning after the puberty stage. Despite being complicated in nature, the association between the success in acquisition of English language and age can be related to the Critical Period Hypothesis. This period is defined as the time when a child is able to acquire a new language more perfectly, easily and rapidly, without several instructions (Haviland, Prins, Walrath, & Mcbride, 2010). The Critical Period Hypothesis
proposes that there is a time period, probably between childbirth and just when the child gets into puberty, when learning a second language can be achieved easily and quickly than learning after the puberty period. However, a few researchers argued that older learners were in a better position to acquire new language skills than their younger counterparts, as the older learners had got a higher level of metalinguistic abilities and problem solving capabilities. It was noted during the research that learning also depended on the individual characteristics and the environment, as the length of residence and the extent of instructions given, also being related to the age factor. From the study it was identified from the students’ English skills test that entailed vocabulary learning, conversation, grammar, and writing, that the students who began learning English at an earlier age performed significantly better than the individuals who began at a later age (Hilsenroth, Segal, & Hersen, 2003).

Even when the research was narrowed down to male individuals, from the findings of the study, there were significant statistical differences probably at a level of 0.01 or even less, between most of the Arab male students who began learning English as a foreign language at about five years and those who began learning at an older age in vocabulary, writing, grammar, and conversation skills, in support of the younger students (Ong & Van Dulmen, 2007). In accordance to the Critical Period Hypothesis, there exists neurological period that ends at 13 years of age, after which the complete mastery of words and pronunciation becomes exceedingly difficult to achieve. From the study, it can be proposed that the students in Arab countries should be ready to acquire the English language just before the puberty period ends, so as to ensure that they gain the appropriate skills and the native like proficiency.

**Strategies Affecting Teaching of English**

The students face learning problems due to the fact that they are not exposed to English learning at the early stages of their lives and they do not apply the English language frequently as a medium of communication except when pursuing certain courses in higher education. Environment and the family background of individuals also play an important function in the success and achievement of the early learning process in the Arab countries. Inadequate family income of most of the families may prevent the parents from giving good education to their children at an earlier stage (England, 2006).

The teachers are striving their best by applying every appropriate mechanism which would help them cope with the issues such as age that are affecting English learning in Arab countries. There are several innovative strategies employed in modern teaching that are required to deal with the daily challenges faced during teaching and learning, in order to achieve the aimed target (Boroweic, 1998). Strategies such as the early start method is being encouraged in various Arab countries as individuals are being encouraged to enroll in English learning classes early enough when they are still young so as to be able to gain the English language skills and proficiency early enough before they become older. Parents are also encouraged to support their children and to take them to schools when they are still able to acquire language skills easier and faster (Kharkhurin, 2012).

The use of technology has led to the development of several language laboratories, which are fully furnished with numerous computer supported language learning, which aids in the provision of proper language skills. The learners become motivated during their studies as they enjoy every activity they are engaged in (Singleton, 1995). The learners are encouraged to attend various remedial courses during vacations so as to improve their skills and knowledge in the
English language, as the teachers are supposed to be fully equipped, updated and ready to encounter every kind of challenge during the teaching process. Teachers have got the most responsibility in the educational setting and therefore they should be updated and equipped with fresh knowledge and the appropriate use of technology in education (Marguardt, Berger, & Loan, 2004). The teachers of English should regularly attend for the development and essentials in service training. Every teacher should be research oriented in order to develop new skills, however, most of the teachers felt embarrassed and feared attending any of the training programs. However no matter how much experienced, knowledgeable and trained a teacher may be, professional advancement is always a necessity for every individual (Suleiman, 2011).

**Problems Faced by English Learning Students**

There are numerous problems that are faced by the Arab English learning students during the period of their learning. Some of the learners are able to fluently speak good English due to their personal efforts; however, they perform miserably when it comes to the actual writing of the language in paper. In this study it was discovered that most of the Arab students who were studying English as a foreign language lacked proper oral communication skills, as most of them committed simple vocabulary errors. After carrying out various tests in the study, several aspects and skills were identified to be giving the learners difficulties (Committee to Review the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays International Education Programs & National Research Council, 2007).

Pronunciation of the English words correctly was one of the major challenges that the Arab English learners faced. Most of the Arab students substituted the (t) or (d) consonant sounds, as others used the (s), (z), or even the (v) consonants. They failed to differentiate words such as pool and pull, fool and full, talk and take. The other grammatical problems were also experienced in capitalization and punctuation of sentences, tense usage, articles, prepositions, synonyms, spellings, use of suffixes, and in the use of prefixes (Law, Pelgrum, & Plomp, 2008).

**Other Factors Affecting Learning of English Language in Arab Countries**

Mother tongue influence also related to age in affecting learning of English as a foreign language in the Arab countries. Mother tongue, also referred to as the first language, is used by most of the individuals in the Arab countries in their daily lives for communicating with one another (Oxford, 1996). First language learners have got no difficulty in pronouncing most of the words in their mother tongue language even after the puberty age. The learners’ minds are usually set to understand the one linguistic system that the individuals have always been exposed to all the time. However, in the acquisition of English as a foreign language, the first language features do collide with those of the foreign language. This therefore proves the fact that the native language phonology highly influences the word pronunciation of the second language (Conture & Curlee, 2007).

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis states that the foreign language elements that are similar to the students’ native language will be easier and simpler for the student to relate, while the differing components will provide a great challenge for the student to relate (Grabe, 2008). The teachers concerned with teaching the English language and the students should therefore know and understand both the structures of the first language and the English language. Acquisition of this knowledge would help the teachers in identifying the influential areas of both the first language and the foreign language, and be able to acquire certain techniques to correct the obstacles (Committee to Review the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays International Education Programs & National Research Council, 2007).
Various non-linguistic aspects that are related to students learning and personality goals, the attitude towards English language, the type of motivation, culture and the native speakers have got certain roles in the advancement of pronunciation skills. The Arab individuals are encouraged to be exposed to the English language and to frequently use the language so as to improve their pronunciation skills. It was determined during the study that the students who were confident and readily outgoing easily interacted with the native speakers and was able to develop and practice the foreign language pronunciation skills (Knapp & Seidlhofer, 2009).

Some of the Arab students felt uncomfortable in trying out extra speech rhythm while the other students felt it to be stupid in pronouncing the English sounds which they termed to be weird, and as time went by, they made up their minds that it was impossible and futile to be able to learn appropriate English pronunciations. It is therefore believed that for one to change or not to change, the patterns of speech is influenced by the amount of responsibility that is taken by the learner and how much practice the learner does outside the class (Grabe, 2008). In conclusion, the factors that are discussed above should help the English language teachers to bear in mind what their learners might possibly encounter during their studying of English as a foreign language. Using these factors the teachers are able to easily identify the challenges faced by the Arab students in the pronunciation of the English language, and therefore help the students overcome the difficulties by providing proficient pronunciation instructions (Amin & Gher, 2000).

Methodology
The following method was employed to investigate the issue of age factor and learning English as a foreign language at Jarash province schools.

Participants
The participants of this study from which information was obtained include 100 students from Jarash province schools, pursuing English as a foreign language, and 50 English teachers who were in charge of teaching those students or their learning counterparts.

Instruments
The instruments that were used for the study included tests for the students and the questionnaires for the English teachers.

Procedures
The general approach used in the research was experimentally investigated, and it mainly examined one objective, which is age. The SPSS was used by the researcher to analyze the collected data in the questionnaire and the students’ tests. The questionnaire instrument was used to gather data from the teachers in various schools. The main part of the questionnaire consisted of 30 items that were appropriately arranged in a format similar to a 5-Liker Scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The equation of Alpha which is a measure for the internal consistency was used by the researcher in order to determine the reliability. The questionnaire was found to be very dependable since its reliability coefficient based on the study extremely ranged between 0.78 and 0.80.

The used questionnaire was submitted to professors in various universities, arbitrators, and also to the Ministries of Education. Some few changes had to be made in the statements. The questionnaire had got internal validity calculated using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient has got its values statistically substantial at level 0.01, which indicated the validity of their reliability with the subject matter.
Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained an official permission from the local authority. There was distribution of the two tests to two control groups by the researcher between 1st of January 2012 and 1st of March 2012. The first group consisted of 25 students who were at level four, learning English in an elementary school; while the second group consisted of 25 students who were at grade-three, learning English in an Intermediate school. Each of the tests took a supervision period of an hour and individuals were allowed to revise their answers.

The students were promised that their answers would be kept very confidential and no individual in the schools would be allowed to see or evaluate them. The subjects were made to know that there would be possible amendments to the English syllabus in response to the results of the study. The students were therefore urged to employ sincere efforts that could give the researcher a true image of their English competency.

Data Analysis

Various analyses were needed to effectively test the research proposal. Thorough comparison of the young students at level four in elementary schools’ performance, with the older students who were at level three in intermediate schools’ performance, was one of the analyses required. SPSS was used in data analyses since it was highly desired to assess hypothesis concerning the age of English as a foreign language instruction initiation.

A three-way analysis of discrepancy was employed. The starting age of learning English as a foreign language in private elementary school and public intermediate school was the independent variable, since it separated the students who managed to have early English as foreign language instructions in their private schools from those in public intermediate schools who have their English as a foreign language later. The conventional .05 Alpha level was used in all the analyses and comparisons that were conducted. This is to imply that the findings were said to be insignificant unless if they had been acquired based on chance alone, probably only in five out of a hundred times. There was calculation of means and standard deviations pertaining to each construct to be able to determine the probable effects of age variable.

Table 1. Correlation results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlation results</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar/Pauses due to hesitation</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar/repetition</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary/Pauses due to hesitation</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary/Word repetition</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation/Pauses due to hesitation</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation/Word repetition</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Comparative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Late Learners/Adults</th>
<th>Young Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>40.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>38.40%</td>
<td>39.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>20.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods of Statistical Treatment

In order to accomplish the aims of the study and evaluation of the collected data, various statistical approaches were employed such as the SPSS. The statistical analyses that were carried out in this study include the following:

The weighted arithmetic mean was calculated in order to determine how high or low the answers of individuals regarding every statement found in the basic variables.

Findings of the Study

The performed study found out that; the students who opted to begin learning English language at an earlier age of about five years performed better than the individuals who decided to learn the language at a later age, probably after puberty. It was also determined that the younger students were faster and easier in acquiring the English language skills. The young learners were able to speak English language more fluently and with much ease than the older learners. It was determined that the most suitable age for any individual to begin learning English as a foreign language was between the ages of five and six years. Some of the students who began learning English at the age of 13 years were gauged and their performance was very weak as compared to their younger counterparts who were also gauged during the same period of time. The major finding of this research tend to be in support of the common notion that the students who began learning at an earlier age had got better chances of acquiring the language skills than the students who opted to begin studying at an older age.

Results of the Study

The results of the students’ tests that majorly evaluated English skills that include reading, grammar, conversation, writing, and vocabulary learning, indicated that the individuals who began learning English at five years of age in the private schools, performed significantly better than the students who started learning at the age of 13 years in the public schools (Amin & Gher, 2000). In accordance to the study findings, there were considerable statistical differences, probably at level 0.01 or even less, between the male learners who began learning English as a foreign language at five years and the students who began studying English as a foreign language at thirteen years of age in vocabulary, writing skills, grammar, and conversation skills in support of the students who began learning English at a younger age of five years.

The results of this study are in support of the declaration that English as a foreign language learning is faster, complete, and easier when it is began at an earlier age than at the later ages in one’s life. The study also agrees to the Critical Period Hypothesis which ascertained that children were capable of acquiring different languages easily before they attained nine years of age (Sara, 2009).

Recommendations of the Study

It is recommended that the number of future researches on English as a foreign language learning in the Arab countries should increase so as to explore most of the effects of age on learning English as a foreign language.

The Ministries of Education in various states should make great contributions with the aim of strengthening the ability of their students to learn English as a foreign language in the Arab countries.

There should be several establishments’ of language workshops and seminars which should look at how to intensify the students’ yearn to learn English as a foreign language.
There should be a conduction of similar studies at a higher level of education in the Arab countries particularly that of secondary school, in which the students would have begun English at different ages however, they would have a longer period of time exposed to English as a foreign language.

The concerned Ministries of Education in the Arab countries should highly encourage the learning of English as a foreign language mostly at early ages. The results showed that the individuals who were exposed to learning English at early ages were able to acquire the required skills of English language early enough.

The role of parents should be initiated as they would evaluate and assess the levels of their children in the acquisition of the English language.

It is recommended that English learning at six years should be introduced in public schools in the Arab countries. Similar studies should then be executed on the experimental schools and the results be compared with the students’ academic achievements in the private schools.

It is recommended that there should be appropriate ways and methods to eradicate the obstacles that are faced by individuals in the field of learning English as a foreign language in the Arab countries.

The teachers of English in different stages should aptly motivate their students during the lessons acquisition of English as a foreign language.

It is proposed that there should be an increased pressure to build up awareness of the importance of studying English language amongst the students at various academic levels.

It is recommended that the governments should appropriately fund and provide support to various institutional programs that aim at providing English language to the students.

Further Studies Suggestions

The future researches should greatly focus on the female students because in most of the Arab countries, the researcher was faced with some obstacles in dealing with the female students who were learning English as a foreign language and the female supervisors concerned with English learning.

There should be a consideration of the foreign private schools for both the male and female students in future researches.

Time as a factor also has got various effects on learning English as a foreign language and therefore its effects should be looked into during the future researches as sometimes the learning process is affected by the length of study.

Conclusion

As observed in this study, age had got great effects on individuals who opted to learn English as a foreign language. The findings of this study resolved that the individuals who began learning English at an earlier age, probably at the age of six, were in a better position to learn English as a foreign language than the individuals who decided to learn the English language when older, probably past the puberty stage. The results of this study also tend to support the established studies which claimed that the earlier an individual acquired the first language learning, the better chance the individual had on the general fluency of the second language which perhaps would be English or any other language (Hinkel, 2011).

From this study, it can be concluded that age is one of the factors that potentially influence the way in which a person is able to learn a second language. It is therefore one of the greatest factors that affects learning of English language as a foreign language in Arab countries. Young
learners are believed to have a higher potentiality of learning than the adults. The young learners are considered to be fluent in the communication of English language and are able to acquire native like accent than the older learners (Boroweic, 1998). The individuals who begin learning a foreign language such as English after the puberty age in most cases fail to acquire the native like accent of the foreign language as they do have complex learning patterns. Various studies state that there is a difference in the developmental states between the children and the adults in their learning of English as a second language (Institute of Medicine, 2009). However, it should be noted that there are other factors linked to age that are also important in determining the rate of acquisition of English as a foreign language in various developmental stages of the learners such as; motivation to learn, learning styles, various learning opportunities, individual differences, and one’s attitude towards learning the English language.

About the Author:
My name is Ahmad Fayez Al-Zu’be from Jordan. I have PhD in Curricula and Teaching Methods of the English Language. I am working as a university doctor in English Language Department, Faculty of Science and Humanities in Ghaat, Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia.

References


Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of students</th>
<th>Grammar Mistakes</th>
<th>Vocabulary Mistakes</th>
<th>Pronunciation Mistakes</th>
<th>Pauses due to Hesitation</th>
<th>Word Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personality Characteristics as Predictors of Affective Availability to Interact Across Cultures

Solodka Anzhelika Konstantinovna

Institute of Pedagogical Problems,
National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine

Abstract
This study aims to investigate the effect of the personality characteristics on the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction process. It is specifically focused on exploring the individual’s traits that enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural understanding and attitudes of students. The intention is to bring together some of the leading theoreticians’ concepts to stimulate new directions in this area and complement this with some conceptual work being conducted by the cross-cultural interaction researchers. The first objective of this study based on theoretical concepts is to introduce the comprehensive model that encompasses the relationships among the individual characteristics and the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction. The second one is to evaluate the influence of the contingency fit of teacher-student relations as moderators of cross-cultural training performance. The availability to interact cross-culturally is defined as a multidimensional construct reflecting individual ability to respond to the differences positively and interact efficiently with the others from a variety of backgrounds. It was described in a three-factor model and structured according to the criteria.

Key words: personality characteristics, cross-cultural interaction, availability to interact cross-culturally.
Introduction
The world is becoming interdependent and interconnected in magnitude. The cross-cultural interaction between people is increasing. According to Hall (1976), the future depends on men exceeding the limits of individual cultures, since technical solutions to environmental problems will never be applied rationally until the man exceed-the limitations imposed by his culture.

Theories and books on the cross-cultural interaction abound (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; House, Javidan, & Gupta, 2004). A theoretical investigation of the cross-cultural interaction process leads to understanding the fact that the participants of the cross-cultural interaction should have abilities to provide its effectiveness (Rich, 1974; Matsumoto, 2001). Therefore, interdependence of the participants’ personal traits and effective interaction with people from a different cultural background is the aim of this research.

Various conceptions of the personality across cultures have varying degrees of explanatory or descriptive utility. They all try to define someone whose identity extends significantly beyond the individual’s own culture. The terminology describing this kind of personality can be different but it assures that the individual’s essential identity is inclusive and comes to grips with a multiplicity of realities (Adler, 1998; Matsumoto, D. & Juang, L., 2008).

The theories representing cultural intelligence (CQ) stress on individual capability to function effectively across cultures. The cultural intelligence approach goes beyond the emphasis on knowledge because it also emphasizes the importance of developing an overall repertoire of understanding, motivation, and skills that enable one to move in and out of lots of different cultural contexts (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Templer, Tay & Chandrasekar, 2005; Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). Cultural, sociological, and individual dynamics occur for each personality in cross-cultural settings.

Another concept, defined as emotional intelligence (EQ), refers to one’s ability to interact with effective emotional sensibilities (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Goleman, 1998; Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012).

Some researchers provide support for a strong positive relationship between the key components of TL and the core factors of EQ, including self-awareness, social awareness, empathy, motivation and communication (Barling, Slater & Kelloway 2000; Gardner & Stough 2002; Leban & Zulauf 2004).

A great deal of research focuses on cultural knowledge to function effectively across cultures, considering that cultures differ in norms, habits, and behaviors (Ruben, 1989). These ideas focus specifically on an individual’s capability to understand and adapt effectively to a myriad of cultural contexts as an additional and essential skill set needed.

We believe that effective cross interaction is not just emotional or/and cultural intelligence but cross-cultural availability (CCA) to interact across cultures.

Emotional intelligence focuses on ability to interact effectively with people by paying attention to the emotions of self and others, cultural intelligence focuses on the ability to function effectively with people and situations involving different cultural backgrounds. The effectiveness of cross-cultural availability (CCA) considers confusing situations, interactive strategies and appropriate adjustments to how other people understand and relate in the context of different cultures. It involves a complex set of capabilities and processes that comes from the importance of higher education internationalization.
1. Three-factor model of cross-cultural availability (CCA)

CCA is based on a tree-factor framework that synthesizes a perspective on successful interaction and adaptation in a host country. It is composed of three qualitatively different capabilities, and each of the factors is interrelated. For cross-cultural effectiveness, the individual needs all CCA capabilities. These factors are cognitive (gnosiological), emotive-value (axiological), and behavioral (praxeological).

1.1.1. The cognitive (gnosiological) factor

The cognitive factor is the knowledge dimension. It refers to the levels of culture understanding and interacting with the others in cross-cultural contexts: understanding cultural systems (the ways societies organize themselves to meet the basic needs), contexts of culture, and the set of its norms and values (the ways cultures approach the things like time, authority, and relationships). It includes the abilities to make personal strategies on the basis of culture knowledge that is not explicit in a culture.

1.1.2. The emotive-value (axiological) factor

Axiological factor refers to individual attitude towards the value of dialogue interaction and understanding it as a process of value-interchange. It includes the abilities of positive interaction with the others (coordination of attitudes, compromise), low level of ethnocentrism, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.

1.1.3. The behavioral (praxeological) factor

The behavioral factor as the action dimension of CCA refers to the individual ability to act appropriately in range of cross-cultural contexts (conflict managing, sensitivity, modification of behavior). It involves flexible actions in every specific cultural situation (both verbal and nonverbal).

2. Each of the factors is emphasized in CCA criteria:

2.1. Efficient participation (cross-cultural competence)

Cross-cultural competence can be defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, knowledge and strategies that come together in a system to function effectively in cross-cultural situations (Davis, 2000). It can be considered as integration and transformation of knowledge about the individuals and the groups of people into some specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings.

Being competent in the cross-cultural interaction means learning new patterns of behavior and applying them effectively in the appropriate settings. It indicates having the capacity to function effectively in other cultural contexts (Lindsey & Terrell, 2003).

The scholars writing about cultural competence have identified five essential elements that contribute to a system's ability to become more cross-culturally competent. The system should value diversity, have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, institutionalize cultural knowledge, and develop adaptations to host culture reflecting and understanding the difference between and within the cultures. They should be reflected in attitudes, structures and strategies.

Cross-cultural competence as a set of individual traits can be applied according to the three factors mentioned:

*The cognitive (gnosiological) factor:* knowledge of the cross-cultural interaction.

*The emotive-value (axiological) factor:* understanding of interaction as the process of value interchange.

*The behavioral (praxeological) factor:* effective solving the tasks of the cross-cultural interaction.
2.2. Positive interaction (cross-cultural sensitivity)

It applies to the ability to acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and accept cultural differences. The individual who is sensitive to other cultures not only notices some cultural differences but also appreciates, tolerates, and accepts the cultural differences apparent in the cross-cultural interaction (Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk, 1992; Engle & Engle, 2004; Huber, 2003; Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Owen & Sweeney, 2002).

Higher education plays a key role in preparing people to function in the world of cultural diversity and it cannot be a temporary measure. It is considered as an attitude and even a state of mind with regard to the situation that is going to endure.

Individual characteristics determined according to the factors:

The cognitive (gnosiological) factor: knowledge of cultural diversity.
The emotive-value (axiological) factor: understanding of multiple realities, empathy, coordination of attitudes, compromise, positive self-reflection, understanding, accepting and interpreting of others, and tolerance of ambiguity.
The behavioral (praxeological) factor: socio-accentuated actions based on accounting of interaction’s cultural specificity, and managing conflict situations.

2.3. Compatibility with other cultural setting (cross-cultural transformation)

Individual-level factors (personality, self-monitoring, and self-efficiency) are important predictors of cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri, 2000). Cross-cultural adjustment is defined as the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity an individual has for the new environment. Black (1999) defines overall adaptation to living in the foreign culture as general adjustment and suggests that interaction adjustment is the most difficult to achieve, as differences in mental maps and rules reveal themselves in interactions with host culture. Adjusting to a new culture, means gaining a new repertoire (or set) of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The individual becomes a different person through transformation, or a person with more choices (Kim, 1992).

The transformation is seen as any shift in the values and norms or in the basic assumptions of the person leading to individual growth.

According to CCA factors, the personality abilities and skills needed for transformation in cross-cultural settings can be determined:

The cognitive (gnosiological) factor: knowledge about of cultural context, language conventions, and cultural selectivity.
The emotive-value (axiological) factor: understanding of the process of cultural adaptation/readaptation, drive to adapt cross-culturally, and low level of ethnocentrism.
The behavioral (praxeological) factor: planning of appropriate strategies of behavior in new cultural setting, managing transition shock, and modification of own behavior according to cross-cultural situations.

2.4. Teacher-student relations as moderators of cross-cultural training performance

It is important to underscore some points: 1) representation of the cross-cultural interaction model by educators; 2) interdependence of learning style and teaching modes in training performance; 3) egalitarian teacher-student relations in teaching performance.

2.4.1. Representation of the cross-cultural interaction model by educators in class.

Learning how to instruct the students in the art of cross-cultural interaction is a necessary objective for the effective educators. The teachers should take the lead and develop the strategies to provide that their students will learn the cross-cultural interaction skills. It is extremely important for the educators to elicit academic performance from the students based on these
skills. It is the educator's responsibility to ensure the students' support of cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity and communication competence.

Lindsey and Robins have devised a “cultural proficiency continuum” to depict how the educators respond to the needs of internationalization. It includes honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully across cultures (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005).

2.4.2. Interdependence of learning styles and teaching modes in training performance.

According to the contingency theory of human resource training, the fit between teaching (training) and learning is critical to achieving better training effectiveness (Kolb et al., 205; Madsen & Ulhoi, 2001; Trappey & Ho, 2002;). Luthans et al. (1998) contended that a great deal of training research has been conducted based on various theories of learning from learners’ perspectives. However, the application of these theories to the educator’s perspective is rare and needs further validation.

Learning style depends on how information was processed and perceived. The educator’s teaching method and the students’ learning style can moderate the relationship between the perceived need for student training and teaching effectiveness. This conceptual framework was developed based on a thorough review of the relevant literature and an integration of previous study results.

2.4.3. Participatory teacher-student relations in educational process.

Linkage arrangements among universities, increasing the teachers, researchers and students communication in cross-cultural context lead to globalization or internationalization and have impact on the curriculum development process. The staff and communities are committed to have an active role in this process. The participatory approach to curriculum, as an interactive one, gains wider acceptance in the world.

Educational framework has two completely different models: classical and participatory. The first one refers to rational approach and follows the “objectivistic” paradigm. Its aims and tendency are established by the educators having the knowledge and common educational goals to produce a desired product without building any consensus with the students.

The participatory model can be characterized as a “subjectivistic” interactive approach. The educators and universities that practice this approach believe that the knowledge should be created through interaction rather than being just reproduced. Thereby the knowledge is socially reconstructed on the basis of the teachers/students’ past experiences.

This process-orientated paradigm emphasizes the participation and interaction of all various stakeholders. The participatory-based educational process makes learners realize the important role they play in formulating their own curriculum to make it compatible and modified. It stimulates them to take an active part in education process turning it into an interactive form. The basis of the participatory model is to consider the learning-teaching process as the way of exchanging the ideas to form new knowledge.

The use of this approach in cross-cultural education (training) can create an atmosphere of cooperation in which the students can get an opportunity for effective learning by exposing their creative skills, expressing their opinions freely, and exchanging their ideas with each other as well as with their teachers.

Consequently, they avoid their learning-related fear and become more confident by getting a chance to show their creative power.

The three factors specify the effective teacher-student interaction as a moderator of cross-cultural training performance:
The cognitive (gnosiological) factor: knowledge of dialogue forms of interaction, and educators’ cultural proficiency.

The emotive-value (axiological) factor: drive to dialogue interaction, openness, and self-efficacy.

The behavioral (praxeological) factor: involvement, participatory, and collaboration.

Conclusion and Discussion

The suggested theoretical model is aimed to give an overview of the complexities of the personality characteristics necessary for the effective cross-cultural interaction.

The theoretical foundation of this study should be interesting for the scholars and educators alike who are interested in how to make the cross-cultural interaction successful in a global environment and, more importantly, how to gain it. As this study illustrates the influence of the participants’ personality characteristics on the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction, it should help lend greater weight to various ways of the students’ individual characteristic development in the process of their interaction across culture. This study also adds to the body of the literature shedding light on the importance of the individual personality characteristics and the teacher-student interaction as the cross-cultural training performance moderator. We believe the present study contributes to research and practice in this field.

However, further research is needed to develop an interactive model of cultural transformation to explain the shifts in cultures we are experiencing today across cultures. There is also a need for further research into different theories of cross-cultural exchange; in addition, the appropriateness, usefulness and relevance of the developed theories should be tested empirically. It is an almost unlimited human capacity for adaptation and self-organization that makes the area of cross-cultural encounters and cultural convergence so interesting. And considering the further development of cross-cultural connectedness, the field for further research seems endless.

About the Author:

Anzhelika Solodka is an associate professor in Institute of Pedagogical Problems of National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine. She got PhD in Education, worked as the Head of foreign languages department in Nikolayev state university in Ukraine. Now she is making postdoctoral research “Theoretic and methodological backgrounds of cross-cultural interaction in higher education”.

References.


Developing Students’ Writing Abilities by the Use of Self Assessment through Portfolios

Saliha Chelli
Department of Foreign Languages
English Division at Biskra University, Algeria

Abstract
Language learning and assessment are closely associated and often intertwined in practice; however, as teaching writing in Algeria has focused more on the finished product, students’ productions are evaluated by their test scores rather than their writing development. The purpose of this paper was to show how effective the use of self-assessment through portfolios was in developing students written productions in terms of accuracy, grammatical complexity and organization. To achieve this goal, a pre-questionnaire was administered to 100 third year participants at Omar Driss High School, and a pre-test given to an intact group of 30 students from the same population to analyse the situation before the treatment. After having been trained during a semester to self-assess their writing through portfolios, the findings revealed not only a significant improvement in students writing abilities, but also in their attitudes expressed in the post semi-structured interview in addition to the development of meta-cognitive skills necessary for effective learning. The results can provide pedagogical implications for integrating self-assessment through portfolios in teaching and assessing writing in that it fits the tenets of the competency-based approach recently implemented in the Algerian school

Keywords: portfolios, self-assessment, writing abilities
Introduction
Writing plays a vital role not only in conveying information but also in transforming information to create new knowledge in such a demanding life (Weigle, 2002). It is thus of central importance for students in academic, second and foreign language learning. Language learning and assessment are closely linked and often intertwined in practice; however, for decades, teaching writing in Algeria has focused more on the finished product or the product approach, which relies on grammatical accuracy neglecting students’ creativity and language skills and evaluating their writing by their test scores rather than their writing development. This means that assessment was not given importance although it is a crucial aspect of teaching, a formative process closely linked to the planning, design and teaching strategies (Hyland, 2004, p. 212). Formative assessment contributes enormously to the learning of individual students and to the development of an effective and responsive writing course. Thus, this kind of assessment can provide data that can be used to evaluate student progress, identify problems, suggest instructional solutions and evaluate course effectiveness.

In spite of the trend to find alternative forms to increase formative assessment, self and peer assessment are rarely used in the Algerian contexts. Therefore, self-assessment practices need to be investigated as the competency-based approach, used in teaching English in middle and high education, calls for developing lifelong learning skills. In addition, as the role of writing in EFL learning is increasing, the students’ ability to self assess their written productions is also becoming more and more important. Hence, this research was intended to investigate the effects of self-assessment through portfolios on high school students’ writing. The use of portfolios is meant to involve students in developing awareness of their development in a natural and non-stressful context. Their portfolios can include drafts, reflections, readings, diaries, observations of genre use, teacher or peer responses, as well as finished texts, thus, representing multiple measures of student’s writing ability (Hyland, 2004, p. 234).

Forms of writing assessment
Assessment forms were influenced by the change in teaching languages; as a result, there was a shift from traditional forms of assessment to recent ones such as the use of the portfolio, conferencing, peer and self-assessment. Traditionally, teaching has been thought of as transmission of knowledge. The role of the teacher is to tell, to be in control of the pace and content of lessons and to be the purveyor of truth. Traditional approaches to the teaching of writing focus on the final product; in other words, the production of neat, grammatically correct pieces of writing focuses on one-shot correct writing for the purpose of language practice (Cheung, 1999). Writing was viewed primarily as a tool for the practice and reinforcement of specific grammatical and lexical patterns, accuracy being all important whereas content and self-expression given little if any priority. The emphasis was on grammatical correctness and adherence to given models or guidelines. However, imitating models inhibits writers; there is little or no opportunity for the students to add their own thoughts and ideas (Raimes, 1983). The inevitable consequence is that little attention is paid to the ideas and meaning of student writing, what is communicated to the reader, the purpose and audience (ibid., 1983, p.75). This over emphasis on accuracy and form can lead to serious ‘writing blocks’ (Halsted, 1975, p. 82) and ‘sterile’ and unimaginative pieces of work (Mahon, 1992, p. 75).

Thus, the only form of assessment in the past relied on the teacher’s correction of the first/final draft. This product approach is often seen as a poor way to approach writing assignments because in applying it, students often use weak writing strategies. According to Flower (1985, p. 87), this approach commonly includes the following weak strategies:
**Trial-Error Strategy:** Students who write using this strategy are trying to use different combinations of words and phrases with the hope that one combination will result in an acceptable one. Using this trial and error method, students work slowly and produce products that contain minimal ideas and content.

**Perfect Draft Strategy:** Using this strategy, students write from start to finish or a single draft. Using this weak strategy, they strive to perfect each sentence before moving to the next one. This strategy is usually used with introductory sentences or paragraphs. As you can guess, this may lead to writer’s block during the beginning.

**Words looking for ideas:** Usually students may use certain words as they hope will trigger ideas as transition words (first, next…). However, using such words to trigger ideas is an unreliable procedure.

**Waiting for inspiration Strategy:** Some students may simply wait until the writing mood strikes them to begin writing. Although effective for some students, it may be a risky procedure. For many students, the deadline itself is the inspiration or the motivation to begin the writing process, however, it may also increase stress levels and actually lead to writer’s block (Boyle & Scanlon, 2009, p. 224).

The failure of traditional forms of assessment gave rise to recent ones such as self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolio assessment, protocol analysis, conferences, learning logs, journal entries and dialogue journals. Self-assessment proponents claim that this kind of assessment can help learners become skilled judges of their strengths and weaknesses and ultimately develop self-directed language learning ability (Chamot & O’Malley, 1994; Oscarson, 1997). This is what is required to monitor learning; therefore, training learners to self-assess their written productions through portfolios can have positive results in the Algerian context as it is suggested in this research work.

**Self-assessment**

Self-assessment refers to the involvement of learners in making judgements about their own learning, particularly about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning (Boud & Falchikov, 1989). It is not a new technique, but a way of increasing the role of students as active participants in their own learning (Boud, 1995) and is mostly used for formative assessment in order to foster reflection on one’s own learning process and results (Sluijmsmans et al., 1998) the fact which develops in them a kind of autonomy and helps them to rely on themselves. Strengths in using self and peer assessment (Sambell & MacDowel, 1998, p. 39) are that:

1. they can foster students’ feeling of ownership for their own learning,
2. motivate students and encourage their active involvement in learning,
3. make assessment a shared activity rather than alone (i.e. more objective),
4. promote a genuine interchange of ideas,
5. lead to more directed and effective learning,
6. encourage students to become more autonomous in learning;
7. signal to students that their experiences are valued and their judgments are respected,
8. develop transferable personal skills,
9. produce a community of learning in which students feel that they have influence and involvement,
10. reduce the teacher’s workload,
11. and make students think more deeply, see how others tackle problems, pick up points and learn to criticise constructively.

From these strengths, we conclude that this kind of assessment as a tool for learning can have a considerable impact on students’ learning and development into reflective and independent learners, and what is most important is that it encourages critical thinking. However, weaknesses of such an assessment lie in the occurrence of possible cheating, stress and time constraints. Thus, goal setting is essential because students can evaluate their progress more clearly when they have targets against which to measure their performance. Their motivation increases when they have relevant learning goals. They also need to be taught strategies related to self-assessment of their written products. The techniques which may be used include the use of rubrics and checklists to guide them in assessing themselves. According to Graham (1996), when students assess their writing with specific criteria, they engage in a focused, thoughtful revision process. Through such an assessment students become aware that a specific feature is present and effective in their writing. They decide whether they must change a sentence to make it clear or correct. Students’ efforts in doing so may result in a piece of writing which is superior to the first draft.

In their commitment to develop students’ ability in the assessment of writing, teachers have posed several related questions (ibid., p.18):

- What general and specific criteria should students use for assessment of their writing?
- What instruction is reflective in improving students’ understanding and application of specific criteria?
- How do we develop effective assessment forms and procedures for students writing in all subjects?
- How to connect student assessment activities to other aspects of instruction-conferences, marking, and use of a computer- in a programme?
- How does student self-assessment of writing connect to other assessment initiatives, peer editing, portfolios, and performance assessment among them?

This calls for the construction of rubrics or checklists in order to guide student self-assessment and make it more effective. This can be done through portfolios so that students can show their progress and thus take part in their own learning. This gives them the opportunity to assess their written production and to develop critical thinking which can allow them to be life long autonomous learners able to develop their writing competencies necessary in the knowledge society.

Portfolio assessment

Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991, p. 6) gave an extensive definition of portfolio as ‘a purposeful collection of students’ work not only exhibiting students’ effort, progress and achievement but also demonstrating students’ participation in selecting contents and selecting the criteria for assessment and evidence of students’ self-reflection”. Another definition suggested by (Jones & Shelton, 2006, p. 18) states that “portfolios are purposeful organized documents which represent connections between actions and beliefs, thinking and doing, and evidence through which the builder (student) constructs meaning”. In other words, the portfolio is “a purposeful collection of students’ work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress and achievement in given areas” (Genessee & Upshur, 1996, p. 99). For some teachers,
the portfolio is part of an alternative assessment, for others, it documents the students’ learning process; still others use it as a means of promoting learners’ reflection.

The Portfolio has several benefits. For example, it promotes students’ involvement in assessment, responsibility for assessment, interaction with teachers and students about learning, collaborative and sharing classrooms, students’ ownership of their own work, students’ ability to think critically and excitement about learning (ibid.). Thus, the teacher’s role is to guide them in developing portfolios because “a well-developed portfolio emphasizes what students can do to participate in an ongoing modified instruction in which assessment takes place all the time (Valentia, 1990, p. 76). By planning and organizing learning, monitoring, observing and reflecting on their own learning, students become motivated and more autonomous individuals.

Portfolios have become a desired tool because they provide authentic evidence of what students know, believe and are able to achieve. There is a strong link between portfolios and constructivism as a teaching/learning orientation and human development (Jones & Shelton, 2006, p.13) because the core of constructivism is also authentic learning. It gives us awareness of what we know and how we happen to know it, what it is to know something and how developmental stages in our capacity to learn change from one to another. By fostering the necessary conditions that encourage an active stance toward learning, constructivism represents a means of observing the learning itself. From an educational angle, looking at development is embedded in constructivism which asks for the students’ exact, conscious, purposeful engagement with the world surrounding them (Fosnot, 1996, p. 16). In order to develop a portfolio, students need to follow certain procedures before reaching the final phase. This process includes the following stages:

- **Collection**: save artefacts that represent the day-to-day results of learning.
- **Selection**: review and evaluate the artefact saved and identify those that demonstrate achievement of specific standards or goals.
- **Reflection**: reflect on the significance of the artefacts chosen for the portfolio in relationship to specific learning goals.
- **Projection**: compare the reflection to the standards, goals and performance indicators and set learning goals for the future. (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997, p.17)

One advantage of portfolio assessment is that it leaves students a chance to reflect upon their development growth and progress over time. It also offers teachers a chance to think about their students’ problems thoroughly (Nolet, 1992, p. 14). It is a good opportunity to give students feedback and advice after having identified their strengths and weaknesses. The overall purpose of portfolios is to enable students to demonstrate to others learning and progress. Their greatest value is that, in building them, students become active participants in the learning process and assessment. Thus, portfolios promote learner-centred learning and make the learning process more visible as they give a more significant picture of the students’ growth.

**Portfolio assessment in writing**

Portfolios represent one form of assessment which is practically used nowadays. It is defined by Applebee and Langer (1992, p. 30) as “a cumulative collection of work students have done”. In the context of writing and assessment, a portfolio is “a collection of texts the writer has produced over a defined period of time (Hamp-Lyons, 1991, p.262) and the collection may consist of “selected but not necessarily polished or finished pieces” (Privette, 1993, p. 60). According to Applebee and Langer (ibid.), some of the most popular forms are the following:

1. a traditional ‘writing folder’ in which students keep their work
2. a bound note-book with separate sections kept for work, progress and final drafts
3. a loose-leaf notebook in which students keep their drafts and revisions
4. a combination folder and brown envelope where students’ writing- exercises, tests, compositions, drafts, and so on- are kept
5. a notebook divided into two sections: one for drafts and the other for final copies (traditionally called original and rewritten compositions back in the late 1950s and 1960s).

So, the writing portfolio contains the student’s total writing output to represent his overall performance, or it may contain only a selection of works which the student has chosen to be evaluated. In other words, the portfolio shows the student’s work from the beginning of the term or semester to the end, giving the opportunity to the teacher and the student a chance to assess how much the latter’s writing has progressed. But, in order to be effective tools of assessment, they should be made clear right at the beginning; in order to meet the goals of literacy assessment, they must be developed as follows (Farr & Lowee, 1991, p. 5):

1. Teachers and students both add materials to the portfolio.
2. Students are viewed as the owners of the portfolios.
3. Conferencing between students and the teacher is an inherent activity in portfolio-assessment.
4. Conference notes and reflections of both the teacher and the student are kept in the portfolio.
5. Portfolios need to reflect a wide range of student work and not only that which the teacher or student decides is the best.
6. Samples of the student’s reading and writing activities are collected in the portfolios, including unfinished products.

According to Gallehr (1993, p. 29), no system of assessment is as perfect as portfolio assessment because students are required to write, but within this requirement, they can choose the topic, audience, responders in the class, revision strategies, and so on. They are also free to select from their work pieces they want to include in their portfolios. Many teachers find the portfolio the ideal assessment tool because it allows them to act as coaches providing feedback that students can use to revise their papers. Besides, it combines process and product together and ties assessment to instruction (Clark, 2008, p. 214). In addition, Weigle (2002, p. 139) finds that portfolios are of “great interest as they are seen to integrate classroom instruction with performance assessment, representing an overall model of organizing writing processes and products for ongoing reflection, dialogue and evaluation”. This shows that portfolios may be used as a holistic process for evaluating course work and promoting autonomy. They provide a sound basis on which to document student progress because they incorporate a range of assessment strategies over an extended period of time. However, the good use of the portfolio requires careful planning (ibid.) as it should be:

- **Integrative**: combines curriculum and assessment which means evaluation is developmental, continuous, comprehensive and fairer, representing programme goals and reflecting writing progress over time, genres and different conditions.
- **Valid**: closely related to what is taught and what students can do.
- **Meaningful**: students often see their portfolio as a good record of work and progress.
- **Motivating**: students have a range of challenging writing experiences in a range of genres and can see similarities and differences between these.
- **Process-oriented**: focuses learners on multi-drafting, feedback, collaboration, revision, etc.
- **Coherent**: assignments build on each other rather than being an unconnected set of writings.
- **Flexible**: teachers can adopt different selection criteria, evaluation methods and response practices over time, targeting their responses to different features of writing.
- **Reflexive**: students can evaluate their improvement and critically consider their weaknesses, so encouraging greater responsibility and independence in writing.
- **Formative**: grading is often delayed until the end of the course, allowing teachers to produce constructive feedback without the need for early, potentially discouraging, evaluation.

However, the use the portfolio in teaching writing is a heavy workload for teachers, especially in large classes as it requires not only a good and careful planning, but also a complete involvement in order to guide students and make them progress in writing. In spite of this, it remains one of the best assessment tools because it enables students to understand different writing processes and provides them with an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in different genres. Using self-assessment through portfolios may foster students writing abilities.

**Method**

The method used in this research study can be considered as both quantitative and qualitative in that it investigated the development of students’ writing abilities using the quasi-experimental design as an experimental group was exposed to a treatment. In addition to this, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample from the same population before having being taught self-assessment strategies through portfolios. Moreover, a post-experiment semi-structured interview was used to serve the purpose of validating the quantitative results.

**Participants**

Third year students at Driss Omar Higher School represented the population used in this research study. The choice of this population was motivated by the fact that they were students who had received an education based on the competency-based approach, we mean in both middle and secondary education. Our interest as a researcher was to apply techniques which comply with the tenets of that approach, which requires the development of autonomous individuals able to face challenges and adopt critical positions in order to adapt to new situations, believing that the accent on the development of competent individuals necessitates a new conceptualization of teaching. The sample who received the treatment consisted of an intact group of 30 third year students tested before and after the experiment. Besides, 100 students have been randomly selected among the four existing groups in that level to be used in the questionnaire and 6 students, from the sample which received the treatment, have been interviewed in order to support the quantitative results.

**Data gathering tools**

This research work relied on the collection of data through pre and post tests, a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Both tests were assignments in which the
participants had to write argumentative paragraphs as generally given in the baccalaureate exam. The questionnaire was administered before teaching the sample writing assessment through portfolios in order to analyse the situation before the treatment. Cohen et al. (2005, p. 24) argue that questionnaires are useful instruments for survey information, providing structured, often numerical data allowing us to quantify people’s observations, interpretations and attitudes. This questionnaire helped us determine how the participants were trained in assessing their written productions and their attitudes towards self-assessment and the use of portfolios.

The questionnaire used in this research was simple and straightforward to be understood by everybody. The most frequent questions used in this questionnaire were close-ended questions because they were easy to answer for such a level and their coding and tabulation is straightforward and leaves no room for the rater’s subjectivity. This kind of questions is suited for quantitative, statistical analyses. Just few questions were open-ended because they ‘take more time, thought, patience and concentration to answer than closed questions (Sudman and Bradburn, 1983, p. 154) though they are considered as an invaluable tool when the researcher wants to go deeply in a particular topic exploring all its aspects, however, they are generally left unanswered mainly by less proficient students.

The semi-structured interview, called in-depth interview, is the most common qualitative data gathering tool during which the person being interviewed is the expert and the interviewer the student. The interview used in this research involved six open ended questions based on the topic under investigation aiming at knowing students perceptions and attitudes on the effects of the treatment. The open ended nature of questions provided opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewees to discuss it in detail. The former used cues and prompts to encourage the latter to consider a certain question further when the required information was not obtained. We also tried to put the interviewees at ease so as to collect data which truly reflect their opinions and feelings of the topic under investigation.

Procedures

First, the participants were given written tasks on descriptive and argumentative paragraphs during five weeks and at the same time they were provided with enough instruction about how to select, collect reflect on the paragraphs they produced in portfolios, based on Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000). They were also trained to fill checklists aiming at developing in them how to assess their writing and what to focus on. Before correcting the students written productions, individual conferences were used to discuss mainly the organization and content of the paragraphs. After five other weeks of self assessing their work, they were provided with feedback on their portfolios. Finally, they were evaluated in terms of accuracy, grammatical complexity and organization. Accuracy refers to how grammatically correct is the piece of writing while grammatical complexity means that learners write more grammatically and lexically complex sentences as they become more proficient Wolfe et al. (1998, p.8). Organization refers to how the thoughts are logically arranged. It is related to coherence or the way the thoughts flow logically.

Research questions

The present study was an attempt at answering a set of questions related to the topic under investigation, developing students writing abilities by the use of self-assessment through portfolios. The objectives of the investigation were guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of assessment are used in writing in high education?
2. Do teachers encourage students to assess their own written productions?  
3. Do they encourage students to assess their written productions through portfolios?  
4. Does the use of self-assessment through portfolios develop students’ writing abilities in terms of accuracy, grammatical complexity and organization?

**Hypotheses**

This study has been designed to test the following hypotheses:  
1. There will be a significant development in the participants’ writing abilities in terms of accuracy, grammatical complexity and organization after the use of self-assessment through portfolios.  
2. There will be a positive change in the participants' attitudes and feelings after the treatment.

**Analysis and interpretation of the results**

This research study first dealt with a questionnaire to analyse the situation before implementing the experiment, which consisted of training the participants to self-assess their paragraphs through portfolios. Second, descriptive statistics were used to measure the influence of the treatment on the participants’ written productions in terms of accuracy, grammatical complexity and organization, followed by inferential statistics to test the hypothesis. For this purpose, a dependent or a paired t-test was suitable as only one group was tested before and after the experiment.

The purpose of conducting statistical tests is to provide information about the likelihood of an event occurring by chance (Kanji, 2006, p.265). The statistical test is used to determine the probability that the observed results could have occurred under the null hypothesis. If this probability is less than, or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis and the results are said to be significant. Finally, the participants’ attitudes towards the treatment, obtained from the post-semi structured interview, were intended to supplement and confirm the effectiveness of the treatment.

The results obtained from the questionnaire revealed on the one hand that the writing approach used in high education was the product approach. When the informants were asked whether their paragraphs were scored just after the first draft, all of them answered affirmatively. Most of the written assignments given to them were also used only as homework and evaluated as final products. This means that the final product was evaluated and given a mark. On the other hand, most of them answered negatively when asked whether they have used a folder in their writing classes. All of these data confirm that teaching and assessing writing remained as it was years ago; we mean that no change was undertaken to improve students’ writing abilities and that the emphasis remained on a single product, neglecting all the wide range of methods and techniques that can be used under the competency-based approach, including self-assessment and portfolios.

When asked about the kinds of errors they make in writing, most of the informants were aware mainly of the big number of errors they make in grammar and in the choice of appropriate words (lexis). They also added that they tend to use simple sentences because they are unable to use complex ones. But in spite of this, they often produce ambiguous sentences difficult to understand as they generally refer to literal translation. The data obtained from the questionnaire were used as situation analysis, confirming that teaching and assessing writing was still traditional and that a treatment was needed. These data were supplemented by those obtained from the pre-test as shown below:
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group Overall Pre-test Achievement in Accuracy, Grammatical Complexity and Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Grammatical complexity</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group Pre-test Overall Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 displays all the results of the pre-test, including the mean and standard deviation scores recorded in the variables, followed by table 2 which shows us the average scores of all the variables tested in this research before using self-assessment through portfolios as a kind of treatment. The results revealed that the participants’ productions lacked accuracy because of the big number of errors (1.64 per T-unit, used as a measure), grammatical complexity (1.23) as they tended to use simple sentences most of the time and also organization (1.58). Therefore, a special remedy was required to enable them to write more accurately and also to produce more complex sentences rather than relying only on simple ones or on coordination as it appeared in their production which contained either an overuse of coordination, or clauses joined with the conjunction ‘because’. They also need to be trained to organize their paragraphs.

After having been trained to write descriptive and argumentative paragraphs, how to organize their written productions in portfolios and how to assess them, on the belief that “we cannot get a trustworthy picture of a student’s writing proficiency unless we look at several samples produced on several days in several modes or genres (Elloward & Belanoff, 1991, p. 5), the participants were tested to measure the effectiveness of the treatment. The posttest results recorded are displayed in the tables below:

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group Overall Post-test Achievements Accuracy, Grammatical Complexity and Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Grammatical Complexity</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group Post-test Overall Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 03 displays the overall post-test results obtained in the experiment in all the areas measured in this research, (accuracy: 17.81, accuracy: 0.65, grammatical complexity: 1.93 and organization (4.95). The overall results of the experiment displayed in table 4 indicate that the post-test overall mean score of the whole test was 2.51. A difference of 1.03 in the means and 0.25 in the standard deviations (table 5) between the two tests shows the efficiency of the treatment used in this research. In order to test the hypothesis formulated in this research that self-assessment through portfolios will help learners develop their writing abilities, a dependent t-test was used to compare the two means (the pre-test and post test means).

Table 5: T-test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std deviation</th>
<th>T-test value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>0,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>difference</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed in the results of hypothesis testing, the value of t (2.18) is greater than the critical value (1.69) for t required for twenty-nine degrees of freedom. This proves that the treatment implemented to the experimental group was efficient in that students’ productions realized in the post-test were better if compared with those recorded before the experiment mainly in terms of accuracy and organization. However, they need more training to be able to write more complex sentences.
In addition, the participants’ attitudes and perceptions about the use of self-assessment through portfolios in developing their writing abilities, obtained from the semi-structured interview, were used in conjunction with the post-test results to supplement the findings and to provide an in-depth insight into the experiment results. This is based on Wallace (1998: 124) who argues that these techniques are classified as ‘introspective’ since they involve respondents reporting on themselves, their lives, their beliefs, their interactions and so on and can be used to elicit factual data. Triangulation from this perspective should be understood as a strategy that attempts to add more vigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the research study (Silverman, 2006, p. 291).

The participants reported that their paragraphs were more organized and that they did not write anything related to the topic as they used to do, but they had learnt that the selection of the most important ideas and their order is primordial in writing. They added that writing paragraphs in English was better clarified for them and that their cognitive abilities were better developed than before the experiment. All of them benefited from the use of portfolios in that they allowed them to witness the progress of their paragraphs. They also became able to identify their strengths and weakness through the use of rubrics and checklists as supported by Joslin (2002) who stated that when students use criteria in the form of rubrics that describe development towards success, they are able to identify strengths and areas needing improvement.

Most interviewees reported that they were anxious about their situation because in spite of the improvement they achieved in writing in terms of organization and accuracy, they still need to write more complex sentences. When asked about the reasons, most of them of them found that they always think in Arabic and then translate their thoughts. Therefore, they need to be more exposed to the language in context to be able to develop this competency. All of this shows how involved they were in their learning and how their desire to learn and to succeed increased. This positive attitude can encourage them to develop their written productions and ultimately lead them to autonomy which is required for lifelong learning, necessary in the knowledge society. Moreover, this study also indicated positive effects of the teacher’s feedback throughout the different sessions and in individual conferences which allowed the students to communicate with the teacher, discussing their strengths and weaknesses. This developed in them positive attitudes towards being given remarks about their writing progress and helped them accept criticism and be more self-confident.

Both self-assessment and portfolios facilitate experiential learning which stresses personal involvement, self-initiation and evaluation by the learner. It makes students reflect, discuss, analyse and evaluate their experience either individually or with the help of the teacher in face to face conferences. Besides, students experience writing through different phases during which they write more than one draft, receiving feedback from either their peers or the teacher seeking improvement. In this way, they are fully engaged in self-assessment which activates their ability to revise and correct their errors. All of this not only motivates them to think harder, analyse and reflect deeper, but also enable them to exercise a variety of learning strategies and higher order-thinking skills which provide direction for future learning (Chamot & O’Malley, 1994, p. 119).

**Conclusion and implications**

In the context of this study, it has been noticed that learners face problems both at lower and higher level skills; i.e., they are not equipped with the necessary skills of writing in grammar, spelling, organization, planning, monitoring and reviewing. They also lack motivation for the writing skill which is considered as the most difficult one. It is worth noting that people
may acquire writing through reading, imitating, experiencing and getting feedback. They need to learn the skill through hard work and the help of experienced teachers. This research was intended to contribute to the development of learners’ writing by making them self-assess their productions through portfolios as part of the change in teaching and assessing writing with the belief that this would also affect positively students’ attitudes towards writing.

This study investigated the effects of self-assessment through portfolios in developing students’ writing ability in terms of accuracy, organization and grammatical complexity. The results revealed that most of the participants developed their paragraphs in the first variables. However, the slight increase in grammatical complexity at this level indicated that they were in need to be trained in writing complex sentences. The use of self-assessment through portfolios developed in them an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. It also enhanced their critical thinking through the different stages of the writing process during which students gained much self-confidence and developed different writing strategies enabling them to be effective problem solvers in future life.

An assessment of this kind involves the assessment of both the process and product. Thus, on the one hand, it helped the students gain strategies enabling them to assess their paragraphs based on selected criteria through checklists and rubrics. On the other hand, this developed in them meta-cognitive skills which enabled them to reflect on their written productions. This also increased the students understanding of where their formal language structures breakdown and willingly they tried to produce paragraphs acceptable in terms of accuracy and organization. However, the results showed that grammatical complexity needs to be developed in future. The most positive thing in this study is that that the use of self-assessment seemed to encourage reflective attitude allied to the willingness to learn, and in this way learners can develop intellectual responsibility, necessary for the individual’s growth and leading to success in the knowledge society.

About the author:
Saliha Chelli is a lecturer at Biskra University. She holds a Ph.D in applied linguistics. Her main areas of interest are the four skills instruction, mainly writing, learning strategies and teacher development.

References
Appendix A: Students’ perceptions of writing questionnaire

1. Do you believe that writing is
   a. a gift
   b. a skill that can be developed through practice
Developing Students’ Writing Abilities

Chelli

1. What is your attitude towards self-assessment?

2. How did you find the use of portfolios in writing?

3. In which way did it help you?

4. Did self-assessment through portfolios enhance your writing abilities?

5. In which areas?

6. Were conferences with the teacher helpful for you? In which way?
Constructive Alignment Vs Experiential Learning for ESL Students

Ethel Reyes-Chua
Jubail University College – Female Branch
Jubail Industrial City
K.S.A.

Abstract
This study looks into the two important pedagogical strategies of teaching based on the author’s experiences: constructive alignment and experiential learning. The researcher proposes that English language teachers should not only master the theories, concepts and principles of teaching and learning, but rather they have to try, to use, re-apply, re-invent, re-develop, implement, and evaluate their pedagogical strategies that work to a certain subject or course or to a certain class of students. This paper concludes with some best practices in teaching and learning that will lead to quality improvement and professional growth. This paper uses the descriptive type of research through documentary analysis and reflective observation. The findings show that whatever type of pedagogical strategies will be used inside the classroom, should not matter at all, as long as the strategies fit the students’ learning styles and preferences. The question: “What have my students learnt after the course?” should be expounded by this piece of work.

Keywords: constructive alignment, experiential learning, effective teaching and learning
Introduction
There are many qualities of a good teacher but the qualities can never be compared to being a reflective teacher, who tries to identify his/her methods/strategies of teaching and evaluating them to improve quality teaching and learning. In this paper, the researcher will show how the two pedagogical strategies of teaching have changed her ways of teaching preparatory students and how these best practices improved her not only as a teacher but also as an individual. There is no such thing as an excellent teacher, but the researcher believes that there is a reflective teacher. Quality teaching has a measurable impact on student outcomes. According to Ramsden (2003), the demands to improve quality teaching are necessary both for accreditation purposes and professional development. He discerns that:

Teaching is one of the most delightful and exciting of all human activities when it is done well; and is one of the most humiliating and tedious when it is done poorly. (p. 5)

This paper specifically examines the effectiveness of two pedagogies of teaching at Jubail University College (JUC) – Female Branch. It seeks to find out specific answers to the following questions: (1) What is constructive alignment and experiential learning? (2) How are these strategies applied to teaching ESL students? (3) What are the implications of these two strategies for teaching and learning (4) How do these strategies improve our current practice as language teachers?

I. Review of Related Literature and the effects on the researcher
There are no empirical or comparative studies about this topic; however, there are some related literatures describing the two pedagogies of teaching. These are described below along with the experiences of the researcher and her development as a teacher.

It is a common belief that teaching and learning is a two-way process – that learning is defined as a change of an individual caused by experience or by development (Vega, 2006). There are various theories of teaching and learning, but these theories depend on how they are applied in the classroom. The “teacher-centered” and “student-centered” approaches are terms that were unclear to the researcher until she started evaluating her methods and strategies of teaching. When the researcher took her Post Graduate Certificate at Southampton Solent University, she was convinced that in a teacher-centered classroom environment, teachers serve as the center of learning and that they can control the students and their access of information. (PGC: Southampton Solent University, 2010).

However, the researcher strived to shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach in teaching at JUC. She applied various instructional materials, online references, games, portfolio writing, debate, buzz sessions, panel discussions and the like. At first, it was very difficult to employ both constructive alignment and experiential learning, but as time went on, students gradually embraced and enjoyed them. Pekcan (2008) claimed that when a teacher uses the student-centered strategy, students come with their own perceptual framework and learn in various ways. According to Pekcan, in terms of learning outcomes, there is a higher order of thinking because students solve problems, critically analyze and also organize information. In this sense, learning takes place through the active behavior of the student. It is what the student does inside the classroom that is more important than what the teacher does. Similarly, in constructive alignment theory, Biggs (2007) proved that students construct meaning from what they do in order to learn. The Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO), the Teaching and Learning
Activities (TLA), and the Assessments are carefully aligned to measure whether ILO’s are achieved or not.

On the other hand, based on Kolb’s study (1984 by Fry, 2004), an appreciation of experiential learning is necessary to underpin many of different types of teaching activity based on the notion that understanding is not a fixed or an unchangeable element of thought but is formed and reformed through experience.

Summerlee and Hughes (2010) highlighted the importance of reviewing pedagogies employed, the content of programs, and the instructor’s professional skills. They discovered that:

There is a need to ensure alignment with institutional policies and practices to facilitate this vision of high quality teaching and learning. (p.243)

The researcher postulates that it doesn’t matter what methods and strategies are used in the classroom, as long as they fit the students’ level and interest. This paper reports on the effort to determine whether these strategies will work with the students.

II. Methodology

This paper has utilized descriptive type research through documentary analysis and reflective observation. In documentary analysis, the researcher has provided descriptions and examples, critical analysis of the workshop conducted with 40 teachers and a group of students at JUC and the various literatures on similar studies. Reflective observations were used to find out what worked well and what were the things to be improved in terms of teaching and learning. There were 100 student respondents during the conduct of the formative survey. These were carefully and qualitatively analyzed as shown in this piece of work.

Descriptive research is commonly described as an approach to apply the result of the study in a practical sense. It can be a good tool to disseminate information and to help improve the teaching-learning process.

III. Discussion

1. Discussion of Terminology

A. What is Constructive Alignment

Constructive Alignment is one of the most influential ideas in higher education (Biggs, 2007). Students construct meaning from what they do in order to learn. In this strategy, the teacher aligns the planned learning activities with the learning outcomes as shown:

*Fig.1 Aligning learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and the assessment. Adapted from Biggs (2007)*
In application of constructive alignment, teachers should begin with what the student knows (McKeachie, 1996). The student compares the old or known information or process from the new and unknown information and this allows the student to grasp new information more quickly.

B. What is Experiential Learning

In this pedagogy of teaching, Kolb (1984) states that learning involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations. The development of new concepts is provided by new experiences. Experiential Learning has the following components:

1. Concrete Experience - a new experience of a situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of an existing experience.
2. Reflective Observation - pertains to a new experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualization - reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept.
4. Active Experimentation - the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results.


2. How are these strategies applied to teaching ESL students?

A. Analysis on the Workshop Conducted at JUC

In determining whether the pedagogy of teaching is used as a constructive alignment or experiential learning, the researcher has analyzed the workshop that she conducted with 50 teachers and a group of students at JUC as follows:

1. Group 1: Basic etiquette of using the mobile phone

| Objective: To learn the basic etiquette of using the mobile phone |
| Activity: Telephone Conversation |
| Presentation: vocabularies and phrases, use correct language usage, how to respond and close telephone conversation |
| Assessment: To determine the use of vocabularies and phrases such as: Hello, good morning, this is Julie speaking, this is Ms. Pitt’s residence, how are you? Thank you, have a nice day, what is your message, Sir/Ma’am? |
The teacher used the constructive alignment of teaching. The objective of the lesson was aligned with its task and the type of assessment given. Tyler (1940’s) developed a four-part model for delivering and evaluating instruction that became known as the *Tyler Rationale as follows*:

a. What educational purposes should the training seek to develop? (Defining appropriate learning objectives)
b. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? (Introducing useful learning experiences)
c. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? (Organizing experiences to maximize their effect).
d. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated? (Evaluating the process and revising the areas that were not effective).

In this lesson on Listening 001, the teacher succeeded in bringing out what students already know (Mc Keachi) about telephone conversation. The students applied their basic etiquette of telephone conversation. It is what the participant does that he/she learns, not what the teacher does (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Prosser & Trigwell, 1998). Since the topic and the task were interesting, the students learned the topic so easily.

2. **Group 2: Advantages of using the computer**

Objectives: To help students (1) identify the main advantages of using computers. (2) demonstrate the use of computers save time. (3) identify the activities in which computers can be used to save time.

Materials: Computer lab/classroom with multimedia

Activity: Group Activity- First Group: will use the textbook Second Group: will use the computer to look for specific information

Assessment: Research output on the advantages of using computers

In this lesson, the teacher used the textbook to identify the advantages of using computers. The students discovered the advantages and discussed them in their own group. During the discussion, students shared their own experiences while looking at the advantages. The second group worked on the computer and easily looked into the advantages. Both of them realized that the use of computer saves time rather than using the textbook. Since the skill used here is Reading, students were given time to read and answer the teacher’s questions. The pedagogy of teaching used was Experiential Learning because students were able to share their own experiences using the computers. They also applied what they learned from each other. It goes on and on as represented by the cycle.

3. **Group 3: Advantages and disadvantages of cell phones**

Objective: Find out new vocabularies and transitional words effectively in a paragraph

Tasks: Based on the passage given, write a paragraph about advantages and disadvantages of cell phones.

Assessment: Transitional words must be applied in writing one paragraph

In this lesson, the teacher taught writing. The constructive alignment was used because students were tasked to elicit responses on what they know about cell phones. Further, students were given the chance to think about transitional words that they have in mind and elicit new vocabulary words. These transitional words were used in writing their own paragraphs. As a supplement to this task, students performed a role play by calling a similar group of students to
the front of the class where a “daughter and mother” talked about the advantages and disadvantages of cell phones.

4. **Group 4: Transitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives: (1) Use transitions correctly in written and spoken language. (2) Express ideas clearly about a given topic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks: buzz session, give sentences using transitions based on the passage, analyze the sentences, summarize the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment: Oral practice (games) and written practice on identifying transitional words based on the given sentences/paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this lesson, the teacher taught grammar in class. She provided buzz session activity as its motivational strategy to facilitate learning. The lesson was based on the similar topic above. Students should be able to find out all transition words correctly in this lesson. Both the teacher and the students achieved their objectives and this is another example of constructive alignment.

As a teacher, what do you want to achieve in teaching? Biggs and Tang (2008) shared that:

The focus in teaching is not what we teach but what we would like our students to learn and how we can help them achieve that. The first step therefore is to define the ILO for our students. Teaching and assessment are then designed and implemented to align with these outcomes. (p. 7)

**The Intended Learning Outcomes**

According to Biggs and Tang (2007), subject or unit level of attaining ILO is answering the question: what are the intended learning outcomes for students taking particular subject/unit at a particular level within the program? ILOs are statements of what students are expected to be able to do as a result of engaging in the learning process (studying a program). The following generic high level verbs are used in conceptualizing and expressing ILOs:

| Table 1: List of ILOs from Biggs and Tang (2008) |
|---|---|---|
| Apply | Conceptualize | Reflect |
| Create original insights | Solve unseen problems | Generate new alternatives |
| Critically review | Hypothesize | Theorize |

Based on the above scenarios, there were three evidences of constructive alignment while only one in experiential learning. Both were used to critically evaluate the learning of students. Using these strategies is not only shifting from the teacher-centered to student-centered method, but it is important to know the students’ learning preferences and their study habits to make learning possible.

3. **Towards quality improvement**

Quality improvement in teaching can be attained through concerted efforts among individuals, management level to rank and file. There are so many ways of improving our teaching methods, strategies, instructional materials, etc. when everyone is ready to embrace a constructively aligned teaching and learning. Biggs and Tang (2007) emphasized the value of formative evaluation, particularly the planning of institutional evaluation. In their book “Teaching for Quality Learning at University”, they partly mentioned about action research or other designs of evaluation that need to be taken into account. They suggested some sort of teaching quality
committee that could have a reflective report on the experience in implementing such constructive alignment at the end of the year of its implementation. Issues may include:

1. The impact on teaching: data from teachers’ portfolios could be compiled and course evaluation by students
2. Impact on student learning: Much similar data as gathered by teachers for individual course evaluations.
3. Comparisons across different aligned courses: What ones are working well? What ones are experiencing difficulties? What difficulties and how were they dealt with?
4. What operational structures have the department with respect to implementing and monitoring the innovation?
5. Concerns regarding continuing implementation
6. An action plan for future improvement

Quality and accreditation are two issues related to all university levels, but these depend on how the whole institution shall respond to this change. As Biggs and Tang (2007) claimed that:

QA is concerned with maintaining the quality of the work institutions... Quality enhancement is concerned with reviewing not only how well the whole institution works in achieving its mission, but also how it may keep improving in doing so. (p. 263)

What are the reasons why students are unmotivated to learn?

One typical example of quality improvement in teaching is to find out the reasons why students are not motivated to learn. Perhaps, they have reasons that a teacher should understand and one way to solving this problem is to align her teaching with the learners’ styles and preferences. The researcher tried to conduct a short dialogue with 50 students in preparatory year. Below are the top reasons why students feel unmotivated to study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank 1</td>
<td>I am used to sleeping late. I love chatting with my friends and relatives abroad. When I am in class I feel tired and want to sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 2</td>
<td>I finished all my paragraphs and my mind is empty when I’m in the class. I want to go home early.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 3</td>
<td>Miss, the room is so cold and I couldn’t help but to take a nap for a few minutes...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 4</td>
<td>I feel bored sometimes because of too many topics in the book. I think understanding all of these topics are not so easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank 5</td>
<td>Eating inside the classroom is prohibited, so I would rather ask permission and go to the cafeteria and buy food to eat. I don’t usually check the time when I come back to class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For quality improvement purposes, the researcher conducted a short dialogue through a written interview with only one question: What makes you unmotivated to learn in the classroom? While doing this short dialogue, she felt that there was “a close relationship” by not just listening to them, but also knowing what and how they feel. After knowing this, the researcher decided to
fully implement the student-centered method coupled with various pedagogical strategies. She realized that these pedagogies are mostly applicable to students who belong to low, average, or superior levels. So, as a result, students’ level of engagement becomes high. Therefore, it made them motivated to learn.

3. What are the implications of these two strategies for teaching and learning?
Both constructivism and experiential learning play important roles in teaching and learning, but the former is effective in constructing new knowledge based on prior learning and experience. The Kolb’s learning cycle focuses more on the experience of an individual that helps improve our reflection process. If a teacher uses the student-centred method, this may lead to students’ autonomy and more opportunities for interaction in the classroom.

Unknowingly, the researcher has been using the constructive alignment and experiential learning in the classroom. She found out that both are effective means of enhancing students’ learning; however, experiential learning cannot always be applied in all language skills. It always depends on the students’ own experience and how they translate these into the real world.

Although as an educator, the researcher never stops from knowing how her teaching and learning progresses by conducting research and continuous reflection on what she does as a teacher and how her students learn best.

In contrast, Kolb’s learning stages and cycles can be used to critically evaluate the learning provision typically available to students and to develop more appropriate learning opportunities (Kolb, 1984). Whatever strategy a teacher should use as long as it suits the learners to engage learning, this does not matter at all. In Experiential learning cycle, students can learn more effectively by identifying their preferred learning styles. There is a need to develop and redevelop our teaching and learning materials, the use of learning materials and handouts, compendiums, activities and the like. Ultimately, the purpose of improving our teaching is studying our students’ learning (Ramsden, 2003).

4. How do these strategies improve our current practice as language teachers?
After a thorough examination and investigation of the two pedagogies of teaching, the researcher gradually noticed that the following aspects are needed to be improved not only in her level as a language teacher, but basically helping to enhance the teaching and learning process in general:

a. Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The researcher discussed her experiences by applying some of the theories of teaching and learning, but she delved only into the most applicable ones that have totally changed her perspective of teaching and learning. One of which is how she became a reflective thinker in the use of Kolb’s Learning cycle and the second is the constructivist theory that proves how her students learn through constructing new things based on experiences and relate these experiences into reality. As a language teacher, shifting to student-centered is not easy, but it encourages her to do it because she has no doubt that growth in teaching can be done through research and continuous reflection. As Skillbeck (2001) opines:

Higher education should mean a higher quality, a standard against which experience of many kinds, learning at all levels and of all types, study and reflective inquiry are to be appraised. (p.1)

b. Curriculum Design and Development: An anonymous writer states that “teaching is something that takes place when learning does. No matter what the teacher is doing in
her class, if her students are not learning something significant, she is not teaching. When
the student fails, the teacher fails more.”
In constructivism, learners construct new ideas or concepts based on prior learning.
Faculty designs instruction around a learning objective, gather resources, and provide
students with an opportunity to explore, build and demonstrate their learning. It shifts the
learning environment from one that is teacher-centered to one that is very student-
centered. The 5E’s Model is most often associated with Constructivist Learning Design.
These are: engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate (Http://www.miamisci.org/ph
Retrieved April 5, 2013). The 5E’s of constructivism is based on constructive alignment
teaching and learning wherein, learning is what students do, experience, apply, and to make personal
reflections about what he is trying to do. What he learns is the product of what the teacher
has taught and his own learning in his environment thus, learning can be a product of change
not only acquiring knowledge.


c. **Evaluation and Feedback**: Where teaching and learning act hand-in-hand, where one
depends on and affects the others, how well the students have learned is the aim of
evaluation and feedback. Angelo and Cross (1998) state that the current view in higher
education is that we should focus on student learning rather than teaching in order to
improve students’ college experiences. There is a need for “change and constructive
alignment:

**Figure 3: Transformative reflection: constructively aligned teaching and learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>STUDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 4: How People Learn by Bransford Retrieved March 25, 2013 from:** (http://www.assessment.ucon.edu)

The researcher perceives that it is not the number of topics from the chapters that make
students learn, but it is how students learn based on the experiences provided by the
teacher through various tasks and assessments that they can easily execute or practice in their own practical way.

d. Effective Learning Environment: The school environment plays a significant role in the deep engagement of learning. The school should support the needs of the classroom to produce a good learning environment. The students’ experiences using various methods and strategies and the use of online resources and other references will possibly make an effective learning environment.

Reflections on-practice

“I strongly count on one of my goals as a teacher is to develop my students the ability to learn how to learn. It is my duty and responsibility to encourage them to attain the highest level of self-esteem and self-confidence to perform the tasks required of them. Thus, it is essential to re-study teaching/learning theories in order to adapt with necessary learning strategies for the students. After this study, I was totally convinced about the constructive alignment theory. Students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, active and reflective use of knowledge. Reflection is brought by the idea of Kolb’s Learning Cycle. There are many principles and theories underlying teaching and learning but these cannot all be applied in one class without actually trying this out (active experimentation). Aligning to curriculum and instruction and assessments can possibly be done. Indeed, Squires (2009) corresponds standards can be aligned to the curriculum provided there is a match between the standards, instruction and assessment even if the standards are considered general and the curriculum is more specific. Taking a look at the standards of teaching in higher education, these will provide and improve instruction and the curriculum which calls for an alignment in higher educational institutions.”

IV. Conclusion

The changes in the researcher’s professional practice and personal development are due to reflections from her past experiences and relating them to present. Teaching in Saudi Arabia can be challenging and as a language teacher, she has proven some aspects to be improved such as: understanding teaching and learning in higher education, curriculum design and development, evaluation and feedback, and effective learning environment. It is not that easy to embrace change but the optimism of the researcher can be part of attaining her goals. It is also important to appreciate continuously the value of reflection in-action and reflection on-action because these will eventually promote new learning and change into personal and professional aspects of her life as a teacher (constructive alignment). In conclusion, re-studying, re-developing, and re-trying out innovative changes in teaching will lead to quality improvement (experiential learning).

The researcher concludes and recommends that language teachers should not stop from re-inventing their methods and pedagogical strategies. It is also advisable if they can find time reviewing all their Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO) in a certain course and align them with their Teaching-Learning Activities (TLA) and assessments. An action research can also be part of alignment by knowing students’ problems and finding solutions to these for improvement and professional growth. No matter what type of strategies are we going to use in the classroom as long as it is appropriate to the learner’s style and preferences. What is important is to pause and think about this question: have my students learned after teaching them the course?
About the Author:
Ms. Ethel Reyes-Chua has been connected with Jubail University College – Female Branch since 2010 as an English Instructor. Prior to this, she has ample experiences in teaching English as a second language in her own country, Philippines. She graduated with the degree in Bachelor of Arts in English and Masters of Arts in Teaching major in Literature. She also finished her Post Graduate Certificate (PGC) at Southampton Solent University in June 2010 with flying colors. She is actively participating at presenting research papers to various local or international seminars and conferences to improve her methods and pedagogical strategies of teaching.

Acknowledgments:
The researcher would like to thank the JUC family for the moral support and encouragements provided to her during the conduct of this research study. Special thanks are due to: Dr. Maher Mohammed Ghanem, Dr. Malak Naji, Dr. Aziza Saleh Hafiz, Ms. Sousan Masoud, Dr. Jeanneath D. Velarde, Dr. Carlo Casinto, Dr. Emad H. Amer, Ms. Denise Wright, Ms. Sumiyyah Hye, Mr. Brayvie Suboc and Mr. Jerome N. Chua and the English Language Department of both Male and Female branches for their cooperation and feedback to the researcher during the conduct of study.

References
Challenges of Conducting Research in a Digital Age

Jinjin Lu
Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia

Wei Fan
Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia.

Ruiting Wu
Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia

Abstract

Human’s lives have been changed in forms of different ways since a substantial development of the high technological appliances in the 21st century. This also includes the ways researchers conduct research by adopting the high technology tools in this era. Most people just witness the development and the substantial benefits brought to the research; however, some drawbacks could be neglected. Particularly, the plagiarism occurs when the widespread of adopting the Internet and lacking the anti-plagiarism software. This paper focuses on exploring the challenges and new directions for researchers when they conduct research in a digital age.

Keywords: digital age, plagiarism, advanced technology, multimedia, digital.
Introduction
Emails, the World Wide Web, and various digital technologies have emerged for the past two decades. Scholars are inclined to search for information and to conduct research online while reviewing literature and contacting publishers and editors. Several recent publications highlight the various methodologies the scholars use, including social, political and cultural exploration, which all employ researches regarding the Internet technology (Gauntlett, 2000; Howard & Jones, 2004; Jones, 1999; Mann & Steward, 2000). Besides these publications, some textual analysis (e.g. Crowston & Williams, 2000; Mitra, 1999; Mitra & Cohen, 1999), surveys (e.g. M. Parks & K. Floyd, 1996; Schmidt, 1997; Smith, 1997) and experiments (e.g. Iyengar, 2002) have been adapted to use online system so as to investigate phenomena more precisely. Not surprisingly, the reasons why users would like to search for information online or research online are time saving, cheaper cost and effective response. Compared with traditional research methods, using these advanced high-technology devices certainly bring much convenience to scholars. However, some drawbacks exist together with benefits in this virtual environment. For example, a large amount of information on web makes users feel in the sea. In addition, searching for information effectively requires basic knowledge of information technology, such as knowing various functions of digital products and softwares. Furthermore, prosperity of electronic journals and publications easily mislead authors without severe censorship. Lastly, plagiarism exits in a growing number of submitting papers online. In this paper, it focuses on reviewing previous literature of four items mentioned above to show an explicit picture of challenges for users before they explore research in a digital age.

The comparison of information retrieval in the past and in digital age
In the past, those who wanted to review literature and collect information before doing research, they have to go to libraries. By means of borrowing books and periodicals, keeping notes on the notebooks and reading newspaper as well as personal communication, they could finish their review process. However, sorting out these pieces of information is like looking for a needle in a haystack, which wastes time and gains little achievement. Luckily, with the development of high technology, the pieces of information have seen a tremendous increase via Internet and computer-mediated communication (Fox et al., 2001; Horrigan, 2001). Compared with traditional methods, electronic media brings people substantial benefits, such as less time-consuming, unlimited borrowing authority, larger sampling population (Wright, 2005). First, when conducting research via the Internet and through other multimedia, it is definitely more efficient than those in the past. More precisely, some searching engines, like Google, Baidu and Yahoo, give users feedbacks in one or two seconds. Moreover, with an increasing number of e-libraries in universities, searching for information becomes easily accessible by sorting out different codes of library categories to track information sources. This brings much convenience to both students and staff as well. Thirdly, downloading books and journals from the Internet provides much more flexibility and freedom for users. Those who read e-books and e-journals would not worry about paying fines if the journals are overdue. And most databases in e-libraries are regularly updated by IT support staff, which provides latest deliveries. The last and most important point is doing online research, by which the ways of sampling take priorities. In the past, researchers needed to have a face- to-face meeting to talk with participants, but due to embarrassment and insecurity, low reliability resulted in the failure of research.
However, the wide spread of communicative activity, which takes place through new media, increases in conducting primary research on virtue environment (Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998; Matheson, 1991; Nonnecke, Preece, Andrews, & Voutour, 2004, August; J. Preece, 1999; J. J. Preece & Ghozati, 2001; Walther, 1996, 2002; Wood & Smith, 2001; Wright, 2000a, 2000b). As a decreasing cost of computer software and hardware and an increasing popularity of the Internet, more groups and organizations are using the Internet for communication and searching for information (Fox et al., 2001; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002). These organizations not only offer information to consumers but also provide opportunities to researchers to access those people who browse web pages on these websites. Due to the nourishment of virtual communities online, a growing number of researchers survey in diverse areas, such as interpersonal (M. R. Parks & K. Floyd, 1996; Tidwell & Walther, 2002), group (Hobman, Bordia, Irmer, & Chang, 2002; Hollingshead, McGrath, & O’Connor, 1993), organizational (Ahuja & Carley, 1998) and mass communication (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). Hence, researchers have access to larger population for sampling easily and samplers can use emails, online questionnaires and chatting tools text to response, which increase the freedom, flexibility and privacy for them. Consequently, satisfied reliability and validity can push research forward. Although electronic media is beneficial in retrieving information, it also has some drawbacks. Compared with printing media, electronic media cannot be permanent for storage (Schneider & Foot, 2004). Specifically, the printed books and hard copies of periodicals could be reused and kept in libraries for a long time. According to the statistics from National Library report, each library of Australian universities averagely has more than two million bibliographies, including printing books, journals and periodicals. Take library of Sydney University for example, it has more than 5.1 million bibliographies, the number which is far more than 54,000 electronic journals and 11,331 digital book chapters. Moreover, a face-to-face survey in research is more authentic than virtual environment because it can eliminate misunderstandings immediately, cement relationships, and encourage continued interaction (Community Banker, 2003). Last, cost of borrowing books from the library, reading newspapers and talking with people is lower, particularly, to those who are university students.

Overall, with the growing popularity on web-based research, electronic resource is more attractive for researchers, not only for its ease access but also for saving time as well. Sometimes printing media has priority but the trend of information era cannot be irreversible.

Knowledge acquired on technological products before conducting research

Though the web provides much ease for researchers to collect, share and distribute information, unskilful operation and lack of technology knowledge hinder them to explore further. Hence, as an advanced new technology, it requires a good understanding of the nature and characteristics of different digital products for researchers; otherwise, they will lose valuable time in searching for useful information. According to Hui and Chau (2002), the digital products can be categorized into three items: tools and utilities, content-based digital products and online services. Each category of these products serves their different purposes. In general, most products in the category of “Tools and Utilities” are software programs, such as virus scanning softwares or Adobe Acrobat for creating and viewing PDF files, which perform its specific functions or achieving other purposes. Real player is the case in point. It allows users to listen to the online music and broadcast. The products in this category could be downloaded via Internet. There are some typical examples like e-journal, e-newspaper, Pro-Quest Direct, databases in the “content-based digital products”, which are used
to assist in the information retrieval or data manipulation process. The function of these products is suitable and commonly used for researchers to acquire information. The product in the “online services” is to provide access to useful resources, such as server connection and online utilities. The characteristic is consumers can only locate target information instead of “purchasing” the product (Hui & Chau, 2002).

Apart from the classification of various products for research, researchers also need to know how to use social software for research in a virtual research environment (VRE). Nowadays, the technology of Web 2.0 is widely used by both researchers and scientists as well, to enable them to work more efficiently and productively (Fraser, 2005). Its use is prevalent with academics, according to Fraser (2005):

*It is very important in biological sciences, or bioinformatics. In the UK, JISC is running a programme which ends in 2011, and which is funding 24 VREs. In Europe, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructure covers a number of key initiatives, including the Digital Research Infrastructure for Arts and Humanities.*

When researchers conduct research in VRE, Web 2.0 applications include blogs, wikis, Twitter, media-sharing sites such as YouTube, 3D environments and social networking sites such as Facebook. These applications are suitable for different research methods. Examples are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research need</th>
<th>Possible Web 2.0 application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying a research project</td>
<td>Federated search engines/commercial bibliographic indexes, RSS feeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying funding streams</td>
<td>E-mail alerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying project partners</td>
<td>Facebook, blog community and social sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating on a research proposal</td>
<td>Google documents and Skype, QQ, MSN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating over research information</td>
<td>Google documents, wikis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing reports and other outputs</td>
<td>Searching engines, such as Google, Baidu, Yahoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating results</td>
<td>Web-based seminar, e-conference, e-publications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Censorship for electronic media**

With the popularity of online submitting and publishing format system, researchers, editors and readers prefer reading others’ papers in the virtual environment. It has indeed revolutionised access to information and knowledge. Akdeniz (2002) explains its importance as follows:

*In some societies, computer literacy is, arguably, already as important as the ability to read, write and count; in others, as yet too impoverished to make a substantial investment in the medium, it promises to be a vital tool in economic, social and educational development (p.1196).*

Many researchers have emphasized the importance and significance on electronic media in recent reviews (Bondarenko & Janssen, 2005; Clark & Kingsley, 2008; Eynon, Schroeder, & Fry, 2009; Peng & Nadarajan, 1995). While it is true that information provided via electronic media is “democratising information” (Sharp, 2001), ethical challenges are still needed to be noticed. Censorship can be taken by the government; academic institutions, like schools and university libraries; and some other institutions such as telecommunication companies; social media sites; military; wikileaks; individual websites; corporations abroad; trade secrets and
copyright. Although technology and censorship are often regarded as opposing forces in the information age, this tension is exemplified by the cases in Singapore, United America, China and Australia, which provide valuable experience on how to harness information via electronic media while having censorship controls in place (Holdom, 2005). In Singapore, the censorship has been differentiated in home and business; children and adults; public and private consumption and it is heavier for public and home use than the business use. The example in U.S.A has been much more successful. Proponents of protecting intellectual property online in U.S.A to produce a system to remove infringing materials so that it could inhibit legally protected materials (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2010). Due to the effort to expand surveillance of digital communications, the American government has carried out some federal laws to censor the Internet. For example, Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) is the case in point. Meanwhile, the government requires the libraries set up its internet connection for internal connection, like vpns. At present, filtering and blocking software in library is used widely to protect intellectual property. In China, various methods are used for censoring, such as IP blocking, DNS filtering and redirection, URL filtering, Packet filtering, Connection reset and Network enumeration (Wikipedia, 2012b). The censorship in Australia is divided between the states and the federal government and the censorship of the Internet sites hosted in Australia is considered to be the strictest in the western world (Wikipedia, 2012a). Particularly, on 1 January 2000, the federal legislation came into effect to enforce the regulation of the Internet sites. If the sites are found illegal by Australian Federal Police, the list of banned sites is then added to filtering software, which was offered by Internet Service Providers and the Australian Government (Wikipedia, 2012a). According to ABC News on 31 December 2007, the Telecommunications Minister of the newly elected Labor government, Stephen Conroy, announced that Australia would introduce mandatory internet filtering. It would provide greater protection to people from illegal and violent websites (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007).

**Research and plagiarism**

There is an interesting explanation of the relationship between research and plagiarism from website *Writing-World.com*, in which the author quotes from a teacher’s idea, “stealing from one source is plagiarism, but stealing from many sources is research” (Allen, 2001). At what point do people use the previous published material cross the line from “research” to “copying”? The action of plagiarizing is defined as “To take ideas, writings, etc., from another and pass them off as one’s own” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2010). According to the UQ Researchers (2011),

> Research is defined as the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes.

There is no simple answer to these two definitions otherwise they would have been codified into law long ago. In a research, the authors are permitted to quote rationally previous published bibliographies and form their ideas so as to find out new outcomes. Hence, using quotes and published sources in one’s writing is ethical and acceptable ways by which conducting research. Consequently, plagiarism is made much easier by the recent availability of huge amounts of paper. Fortunately, there are some simple criteria to help one establish and to extinguish one from another (Allen, 2001).
**When it is a Research…**

♦ The author should identify the audience he/she is writing for. For example, if it is written for a research or professional journal, quoting the work from others is not only acceptable but expected. However, if the writing is for a specific consumer publication (i.e., a magazine), the quotes from previously published sources would not be concerned since saleable articles are suitable in the consumer marketplace.

♦ Background information is expected when the author needs publish his or her work in an academic journal. This means that reviewing published sources of information that are accurate and acceptable. Suppose, if an article is on animal-assisted therapy for a magazine, the authors probably want to make definition of animal-assisted therapy for the audience. Therefore, current references would be drawn upon logically by which on one considers it as a plagiarism.

♦ The way how to reference the materials is important. In academic researches the author should quote directly or paraphrased. In either case, they are often supported with footnotes and complete references. Nowadays, Harvard Referencing System is adopted popularly by most academic institutions; APA writing style was first used by journals and publications of American Psychological Association and now it becomes a standard writing style among some disciplines. Another popular academic writing style is MLA, which is widely used in the humanities, especially in writing on language and literature. According to Achtert and Gibaldi (1985), “MLA style has been widely adopted by schools, academic departments, and instructors for over half a century. The association's guidelines are also used by over 1,100 scholarly and literary journals, newsletters, and magazines and by many university and commercial presses.”

♦ To what extent does the paper originate with the author is the key to decide if the material the authors uses for reference constitutes “justified research” or a form of copying. If the idea and style is original, then the author can use however much research he or she needs to stand the point. The question is to use something new and bring valuable materials when quoting.

**When it is plagiarism…**

♦ Using simply another person’s ideas as the author’s is regarded as theft. When research is conducted, the inspiration and creativity of central ideas should come from the author. If it is only recycling others’ work into the author’s own words, it is a copy.

♦ If the author borrows a large proportion from others’ original work, even it is referenced, it will be a problem. Thus, to the largest extent, the author’s paper cannot be read like reading a condensed work of others’. If the paper has more quotes from the original work, it is not the “fair use” (Allen, 2001).

**Challenges for editors**

Though a large amount of electronic text has made plagiarism in the era of high technology, it is also easier to discover by means of plagiarism software (Lose, 2011). To help editors resolve the issue of plagiarism, some journals set an upper limit for the amount of text that can be reused, usually 30% (Giles, 2005). Some journals, such as The Lancet, have decided to check all manuscripts for plagiarism by using plagiarism detection software. In a recent case, the thesis of “The German Secretary” has been discovered plagiarism because nearly 20% of the all these contained copies. To be frank, few editors will knowingly republish a paper that contains a large amount of previously published work and no readers would like to read same materials in different journals several times (Giles, 2005). Hence, the Committee on Publications Ethics (COPE) is currently drawing up a discussion paper on text recycling when discovered by Cross Check (2011).
Conclusion
With the proliferation of Internet digital technologies in 21st century, it has challenged scholars conducting research in the virtual environment. Compared with traditional method, using those high technologies bring much convenience to researchers in terms of cost, time and efficiency together with some feedback. This chapter first explains the differences of retrieving information in the past and in a digital age. Then it moves to provide some basic knowledge of various digital products’ function in order to improve the efficiency of the research. Furthermore, due to lack of severe censorship of electronic media resources, it exemplifies cases from some countries to provide experience and guide future research. Last, in terms of the boom of e-journals and e-paper, the emergence of the plagiarism has challenged scholars and editors. Thus, distinguishing the research and the plagiarism seems necessary and vital.

About the authors:
Jinjin Lu is a PhD student in the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia. She has taught English in Chinese universities from 2006-2012. Now, her research interest is TESOL, English Curriculum, and pedagogy.
Wei Fan is a master student in the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia.
Ruiting Wu got Master of Teaching from in the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia. She had teaching experience in Australia.

References
Community Banker. (2003). E-mail replaces face-to-face communication. *Community Banker, 12*(3), 56.


Communication Achievement and the Need for Language Reform

Mohammed Hiddas
Moulay Ismail University, Meknes, Morocco

Abstract
Globalization and modern technology have drastically reduced the constraints of time and space between the different nations of the world. To cope with the exigencies of the twenty-first century, people from different linguistic and socio-cultural contexts need to communicate rapidly, more efficiently and, eventually, at a lower cost. To achieve communication, we have at our disposal a considerable number of natural and human-made means. Language, however, remains the most effective medium that can actually bridge the gap between the different peoples of the world. The present article is a brief survey of some salient aspects of verbal communication. With a special reference to English, it evokes a reconsideration of the role of the linguistic means in achieving communication. Accordingly, three interrelated concerns of verbal communication are discussed. These are namely (1) how verbal communication achievement depends largely on the linguistic meaning as a means that triggers the contextual meaning, (2) the linguistic and contextual disturbances that may partly or wholly obscure communication and (3) the implications of such issues with regard to intercultural communication and foreign language learning. Then, a paradox of paramount importance is raised with regard to the English language. English is increasingly standing out as the first international lingua franca of the twenty-first century, while its linguistic system continues to suffer from many inherent inconsistencies. Therefore, it is deemed that the first global language needs to undergo some serious remedial reforms with the purpose of making it easier to learn and more efficient to use.

Keywords: communication achievement, inconsistency, language reform.
Introduction
During mainly the last four decades, a remarkable number of communicative and pragmatic approaches have prevailed in the domain of language learning and language use. As a revolutionary reaction against language structuralism and its related pedagogy, those approaches have brought about an outstanding shift of focus from the grammatical aspect of language to the use of language in context. One of the most commonly quoted statements with regard to this revolutionary orientation reads as follows: "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes, 1971, p. 278). In general terms, the rules of grammar are those rules that govern the overall linguistic system of a given language. They are accordingly related to syntax, phonetics, lexis, morphology, tense, orthography, etc. The rules of use, on the other hand, are rules according to which we pick up items from our linguistic repertoire in order to interact appropriately with each other in a certain communicative event. As examples of these rules, we normally say "good morning" when it is morning, we address our superiors with forms like "Sir" or "Madam", we call our intimate friends by their personal names rather than by their family names, we provide a piece of information to someone according to a certain purpose, we use formal rather than colloquial language in formal contexts, and so on and so forth.

The rules of use are important entities in verbal communication, but what if our linguistic repertoire suffers from a certain shortage involving the rules of grammar? Very obviously, this will partially or wholly hinder communication. From a rational point of view, Hymes' statement sounds plausible, but somewhat inequitable and incomplete. The quote will gain more credibility if a complementary part is added so that it would read as follows: "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless, and there are rules of grammar without which the rules of use would be helpless."

Normally, communication achievement requires both grammatical rules and contextual rules. However, the excessive shift of interest from the linguistic system to the contextual use of language has brought about a couple of issues. Firstly, there has been an underestimation of the grammatical mastery, while actually verbal communication depends largely on the correct use of the linguistic system. This is remarkably apparent in the learners and users of English, be they native or non-native speakers. Secondly and more importantly, the inequitable shift of interest from language to context has deviated attention and averted criticism vis-à-vis a highly important concern. This is namely the excessive inconsistency of the grammatical rules of the English language. In all vital domains of the twenty-first century, English is actually the most widely used language. Globalization and information technology are still widening the scope of its use; this is happening rapidly and drastically all over the globe. Thus, English has become distinctively the most used and the most needed means of communication worldwide. However, the first international language continues to run under a flagrant set of anomalous grammatical rules. One of its most apparent inconsistencies lies in that large discrepancy that exists between its phonetic articulation and its spelling form. The English grammatical system also suffers from a number of other irrational and unnecessary inconsistencies like irregular verbs, irregular adjectives, irregular adverbs, complex and confusing rules that often carry with them attached categories and sub-categories of exceptions, and so on and so forth. This significantly hampers and delays the process of learning and consequently hinders both intracultural and intercultural communication. Therefore, researchers should strike a balance between the rules of grammar and the rules of use. Accordingly, a reorientation towards the grammatical rules of the first global language is insistently needed. With regard to this outstanding issue, there are two possible solutions. The first solution consists in investing more time, more money and more efforts to...
improve the teaching and learning of the English language with its inherent inconsistencies. This is actually what has been done, especially over the last eight decades. A long series of approaches, methods and techniques have been developed and used, while the learners and users of English have been continuously suffering from the burden of those anomalies. The second solution is to opt for a serious and rational reform of the English grammatical rules. This would facilitate the learning and the use of English. This would also upgrade the English language to meeting the exigencies of the present century, namely in terms of rapidity, efficacy and cost. Such a solution would also promote communication and coherence between the different nations of the world.

1. Communication achievement
In general terms, verbal communication is achieved when the addressee recognizes the intended message of the addressor; that is to say when the addressee understands the addressor's intended meaning. At a more detailed level, the understanding of the addressor's intents involves the recognition of two types of meaning: the linguistic meaning and the contextual meaning. This is respectively what Widdowson (1978) calls "signification" and "value". These two dimensions of meaning are inherent variables in verbal communication achievement.

1.1. The linguistic meaning
The linguistic meaning or, in Widdowson (1978)'s terminology, "signification" refers to the meaning that words convey by virtue of their grammatical entities. This involves the linguistic elements through which a certain linguistic meaning is expressed. For example, in saying "Driss went downtown", "Driss" stands for a male proper name having that grammatical function of a subject. The form "went" indicates an action of moving from place to place some time in the past, since the verb is conjugated into simple past tense. The word "downtown" refers to a generic mental representation of some centre in some city. Then, the linguistic meaning of the sentence above covers the meanings of those three words as they are defined separately in a dictionary, in addition to the holistic meaning that those three words acquire together thanks to their grammatical relationship within that sentence. It comes out that the linguistic meaning is generic and somewhat fuzzy, but once it is used in a real communicative situation, it triggers a very specific meaning. Such a specific meaning is context-bound. It is called here contextual meaning.

1.2. The contextual meaning
When used in context, a linguistic meaning is normally intended to convey a certain contextual meaning. The contextual meaning is that particular piece of information that a linguistic meaning is intended to express by virtue of its use within an actual communicative event. This type of meaning is what Widdowson (1978) calls "value". Accordingly, "Driss" in our example refers to a particular person in the real world: let us say my cousin whose name is Driss. Moreover, both my addressee and I share some knowledge about that particular person. For example, we have some sort of shared knowledge about his age, his physical details, his mental aspect, his familial status, his occupations, etc. The item "went" points to a specific type of movement within a specific situation. It is used to indicate that the action of going was performed by that very person who is called Driss. Depending on the amount of knowledge that I share with my addressee about the contextual components of our communicative event, "went" may also designate that this particular action was performed on foot and not by any means of
transportation, that such an action took place at a specific past time and for some specific reasons, etc. Likewise, "downtown" is intended to mean a particular centre in a specific city; let us, for example, say the centre of Hamria in Meknes. The contextual meaning, then, involves the use of a given linguistic meaning as a means to convey a certain context-bound communicative intent.

Here, it is important to note that the dichotomy of linguistic meaning versus contextual meaning is actually subject to many controversies. As a matter of fact, it is difficult and confusing to try to provide a clear-cut delimitation between the constructs of that dichotomy. This is so, because the pairs of the dichotomy together with their complex constituents are very much fused into each other and are, therefore, very difficult to discern. This involves a set of highly complex labyrinths, especially when it comes to the overlapping and interactive aspects of those constituents. In this regard, Swan (2007) comments, "Confusion between the two senses leads to the common and mistaken claim that all the structures of a language encode two levels of meaning, 'semantic' and 'pragmatic', both of which must be learnt for communicative competence" (Abstract section, para. 1). Another confusing difficulty in trying to deal with the constituents of verbal communication is the chaotic aspect of the terminology that has been used to discern meaning. In the literature that is related to verbal communication, sometimes different terms are used to mean one and the same thing, sometimes one and the same term is used to mean different things, sometimes different terms are used to refer to similar or overlapping things, etc. Despite all these problems and despite arguments like Swan (2007)\textquotesingle s, it remains necessary to call for the dichotomy of linguistic meaning versus contextual meaning, at least for the sake of illustration.

Thanks to our human mental faculties, the achievement of communication upgrades from linguistic meaning to contextual meaning. In normal communicative events, this happens so rapidly and so covertly that it becomes quasi-impossible to detect the two types of meaning. This actually makes the movement from the first meaning to the second go unnoticeable. However, in some communicative events such a distinction becomes easier to depict. Let us consider the following example:

- Ahmed: Have you heard the news?
- Driss: What news?
- Ahmed: Mohamed bought a laptop.
- Driss: Oh, fine. I have always encouraged him to buy one.

Thanks to some examples like this one, it becomes easier to identify the passage of communication achievement from linguistic meaning to contextual meaning. In this communicative situation, Driss can recognise the intended linguistic meaning of the word "news", but he cannot immediately recognise its contextual meaning. This is why he asks the question "What news?". Thus, communication cannot upgrade to the level of the contextual meaning of that word. This small delay in communication at the word "news" allows us to point more clearly to the existence of the two types of meaning: the linguistic meaning which is generic and fuzzy and the contextual meaning which is rather specific. That brief pause takes place between the recognition of the linguistic meaning of the word "news" and the lack of recognition of the contextual meaning of that same word. In response to Driss' request "What news?", Ahmed provides a little pack of information by saying "Mohamed bought a laptop". Thanks to that information, Driss can eventually identify the intended contextual meaning of the word "news". Moreover, the information that Ahmed provides in “Mohammed bought a laptop” involves in its turn the promotion of communication achievement from linguistic meaning to
contextual meaning, but this time without any pause between the two types of meaning. Then, in an interactive way, the achievement of communication in "Mohammed bought a laptop" has actually promoted Driss’ understanding of the word "news" from the linguistic meaning to the contextual meaning. This example, so simple as it may seem, is subject to longer and much more detailed analyses. Its linguistic and contextual components can be discussed further in terms of both rules of grammar and rules of use. It comes out that the achievement verbal communication is highly complex due to the large set of components and subcomponents that it involves both linguistically and contextually. The extent of that complexity becomes even higher when we think about the interdependent and interactive relationship that holds those components together. Nevertheless, some verbal communicative events, like the example above, can help in providing some evidence about the fact that the achievement of verbal communication involves two types of meaning: a linguistic meaning and a contextual meaning.

2. Communication disturbance

Verbal communication may break down partly or wholly even when the linguistic meaning is performed in context. Communication failure may be caused by one or more than one linguistic and/or contextual disturbance. Such a disturbance can be an erroneous item of language usage or a deviant rule of language use. An erroneous item of language usage can affect the linguistic meaning, which in turn can affect the contextual meaning. This can be illustrated through the following example: "Actually, peopl get married at a later age ". This sentence is from a piece of writing that an intermediate learner of English was asked to write to a virtual English friend, while the topic of writing was about marriage nowadays. In the linguistic repertoire of that learner "actually", like the French word "actuellement", meant "nowadays". This is an error that was identified by consulting the student writer and asking him about his real intended meanings. Thus, it was made clear that the word "Actually" was used erroneously to mean "nowadays". Then, a native speaker of English was asked to read the learner's paper as being supposedly the learner's addressee. More importantly, the native speaker was asked to provide a detailed report on what he could actually understand. After that, the learner's intents were compared with the reader's understanding. The comparison revealed that there was a mismatch between the learner's intended meaning and the reader’s actual understanding at the word "Actually". In general terms, the learner intended to mean "Nowadays, people get married at a later age", while his reader understood "In fact, people get married at a later age". At a more detailed scale, the learner's error at the word "Actually" proved to be a disturbance involving an item of language usage. At the linguistic level, such a disturbance affected the learner's intended linguistic meaning, which in turn affected the reader's recognition of that meaning. At the contextual level, the linguistic disturbance in question affected the learner's intended contextual meaning and, eventually, caused failure in the reader's recognition of that intent. Thus, the learner's wrong substitution of "nowadays" with "actually" proved to be a linguistic disturbance that brought about a certain communication failure. The disturbance was, moreover, hidden under the seemingly correct form "Actually". The covert aspect of that disturbance, moreover, averted any remedial measure on the part of the reader. Aside from that, the reader could easily do away with the spelling disturbance in "peopl". The item "peopl" was then an overt linguistic disturbance. This disturbance, however, did not result in the reader's failure to recognise both the intended linguistic meaning and the intended contextual meaning of that erroneous item.
A defective element of language use, on the other hand, may affect the contextual meaning without necessarily having any deviant item at the level of the linguistic meaning. Here, it is important to recall that language usage covers vocabulary too. As we have already seen, when an addressee recognizes a linguistically correct sentence, the intended linguistic meaning of the sentence without being able to cope with its contextual interpretation. From a functional perspective, this can eventually occur when the linguistic meaning conforms to the rules of usage but violates a given rule of use. This occurs frequently in utterances involving problems of redundancy, fuzziness, contradiction, inconsistency, misplaced premises, distorted reasoning, irrelevance, etc. These problems usually involve longer texts and larger amounts of discourse. Eventually, this makes it practically difficult to illustrate these sorts of issues here. However, it is important to note that, in these cases as well, covert problems having to do with the linguistic mastery are not to be excluded.

An utterance may misleadingly show a problem involving a rule of use while it actually suffers from a grammatical problem. Here is an authentic example from the composition paper of a high-school learner of English as a foreign language: "I passed my exam and I succeeded." In analysing this statement, two types of interpretation were used. These were what Corder (1973) calls "plausible interpretation" and "authoritative interpretation". A plausible interpretation involves the inference a researcher can make in trying to identify the intents of a given utterance. Without asking directly the learner about his or her real intents, such an inference relies mainly on the interpretation of the linguistic and contextual properties of the performed utterance. The researcher's thorough mastery of the learner's mother tongue and second language can actually provide much help in carrying out a plausible interpretation. An authoritative interpretation, on the other hand, requires asking the learner directly about his or her real intents in a given utterance. To assure a credible result, the learner is interviewed in his or her own mother tongue.

Apparently, the learner's statement in our example above seems to suffer from a problem of language use. The statement sounds clearly redundant, since "passed" and "succeeded" mean the same thing in English. Apart from that, the sentence looks grammatically correct. However, a plausible interpretation revealed the existence of a serious error of vocabulary. The identification of that error was confirmed later by means of an authoritative interpretation. Actually, the student wanted to say "I took my exam and I succeeded", but he lacked the linguistic means "to take an exam" and "to sit for an exam" for encoding his intent. Therefore, he erroneously used "to pass an exam" and, thus, he could not come out with his intended message within safe borders. It is very common for a language learner to make use of sentences that suffer from covert linguistic problems like this one (Hiddas, 1997). Moreover, a lack in the linguistic repertoire may result in a much more hidden cause of failure. Language users may simply resort to omitting some parts of their communicative intents, because their linguistic mastery does not cover the linguistic items through which they can encode those intents (Corder, 1981; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; among others). Then, when failure is apparently attributed to a deficiency at the level of what Hymes (1971) calls rules of use, this does not necessarily exclude the existence of some covert gaps in the grammatical mastery as being actually the major cause of failure.

In general terms, the effect of a disturbance on the achievement of communication can be situated somewhere in a continuum going from the degree of almost no damage to the degree of total damage. At the lowest level of damage, a disturbance may simply cause a minor difficulty or a short delay to the fluency of the addressee's process of understanding (Hiddas, 1997). These are disturbances involving for example minor problems of spelling or pronunciation. At the highest level of the continuum, disturbances are very often related to problems of vocabulary.
The next examples are taken from some learners' real performances. These examples are listed here according to a progressive order with regard to the gravity of their effects on communication. For practical reasons, they are presented briefly without providing accounts about the contexts in which they occurred. Nevertheless, the effects of these disturbances on communication can be easily guessed. Here are the examples: "peopl" instead of "people", "childrens" instead of "children", "boys" instead of "children", "usually" instead of "always", "uselly" instead of "usually" and with an intended meaning of "always", "pass an exam" instead of "take an exam", "illiterate" instead of "literate".

Congruently with what Grice (1975) calls the "cooperative principle", the participants may have to call for some additional efforts in order to clarify their intended contextual meaning. Accordingly, the achievement of communication may require some extra pauses or additional remedial measures. In addition to the use of paralinguistic means, like gestures and facial expression in a face-to-face interaction or punctuation and pictures in writing, the addressor may call for different communication strategies such as paraphrasing, exemplification, appealing to the addressee's feedback or help, etc. The addressee, in turn, can contribute by calling for the addressor to confirm or refute some of his or her hypothetical remedial measures. This can be illustrated through the following example. This is an authentic communicative event which I personally witnessed while I was once on the train from Meknes to Rabat. The person I name here "addressor" was a teenager who was apparently a Moroccan learner of English, while the "addressee" was a young woman, very likely a British native speaker. Here is the example:

- Addressor: My MP3 cost me ... [the addressor marks a few-second pause for converting Moroccan dirham into US dollar] ... forty dollars.
- Addressee: ... er ... hum ... . You mean fourteen dollars: ten plus four ...?
- Addressor: ... Yes, yes. This is what I mean. Fourteen ..., yes, fourteen dollars.

In this example, the disturbance occurs at the level of the linguistic meaning. The linguistic item "forty" is erroneously used instead of "fourteen". Although it is linguistically covert, the erroneous item is identified by the addressee at the level of the contextual meaning. The addressee knows that the MP3 in question, with its limited specificities and as a second hand device, is far from being worth forty dollars. According to a plausible explanation, she instantly deduces that her addressor may be untruthful, may have been swindled, or has simply made a linguistic mistake. Then, she immediately opts for the most credible hypothesis which is that of her addressor having made a linguistic mistake, because most probably she believes that there is no reason why her addressor should tell a lie, that her addressor is a foreign learner of English and that his English is not that perfect. In this simple example, the fundamental informative intent is preserved thanks mainly to the cooperative remedial efforts on the part of the addressee. The addressor, too, has been cooperative by confirming his addressee’s remedial guess.

Differently from that, a disturbance can cause a serious damage to communication. At the highest degree of the gravity continuum that we have envisaged, the addressee cannot recognize the addressor's intended contextual meaning. Such an intent is either totally obscured or entirely distorted. This implies that the addressee has not been able to interpret the addressor’s words or has made an interpretation which does not match the intended contextual meaning of the performed words. This can be more obvious in a communicative event wherein the participants are writer and reader and there is no opportunity for an immediate remedial cooperation to take place. That is why many readers fail to recognize their writers' intended contextual meanings despite of the presumed efforts they make in interpreting the written items of usage in question.
and despite of understanding the corresponding linguistic meanings of those items. In such cases, communication is either postponed to some coming remedial events or closes up on a permanent failure.

When we speak or write, we do not do that for the sake of simply producing sounds or graphic forms. We rather do that to deliver a given contextual meaning. Our addressees normally receive our intended linguistic meaning through its corresponding graphic forms or oral sounds. Then, they analyse that linguistic meaning in terms of the different contextual components that they have in hand and, very often, they provide a feedback to inform us about the extent to which they have actually recognized that intent. Thus, in a communicative event, the participants may get involved in a relatively longer interchange of role taking by shifting between the position of addressee and that of addressee. Within those verbal interactions, there is always a set of concrete and abstract contextual variables. Then, these variables determine the linguistic tools that we choose from our linguistic repertoire in order to convey our communicative intents in a more efficient and more relevant way. These contextual variables, moreover, are inherent in our linguistic and socio-cultural entities and some of them prove to be more knowledge-specific and/or more culture-specific than others. Nevertheless, the linguistic means or what Hymes (1971) names rules of grammar have always had a paramount importance in achieving communication accurately and fluently. They also have an important role in boosting cooperation and providing remedy when a given disturbance takes place.

3. A reconsideration of shared linguistic knowledge

When contextual knowledge is shared between the participants of a communicative event, this does not necessarily entail success of communication. Two monolingual speakers of two distinct languages, like Arabic and English for example, cannot understand each other so clearly and so fluently by relying solely on their shared contextual knowledge. Through our previous example "Driss went downtown", let us add that communication has been achieved smoothly without any intervening disturbance. Accordingly, my addressee has been able to recognise my intended contextual meaning clearly and fluently. This is due to three main reasons. Firstly, my addressee and I have some shared linguistic knowledge, at least vis-à-vis the linguistic elements of that sentence. Thanks to that linguistic knowledge, I have been able to formulate and perform that sentence correctly according to the grammatical requirements of the English language and appropriately according to the contextual requirements of that communicative event. My addressee, on his part, has been able to successfully analyse the linguistic codes through which my message has been delivered to him. Eventually, my addressee has been able to recognise the linguistic meaning through which he has succeeded in recognising my intended contextual meaning. Secondly, my sentence does not suffer from any grammatical disturbance, and my addressee's ability to interpret the linguistic components of my performed sentence does not suffer from any deficit either. This is why my addressee has found it easy to understand my intended contextual meaning. Thirdly, the contextual knowledge that I share with my addressee has been easily accessible, because it makes part of the ordinary experience that we have in common. Hence, that contextual knowledge has not actually required any demanding tasks to be learned. It has not been necessary for both my addressee and I to spend much time and enormous efforts on knowing that Driss is my cousin, that he has those physical and mental characteristics, etc. In general terms, what is rather demanding is to learn and use the linguistic items that are required to convey and recognise a given communicative intent so clearly and so fluently. Then,
unless shared contextual knowledge falls within the boundaries of complex and specialised fields like linguistics, aeronautics and biogenetics, the context of use together with its rules and norms are generously available in helping us to express and understand different communicative intents with much accuracy and fluidity. In fact, both linguistic knowledge and contextual knowledge are inextricably needed for the achievement of communication. However, contextual knowledge is relatively easier to learn and use, especially when it falls within the scope of our ordinary lives. The linguistic knowledge and its related skills, on the other hand, are much more demanding to learn and use, particularly when it comes to a second or foreign language.

As we have seen, the linguistic means constitute a mandatory condition for verbal communication to take place. The linguistic system constitutes a major variable in determining the amount of success in verbal communication. The importance of shared linguistic knowledge, however, has been largely underestimated by the different communicative and pragmatic approaches during the last few decades. As it is mentioned before, there has been an excessive shift of focus from the rules of grammar to the rules of use as a reaction to the traditional structural approaches, which used to emphasise the linguistic aspect of language at the expense of its contextual use. As a result, those context-oriented approaches have withdrawn much attention from the constituents of shared linguistic knowledge and from their compulsory role in verbal communication achievement. Such a shift of focus has actually disregarded major determining variables in the achievement of communication. These variables involve mainly the specificities of the linguistic system of rules under which verbal communication runs. From a descriptive point of view, this is an interest that was largely dealt with by traditional structuralism. What has been remarkably neglected by the different trends of both structure-centred and context-centred approaches, however, is the interest in the linguistic form of communication from an analytical and critical perspective. More precisely, there has been an apparent lack of interest in the consistency of the rules of grammar. Actually, there is a critical need to carry out a thorough investigation in the linguistic system of rules with two main objectives in mind. The first objective is to check the extent to which a linguistic system lends itself to smooth learning and to efficient communicative use. The second objective is, eventually, to provide efficient corrective reforms to the identified inconsistencies. As a matter of fact, the consistency of the linguistic system is an issue of paramount importance, especially with regard to language learning and language use for communicative purposes among the different nations of our composite world. Unfortunately, this concern has been largely disregarded by researchers.

4. Interlingual and intercultural communication

As human beings, we acquire various forms of knowledge and skill to communicate efficiently and appropriately within our native linguistic and socio-cultural context. In that natural context, we acquire our mother tongue together with the norms and rules that govern its use for communicative purposes. As native speakers, we normally have at our disposal those necessary linguistic and cultural properties through which we can communicate effectively with the members of our socio-cultural community. Under the effect of some deviant items of use and usage, however, communication may partly or wholly fail. This can take place even between the members of one and same speech community. In other words, this can happen even when those members have at their disposal a consistent linguistic and non-linguistic shared knowledge. It comes out that when we interact with people whose native language and culture are different from ours, the risks of communication failure prove to be much higher. As a social behaviour, verbal communication differs from society to society and from culture to culture. Therefore, to
learn a second or foreign language in isolation from its socio-cultural entities is said to be of little help, especially when it comes to real-life verbal interaction. Communication achievement proves to be even more vulnerable when a culture-specific topic is involved. Therefore, to communicate effectively in a second or foreign language, one has to be both bilingual and bicultural. Then, it is also worth mentioning that beyond the purely linguistic aspects of language, there are cultural dimensions which stand out as important variables in cross-cultural communication. Some of these dimensions involve even much higher risks of communication failure, because they involve areas of much more different cultural properties. This, for example, includes the way people from distinct cultures perceive time, space, fate, and personal responsibility. Those dimensions, as well, are significantly important. However, by virtue of globalization and modern technology, and thanks especially to satellite television channels and Internet services, the scope of culture has been so remarkably universalised. Bygone culture-specific issues, even at the most isolated local areas of the globe, have considerably been unveiled to the worldwide public. What remains almost unchanged, however, is the linguistic mastery without which it is definitely impossible to encode and decode our intents in a verbal communicative event.

5. Issues in learning and using the English language
The importance of English as a global lingua franca has been constantly growing since the last half of the previous century. Consequently, a series of approaches and methods have been adopted to cope with teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. These are Audio-lingual Method, Direct Method, Communicative Approach, Content-Based Approach, Task-Based Approach, and Standards-Based Approach, among others. To be able to achieve inter-cultural communication has always been an outstanding element among the objectives of those approaches and methods. Such an objective, however, has usually proved to be very difficult to implement and has always been subject to a large number of controversies. In parallel, teachers and researchers have always pointed out to those large numbers of errors occurring in the performance of non-native speakers of English inside school and, more obviously, in authentic and authentic-like communicative events (Duskova, 1969; Whitman & Jackson, 1972; Nemmassi, 1991; Hiddas, 1997; Abe and Tono, 2005; Hemchua, 2006; among others).

5.1. A flagrant inconsistency in the English linguistic system
As a matter of fact, the English language is known for the excessive inconsistency of its linguistic rules. This actually hinders the rate of learning and, therefore, delays intercultural communication. The learners and users of the English language, at least those who have not reached a thorough linguistic mastery, encounter serious difficulties in the formulation of their linguistic meanings. This inevitably involves serious difficulties in learning and using those inconsistencies which exist inherently in the English linguistic system. This also implies that even the native speakers of English suffer from the anomalies of their mother tongue (Wade-Woolley and Siegel, 1997; Lipka, Siegel & Vukovic, 2005; Bell, 2004; among others). These resources have similarly reported that at the level of orthography alone, the average time it takes a young English native speaker to become properly literate before graduating to secondary school is approximately three times longer than the time needed in other languages like Spanish and Danish. Moreover, 20% of the English native children fail to cope with the chaotic speaking-spelling system of their mother tongue at the primary school. As a consequence, adult functional
illiteracy reaches 20% in UK and almost the same percentage in USA. Moreover, about 50% of the native speakers of English encounter serious problems of spelling and almost no English native speaker can claim to be a perfect speller. On his website "Spelling Dearest", Waldman (2004) provided a list of statements from linguists, thinkers and researchers who have tried to draw attention to this issue. Here are some of those statements:

- "English is not one language, but two -- a written one and a spoken one." (Rolf Johnson, professor of English, University of Illinois. From an article in The American Mercury, 1948).
- "One cannot tell how to spell an English word by its pronunciation or how to pronounce it by its spelling." (Professor Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language, 1959, page 13).
- "The biggest spelling-chaos that it has ever been the misfortune of any nation to cope with." (Dr. Mont Follick, The Case for Spelling Reform, 1965, page 220).
- "A learning period of 2 ½ to 3 years is needed to match the competence which is achieved in less than one year in most languages.... We would therefore like to retain the suggestion that learning to read in English is simply a slower process than learning in other languages." (Professor Philip H.K. Seymour, University of Dundee. How do children learn to read? Is English more difficult than other languages? From a Paper presented to the British Festival of Science, Glasgow, September 2001). (Supporting Information section)

Furthermore, the anomalies of the English language, especially those that are related to spelling and pronunciation, are held responsible for causing dyslexia to a large number of people (Siegel, 2006). According to this resource, dyslexia is an acquired reading disability that apparently occurs in the English-speaking countries more than anywhere else. Due to those linguistic inconsistencies too, many people have missed or lost a job simply because they have mispronounced or misspelled some words. Very unfortunately, those anomalies are vigorously maintained and protected by official political and educational authorities through highly certified dictionaries like the famous Oxford English Dictionary. In this respect, Waldman (2004) humorously comments, “The Oxford English Dictionary became the unofficial bible of British spelling. Unlike the real bible, though, if you break one of the Oxford English Dictionary’s commandments, you don’t go to hell – hell comes to you” (para. 5).

Cognitive psychology has always proved that we learn and process different components of knowledge according to well-organised patterns that are inherent in our mental faculties (Martin, 2007). This involves a set of basic procedures and processes such as categorization, super-ordination, sub-ordination, opposition and association. It comes out that when a learner says or writes, for example, "comed" instead of "came", "hardly" instead of "hard", “she know” instead of “she knows” or "foots" instead of "feet", the anomaly actually does not reside in the system of the learner's mental faculties. The anomaly, rather, lies in the linguistic system of the English language itself. Obviously, the linguistic system of English proves to be highly affected with the anarchy and arbitrariness of its rules. This includes that excessively flagrant mismatch between its spelling and pronunciation forms. For example, why should the pronunciation of "o" differ between "drove" and "above"? Why should the combination "ough" result in different articulated sounds as in "plough", "though", "cough" and "through"? What is the rationale behind putting the
spelling rule "i" before "e" except after "c" as in "believe" and "achieve" versus "receive" and "deceit"? Why has such an exception, like many others, been adopted and maintained? Why should there be a further exception to an already existing exception of a given rule as in "neighbour" and "weight" which take "ei" instead of "ie" even though there is no preceding "c"? Actually, the anomalies affecting the English linguistic system are so numerous and so varied. The listing of those inconsistencies requires long series of categories and subcategories. This involves spelling, pronunciation, tense, gender, number, vocabulary, word order, etc. Consequently, millions of learners all over the world suffer considerably from those irrational burdens, while the native speakers of English themselves do not make an exception to the rule. This misfortune is an inherent aspect of the English language and its origins are deep-rooted into history.

5.2. A brief historical account
The massive inconsistencies of the English language, particularly at the level of orthography and pronunciation, have developed over long periods of history. They occurred progressively as the result of a set of interrelated factors. Waldman (2004) and Bell (2009) have provided some detailed reports about this issue. Accordingly, the present section consists of a brief account of some important events from the historical surveys of these two documents. One of the most affecting factors is what is known as loanwords. For hundreds of years, many words have been borrowed from different languages like Latin, Greek, Arabic, French and German. Moreover, the majority of those loanwords have wholly or partly kept their original spelling and/or pronunciation and, therefore, widened the gap between the graphic form and its phonetic articulation. Moreover, the English language has undergone a number of changes in pronunciation due to many social and historical events. One of the most known of those changes is what is known as the Great Vowel Shift. This three-word term is used to refer to a long historical transformation in the pronunciation of the English vowels. This took place mainly from the second half of the fourteenth century through the end of the sixteenth century. Over such a long period, the English vowels changed gradually and the result was a striking divergence with their alphabetic representations. According to some historians, this happened due to a long and complex series of people's migration and interaction. That happened under a number of historical impacts involving trade, epidemics, regional conflicts, etc. It comes out that the Great Vowel Shift was actually one of the major causes of those large numbers of discrepancies. In the sixteenth century, the English language was gradually standardised with some remedial intervention at the level of spelling. Unfortunately, those efforts were limited to orthography while pronunciation was remarkably discarded and kept in a remarkable mismatch with its written representation. Since then, many attempts were made to mend the damage, but those efforts always met strong resistance from higher decision makers. Apparently, there was also an underlying desire to limit literacy to the elite and keep it difficult to access for the majority of people. Fanatic nationalism and irrational xenophobia were also manifest in that resistance. Accordingly, attempts of reform were objected under the pretext of conserving the cultural heritage of the English language and denying the way for foreigners to have an open access to it. Later on, American English nevertheless drew some advantages from some spelling reforms thanks to Noah Webster's publication of An American Dictionary of the English Language in 1828. However, the results of Webster' efforts were very limited, because they were confined to orthography. Then, the big mismatch between spelling and pronunciation was unfortunately maintained without any significant improvement. More inconveniently, another difficulty was
added to foreign learners and eventually to the actual users of the first global lingua franca. English was divided into two major versions: American English and British English. Up to the present time, many attempts have been made to fix or substitute for the anomalies of the English linguistic system. However, due to a number of economical, political and practical issues, none of those endeavours has been effectively implemented.

6. A mandatory need for a rational reform of the English language
Instead of progressing smoothly in learning new linguistic items and actually making use of them to achieve and promote cross-cultural communication, English language learners have to make additional efforts for the sake of complying with the correctness of those incorrect items. Consequently, millions of learners all over the world are forced to lose much time and postpone effective communication for the sake of preserving a well-formedness which is originally ill-formed. The loss and delay prove to be far more serious, especially when we take into account those excessively large amounts of time, energy and money that are spent daily on maintaining, learning and using those anomalies. What is logically needed is to make language comply with the nature of our mental faculties rather than the other way round. That is to make the "natural language" sound really natural.

Thanks to the dominance of its speaking countries, however, English is now the first international lingua franca of the globe. It is one of the most used languages on the Internet all over the world. It is, moreover, the major medium of communication among the six languages that are officially adopted by the United Nations. The number of people who use English as a second or foreign language far exceeds the total number of its native speakers (British Council, n. d.). More importantly, English has become a compulsory language in many vital domains like medicine, aviation, business, communications and international politics. Unfortunately, the first global language continues to run under a remarkably distorted system of rules. It comes out that the need for a rational reform of the English language proves to be critical and more urgent than ever before. The aim is clear and self-explanatory. That is to make the first international lingua franca of the twenty-first century much easier to learn and more efficient to use.

Conclusion
More than ever before, people from different parts of our present globe need to communicate with each other more efficiently. According to the exigencies of the twenty-first century, this should take place within a much shorter time, with less efforts and at a much lower cost. Actually, language remains the most effective means of communication. During the last decades, the linguistic meaning and its corresponding linguistic means have been remarkably underestimated by an excessive shift of focus from the rules of usage to the rules of use and from text to context. Accordingly, much importance has been attributed to the contextual meaning at the expense of the linguistic meaning. Normally, verbal communication achievement requires the recognition of the intended contextual meaning. However, such recognition depends inextricably on the understanding of its corresponding linguistic meaning. It comes out that, in normal communicative verbal events, the mastery of the linguistic system stands out as a primary condition for communication to take place. With regard to intercultural communication, English is distinctively the first global lingua franca of the present world. However, its linguistic system continues to suffer from a large amount of inherent inconsistencies. This evidently brings about a multitude of tangible issues. Day in day out, and throughout the whole world, huge amounts of time, efforts and money are spoilt on learning and using "correctly" incorrect linguistic items.
addition to that, this considerably hinders and delays the achievement of communication. From a high-order functional and pragmatic point of view, it is high time the English language underwent a rational reform. The ultimate goal is to promote local and global communication.

About the Author:
Mohammed Hiddas is Professor Assistant of EFL Teaching and Learning. Currently, he is a full-time tutor at L’Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS), Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Morocco. His main interests are applied linguistics, ESL/EFL learning and teaching, translation, intercultural communication and ICT for educational purposes.

References


Tense and Aspect Acquisition in L2 English by Native speakers of Arabic

Mahfood Alsalmi

English Supervisor
Taif, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
This paper sheds light on tense and aspect acquisition in L2 English by native speakers of Arabic. The main goal is to present a clear explanation of tense and aspect systems in English and Arabic. This work includes four sections. The first section focuses on the main definitions of tense and aspect and tries to make a clear distinction between notions such as time-tense, tense-aspect, lexical aspect and grammatical aspect etc. It also provides a classification for tense and aspect systems. The second section contains a brief analysis of tense and aspect systems in English and Arabic and adopts a contrastive analysis approach supported by many examples. The third section investigates the role of language transfer on the acquisition of L2 and outlines some hypotheses and predictions that arise for an Arabic L2 learner of English acquiring tense and aspect. Finally, the fourth section studies the aspect hypothesis in relation to English and Arabic.

Keywords: Tense; Aspect; Acquisition; Arabic; English.
Introduction

Tense and aspect represent a rich subject for traditional grammarians and modern linguists who have approached this complicated area of languages with slightly different terminological conventions.

Traditional grammarians do not distinguish tense from aspect while modern linguists make a distinction between tense which focuses on WHEN something happened or was the case and aspect which expresses factors like duration and completeness of events.

Hurford states that "For English, this difference of terminology comes out mainly in relation to the perfect and the progressive, which many traditional grammarians would treat as part of the system of tense, but modern linguists treat as belonging to the system of aspect." (1994, p. 16).

In this paper, tense can be defined as the linguistic expression of time-relations. It refers to temporal deixis - the relation (present, past or future) of a given situation to a reference time, usually the time of speech.

Aspect, on the other hand, is not concerned with temporal deixis, but rather characterizes “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (Comrie, 1976, p. 3). Therefore, the difference between he is writing and he was writing is that of tense, since the is/was contrast signifies the difference between the two in relation to speech time. However, the difference between he wrote a letter and he was writing a letter is one of aspect, since the difference stems from how the action of writing is viewed by the speaker: the former views the situation in its entirety (external view) whereas the latter views the situation as consisting of phases (internal view) (Comrie, 1976, p. 5).

However, studies still adopt different approaches and methodologies to focus on tense and aspect. According to Binnick (2012):

Almost every area of linguistics, with the exception of phonetics and phonology, has its own approach to tense and aspect. Not only do morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics differ in their terminology and methodology, but each area has its own distinct Problematik—they naturally seek to answer quite different questions where tense and aspect are concerned. (p. 56)

Chomsky states that "In a highly idealized picture of language acquisition, Universal Grammar is taken to be a characterization of a child's pre-linguistic state. Experience... serves to fix the parameters" (1981, p. 7). According to him, all languages have a common structural basis because humans have innate set of rules and principles that organize language.

If we assume that L1 acquisition is mediated by universal grammar, then we can ask an important question: do adult L2 learners still have access to the principles and parameters of UG? Generally, we can find three different hypotheses regarding the accessibility of UG by adult L2 learners: No access to UG, Direct access to UG, and Indirect access to UG (Cook, 1988; White, 1991).

Apart from UG, the acquisition of tense and aspect is considered a new area because people tend to consider inherent lexical and grammatical aspects outside the compass of UG. In fact, many studies in L1 acquisition of various languages have shown that children acquiring an L1 are strongly influenced by the semantic aspect inherent in the verb to which verb morphology is attached. Therefore, children use present inflection with statives, progressive inflection with activities and past inflection with achievements and accomplishments. In this stage, the acquisition of tense and aspect morphology is strongly influenced by lexical aspect inherent in the verb or predicate, with tense distinctions being neglected. This situation is summarized by the Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen and Shirai, 1994). It has been observed in L1 acquisition of various
languages such as French (Bronchart and Sinclair, 1973), Italian (Antinucci and Miller, 1976),
Greek (Stephany, 1981), and English (Bloom et al, 1980; Shirai and Andersen, 1995). The same
tendency has also been observed in SLA: French (Kaplan (1987), English (Jabbari, 1998;
Robison, 1995), Spanish (Andersen, 1991; Ramsay, 1990), Dutch (Housen, 1994), and Japanese
(Shirai and Kurono, 1998) .

This paper is intended to investigate tense and aspect acquisition in English by native speakers of
Arabic. It attempts to present a clear view of tense and aspect systems in English and Arabic. It
examines Arabic influence on the acquisition process. It also attempts to clarify the Aspect
Hypothesis, which claims that verb inflections in early interlanguage systems function primarily
as markers of lexical aspect regardless of tense.

**Main definitions**

**1-Tense**

In the literature related to tense and aspect, many definitions of tense can be found. Jespersen
(1962) defines tense as "the linguistic expression of time-relations, so far as these are indicated
in verb forms"(p. 1). Hockett (1958) claims that tenses typically show different locations of an
event in time. Lyons (1968) gives a broader definition of tense, stating that:

- The essential characteristic of the category of tense is that it relates the time of the
  action, event or state of affairs referred to in the sentence to the time of utterance (the
time of utterance being 'now'). Tense is therefore a deictic category, which (like all
  syntactic features partly or wholly depend upon deixis) is simultaneously a property
  of the sentence and of the utterance.(p. 305).

**a-Tense Distinction**

English has two tense forms: past and present (see also Lyons, 1977; Quirk et al, 1972; Smith,
1978). Lyons (1968) argues that this tense distinction is best regarded as a contrast of 'past'
versus 'non-past'. The reason is that whereas:

- The past tense does not typically refer to 'before-now', the non-past is not restricted to
  what is contemporaneous with the time of utterance: it is used also for 'timeless' or
  'eternal' statements... and in many statements that refer to the future ('after-now')...
  the opposition of past and non-past is realized systematically by suffixation of the first
  element of the verbal phrase . (p. 306)

The future form has often been shunned from admittance to the rank of tense. Leech (1971, p.
52) states that "although the will/shall construction provides English with its nearest
approximation to a 'neutral' or 'colorless' future, one ought not to describe it as a "future tense"
on a par with the past and present tenses".

Furthermore, Quirk et al (1972, p. 87) state that "there is no obvious future tense in English
corresponding to the time/tense parallel for present and past". This view is shared by Lyons
(1968, 1977) who argues that futurity is never a purely temporal concept. It necessarily includes
an element of prediction or some related modal notion. In other words, there is no form which in
itself indicates futurity. These linguists (Hockett, 1958; Lyons, 1968) observe that the
inflectional morphology of the English verb does not include any affix that could be regarded as
an explicit marker of future tense. Futurity can be expressed in several ways such as with the
auxiliary verbs shall1will which, they argue, should be treated as modals (e. g., can, may, must,
etc.) because of the modal connotation they express in certain contexts, and with other semantic
forms (e. g., the present form of the English verb plus an obligatory temporal adverb). What has
been treated in most languages as the future tense is, Lyons (1977) argues, rather a modal category, and so-called present tense markers have primarily aspectual functions. Thus, the opposition is reduced to the binary one of past-non-past. However, other linguists (Comrie, 1985; Reichenbach, 1947) distinguish a wider range of tenses, maximally including the present tense, the past tense, the future tense, the present perfect, the past perfect, the future perfect, the conditional and the conditional perfect. This distinction is deemed necessary for labeling different kinds of verb forms and is warranted from a theoretical view-point since each of these tenses corresponds to a different temporal scheme (Declerck, 1986).

**b-Tense and Time**

When we focus on tense and time, we can clearly deduce that tense does not always refer to the same time. The following examples illustrate this:

- We hope he comes tomorrow: present simple refers here to future time.
- If he was here now, he could help her: past simple refers here to present time.
- I am going to meet him tomorrow: present progressive refers here to future time.

That’s why we can say that certain tenses in English can be used to refer to a different time.

2-Aspect

Tense, as we have seen, is a deictic category that locates a situation in relation to some other time (usually the time of speech). Aspect, on the other hand, is non-deictic and covers a wide range of phenomena having to do with the internal temporal structure of the situation described by a verb (Comrie, 1976). It refers to the internal temporal properties of the situation such as duration, interactivity, etc.

**a-Lexical Aspect**

Lexical aspect is also known as inherent aspect, situation aspect and VP aspect. It refers to the inherent semantic features of verb. The most well-known classification of verbs based on their inherent properties is introduced by Vendler (1957) where verbs can be classified into achievement, accomplishment, activity and state.

The classification of verb types can also be made in terms of three semantic dimensions (Comrie, 1976; Smith, 1991):

- Dynamicity;
- Durativity;
- Telicity.

**b- Grammatical Aspect**

Smith calls the grammatical aspect the viewpoint aspect (Smith, 1983). It refers to the ways in which the temporal features of a situation are viewed independent of its relation to any reference time (Comrie, 1976; Smith, 1983). The grammatical aspect refers also to non-tense distinction expressed by grammatical markers such as auxiliaries or inflections (Andersen, 1991; Shirai and Andersen, 1995). Generally, the distinction between perfective and imperfective is the key of grammatical aspect.

In order to clarify the meaning of grammatical aspect, the following examples show the difference between perfective and imperfective aspects:

(a) zaarat landen (perfective).
'She visited London'.
(b) kaana yakrau kitaaban (imperfective).
'He was reading a book'.
(c) akala (perfective).
'He ate'.
(d) kaanu yaakuluna (imperfective).
‘They were eating’.
(e) kaana yakulu hunaa kulla yamin (imperfective).
'He used to eat here every day'.

In sentences (a) and (c), there is a complete action that started and finished in the past. It is perfective. In sentences (b) and (d), the event is still in the past but it is progressive and there is no idea if the event was completed or not, that’s why it is imperfective. The event in sentence (e) is also imperfective but it refers to a habit in the past.

**c-Terms for Various Aspects**

When reading the literature related to tense and aspect, many aspectual terms are found. Table 1 shows some of these terms with examples:

**Table 1: Terms for Various Aspects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspectual Terms</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>I went there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect (a common conflation of aspect and tense)</td>
<td>We have arrived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>She is Reading a book (progressive) or she reads a book every day (habitual).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>He is playing or He knows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuative</td>
<td>It is still raining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>He is eating (ongoing and evolving action).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stative</td>
<td>He knows Arabic (ongoing but not evolving).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>She slept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durative</td>
<td>She slept for a while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>It is about to burst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitual</td>
<td>I visit them every month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnomic/generic</td>
<td>Humans speak (general truth).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodic</td>
<td>The bird flew (non-gnomic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pausative</td>
<td>They stopped talking for a while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumptive</td>
<td>I resumed sleeping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitative</td>
<td>He played for an hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iterative</td>
<td>She watches the same movie again and again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>I accidentally knocked over the chair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this paper, we adopt the previous classification of aspect (Lexical/Grammatical) because it is clearer and more efficient for studying tense and aspect acquisition for an Arab learner of L2. Moreover, it is the most used in literature related to tense and aspect and it involves the other aspectual terms.

For the lexical aspect, our choice goes for the classification of Vendler (1957) (state, activity, accomplishment and achievement) enriched by three semantic dimensions (dynamicity, durativity, telicity). This classification helps to investigate the dimensions of tense and aspect in both languages Arabic and English and establish concrete results and findings.

Finally, for the grammatical aspect, our choice goes for the distinction (perfective/imperfective) because it is related to the classification of lexical aspect that we chose and it can apply easily in both languages when making a contrastive approach.

Our choice of these classifications is not absurd or spontaneous but it is really based on a deep research in literature related to tense and aspect. Our main goal is to succeed to make a study that does not reach only professionals but also normal people like parents and students who find it difficult to acquire tense and aspect in L2.

3-Tense – Aspect Systems
In the literature related to tense and aspect, four major possibilities of tense-aspect systems can be found as following:

- a pure aspect system;
- a pure tense system;
- an aspect system by priority, combined with a tense system;
- a tense system by priority, combined with an aspect system.

In this paper, we will focus mainly on mixed tense-aspect system because both languages Arabic and English have this system. The obligatory category for English is tense, while it is aspect for Arabic.

Tense and Aspect in English and Arabic

1-Tense and Aspect in English
In English, the aspects of the present tense are the following:
- Present simple (not progressive, not perfect): "I write".
- Present progressive (progressive, not perfect): "She is singing".
- Present perfect (not progressive, perfect): "He has written".
- Present perfect progressive (progressive, perfect): "We have been travelling".

The aspects of the past tense are:
- Past simple (not progressive, not perfect): "I wrote".
- Past progressive (progressive, not perfect): "She was singing".
- Past perfect (not progressive, perfect): "He had written".
- Past perfect progressive (progressive, perfect): "We had been travelling".
The uses of the progressive are multiple and they may refer to the viewpoint of the speaker:
- I was watching TV when he came. (in middle of action).
- She has seen a lot in her life, but she has never seen this. (at end of action)
The use of progressive can have illocutionary forces or additional modal components such as:
- You are being innocent now. (deliberately)
- She is not lying to me! (forbidden)
- They are playing tomorrow. (decided)
Some other constructions can be used in English to express aspectual distinctions such as:
- Used to + Verb to express a past habit: "We used to sit here".
- Going to + Verb to express a future situation: "We are going to meet him next week".

2-Tense and Aspect in Arabic
In her study, Bouras (2006) states that “In Arabic, Tense and Aspect are rather of limited semantic expression when compared to other languages. Grammarians argue that the verb in Arabic refers to the polarized aspects of completed and incomplete action. It refers only to imperfect (incomplete) and perfect action largely ignoring those references in tense and mood which are so common in Indo-European languages. Tense and aspect in Arabic are expressed in terms of perfectiveness and imperfectiveness. The perfect is called الماضي and the imperfect المضارع.” (p. 84)
According to Comrie (1976) “the difference between the Arabic perfective and imperfective cannot be purely one of aspect” (p. 78). He believes that Arabic perfective/imperfective is a case of tense/aspect opposition.
Tense perfective is characterized by suffixation and imperfective by prefixation or by a combination of prefix and suffix. We have three variations: person (first, second, third), number (singular, dual, plural) and gender (masculine, feminine).
English and Arabic have complementary tense-aspect systems in several respects. The obligatory category for English is Tense, for Arabic, it Is Aspect. These obligatory categories are inflected forms in both languages. In a sentence, obligatory Aspect in Arabic may imply Tense or obligatory Tense in English may imply Aspect.

3-Contrastive Analysis of Tense and Aspect in English and Arabic
It is appropriate to contrast tense and aspect in English and Arabic from the perspective of functional equivalence because structural, formal equivalence is often misleading (Siery, 1986). Lado (1957) points out that the same grammatical function might be expressed through different 'media' in two different languages. In our case, the same verb form, even in the same language, may be used to express different functions. Therefore, the functional equivalence between tense and aspect in English and Arabic may be summarized, as in Table 2.

Table 2: Functional Equivalence between Tense and Aspect in English and Arabic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FETA-</td>
<td>1. She washes her hands</td>
<td>1. Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>(event)</td>
<td>Tagsilu yadayhaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETA Tense</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Continuous</td>
<td>2. We start filming next month</td>
<td>2. Different: Future time is expressed by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Future time forms: sa-/sawfa nabdau a-taswira a-shahra al-kaadema.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>1. He is watching TV. (action in progress).</td>
<td>1. Different: present continuous is indicated by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>or * active participle with no finite form: Huwa aatin nahwi. He is coming towards me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>2. They are playing tomorrow. (future)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>1. I have met him.</td>
<td>1. Different: present perfect is expressed by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* past simple: Mundu an kaabaltuhu 'Since I have met him; i.e., 'Since I met him'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* recent past: qad wajada hallan 'He has found a solution'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect Continuous</td>
<td>1. I have been working here since 1995.</td>
<td>1. Different: present perfect continuous is expressed by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Or * past continuous: kaana yantadiruka saaatan 'He was waiting for you for an hour'; i.e., 'He has been waiting for you for an hour'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Simple</td>
<td>1. He found his wallet.</td>
<td>1. Same: Wajada mehfadatahu. 'He found his wallet'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Anterior Tense and Aspect Acquisition in L2 English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense/Aspect</th>
<th>Arabic Example</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **FETA Past Continuous** | She was playing. | 1. Different; two forms are used:  
- kaana + imperfect:  
  kaanat talaabu  
  'She was playing'.  
- kaana + active participle:  
  kaana naaiman  
  'He sleeping'; i.e.,  
  'He was sleeping'. |
| **FETA Past Perfect** | She had read a book. | 1. Different; many forms are used:  
- remote past:  
  kaanat qad karaat kitaaban  
  'She had (already) read a book'.  
- past continuous:  
  kaanat takrau kitaaban  
  'She was reading a book'.  
- recent past:  
  qad karaat kitaban  
  'She read a book'; i.e.,  
  'She had (just) written a letter'. |
| **FETA Past Perfect Continuous** | He had been reading a book. | 1. Different; past perfect continuous is indicated by:  
- past continuous:  
  kana yakrau kitaaban  
  'He was reading a book'; i.e.,  
  'He had been reading a book'.  
- emphatic past continuous:  
  laqad kaana yakrau kitaaban  
  'He was reading a book'; i.e.,  
  'He had been reading a book'. |
| **FETA Future Simple** | He will travel. | 1. Different; three forms can be used:  
- future simple:  
  sa-/sawfa yusafiru  
  'He will travel'.  
- present simple:  
  yalabuna gadan  
  'They will play tomorrow'.  
- active participle + future temporal adverbial:  
  Ali musafirun gadan  
  'Ali travelling tomorrow'; i.e.,  
  'Ali is travelling tomorrow'. |
| **FETA Future Continuous** | He will be watching TV. | 1. Different; two forms can be used:  
- future continuous:  
  sa-/sawfa yakunu naiman  
  'He will be sleeping'.  
- present simple:  
  Antadiruka  
  I will be waiting for you. |
| **Future Perfect** | She will have found a solution. | 1. Same:  
  sa-/sawfa takunu qad wajadat hallan  
  'She will have found a solution'. |
Table 2 shows that there is no one-to-one relationship between forms expressing tense and aspect in English and Arabic. Even in cases where the English and Arabic verb forms appear to be similar in their form classification (e.g., present simple, past simple, past continuous, future perfect... etc.), their functions hardly match. For example, whereas English uses the past simple tense to express a habit in the past, Arabic employs the past continuous. The following example is given in English along with its equivalent in Arabic:

- She read a book every week last year.
- kaanat takrau kitaaban kula usbuin alaama al maadi

'She was reading a book every week last year'.

Furthermore, Arabic verb forms are used to express functions different from their counterparts. Thus, Arabic often uses at least two verbal forms to express a verbal form in English (Lado, 1957). In this regard, Ellis (1994) argues that the difficulty of learning a second language depends on the distance between the target language and the first language. Where the two languages are closely related, learning is facilitated; and where they are distant, it is not helped. Corder (1967) subscribes to this view. This old fashioned approach to transfer is replaced by an innovative one proposed by Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994), who claim that what transfer in early stages of L2 acquisition are only lexical categories and their projections but not functional categories.

**Language Transfer**

**1-Overview**

In many cases, learners of L2 tend to apply knowledge from their native language to a second language when speaking or writing. This process is called language transfer which is also known as linguistic interference, crossmeaning and L1 interference. It is largely observed and discussed in learning and teaching English as a second language due to its important impact on the learner ability to acquire the new language.

Generally, we can distinguish between two types of language transfer. The first one is called positive transfer which occurs when the structure of a sentence is the same in L1 and L2 and here the learner succeeds to make a correct sentence. The second type is called negative transfer which means that by transferring knowledge from L1 to L2, the learner forms a wrong sentence in L2 because the structure is not the same in the two languages. Therefore, the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfer can be expected.

In the relevant literature, the second type is most often discussed while the impact of positive transfer is most of the times unnoticed.

**2-Impact on the Acquisition of Tense and Aspect for Arab Learners**

Based on the contrastive analysis of tense and aspect in English and Arabic that we did and considering the impact of language transfer on the acquisition of tense and aspect, the following hypotheses and predictions arise for an Arab learner of L2:
- Arabic-speaking learners would encounter many difficulties in using the third person morpheme '-s'. They would fail to attach this morpheme to the English verb. As a result, uninflected forms would be frequently used as an attempt at present reference, which is usually indicated in Arabic by means of prefixes such as ta, ya, na, and a attached to the Perfect form.
- Progressive meaning in Arabic can be expressed by the Imperfect form, the active participle, or by kaana + Imperfect. This means that the construction of progressive tenses is different from that of their counterparts in English. As such Arabic-speaking learners of the lower proficiency level would encounter difficulties in acquiring progressive forms in English in terms of either using auxiliary verb 'be' with the base form without inflection, or attaching the '-ing' ending to the base form without the auxiliary verb 'be', resulting in transfer.
- The lack of one-to-one relationship between forms expressing tense and aspect in English and Arabic would lead to difficulties in acquiring different tenses such as present perfect, present perfect continuous, past perfect, future perfect ... etc, and consequently transfer would occur. Arabic-speaking learners would use various verbal forms to express the functions of English tenses. They would, for example, use the Arabic past simple tense for the English present perfect. However, similar tense forms such as present simple and past simple would be easily acquired.
- Arabic-speaking L2 learners are sensitive to the semantic distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects on accomplishments and achievements since such a distinction is instantiated in their L1.
- Arabic-speaking L2 learners overgeneralize the use of the progressive aspect on English state verbs because this overgeneralization is initiated in their L1 Arabic.

**Aspect Hypothesis**

1-Overview
Over the last two decades the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology has been intensively investigated to account for the observation that emerging verb inflections appear to function in ways distinct from the target. This investigation has shown an interesting universal pattern in both first- and second-language acquisition. The development of tense-aspect morphology is strongly influenced by the lexical aspect inherent in the verb to which inflections are attached. This tendency has been observed in French (Bronchart and Sinclair, 1973), Italian (Antinucci and Miller, 1976), Greek (Stephany, 1981), and English (Bloom, Lifter, and Hafitz, 1980; Shirai and Andersen, 1995). The same tendency has also been observed in SLA. Robison (1990, 1995) and Jabbari (1998) study the acquisition of English, Andersen (1991) and Ramsay (1990) investigate the acquisition of Spanish, Housen (1994) examines the acquisition of Dutch, and Shirai and Kurono (1998) study the acquisition of Japanese. The occurrence of this phenomenon in various languages indicates that the universal innate aspectual values of punctuality, telicity, and dynamicity provide the basic characterization of aspectual categories. The variations that occur among the aspectual systems of languages are departures from the general characterization of these categories. Thus, aspectual categories are not language-dependent. People distinguish the basic aspectual categories by using three universal aspectual values: [dynamic], [punctual], and [telic]. There appears to be, therefore, a common feature in all languages making stative verbs [-dynamic], activity verbs [+dynamic] and
[-telic], achievement verbs [+punctual] and [+telic], and accomplishment verbs [-punctual] and [+telic].

The above tendency, which has come to be known simply as the Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen and Shirai, 1994), has appeared under different names and formulations, including the Defective Tense Hypothesis, the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (Robison, 1990) and the Relative Defective Tense Hypothesis (Andersen, 1989). The Defective Tense Hypothesis states: "In beginning stages of language acquisition only inherent aspectual distinctions are encoded by verbal morphology, not tense or grammatical aspect" (Andersen, 1991, p. 307).

2-Aspect Hypothesis in relation to English and Arabic

The Arabic tense-aspect system is considered in detail, and relevant research hypotheses posed, hypothesizing that while the learners have their L1 as the initial state of SLA, they will resort to their native language only to the extent that universal principles of tense and aspect are not violated (see Jabbari, 1998). Arabic-speaking learners would, for example, use base forms of stative verbs as an attempt at present reference. The tendency to use uninflected forms seems to be a universal characteristic of early stages of language acquisition (Brown 1973). Moreover, learners would mark achievement and accomplishment verbs with past tense and the progressive. The use of past marking with achievement and accomplishment verbs is consistent with the universal entailments of these verbs. However, marking achievements with the progressive is consistent with the characterization of achievement verbs in Arabic, but not in English. It is a departure from the general characterization of aspectual categories. Therefore, marking achievements with the progressive can not be a violation of constraints on aspectual categories.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that tense and aspect acquisition in L2 English by native speakers of Arabic reveals different axes and areas of research.

This paper is a simple attempt to shed light on tense and aspect in both languages. At this level, two main points draw specifically the attention; the first is about the role and impact of language transfer while the second is about the aspect hypothesis and its validity for Arab learners of L2.

About the author :

Mahfood Alsalmi, holds PhD in EFL from Mohammed V University in Morocco. He worked as an English teacher in Saudi Arabia for twelve years in different stages as well as teaching abroad for four years in Morocco. Currently, he is working as an English supervisor in Taif, Saudi Arabia. He published two papers in the same field.

References


Promoting Literacy and Writing Proficiency through a Reading-Based Method

Nassira Boudersa
Applied Language Studies
University of Constantine 01
Constantine, Algeria

Abstract
The present study examines the writing proficiency of Algerian EFL undergraduate learners (Applied Language Studies) at the university of Constantine 1, Algeria. As a very important language skill, the ability to write stretches of discourse that are communicatively successful is one of the major concerns of language teachers. The main aim of the study is to see whether there is a positive relationship between the use of connective expressions in the argumentative type of text and the students’ overall writing quality, reflected by the teacher’s assigned marks to students’ essays. Two groups of students were tested before teaching intervention to have a general idea about their level (pre-test) in writing and the use of connectives. The two groups received the same teaching intervention during a period of 9 weeks (quasi-experimental design), then they have been given a post-test. The results of the pretest and the posttest have been analyzed using the correlation coefficient test. The results have shown that there is an improvement in the students’ proficiency in writing after the teaching intervention. The analysis of the students’ essays with regard to the use of connective expressions and the students’ overall mark has shown that there is a positive relationship between the students’ frequent use of connective expressions and their marks (quality of texts The hypothesis upon which the research was based on was, hence, confirmed.

Key words: Writing proficiency, connectives, argumentative writing, writing quality
Introduction

As a language skill, writing is very important especially in EFL contexts. EFL students do usually face problems in producing acceptable and communicative stretches of discourse. The aim of this study is to use a method of teaching the skill of writing on a reading-based level and adopting the genre approach to teaching writing. The reason behind that is the belief that texts differ from each other in the way they are written and in the linguistic features writers use to produce communicative texts that are acceptable by a given discourse community. The main linguistic feature that characterizes the argumentative type of writing is the use of connective expressions to show the logical relationship between ideas, to achieve coherence and to show the writer’s moves through her/his text. Accordingly, we claim that the more the students use connective expressions in the argumentative type of writing, the better the quality of their texts will be, reflected by the teacher’s assigned marks.

1. The Relationship between Reading and Writing

Writing is one of the major skills emphasized in learning a language. This skill is relatively related to the notion of literacy, which, according to Stern (1983), refers to one’s ability to write and read. In the Algerian context, literacy and the writing ability are usually emphasized at the early stages in an educational syllabus at university, namely, at the beginner and intermediate levels of language learning.

There has been a paradigm shift in the notion of literacy. The tendency to consider reading and writing as the determining factors in boosting one’s literacy level stands no longer. The reason behind this is that this tendency which concentrates on reading and writing reflects a limited view of literacy as a dynamic concept that encompasses several social and cultural aspects in reading and writing practices. According to Stern (1983:171), “Reading and writing are intrinsically linked, complementary processes. Writers are their own first readers, and their ability to read closely is essential to their ability to write coherently.” Besides that, in the act of writing, writers go through cognitive processes which promote a sensitivity to language, making, thus, analytic reading possible. (ibid.)

1.1. Types of Reading in EFL Context

1.2. Extensive Reading

There are two reading approaches that language teachers seem to adopt in their courses. They are referred to as “intensive” and “extensive” reading approaches. Some teaching programs and materials may use one approach, though, Grellet (1981), and Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) call for a combination of both approaches if time and resources permit. Extensive reading is said to fit into “meaning-focused input” and “fluency development”. According to Nation (2008: 49), “Reading is a source of learning and a source of enjoyment. It can be a goal in its own right and a way of reaching other goals.” Reading is a good means of learning since it can establish and reinforce previously learned vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, successful learning of these aspects of language can encourage the EFL students to learn more. Reading can even be a source of enjoyment as students gain skill and fluency in it.

Extensive reading involves incidental learning. That is to say, focus is on reading as such (story, for instance), and not on items to learn. It involves large quantities of varied
reading texts (inside/outside classroom), and focus is usually placed on the learning of vocabulary. To use Nation’s (ibid.:50) words, “Extensive reading is a form of learning from meaning-focused input.” Focus in reading is on the meaning of the text rather than on learning the language features of that text.

1.3. **Intensive Reading**

The following are the main characteristics of the intensive reading approach adopted in the present research:

- The texts to be studied are selected by the teacher (perhaps with input from students).
- All students read the same text at the same time and complete in-class or out-of-class exercises and assessments designed or assigned by the teacher.
- The teacher highlights specific linguistic features and content dimensions of the text, introducing and reinforcing selected reading strategies through whole-class instruction and activities.
- Assessment of student comprehension, reading development, and reading efficiency is facilitated by the fact that all students work simultaneously with the same text and activities.

Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) point out that the intensive approach to reading is the most predominant approach to ESL/EFL reading instruction. To frame the discussion of intensive reading, they make the following assumptions:

- Intensive reading lessons should in most instances be based on entire texts, not just excerpts (e.g., a newspaper or journal article, a chapter from a textbook or novel, rather than just a few paragraphs) Ferris and Hedgcock (2005)
- Overall purpose of an intensive reading lesson is only secondarily the comprehension of text content—the overriding goal is to build students’ skills and strategies for reading authentic texts beyond the reading classroom.
- Texts for intensive reading lessons have already been carefully selected by the teacher (either from a textbook or other source) using text selection considerations (Ferris and Hedgcock (2005)

According to Nation (2008:25), “Intensive study of reading texts can be a means of increasing learners’ knowledge of language features and their control of reading strategies”. Intensive reading has been the classic procedure in the grammar-translation approach. Teachers who used to adopt this approach work with their students on texts using their first language to explain the meaning of the text, going through the text sentence by sentence. This procedure can be a useful one if used with appropriate texts and appropriate principles as being a part of the reading program.

A very important goal of intensive reading is that of determining the language features of a particular text to draw the students’ attention to them in the teaching course. Teachers adopting this method of teaching have the language features characterizing each text as the main focus of syllabus for their courses. This, Nation (ibid.) argues, has various positive aspects. He (ibid.) suggests that if the identified language features are set in a communicative context of a text, one can show how these
latter can contribute to achieve the communicative purpose of the text. If done appropriately, this method of teaching can help teachers to prepare some writing activities. Thus, Nation (2008:25), points out, can rule out any interference between decisions to include vocabulary items or grammatical features in syllabus design.

Special focus on certain grammatical features can be determined by both the topic and the genre of the text, thus, giving rise to the use of certain salient language items rather than others. As such, we deduce that teaching can be directed towards the text and what linguistic features it necessitates for use. This point has been made clear by Nation (2008) in the following statement, “If intensive reading is to be done well, the major principle determining the focus of the teaching should be that the focus is on items that will occur in a wide range of texts.”

The focus of intensive reading in a text can be on the following aspects:

- **Cohesion:** Learners can practice interpreting what pronouns refer to in the text, what the conjunction relationships between sentences are, and how different words are used to refer to the same idea.

- **Information structure:** Certain texts contain certain kinds of information. Newspaper reports, for example, can describe what happened, what led to the happening, what the likely effects will be, who was involved, and when and where it happened. Learners can be helped to identify these different kinds of information.

- **Genre features:** The vocabulary, grammatical features, cohesive features and information will contribute to the communicative effect of a text. Intensive reading can focus on how the text achieves its communicative purpose through these features and what this communicative purpose is.

When using intensive reading, in teaching and explaining the texts in the foreign language, the teacher’s aim is to make understanding much easier for students. The effect of this is to let students notice and learn the specific linguistic features of the text that they may encounter in the future in other texts, thus, have a greater chance to learn and use them.

In more practical terms, Nation (2008) points out that ‘language-focused learning’ through intensive reading can take the form of written exercises accompanying a text. He (ibid.) states that a good reading exercise should draw the students’ attention to language features in the studied texts that can be found in other texts too. The aim of this is to give students strategies of how to deal appropriately with texts to help them develop the ability of comprehension (Davies and Widdowson, 1978). In other words, the aim behind getting students to read and analyze a text is to help them gain some important linguistic knowledge which can help them understand what Nation (2008) termed “tomorrow’s reading texts”. The rule of thumb is that students should learn what is applicable to all texts. On that basis, Nation (ibid.:28) argues that exposure to language features through the use of texts is a necessary and important requirement for learning. To use his (2008) words,

We want [students] to gain knowledge of the language and ways of dealing with the language rather than an understanding of a particular language. If a reading exercise does not focus on generalisable features of a text, it does not provide much opportunity for any useful, cumulative learning to take place. (p.28)
Another important aspect of reading exercises based on texts is that they provide teachers with information about the learners’ performance on the exercise. This can guide the teacher also to improve his/her teaching on the basis of the learners’ performance. However, if students were unsuccessful in some exercises, the teacher can take some action and interfere by re-considering some exercises, or drawing the students’ attention to the importance of certain salient language aspects that are crucial to the production of communicatively successful argumentative writing, in our case.

Reading exercises and students’ performance can provide teachers with useful feedback. Exercises can tell the teacher what aspects of language are being focused on and taught, and what linguistic features she is trying to teach. This, we maintain, places the teacher in a better position to judge the value of the exercise with regard to the aspects she believes they are important in teaching reading and/or writing. A good reading exercise is also easy to make. That is to say, the teacher chooses texts that meet her students’ needs. The exercise should reflect the learners’ needs not aim at satisfying them. Moreover, Nation (2008) claims that if the texts do not provide exercises that are of interest to learners, teachers must make their own.

Encountering these important textual features (connectives/conjunctions in this case) and getting used to analyze and learn them is of central importance for learners to understand where and how they are used in texts to organize ideas and convey information. Learning and analyzing conjunctions from one text can help learners to transfer them alongside the different meanings they carry to convey particular messages from text to text. These features are said to focus the learners’ attention on the message of the text beyond the sentence boundaries.

As salient linguistic features that characterize different types of texts, conjunctions (Halliday and Hassan, 1976 taxonomy of conjunctive cohesion) lie at the heart of ‘grammatical cohesion’. They gained lot of importance and received attention because of the significant role they have in expressing meaning relations between the different parts of a text. Nation (ibid.:44) suggests that carefully designed exercises focusing on cohesive devices are easy to make, and their implementation can result in positive effects on both reading and writing. On the basis of that, the exercises about conjunctions in the present research experimental design are based on the types proposed by Nation (2008).

2. Teaching Writing Through Reading

Taught together, reading and writing are said to enrich the students’ language and thinking capacities. Taken together, reading and writing are the hallmarks of a literate person. It only makes good sense, then, that they be integrated in teaching for students to get the most of each. What is also essential is how these processes are taught. For instruction to be effective, students need to have some choice—about what to read and the topic of their writing. When students have some control over what they choose to read, they are more likely to invest themselves in developing a full understanding of the text, and so work hard to comprehend what they are reading. Similarly, when writers have some choice over what to write about, they will probably work harder to communicate simply because the topic is meaningful to them.

In order to make the connection between reading and writing plain to EFL students, the two processes should be taught together. There needs to be a sense of
process; both reading and writing are, after all, to be an initial understanding of the text that may hold up or may need to be revised as the text unfolds. Writers, too, revise. They produce early drafts that may need only a little tinkering with or-more typically—may need substantial revision to communicate adequately and well. There also needs to be an effort from the teacher to make the reading/writing relationship explicit, through genre knowledge and understanding of language structure, and to establish expected behaviors—habits of good readers and good writers—that guide what students do (Cole, 2008).

To summarize, the relationship between reading and writing is important for the learning process of ESL/EFL students. The two processes are almost two sides of the same coin, and knowledge of one supports the learning and development of the other. Drawing on their understanding of sound/letter correspondence, readers decode messages. Also, drawing on the same skills to form the words that tell their stories, writers encode messages. Moreover, sounding out a word helps students to read and to spell it; knowledge of signal words and phrases allows writers to join ideas in an appropriate way, and allows readers to connect ideas and understand the relationship between those ideas (ibid.).

3. The Genre Approach To Teaching Writing
The notion of genre has been established by Swales (1990), and the introduction of genre pedagogy is a reaction to the widespread emphasis that has been placed on the planning-writing-re-viewing framework, i.e., on the learners’ strategies for writing and the cognitive process they go through. This over-emphasis has been at the expense of teaching and raising students’ awareness about the necessary linguistic resources to express and communicate effectively in different social contexts. The discovery-based approach failed to take into account the social authority of powerful text forms. On the one hand, it succeeded, up to an extent, to provide students with the freedom they need to encourage and boost their writing fluency, but, on the other hand, it could not free them from the grammatical and social constraints involved in the construction of social meanings in different contexts.

Over the last few decades, a good deal of attention has been given to the notion of genre and its application in language teaching and learning. This interest in the notion of genre is due to the changing views that characterized areas of discourse and teaching composition. Understanding how language is structured to achieve different social purposes in given contexts of use has become a central focus.

For language teachers, genre-based pedagogies offer principled ways for assisting writing teachers to provide their students with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction. By enabling teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will need to write in occupational, academic, or social contexts, they help guide learners to participate in the world outside the ESL classroom (Hyland, 2007).

By making explicit what is to be learnt, providing a coherent framework for studying both language and contexts, ensuring that course objectives are derived from students’ needs, and creating the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses, genre approaches provide an effective writing pedagogy.
Genre instruction, in contrast to other previous teaching pedagogies, stresses the fact that genres are specific to particular cultures, reminding us that our students may not share this knowledge with us, hence, urging us to go beyond syntactic structures, vocabulary, and composing to incorporate into our teaching the way language is used in specific contexts. It assists students to exploit the expressive potential of society’s discourse structures instead of merely being manipulated by them.

Genre pedagogies appear more promising for the learners’ benefits since they take into consideration language, content and context. The same can be said for teachers since those pedagogies represent a good means for making it explicit to the learners how writing works to communicate through systematic explanations (ibid.).

In support of the genre-based pedagogy, Hyland (2003:10-16) enumerates the following advantages of the genre pedagogy:

- **Explicit**: Makes clear what is to be learnt to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills.
- **Systematic**: Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts.
- **Needs-based**: Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students’ needs.
- **Supportive**: Gives teachers a central role in scaffolding students’ learning and creativity.
- **Empowering**: Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts.
- **Critical**: Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses.
- **Consciousness-raising**: Increases teachers’ awareness of texts to confidently advise students on writing.

Hyland (2007) points out that by stating these advantages, he makes no claim that “all these characteristics are unique to genre pedagogy”. He (ibid.) claims, however, that the most important feature in the genre-based writing instruction is the fact that it makes it clear to students how target texts are structured. It is the explicitness which, to use Hyland’s (2007) words,

 [...] gives teachers and learners something to shoot for making writing outcomes clear rather than relying on hit or miss inductive methods whereby learners are expected to acquire the genres they need from repeated writing experiences or the teacher’s notes in the margins of their essays. (p.151)

The genre-based pedagogies shift the teaching focus from the implicit and exploratory instruction to a ‘conscious manipulation of language and choice’, by providing teachers with useful knowledge of appropriate language forms. The main aim of genre pedagogy is to address ESL/EFL learners needs. It calls for teachers’ attention to the way texts actually work in communication. This, Hyland (2007) argues, require a good knowledge of language on the part of teachers in order to be able to make appropriate linguistic choices, appropriate organization of their topics, and so on. Knowledge and focus on grammar, for instance, is necessary since it gives learners the ability to codify meanings in ‘distinct and recognizable ways’ (ibid.).
One of the central matters emphasized by Hyland (ibid.) is the fact that genre is not prescriptive, hence providing learners with descriptions of how texts are written. According to Hyland (2007):
Selecting a particular genre implies the use of certain patterns, but this does not dictate the way we write. It enables us to make choices and facilitates expression. The ability to create meaning is only made possible by the possibility of alternatives. By ensuring these options are available to students, we give them the opportunity to make such choices, and for many L2 learners this awareness of regularity and structure is not only facilitating, but also reassuring. (p.151)

3.1. The concept of genre
According to Hyland (2007:149), genre refers to “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language.” Members in a given discourse community are said to share some concepts, notions, conventions and knowledge that help them recognize similarities among texts. Based on certain shared knowledge as well as repeated experience, people can read, understand and even write those texts easily. Within the realm of genre pedagogy, writing is seen as being based on the readers’ expectations. The interpretation of the writer’s purpose is based on the latter’s ability to anticipate what his/her reader might expect on the basis of repeated experience gained from reading texts of a similar kind (ibid.).

The reader understands the text on the basis of his/her anticipation and by making connection to prior texts. Texts are recognized as belonging to the genre of poetry, recipe and so on, and the reader can, as a result, respond to them immediately. To use Hyland’s (2007:150) words, as members of a given discourse community, “we process a schema of prior knowledge which we share with others and can bring to the situation in which we read and write to express ourselves efficiently and effectively.

Hyland (ibid.) argues that genre application in classroom is a result of the communicative approach to language teaching which emerged in the 1970s. It has as its main focus the role of language in helping students achieve particular purposes in given contexts.

3.2. Genre and writing instruction
Genre teaching pedagogies are based on a set of principles which, according to Hyland (2007), can be translated into syllabus goals and teaching methodologies. He (ibid.) maintains that:
- Writing is a social activity: Communication is always purpose-driven, has a context and directed to given audience. These latter are said to form the basis of both writing tasks and syllabuses. Teachers should engage their students in a variety of “relevant writing experiences which draw on, analyze, and investigate different purposes and readers.”
- Learning to write is needs-oriented: Effective teaching recognizes learners’ wants, prior learning, and students’ current level of proficiency. Genre-based courses make a further addition by emphasizing the kinds of writing learners will be in need of in their TL, thus, incorporating them into their courses.
• **Learning to write requires explicit outcomes and expectations:** Learning will be more effective if teachers are more explicit about what is taught, why it is taught, and what will be expected of students at the end of each course. *(ibid.:152)*

• **Learning to write is a social activity:** To use Hyland’s *(ibid.:153)* words, “Learning to write is supported within familiar routines, or cycles of activity, and by linking new contexts and understandings to what students already know about writing. Teaching is, therefore, always a series of scaffold developmental steps in which teachers and peers play a major role.” *(ibid.:153).*

In line with Hyland (2007), and over the few last decades, there has been a considerable movement in literacy curriculum in many places all around the world. In the late 1980s, genre-based approaches emerged and started to underpin many ESL/EFL English syllabuses. They represented a move away from the naturalistic models of language learning that framed such approaches as the process approach to teaching writing, which has dominated the teaching of writing throughout the late 1970s and well into 1990s. These approaches were seen as progressivist that were closely aligned with principles of developmental psychology. Moreover, such kind of movement (process approach) is based on the assumption that language learning is an individualized phenomenon. Genre approaches were a reaction to the formal instruction of grammar and language features. The central focus of genre-based curricula is on an explicit teaching of grammar and text *(Hyland, 2003).*

4. **Research Questions**

The research questions that guide the present research paper are as follows:

1. What is the most useful teaching approaches adopted in teaching Written Expression to EFL students at the university of Constantine 01?
2. Is there a relationship between increasing reading-based tasks, adopting the genre approach to teaching Written Expression to EFL students, and the students’ writing proficiency?

5. **Research Hypothesis**

Teaching writing on a reading-based method and adopting the genre approach will develop EFL students' writing proficiency as well as their communicative competence vis-à-vis the use of the linguistics feature that characterize each genre of writing (connectives).

6. **Research Methodology**

6.1. **Subjects**

The subjects of the present study are third-year-LMD (Licence/Master/Doctorat) students at the English Department, Constantine University 01, of the year 2010-2011. The reason behind choosing this particular year (i.e., third year) is simply the fact that students are in their last year of study. This is of due importance for the aim of the
study since at this level, students may be involved in different kinds of jobs either in the academic domain, if they aspire to have higher educational degrees, or otherwise. Given this fact, it is usually expected that, before leaving university, students should have possessed the most important skills of language amongst which writing forms the cornerstone. As such, this study has been set at this level of study to test how successful students' written texts will be in terms of communicating ideas and conveying meaning.

Two group of students, each group consisting of 28 students, were selected in the present research experiment. Both groups have been tested before any teaching intervention for their proficiency in writing and with regard to the use of connective expressions as textual markers that are specific to each genre of writing. Both groups have received a teaching intervention (quasi-experiment) and have been both used as experimental groups.

6.2. Materials
This study is based on a corpus of students' written compositions. The texts were obtained from the students' first and second semester exam in Written Expression. The corpus used for the analysis consists of essays selected from 112 argumentative essays written in an exam and under exam conditions by third-year students attending a three-year degree in English. The participants were all Algerian native speakers, with just one exception which has been ruled out from the analysis, and they all aged between 21-27.

In the first two years of their studies, students attend compulsory writing classes with focus being placed on the acquisition of the basics of English writing. Efforts on developing the students’ competence vis-à-vis certain types of writing are also being emphasized. In their second year at university, students are introduced to the expository and narrative and/or descriptive types of writing. Efforts are done to help them master knowledge of writing these texts, and in their third year, teachers move to the more complicated type of writing, i.e., the argumentative type.

6.3. The Experiment
This study is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a new program or teaching intervention will have certain positive effects on the participants’ performance. Data have been collected to determine the participants’ level of proficiency in writing prior to any kind of intervention to take place as a part of pretest. Data have also been collected from the same sample of participants after the teaching intervention (post-test). The present study looks at two groups of participants (108 essays) who received a teaching intervention; we call it the treatment group. The pre-test allows us to make inferences about the effects of our intervention by looking at, and comparing the pre/posttest results.

6.4. Procedure
The texts contained in the sample were typed using a computer, but the different types of mistakes (punctuation, tense, grammar and spelling) found in the texts were kept as they were in the original texts of students. In addition to that, incomplete conjunctions were counted and considered as mistakes. These include expressions such as
even (though), despite (the fact) and so on. Mistakes of spelling were also counted such as also, in one hand and so on.

The essays (112) were scored on the basis of (a) overall quality, as measured by holistic scores. Writing samples and data scoring rubrics are used to make it clear what factors led the raters to award higher holistic scores to certain essays rather than to others. Two independent raters have been called to score the students’ essays each one separately. The following are the criteria of holistic scoring given to both raters to consider before starting to score students’ essays:

1. The rater goes through the essay as a whole (usually from 2 to 4 minutes).
2. The task is taken as a whole and the rater assigns a score on the basis of an overall impression about the performance.
3. The rater’s attention should be placed on the overall communicative ability of the student.
4. The rater takes account of all language aspects together especially coherence in writing.
5. Minor mistakes that do not impede or create reading problems are overlooked if reading is still eligible and communicative.

To avoid the intervention of scorer external variables that might affect ratings, features such as handwriting has been ruled out by typing all essay samples and keeping the same mistakes found in them. We believe that teachers adhered to the identified factors: (a) content, (b) development, (c) organization, (d) the degree to which the writer effectively addresses the task, (e) coherence.

The assumption underlying holistic scoring is that higher scores indicate greater quality of writing. We also maintain that connective expressions as markers of discourse organization, coherence and the writer’s moves, contribute to writing quality. Accordingly, focus will be placed on the notion of coherence and cohesion, namely, conjunctive cohesion. We examined and analyzed the 112 essays on the basis of one discursive feature: conjunctions. Our reason for choosing to focus on connective expressions stems from our experience as teachers and as discourse analysts who seek to explore how language functions and what features lead to successful communication.

6.5 Methodological Procedures

To test the research stated hypothesis, a quasi-experimental study has been carried out. As such, two different methods of teaching Written Expression have been used. Two groups of third year students have been chosen as the sample for this study, both of which were used as an experimental group. In the first semester, students were taught using the ordinary method of teaching with given focus on different matters. The ordinary method of teaching involved teaching students writing by delivering the course to students in a theoretically-based way. Even if students were given texts to read, the focus of teaching has been very broad put mainly on language structure such as the thesis statement, the topic sentences, the supporting details and so forth. This method of teaching was the one practiced in the Department of Foreign Languages at the university.
of Constantine 01. The new method of teaching writing, which differs in terms of teaching focus and teaching approach, has been used in the present study experiment, and it aims at testing the research stated hypothesis, was introduced and applied on a reading-based method adopting the genre approach to teach the subject of Written Expression. Besides other aspects of writing, the main focus of teaching has been on discourse structure, discourse moves, coherence and the use of conjunctions. As such, the tasks, activities and method of assessment were determined by, and dependent on, the objectives of the teaching content.

The main aim of the present research is, in the first place, to test the efficacy of a given method of teaching Written Expression to EFL students at the university of Constantine 01, on the basis of greater exposure of students to written material in the argumentative type of writing (through reading, analyzing, and highlighting features of the English prose) will improve EFL students' writing proficiency and increase their linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic knowledge of the text-type at issue. Prior to the application of the new method of teaching, students were given a pretest to elicit information and gain some knowledge about the level of their writing proficiency in writing in general, and their use of connective expressions in their writing in particular. Thereafter, the teaching intervention took place, and a post-test followed in due course. During the period of teaching, students' level of proficiency and progress vis-à-vis certain linguistic features and norms of writing was also observed and evaluated on a regular basis.

7. Results: Quantifying the Association between Two Variables: Correlation Coefficient

In order to test the research stated hypothesis and to explore the relationship between the use of connective expressions and the students’ proficiency in writing, reflected by the marks they received on their essays, the statistical test which has been used is Pearson product moment correlation coefficient test. The results of the test are discussed below.

Table 1: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (pretest 1 Group 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Variable X(Conjunction)</th>
<th>Variable Y (Mark)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statistic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>31.5714285714286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Biased Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>9.02547415227972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0930634914103043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T-Test</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.476600922708735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments:

Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient test is used to measure the strength of a linear association between variable (x) and variable (y). Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient ($r$) value in the first pre-test of group 1 was 0.09. This value reflects a positive relationship. Though this is a very small association between variable (x) which is the number of connective expressions and variable (y) which is the overall grade the student got in her essay, but the relationship is nevertheless positive to some extent.

Table 2: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (pretest 2 Group 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Variable X (conjunction)</th>
<th>Variable Y (Score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>37.9642857142857</td>
<td>10.6517857142857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Standard Deviation</td>
<td>10.675345905594</td>
<td>1.75298124342388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.155829052677176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.804401923465313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Number of Observations     |                           | 28                     

Comments:

The result of Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient test in the second pretest (group 2) is 0.15. The ($r$) value here reflects also a positive association between the dependent variable (y) and the independent variable (x). The degree of association reflects also a weak, tough positive relationship, meaning thus that the association is not strong.

Table 3: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (posttest 1 Group 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Variable X (Conjunction)</th>
<th>Variable Y (Score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>30.57142857142856</td>
<td>10.1785714285714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Standard Deviation</td>
<td>7.79390133111676</td>
<td>1.81001324834479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.319983690387982</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The correlation coefficient results in the first group posttest is 0.31, which means that the association between the two variables (the number of connective expressions and the final mark) is medium positive. The closer the \((r)\) to +1, the more positive the association is, and the closer the \((r)\) is to -1, the more negative the association is. In this case, the association is considered positive but it is not very strong enough to claim anything about the effectiveness of the teaching intervention.

Table 4: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (posttest 2 Group 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Variable X(Conjunction)</th>
<th>Variable Y(Score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>30.2857142857143</td>
<td>10.1339285714286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased Standard Deviation</td>
<td>11.4824622261739</td>
<td>1.74038447986504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>0.398407471651446</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-Test</td>
<td>2.21485889744835</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
With the second group posttest, the value of \((r)\) is 0.39, which means that despite being positive but the association between variable (x) and variable (y) is medium. In this case also, the degree of positivity cannot be considered as significant, and hence conclude that the teaching intervention has brought significant effect on the students use of conjunctions and their overall marks.

So, the results of the correlation coefficient test show in both groups in the experiment (pretest and posttest), that the relationship between the use of connective expressions and the essays marks is positive, but the strength of association between the two variables (variable x and variable y) was not strong enough. The strength ranged between 0.9 and 0.39. This reflects a small or medium value of \((r)\).
Conclusion

The present research has been based upon the assumption that the students’ writing proficiency can be improved if writing is taught on a reading-based method and adopting the genre approach to writing, with emphasis being placed on connective expressions as textual markers of the argumentative genre. The students’ involved in the present study have been tested before teaching intervention and after the teaching intervention, and then the results of the pretest and the posttest have been compared for the association between the use of connective expressions as features of the argumentative genre and the students’ writing proficiency reflected by the score they received on their writing.

The results of correlation coefficient test have shown that there is a positive association between the use of connectives and the students’ writing proficiency in both experimental groups. Accordingly, the hypothesis upon which the present research has been based was confirmed. Increasing reading-based tasks and adopting the genre approach to teach the argumentative writing to students have led to positive results in the proficiency of students in writing.

About the Author:
Nassira BOUDERSA is a 4th year Ph.D candidate in applied Language Studies at the university of Constantine 01-Algeria, and a part-time teacher at university from 2008 till now. Nassira BOUDERSA is interested in doing research in Discourse Analysis and the translation of poetry from Arabic into English and vice versa.

References
The Linguistic Adjustments of the ACT-R Model to the Acquisition of the Simple Past Tense in the Arab Learners of English Context

Anwar Mourssi
Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

Abstract
The Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational ACT-R model (Taatgen and Anderson, 2002) is one of the most recent computational models of the acquisition of simple past morphology. This empirical study focuses on the ACT-R model which is proposed in order to explain and predict language acquisition behaviour which may be relevant to the SLA of the simple past and the grammatical construction. The study was conducted on 74 Arab Learners of English (ALEs) which lasted four months. Quantitative and qualitative analysis show that the language behaviour of most of the second language learners can be explained drawing on a recent computational model of the acquisition of simple past morphology, namely the ACT-R model. Linguistic adjustments have been made by the researcher to the ACT-R model, which suggested two more strategies are added to the four strategies proposed by Taatgen and Anderson (2002) and updated by Taatgen and Dijkstra (2005). These two added strategies, namely, the L1 Transfer Strategy and the Overgeneralization of Alternative Category Strategy could capture all forms produced by the ALEs in the acquisition of the simple past tense in the three chronological writing, which the ACT-R model could not capture. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of the learners seemed to follow the six strategies proposed in the adjusted ACT-R model which can best accounted for in the acquisition of the simple past tense in the context of the ALEs.

Keywords: ACT-R model, U-shaped learning model, SLA, Crosslinguistic influence, overgeneralization, simple past
1. Introduction
Mourssi (2012a, 2012c, 2013) indicates that the acquisition of the simple past is one of the problems Arab Learners of English (ALEs) face in L2 learning English Language. He pointed out that there is a number of models address the acquisition of the simple past tense: some of these models are; Interlanguage model termed by Selinker (1969), the Words and Rules model designed by Pinker (1999), the U-shaped Learning model, and the ACT-R model. This study examines the ACT-R model, followed by investigating its relevance to the acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context. This paper is divided into five main sections which are introduction, the literature review, the methods used in the current study, the analysis and the discussion, and finally, the conclusion. The following section presents the literature review.

2. Literature Review
First, evaluating the previous models followed by presenting the ACT-R model

2.1 Evaluating the previous models
Mourssi (2013) mentions that some linguists assert that over a longer time-scale, a U-shaped curve does exist, at least for a subset of children, (O'Reilly & Hoeffner, 2003, p.2). However, Hoeffner (1997) argues that there is no empirical indication that all language learners exhibit the U-shaped developmental curve. On the contrary, Taatgen & Anderson (2002) claim that there is a host of empirical studies showing the relationship between learning the simple past tense and the U-shaped learning model, (Mourssi, 2013).

It was pointed out that another model was presented by Kirby (2001) based on the main idea of the U-shaped learning model, (Mourssi, 2013, P.110) and that model was termed as the Iterative learning model (ILM) (p.111). Kirby defines the ILM as a computational implemented model of the transmission of linguistic behaviour. He adds that in ILM, there is no biological evolution, natural selection, nor any measurement of the success of the learners at communicating (except for results-gathering purposes). Nevertheless, counter to intuition, a significant evolution of linguistic behaviour is observed (p.102). Taatgen & Anderson (2002) added that a number of researchers have identified additional aspects related to the U-shape (p.126). As cited by Taatgen & Anderson (2002), a series of empirical studies (Marcus (1996), Marcus et al. (1992), Marchman & Bates (1994)) have suggested a non-linear relationship between the size of the vocabulary and the number of inflected irregular verbs in the simple past tense (p.126). In the following is describing the ACT-R model.

2.2 The Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational (ACT-R) Model
It is worth mentioning that the ACT-R model is a computational model, however, the four strategies proposed by the designers of the model were used to test the data of the study, after some adjustments made to the ACT-R model. Taatgen & Anderson were uncertain what causes the U-shape in the learning of the irregular simple past forms and developed two accounts for that: the dual-representation and single-representations explanations (Taatgen & Anderson, 2002, p.124). The first account focuses on a dual-representation of knowledge and posits that in the first instance the formation of the simple past tense is based on memorized verbs (irregular forms). This means that in the first stage, producing the simple past is only successful because the forms have been memorized. If the form of the simple past has not been memorized, it cannot be produced. This case changes in the second stage, when the regular rule is learned: the regular rule can produce the simple past form for any verb, although the forms produced can be non-target-like forms. In these non-target-like forms overgeneralization slowly disappears – that is
what occurred in two recent studies were carried out by Mourssi (2012b, 2012d - because more target-like forms are learned. An example: break – broke – broken is shown in more detail below.

Stage one: students produce broke. Stage two: students produce broke if the form is memorized. Students produce *broke if the simple past form has not yet been memorized, and then they apply the –ed rule. Stage three: students produce broke because their memory is strong enough to block the regular rule which produced *broke in the second stage.

Memorization is similar to what Pinker (1999) would refer to as “Rote”. The simple past tense can also be formed by adding –ed to the base form to produce the regular simple past forms and Pinker referred to this as “Rule”. Taatgen & Anderson (2002) elaborated on this and explained that in the second stage of the U-shaped learning model, the blocking mechanism would dictate (in the mind) that the regular rule should apply unless an exception can be retrieved from memory. When the process of retrieval fails to recollect an irregular past tense, the U-shape occurs (p.124). With regard to the second account, learning the simple past is regarded as a single-representation which is usually present in the neural network. According to Taatgen & Anderson (2002), U-shaped learning is mainly initiated by changes in the vocabulary size which means, as the vocabulary grows, the need for regularization increases. Therefore during the learning process, the network shifts weight to support regularization and it takes some time to properly integrate this with the other exceptions causing the U-shape. Taatgen & Anderson also pointed out that the growth of vocabulary is related to the distinction between the learner's input (which represents the raw input from the environment) and the learner's uptake (which represents what the learner actually processes) (p.124). They explained that one of the problems related to the single-representation model is that children do not receive feedback on the syntactic correctness of the language they produce, but most network models need the correct answer to adjust their weights (in the classroom context, students receive a variety of types of feedback on their performance and this may help ALEs, for example, to develop the target-like usage of the simple past, drawing in part on the strategies produced in Taatgen & Anderson’s ACT-R model).

In the following section, the four proposed strategies in the acquisition of the simple past tense in the original copy of the ACT-R model are presented.

2.2.1 The ACT-R model and the proposed strategies used in the acquisition of the simple past

According to Taatgen and Anderson (2002), the main aim of the ACT-R model, which is a computational model set up to mimic first language acquisition of the simple past tense, is to produce the past tense with the use of three strategies at the starting point: the Retrieval Strategy, the Analogy Strategy, and the Zero Strategy. The model later learns the fourth strategy which is the Regular Rule Strategy (p.127). The Retrieval Strategy aims to produce a past tense by recalling an example of inflecting the word from the memory. Taatgen & Anderson (2002) explain that the successfulness of this strategy depends on the availability of examples. The second strategy, the Analogy Strategy, recalls an arbitrary example of a past tense from the memory and tries to use this as a basis for analogy. They posit that the Analogy Strategy will only succeed if it is able to find a pattern in the example which is applicable to the current word. The third strategy, the Zero Strategy, is also called the do-nothing strategy. It always succeeds, because it does not attempt any inflection at all. Taatgen & Anderson mentioned that associated with each strategy is the expected outcome of that strategy and the estimate for expected outcome is continuously updated on the basis of experience of how much effort it takes to use a
strategy. In other words, the strategy with the highest expected outcome has the highest probability of being tried first, and if it fails, other strategies can be attempted. The fourth strategy, the Regular Rule Strategy, is learned on the basis of the Analogy Strategy, but it takes time to surface. That is because new rules can only be learned when the parent rules have sufficient experience, and because the new rules start out with a relatively low expected outcome and first have to prove themselves.

It is proposed that the dynamics of the expected outcomes of the different strategies, the introduction of the regular strategy, and the increased availability of examples of past tenses in memory, can explain U-shaped learning. The assumption of the ACT-R model is that it both perceives target-like forms of past tenses in the environment, and produces them itself. The model does not receive any feedback on its own production.

2.2.2 The ACT-R as a model of learning the simple past tense
Taatgen & Anderson (2002) mention that the ACT-R model initially has to choose between numbers of ways to produce a past tense given the stem of verb. They mention that, first, the model attempts to retrieve the past tense from declarative memory (Retrieve Strategy), then it attempts to generate a new past tense by analogy which retrieves an arbitrary tense from memory and uses it as a template to find a past tense for the current word (Analogy Strategy) (p.133). It is worth mentioning that Lebiere, Wallach, & Taatgen (1998) and Salvucci & Anderson (1998) comment that the Analogy Strategy is probably one of the dominant strategies for problem solving and discovery. Finally, the model uses just the stem as a past tense, basically doing nothing at all (Zero strategy or Zero Rule). The interesting issue here is that the authors themselves evaluate the strategies proposed in the ACT-R model. They mention that none of the proposed strategies are very good initially: the Analogy Strategy involves more than one reasoning step and it is only successful if the retrieved example is suitable; the Retrieval Strategy needs examples before it can be successful, and the Zero Strategy always succeeds, but it rarely produces target-like forms of past tenses (there are some instances, however, where the base form and the simple past are identical, like put). Finally, there is no production rule for the Regular Rule Strategy, because the ACT-R model will learn it as a specialization of the Analogy Strategy (Taatgen & Anderson, 2002, p.134).

Evaluating the Analogy Strategy, Taatgen & Anderson (2002) mention that the Analogy Strategy produces two types of past tense: past tenses identical to the present tense (mimicking the Zero Rule Strategy), and past tenses by adding –ed to the stem. They suggest that the former-present tense will occur much more than the latter –ed in the initial stages of running the model (p.135).

2.2.3 How the model works
The model’s strategies will produce different behaviour at different stages in the learning: initial behaviour, behaviour after the model has seen some examples, behaviour after the model has learned the Regular Rule, and finally behaviour after the model has mastered the task.

2.2.3.1 Stage One: Initial behaviour
The model does not know any single example of inflecting words initially, so the Retrieval Strategy and the Analogy Strategy will always fail. The only strategy which is viable is the Zero Strategy, which will produce the stem verbs as past tense.

2.2.3.2 Stage Two: Behaviour after the model has learned some examples
At this stage, the Retrieval Strategy may or may not be successful. If the target-like example is present in the memory and it is sufficiently active, it will be retrieved, producing the target-like past tense. At this stage, the Analogy Strategy is now also a viable strategy. If analogy retrieves an example that does not sufficiently match the target verb, it will fail and will produce the stem as past tenses. It might also produce an irregular verb in which the stem is identical to the past tense e.g. hit-hit. It is also mentioned that, at this stage, when the analogy retrieves a regular example work-worked, it can use this as a template to produce *caught. Taatgen & Anderson (2002) comment that these occasional regularizations build up eventually so that the model learns the regular rule (p.137).

**Stage Three: Behaviour after the model has learned the regular rule**
As mentioned above, the occasional use of the Analogy Strategy will lead to learning the Regular Rule. At this stage, still, the Retrieval Strategy will remain the dominant strategy. However, because of the huge amount of examples of regular endings, the model will produce –ed with irregular verbs *gived. If the Retrieval Strategy fails to find a past tense, the Regular Rule Strategy is now the backup strategy. The Analogy and Zero strategies will at this stage be used very rarely, because they now have to compete with the Regular Rule Strategy, and with the successful Retrieval Strategy.

**Stage Four. Behaviour after the model has mastered the task**
Taatgen & Anderson (2002) mention that there is no clear moment at which one may judge that the model has mastered the task, but it is the moment when all irregular past tense forms are represented as chunks in declarative memory. At that stage also, regular past tense forms with high and moderate frequencies will be memorized separately as irregular verbs. The Regular Rule Strategy will now only be used for low-frequency regulars and new words, and the Analogy and Zero Strategies will almost never be used any more (p.138).

To sum up, during stage one the main strategies are Retrieval and Do-Nothing. If the Retrieval Strategy succeeds, the model will generally produce target-like irregular verbs, while Do-Nothing produces undetectable errors that are not counted. After the Regular Rule is learned, the transition to stage two begins. An important aspect of the ACT-R model is that the Regular Rule will not dominate the Retrieval Strategy (irregular verbs) although, whenever retrieval fails to find an example, the Regular Rule is applied. This produces the over-regularization errors in irregular verbs. In the following section, methods used in the current study will be presented.

### 3. Methods
This section discusses the subjects of the study, the research question and the methods used in the analysis of the written texts.

#### 3.1 The subjects of the study
Based on the results of a placement test, two classes were selected from a total of 12 enrolled in grade 12. The target location was in one of the Omani government secondary schools (High School). Each group consisted of 37 Arab Learners of English (ALEs), with ages ranging between 16 and 18, pre-intermediate to intermediate level in English. The subjects were all Arabic speakers and had been learning English as a foreign language for eight years attending four to five sessions per week on average.

#### 3.2 The research question
The current study seeks to answer the following question: How relevant is the Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational ACT-R model to the acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context? This is to provide empirical evidence in relation to the acquisition of the simple past tense forms to test hypotheses emerging from the ACT-R model and thus contribute to the advancement of theory on Second Language Acquisition.

3.3 Methods assigned to the research question

For the research question presented above, and to investigate how ACT-R model as a language acquisition model best accounts for the acquisition of the simple past tense, quantitative analysis were followed for all the simple past tense forms produced by the samples in 222 written texts which had been collected chronologically. The ACT-R model was tested to measure how it is relevant with regards to capturing the simple past forms produced by ALEs in the classroom context. In the section below, the relevance of the ACT-R model to the acquisition of the simple past in the ALEs’ context will be discussed.

4. The Analysis and the discussion

4.1 The relevance of the ACT-R model to the acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context

The ACT-R is a computational model, applied by Taatgen & Anderson (2002) to capture behaviour in first language acquisition of the simple past tense. The current study tries to apply the strategies proposed in the ACT-R model to capture behaviour in the second language acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context in the classroom settings.

Table 1, 2 and 3 below show the ways in which the four strategies described in the ACT-R model could capture the simple past forms produced in the three chronological written texts collected from each sample in the current study. The first piece of writing (B) was collected after two weeks; the second piece of writing (M) was collected after two months; while the third piece (F) was collected after four months at the end of the experiment.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 below also show how the strategies of the ACT-R model capture the forms of the past tense produced by the ALEs in the three chronological writings. The past tense forms will be distributed as the sequence of the ACT-R model, the Retrieval Strategy, then the Analogy Strategy, after that the Zero Strategy, and finally the Regular Rule Strategy. The tables also show the failure of the strategies during the learning process and the amount of stem and present verbs used instead of the past tense, as mentioned by Taatgen & Anderson (2002) evaluating the performance of the ACT-R model. The section below analyses the relevance of the ACT-R model to writing B.

4.1.1 The relevance of the ACT-R to Writing B

Table 1 below shows the relevance of the ACT-R model to ALEs’ writing B. The table presents the four strategies proposed in the ACT-R model: the Retrieval Strategy, the Analogy Strategy, the Zero Strategy, and the Regular Rule Strategy. The table also shows the proportion of the simple past forms captured by each strategy in both groups.

As shown in Table 1 below, the irregular simple past forms captured by the Retrieval Strategy from ALEs writing B is 304 (32.72%) forms. The Analogy Strategy captures 9 (0.97%) forms produced by ALEs in writing B. The third strategy in the ACT-R model, the Zero Strategy, captures 395 (42.52%) forms from writing B. The higher number captured by the Zero Strategy shows how the ALEs start acquiring the simple past tense by producing the root or the simple present instead of the simple past tense forms. The Regular Rule Strategy which is learnt at the last stage captures 221 (23.79%) forms from the simple past tense forms.
Table 1 reveals the results of implementing the ACT-R model and how it is relevant to the ALEs writing B. The model was able to capture 929 out of 1003 forms produced by the ALEs in writing B; however, 74 simple past forms have not been captured. The model could not capture them due to the fact that they are not matched with any of the four strategies proposed in the ACT-R model. The forms will be captured by the ACT-R model after the adjustment on the model has been made by the researcher at the end of this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Retrieval Strategy</td>
<td>32.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Analogy Strategy</td>
<td>0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Zero Strategy</td>
<td>42.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regular Rule Strategy</td>
<td>23.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total captured forms</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left uncaptured forms</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 The relevance of the ACT-R to Writing M

Table 2 below shows the implementation of the ACT-R model on ALEs’ writing M. The table shows the proportion of the simple past forms captured by each strategy in both groups. As shown in the table, the Retrieval Strategy captures 345 (37.34%) irregular simple past forms produced by the ALEs in writing M. The Analogy Strategy captures 19 (2.06%) forms from the total of simple past forms produced by the subjects in writing M. The third strategy in the ACT-R model is the Zero Strategy which captures 333 (36.04%) forms. This strategy shows how most of the ALEs still use the root and the simple present forms instead of the simple past tense forms. The table shows that the Regular Rule Strategy captures 227 (24.57%) forms from the total captured simple past forms.

Table 2 reveals the results of implementing the ACT-R model on writing M and how it is relevant to the acquisition of the simple past in stage M. The model was able to capture 924 out of 946 forms produced by the ALEs in writing M, however, 22 simple past forms have still not been captured. These forms will be captured by the ACT-R model after the adjustment applied to the model at the end of this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Retrieval Strategy</td>
<td>37.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Analogy Strategy</td>
<td>2.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Zero Strategy</td>
<td>36.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regular Rule Strategy</td>
<td>24.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total captured forms</td>
<td>924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left uncaptured forms</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 The relevance of the ACT-R to Writing F

Table 3 below shows the implementation of the ACT-R model on ALEs’ writing F. The table shows the proportion of the simple past forms captured by each strategy. The table illustrates that, the Retrieval Strategy captures 492 (51.46%) irregular simple past forms produced by the
ALEs in writing F. The Analogy Strategy captures 34 (3.56%) forms from produced by ALEs in writing F. It can be noticed how the Analogy Strategy is reduced due to the conflict between the Retrieval Strategy and the Regular Rule Strategy. The third strategy in the ACT-R model is the Zero Strategy which captures 81 (8.47%) forms from writing M. This strategy shows how much progress occurred in the acquisition of the simple past tense forms in both groups, it can be noticed however, that the subjects achieved more progress in writing F more than writing M. The proportion of the Zero Strategy reduced sharply from 333 in writing M to 81 in writing F. The Regular Rule Strategy which is learnt at the last stage captures 349 (36.51%) forms. The total forms captured by the Regular Rule Strategy are 349 simple past tense forms compared with 227 forms in writing M. The increase of the forms captured by the Retrieval Strategy and the Regular Rule Strategy, and the decrease of the forms captured by the Analogy Strategy and the Zero Strategy, reveal that the development occurs in the acquisition of the simple past tense in both groups during the experiment.

Table 3 below shows the results of implementing the ACT-R model on writing F and of the ACT-R model for the acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context. The model could capture 956 out of 973 forms produced by the ALEs in writing F; however, 17 simple past forms have not been captured; this will be captured by the ACT-R model after the adjustment made by the researcher on the model at the end of this section.

Table 3: The relevance of the ACT-R to Writing F

| The Retrieval Strategy | 492 (51.46%) |
| The Analogy Strategy   | 34 (3.56%)  |
| The Zero Strategy      | 81 (8.47%)  |
| The Regular Rule Strategy | 349 (36.51%) |
| Total captured forms   | 956         |
| Left uncaptured forms  | 17          |

4.2 Evaluation of the ACT-R model

The analysis of the simple past forms produced by the ALEs in the three chronological pieces of writing, appears to indicate that the four strategies proposed by Taatgen and Anderson (2002) capture the majority of the variety forms produced by the ALEs in the experiment. It seems, however, that there are some past tense forms which are not captured by the four strategies proposed in the ACT-R model, e.g. how can *are went, *was came, *was gave, *to went, *to visited, and *has went be captured by the ACT-R model?

It might be argued that two proposed explanations for the simple past forms which are not captured by the ACT-R model are as follows: firstly, it may be L1 transfer where learners try to apply some rules from L1 on their performance in L2; secondly, it may be due to learners’ lack of awareness as well as lack of knowledge: when they learnt the simple past tense, the learners tried to overgeneralize other forms instead of the simple past tense e.g. have or has + simple past, thinking that it might be the correct simple past form. These forms could not be captured by the ACT-R model. The above interpretations led the researcher to adjust the ACT-R model in order to capture all forms produced by the ALEs as foreign language learners in the classroom context. In my opinion it might be reasonable to propose two new strategies in addition to the four strategies proposed in the existing ACT-R model in order to capture the simple past tense forms produced in the context of ALEs. The two additional strategies proposed are: the L1 Transfer Strategy and the Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy.
4.3 Proposed Adjustments of the ACT-R model

It might be the case that some forms were not captured by the ACT-R model because of differences between L1 and L2. The proposed adjustment is a reply to a study by Taatgen and Dijkstra (2005) in which it was concluded that the only error type not addressed by the ACT-R model was the so-called blends, like sing-*sanged, (the forms could not be captured by the ACT-R model as they are not related to the regular rule). Taatgen and Dijkstra (2005) concluded that any other error can be explained by the application of the Regular Rule Strategy. The researcher can claim that this may be the case for the L1 acquisition but is not the case for the L2. In the section below, I will present the adjustment to the ACT-R model in an attempt to capture all simple past tense forms produced by ALEs in the classroom context.

4.3.1 L1 Transfer Strategy

One of the strategies which this study suggests should be added to the model is the L1 Transfer Strategy. One explanation of this proposed strategy is the particular forms produced by ALEs due to the differences between L1 and L2. This strategy seems to suggest two types: the first type is using the verb to be + stem, agent, simple past, past participle or gerund. The second type is using to + stem, or simple past. The first type is illustrated below.

Type one

The tables below show the occurrence of the sub-types of the L1 Transfer Strategy in both groups. Table 4 shows applying the L1 Transfer Strategy to the three chronological writings (Type One).

Table 4: Using verb to be + stem, simple past, past participle, or gerund

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Proportion used forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing B</td>
<td>41 (75.93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing M</td>
<td>7 (12.96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing F</td>
<td>6 (11.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type two

Table 5 shows applying the L1 Transfer Strategy to the three chronological writings (Type Two), where ALEs use to + stem or simple past

Table 5: Using to + stem, simple past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Proportion used forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing B</td>
<td>10 (66.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing M</td>
<td>3 (20.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing F</td>
<td>2 (13.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2 Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy

The second proposed strategy may be the Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy. In this strategy, the learners use alternative forms of the simple past which are: the present perfect forms 7; the present continuous 4; the past continuous 9; the gerund 19; the past
participle 2; and finally nouns 3. The learners think that the alternative forms can give the same meaning as the simple past in the English grammar. It is worth mentioning that learners in both groups used more alternative forms in writing B which decreased dramatically in writing M and F. The prevalence of the Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy in the first writing - stage B - seems to suggest that learners' lack of knowledge or the fluctuation in producing the target-like simple past tense forms operate at the beginning of the experiment. It is also worth mentioning that, after the ALEs spent more time learning the simple past tense forms, the Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy decreased as is shown clearly in Table 6 below. Most of these forms rarely appear at stages M and F.

Table 6: Using have or has + simple past, past participle, or any other L2 alternative form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Proportion used forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing B</td>
<td>23 (52.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing M</td>
<td>12 (27.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing F</td>
<td>9 (20.45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In updating the ACT-R model, Taatgen and Dijkstra (2005) presented an extension of the ACT-R model designed by Taatgen and Anderson (2002). They only added change is that, when the model produced *sanged instead of sang, it meant that it considered the verb “sang” as a stem verb. It is worth mentioning that the four strategies proposed in the ACT-R model were found in the production of the simple past tense forms in the classroom context with ALEs. The adjustment made by the researcher could capture all simple past forms produced by all the subjects in the experiment. It is also worth mentioning that the two strategies added by the researcher to the ACT-R model are the same different interlanguage stages found in the context of the ALEs in the acquisition of the simple past tense forms from the interlanguage stages found in other studies. The two additional strategies added to the ACT-R model represent the specific characteristics of the context of the ALEs in the acquisition of the simple past tense, Mourssi (2012a, 2012c).

To sum up, most of the past tense forms produced by ALEs appear to indicate that the ACT-R model can be the most relevant model to the acquisition of the simple past tense in the context of ALEs, and that the forms which were not captured by the ACT-R model, could be captured by the adjustment made to the strategies proposed for the ACT-R model by adding two more strategies, namely, the L1 Transfer Strategy and the Overgeneralization of Alternative L2 Category Strategy.

5. Conclusion

The findings reveal that the ACT-R model offers insights into the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and is therefore integrated in classifying how ALEs learn the simple past tense forms and possibly other grammatical features as well.
The findings of the study reveal that the majority of the learners seemed to follow the six strategies proposed in the adjusted ACT-R model which can best account for in the acquisition of the simple past tense in the context of the ALEs. The learners in both groups started producing target-like forms from the beginning of the experiment, thus drawing on what the ACT-R model refers to as the Retrieval Strategy. This was followed by producing non-target-like forms using the Zero Strategy and the Analogy Strategy. After spending more time learning the simple past tense forms, the learners used the Regular Rule Strategy and at the end of the experiment, most L2 learners used the Retrieval Strategy and the Regular Rule Strategy, while the use of Analogy Strategy and the Zero Strategy decreased sharply. The adjusted ACT-R model could capture all the simple past tense forms produced by all the learners in the experiment.

Another conclusion from the discussion here is that the more Arabic L1 English language learners receive comprehensible input, the greater their proficiency. It is a question of time spent in interaction between the teacher and the students. When it is decided to apply the ACT-R model on L2 writing, overgeneralization of irregular forms to the regular ones or vice versa (such as *brang, *gived, *caught, *camed, *broked and *telled), Language Transfer (the cross-linguistic influence of L1 in learning L2), and overgeneralization of alternative categories on the simple past tense forms were taken into consideration. Therefore, it takes ALEs time to absorb the morphological rules of the simple past tense forms in English in their internalized grammatical system.

Finally, based on the data derived from the implementation of the ACT-R model on the three chronological writings, the researcher claims that the ACT-R model can be the most relevant model to the acquisition of the simple past tense in L2.

**About the Author:**

**Anwar Mourssi** received his M.A in TESL/TEFL from Birmingham University/UK in 2006, and his PhD in Applied Linguistics from University of the West of England, Bristol/UK in 2012. His major field of study is Second Language Acquisition and he is interested in error analysis, FFI and ELT methods. Currently he is assistant professor at Higher College of Technology, Muscat, Oman.

**References**


Mourssi, A. (2012c). The Acquisition of the Simple Past Tense in the Context of Arab Learners of English, *Arab World English Journal*, 3 (3) 204-222


Knowledge Construction and Gender in online Debates

Ines Khalsi
The higher institute of Studies applied to Humanities
Tunisia

Abstract
This study investigated knowledge construction in two online debates using the Gunawardena et al.’s Interaction Analysis Model (1997). On the one hand, it aimed at assessing the relationship between knowledge construction and participation. On the other hand, it investigated the variation of constructed knowledge by gender. Results revealed that most of the postings were coded phase II in debate A whereas most of the postings were coded phase I in debate B. Few postings were coded phase IV and no posting was coded phase V. Statistical analysis yield that knowledge construction and participation are significantly and positively correlated. Besides, there was no disparity in the variation of constructed knowledge by gender which implies that CMC may have an equalizing effect on men and women’s conversational behavior. Findings demonstrated that online debates may be appropriate media for learners to perform higher-order thinking and achieve knowledge construction but limited in fostering the higher mental phases (IV and V). The study confirmed the effectiveness of asynchronous online environment in supporting online learning. Some actions could be done to stimulate participation in order to foster knowledge building such as assigning roles or tasks to online debaters.

Keywords: Knowledge construction; online participation; gender; phases of interaction
Introduction
As the Internet is increasingly growing, online education continues to grow too (Johnson & Aragon, 2003), a phenomenon expected to continue at a significant rate (Allen & Seaman, 2004). Online discussion forums, or Computer Mediated Discussions, are popular with educators who aim at using IT (information technology) to enhance the quality of student learning. At NUS (the national university of Singapore), statistics demonstrate that the online discussion forum is among the most used tools in the Integrated Virtual Learning Environment (O’Grady, 2001). Computer mediated communication can not only promote meta-cognition but also uphold new ways of thinking and processing ideas (Johanyak, 1997, Gil & Quinones 1999). Computer mediated discourse (CMD) also enables students to produce language abilities (Beauvois, 1998) and generate a large range of views (Sommers, 1997). Barker & Kemp (1990) emphasize that electronic discussion purportedly encourages “a sense of group knowledge” and “a communal process of knowledge making” (p.15). It also promotes “critical awareness about how communication, or miscommunication occurs” (DiMatteo, 1991). Asynchronous discussion is one of the main ways to assist student learning in online courses (Joeng, 2003). As an instructional approach, asynchronous online discussions provide for dialogue, critical thinking, self-evaluation and independent learning by learners (Kaylor & Weller, 2007).

The increase of online education has spurred a demand for institutions to assess how to expand online programs (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005) and use the environment in a better way (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2002). The implementation of asynchronous discussion groups is based on the notion that social dialogue is important to trigger construction of knowledge. The importance of dialogue is in turn founded on principles of the social constructivist theory. Social constructivists regard individual learning as socially mediated (De Wever, Van Keer, Schellens & Valcke, 2009). The strength of computer conferencing and electronic mail as constructivist learning means and environments lies in their abilities to foster conversation and collaboration. Dyads or groups can work together in order to solve problems, discuss about interpretations, negotiate meaning, or engage in other educational activities including coaching, modeling, and scaffolding of performance (Jonassen et al., 1995). The use of computer-mediated-communication tools can present new ways to promote knowledge construction (Schellens & Valcke, 2006).

Computer-mediated-communication tools can help make the construction of knowledge easier by working as a social medium to support students’ learning by discussion and representing students’ ideas and understandings in concrete forms (e.g., notes) so that ideas can be more developed via social interactions (e.g., questioning, clarifying) (Van Drie et al., 2005). One example of such tools is the asynchronous discussion forum. The technology which is available in asynchronous online discussions provides a number of ways to foster the construction of collaborative knowledge, while asynchronicity offers learners the opportunity to interact at any time from any place (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994). The debate could be described as a constructive learning environment which offers multiple approaches and actual world examples of the topic of discussion, that encourages reflection, and that supports collaborative construction of knowledge via social negotiation (Jonassen, 1994).

While Internet technologies can enable greater synchronous and asynchronous collaboration among distance learners, there is still a lack not only of clarity of what online collaboration is or should be but also of knowledge on how to structure and engage in it (Chan, 1996). An extra challenge to efficient collaboration in online courses is that the intended consequence of collaboration have not been clearly stated by research and/or experienced in
practice (Chan, 1996). Although much praised as a method to effective, deep, and reflective learning online (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000; Hathorn & Ingram, 2002), collaborative interactions leave many tutors and students insecure at best and unwilling to engage fully at worst. Conflict orientation as debates can facilitate the development of new knowledge structures by suggesting alternative approaches, focusing learners on the task, and receiving new information (Doise & Mugny, 1984).

Collaborative work enhances critical thinking; in support of this some claim that the participants of group work activities can develop their critical skills in a better way via their interactions with other group members than those who work by themselves (Dundes, 2001). Although the significance of CMC, in relation to the social constructivist theory is well documented in research literature (Resnyansky, 2002), the research relationship is often tentative. In fact, Hendricks & Maor (2004) claim that research has not totally supported strong evidence linking CMC to social constructivism, as the most of studies were often anecdotal or descriptions focusing on individual experiences. The fundamental problem with this is the use of small samples of discourse data, and as a result, the studies often neither describe the cognitive processes of the students correctly nor illustrate how knowledge develops and grows across time and across topics (Fitzpatrick & Donnelly, 2010). No wonder, CMC researchers continue to incite further search into the quality of student learning via CMC. Yet, there is a movement towards other kinds of content analysis like speech acts, genre, roles and goals of interlocutors which are starting to show some interesting results (Guevarra Enriquez, 2009).

Early analysis of computer-mediated communication using asynchronous tools tended to concentrate on more quantitative analysis of the data, focusing essentially on word counts and numbers of postings. Yet, this method of analysis gives a first good survey of the interactions which occur online but does not take into consideration the content of what is posted on the discussion boards. The analysis of the content of the discussion boards, thus, moved towards a more semantic labeling of content or propositions (Fitzpatrick & Donnelly, 2010). The assessment of co-construction of knowledge based on quantitative analysis of discussion posting underestimates the complexity of the available issue. Although a quantitative analysis allows the researcher to understand some linguistic online behaviors, it does not allow deep investigation of the language complexity in order to pinpoint the collaborative learning among learners. Thus, linguistic models for a qualitative analysis of online discourses have been elaborated by several researchers such as Interaction Analysis Model by Gunawardena et al. (1997).

**Gender Issues in Educational Collaborative Work**

Numerous research studies investigating teachers’ interactions with students reported that male informants tended to get more attention than females due to their dominancy (Brophy, 1985; Sadker et al., 1991). This may be explained by the fact that men were more likely to participate to special-issues discussions during educational activities than women (Sierpe 2001). Gender can be the main cause of unbalanced interaction during collaborative work activities (Khan, 2006). In order to optimize collaboration benefits, focus should be on the barriers to collaborative work, and actions should be undertaken to find potential solutions to these issues. Khan (2006) states that gender is the main cause of the empowerment problem in collaborative learning. He adds (2006) that educators and researchers must be determined in resolving the empowerment problem of female students to obtain maximum advantages from group work activities. The equality perspective may make women feel more powerful and behave as such.
Few studies revealed that females are more at ease during the interaction with others through computers modes. For instance, Hiltz & Johnson (1990) sustained that females considered CMC more favorably than males. One reason could be that females could express freely their points of view without being interrupted by dominant males in a decision group. Women viewed email to be easier to use and more efficient than men in a case study with an intra-organizational mail system (Allen, 1995). When investigating a face to face problem solving discussion of a gender-mixed group, McGuire et al. (1987) found that males suggested five times as many first suggestions for a solution. When the same group discussed issues in a computer mediated medium, females were the first to give a solution as often as males.

This paper addresses the knowledge construction issue in online debates from a sociolinguistic view and tries to ask these two research questions: Does knowledge construction occur in online debates and how does it occur? Is there a difference in men and women’s knowledge construction in online debates?

The Study
The goal of this study was to add evidence to the current literature through exploration of how males and females construct knowledge in a social setting within a primary asynchronous environment. This study is a longitudinal case study because the data source is bounded by time and environment (Creswell, 1998).

Variables of the study

**Independent variable**

Gender has been a recurrent variable in previous studies on computer mediated communication (Ogan et al., 1997). The informants are classified by gender to test the relationship, if any, between gender and knowledge construction. Informants of the study include 298 men and 146 women participating in the two selected online debates.

**Dependent variable**

Phases of interaction were identified using the Gunawardena et al’s (1997) Interaction Analysis Model. Phases of interaction by participants were calculated to look into the relationship between the different variables.

**Online conversations sampling and informants of the study**

Informants of the study are 444 online debaters selected from two online debates; 298 men and 146 women. 326 debaters participating in the online debate: “Technology in Education” retrieved from: http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/244, including 86 women and 240 men. 118 debaters participating in the online debate “Internet Democracy” retrieved from: http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/662, including 60 women and 58 men. It was opted for online debates as a CMC interaction, because in debates, participants may have different points of view which may facilitate active interaction. The first selected online debate is entitled “Technology in education” and was retrieved from the Website “The economist.com” on 18th March 2011. It was carried over 11 days from the 15th till the 26th October 2010 and comprised 371 comments. The second online debate is entitled “Internet Democracy” and was also retrieved...
Interaction Analysis Model

The informants’ online transcripts were analyzed qualitatively using the Gunawardena et al. (1997) interaction analysis model (IAM) based on the five phases of knowledge co-construction that occur during the online debates. As stated Gunawardena et al. (1997), notes ranked in Phase I and Phase II will be considered to “represent the lower mental functions”, while notes rated in Phase III, Phase IV, and Phase V will represent the higher mental functions.

Table 1. Gunawardena et al.’s (1997) Interaction Analysis Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sharing/comparing of information: Statement of observation or opinion; statement of agreement between participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discovery and exploration of dissonance: Identifying areas of disagreement, and answering questions to clarify or inconsistency among participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Negotiation of meaning/co-construction: Negotiating meaning of terms and negotiation of the relative weight to be used for various agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Testing and modification of proposed knowledge: Testing the proposed new knowledge against synthesis or co-construction existing cognitive schema, personal experience or other sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Agreement statement(s)/application of newly constructed meaning: Summarizing newly constructed meaning statements that show new knowledge construction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedure

To apply the Interaction Analysis Model, I read each posting in the original sequence and applied a phase or phases from the IAM. It is very possible to code multiple sentences or a paragraph or two with a single phase; this use is consistent with the original application of the IAM (Gunawardena et al., 1997). I calculated the frequencies of the coded phases per posting and also for all the informants’ contributions to the entire discussion. Two raters; myself and an English assistant colleague, coded the online transcripts. In order to conduct inter-reliability checks, I adopted the convention based on prior research using this protocol (Beaudrie, 2000) to use the most advanced phase from each posting as the basis for inter-rater checks. Inter-rater differences were addressed following Chi’s (1997) recommended process for resolving discrepancies between coders:

1. Based on each author or rater’s original coding, record agreements and disagreements of the most advanced coded phase per posting.
2. Determine which authors used the highest phase for the posting.
3. Examine the segments illustrating the highest phase.
4. Determine if code was appropriate by reviewing the phase and code definitions in addition to the examples provided by Gunawardena et al. (1997).
5. If all the study researchers agree on the highest phase to use for the posting, then the change will be recorded; otherwise the disagreement remains.

Chi (1997) describes two types of rater discrepancies. The first happens when raters have firm ideas on which code should be used for a particular data segment. The second type of discrepancies happens when raters use different codes but are not sure of which code should be used. In this case, the passages are going to be re-examined collectively and then we will decide on which code to apply.

Postings were coded using the five phases of Gunawardena et al (1997). For statistical correlation, Phase I was coded 1, phase II was coded 2, phase III was coded 3, phase IV was coded 4 and phase V was coded 5. The absence of phase was coded 0.

A second researcher reviewed the coding of the total postings in debate A and B. The inter-rater was selected based on her field of specialization; “applied linguistics” and her familiarity with discourse analysis. The inter-rating training consisted of an independent review of the Interaction Analysis model. The inter-rater was able to provide reliability for 100 % of the data. Her task was to review the coding made by the investigator. It was easy to reach 100 % agreement because disagreement in coding posts concerned only 3 postings in Debate B. Total agreement was achieved after discussing discrepancies.

The statistical data analysis was based on descriptive and analytical statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate percentages in order to cross-tabulate selected variables of the study which are Gender, Phases of Interaction, Posting frequency and Posting length. Correlation analysis was used to describe the relationship between Phases of Interaction, Posting length and Posting frequency. Data were computed using the statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.
As shown in figure 1, in Debate A, informants went through the four phases of Interaction Analysis Model; the first and the second phase which are considered to “represent the lower mental functions” (Gunawardena et al., 1997), the third and the fourth phase which are considered to illustrate the higher mental functions whereas, in debate B, they only went through the three phases of Interaction Analysis Model; the first, the second and the third phase. These results corroborate Fujiike’s (2004) results showing that participants used only the three first phases of interaction (Gunawardena et al., 1997). They also support Schellens & Valcke’s (2005) study that yield that phase IV (testing tentative constructions) and phase V (statement/application of newly-constructed knowledge) are almost non-existent. Study results disagree with Harris (2009) and Gunawardena et al.’s (1997) results showing that the data included all five phases of the Interaction Analysis Model. These findings are in line with the conclusions of Fahy et al. (2001) who sustain the “lack of discriminating capability of instruments”. They claim that “some previously used analytic approaches and tools have been acknowledged by their developers as failing to discriminate adequately among the types of statements appearing in transcripts” (Schellens & Valcke, 2005 p.972).

A major problem was that large portions of the transcript were coded into a very few interaction categories (Gunawardena et al., 1997; Zhu, 1996), with the result that the transcript’s communicative richness may not have been fully revealed.” (Fahy et al., 2001). Schellens &
Valcke (2005) explain the scarcity of messages in phase IV (testing and adjusting new hypothesis) and phase V (statement/application of newly constructed knowledge) by the fact that students were never asked to test a hypothesis or to come to clear conclusions about newly built knowledge. In this study, informants tended to expose their ideas and give arguments to defend their position but hardly did they ask questions to prompt each other into deeper thinking. This conversational behavior could be due to their willingness to avoid confrontation with other participants caused by a feeling of lack of confidence. The paper results corroborate Lee’s (2012) reviews of previous research revealing that studies addressing the meaningful status of phase III stated that higher phases of knowledge construction are difficult to achieve.

Figure 2

Figure 2. Percentages of constructed knowledge phases in Debate B

Figure 2 reveals that in debate B, most of the informants used the Phase I. This corroborates findings by Gunawardena et al. (1997), Moore & Marra (2005) and Schellens & Valcke (2005) who perceived high percentages of communication in phase I. Quek (2010) explains the large percentage of phase I by the fact that co-construction of knowledge may not always be an observable phenomenon in the online learning environment. Anderson & kanuka (1998) explains the high number of posting coded phase I by one hypothesis which is informants were limited in their interaction ability due to the limitations of a text-only environment and a limited social presence (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) with no opportunity to perform body language or graphic illustration. They added another alternate hypothesis explaining the absence of higher mental phases holding that it is much easier to ignore online messages that are incompatible with individuals’ existing knowledge than it is in a face-to-face environment (Anderson & kanuka, 1998).
However in Debate A, most of the participants used Phase II. These results are in line with Thanasingam & Soong’s (2007) findings revealing that most of the postings are clarification comments. There were more critical comments, (Phase II level) comments, than observations and opinions (Phase I level) suggesting “that the online forum has been effective in engaging students to critically reviewing their peers’ feedback on the presenter” (Thanasingam & Soong’s, 2007, p. 1005). The significant percentage of phase III implied that participants were constructing new knowledge arousing from their proper or another person’s disagreement.

The study results corroborate Thanasingam & Soong’s (2007) findings that Phase III level posting, implies that forum characteristics enabled many participants to achieve greater understanding of the knowledge constructed. “Through exercising higher mental functions such as negotiating or clarifying, they have tried to process and construct more accurate feedback” (Thanasingam & Soong’s, 2007, p. 1005). In debate A and B few postings were non codeable. This result approves Quek’s (2010) finding that shows that 33 % of the postings were irrelevant. Quek (2010) claims that this could result from the participants’ uncertainty of CMC possibilities for online interaction, lack of understanding of who they were communicating with, and lack of help for one another. Also, they are likely to be afraid of criticism, or they were not sure of their own ideas, or they were too dependent on their more able peers to guide the conversation.

Informants displayed new knowledge and confirmed the acquisition of new knowledge (Cawthon & Harris, 2008). In addition, the interaction achieved by the act of disagreeing, negotiating meaning, testing and few times, modifying meaning, and applying new knowledge (Gunawardena et al., 1997) illustrated by the presence mainly of phases II through III and few times phase IV provides evidence for social construction of knowledge. This finding corroborates the position that online conversation promotes sharing information and building new knowledge (McConnell, 1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phases of Interaction</th>
<th>Posting Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posting Frequency</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting Length</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Spearman’s Rho correlation between Posting Frequency, Posting Length and Phases of Interaction in Debate A
Correlation between Phases of Interaction and Posting length and frequency was revealed to be significant and positive implying that writing longer and more frequent postings tend to foster higher order thinking. It means that the higher the participation level is the higher knowledge construction is. These findings support Kale’s ones (2005) showing that the low number of knowledge areas was clear in the postings, which can be a possible explanation for low level of participation and may be the reason behind the low level of knowledge construction too.

Kale (2005) mentions that one reason may be the meaningful active knowledge construction that requires connecting and mentioning more than one type of knowledge. He sustains that: “Without sufficient participation in the forums, it is hard to expect collaboration that leads to meaningful information exchange and knowledge building” (2005, p. 1). High mental phases are achieved by informants through frequent postings. One possible reason is that participants, in groups where messages are frequent and long, have access to a wider range of opinions or viewpoints when compared to participants exchanging short and few messages. This provides greater opportunities for participants to identify the differences between the contributions, to consider all the opinions, and to negotiate the various meanings of ideas or comments raised. These activities would help to promote the achievement of high levels of knowledge construction.

### Table 3. Spearman’s Rho correlation between Posting Frequency, Posting Length and Phases of Interaction in Debate B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of Interaction</th>
<th>Posting Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posting Frequency</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting Length</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Knowledge construction by Gender in Debate A

Figure 3 shows that more women used phase I that men in Debate A. However more men used phase II, III and IV. Whereas Figure 4 shows that in Debate B, more men used phase I and more women used phase II and phase III. These findings on knowledge construction by Gender did not reveal any bias in women and men’s constructed knowledge in online debates.
Figure 4. Knowledge construction by Sex in Debat

Discussion and Implications

The data yield the efficiency of asynchronous online environment in carrying social construction of knowledge. Informants in this study managed to construct knowledge together and change their own existing knowledge. The study results showed that debates format seemed to be an appropriate medium to achieve knowledge construction. Consequently, online debates may be a suitable platform for online learning. Course designers should conceive online learning interface through adopting the debate structure. A motion is announced by the moderator then learners are invited to vote for or against the motion and develop their points of views. The study findings added evidence to the online learning field which is expanding very rapidly. It confirmed the effectiveness of asynchronous online media in supporting online education. It is worth noting that some individuals used more phases of Interaction than other implying that participants have different intentions in the online debate. When learners have different goals in a shared online conversation, they may misunderstand each other and fail to achieve authentic collaboration and knowledge construction. In consequence, it is essential to set common objectives before enacting the conversation.

Indeed, social knowledge building and change were performed as participants shared different ideas, agreed and disagreed on these ideas, negotiated their views and formed together a new knowledge. Actually, the study also supports the importance of collaboration in constructing new knowledge. Collaborative learning is primordial in achieving and catalysing knowledge construction. These data may aid online educators in elaborating appropriate online programs. Results imply that learners worldwide can collaborate together, share their own knowledge and build a new one, thus, achieving authentic social change and knowledge building. The social change that has occurred within learners could be expanded to their whole communities resulting
in an international communities’ ex-changing. It is the new era of cross-cultural collaboration and learning. Therefore, online learning appears to be a potent tool for cross-cultural learning.

Results showed that the two constructs of Participation and knowledge construction are closely intertwined. An increasing participation seems to result in an increasing knowledge building. Consequently fostering informants’ participation should foster social knowledge formation. In the educational online context, which is a quite formal context, the online discussion can be narrowly supervised. When learners’ participation is fading, teachers or moderators could ask further questions to push informants into deeper thinking and explanations. It is possible that some participants may be reluctant from involving in the online conversation due to several factors. One of these factors is the participant’s lack of familiarity with CMC.

The unskilled learner tends to be less self-confident and avoid confrontation with other informants leading to a limited participation and sometimes to a total withdrawal from the interaction. Accordingly, training sessions could be offered to students lacking familiarity with CMC in general and asynchronous online environments in particular. These training sessions should enable them to acquire online skills such as being able to uphold a significant asynchronous communication and using the appropriate computational and linguistic tools in order to fulfill learning collaboration, social change and knowledge construction. Debates could also be assigned to students as an examination. Learners would be assessed according to their postings length, frequency and content. In fact, the testing effect may generate a facilitative anxiety among participants which may push them to participate more and engage significantly and seriously in the online conversation. Nonetheless, testing may also engender debilitative anxiety which may block the student and prevent him/her from involving into the discussion.

When investigating knowledge construction by gender, the research study did not reveal any disparity in women and men’s knowledge construction through the two online debates. Earlier studies investigating women and men’s face-to-face interaction, revealed most of the time men’s domination in participation, problem-solving, solution-finding, etc. Then, focus was on females and males’ interaction online to find out if this disparity is replicated in CMC. Many studies revealed that CMC had an equalizing effect on women and men’s participation. This could be explained by the fact that female participants may feel more at ease when interacting with males’ participants through the computer medium. For instance, Hiltz & Johnson (1990) found that females viewed CMC more favorably than males. These findings are in line with McGuire et al.’s (1987) results that in a face to face problem solving discussion of a gender-mixed group, males gave five times as many first suggestions for a solution. When the same group discussed problems in a computer mediated medium, females were the first to suggest a solution as often as males.

Limitations of the study
One of the main limitations of this kind of research study is the subjectivity of coding. The classification of messages is open to individual interpretation. Using Interaction Analysis Model is mainly based on personal opinion and own knowledge. Posting content could be understood differently by coders resulting in different phases coding. Online debates may be inconvenient for informants who have poor written interaction skills or participants who could be involved in a conversation where the language used is not their mother tongue.

In online discussions; the construction of knowledge may not be an observable phenomenon. For example, participants may have been cogitating on topics discussed in the online forum, generating knowledge construction that was not shared with other informants.
Another possible explanation is that knowledge construction was achieved after the end of the online conversation. Consequently, it is worth noting that online debates analysis provides only for the observable version of the knowledge construction. Besides, the CMC blind effect makes it possible for informants to modify their gender. Actually, participants may lie about their sex, job or educational level. The main limitation is that it is impossible to check the correctness of these information.

**Suggestion for Future research**

There are other variables that should be investigated and that may impact participants’ achievement of higher knowledge construction such as group size. Further studies could replicate this research study under different conditions (e.g., selecting informants from other nationalities and origins because they may have different online linguistic behavior). Besides the group size, there are still other possible factors that may influence participants’ achievement of high knowledge construction levels. Some of these factors may be the duration of the online conversation or the scaffolding techniques used by informants in the discussion. Findings arising from these investigations would provide further insights into how high level of online debate participants’ knowledge construction should be urged. In fact, researchers are using different linguistic instruments to investigate knowledge construction in online discussions. The quality of one conversation based on constructed knowledge can differ from one study to another. Therefore, researchers should elaborate a common model to assess online discussions.

It would be interesting to explore some areas that were not investigated in this study and that may be worthy of further investigation. These areas comprise the influence of CMC familiarity on the use of online debates; the impact of evaluation in the use of online debates; the involvement of a moderator or an instructor in guiding or urging the conversation; the use of hints to trigger discussion and participants’ moderation for the content; the assignment of roles to participants. Other areas that may influence informants’ interaction should be explored such as the impact of those who read but do not send messages, qualified as “ropers” or “lurkers”; consequence of negative or no responses to the first postings.

**Conclusion**

Results of the study imply that learners worldwide can collaborate together, share their own knowledge and build a new one, thus, achieving authentic social change and knowledge building. The social change that has occurred within learners could be expanded to their whole communities resulting in an international communities’ ex-changing. It is the new era of cross-cultural collaboration and learning. Therefore, online learning appears to be a potent tool for cross-cultural learning.

Findings did not reveal any bias in women and men’s knowledge construction through the two online debates. Old theories on men dominance in mixed-sex conversations are no more applicable. Female participants were as able as male participants to achieve advanced levels of knowledge construction online. Consequently, in conceiving educational online programs and interfaces, educators or designers should not consider gender as an issue in CMC and should, may be, focus on other variables such as age, social status, origin, familiarity with CMC, etc.

**About the Author:**

*Mrs Ines Khalsi Zaouchi* is an assistant teacher in Tunisia at “the Higher Institute of Studies Applied to Humanities” in the English department. She is in charge of teaching research
methodology and oral presentation skills to 3rd year Business English classes. For her master’s degree, she has conducted a research study on gender differences in computer-mediated-communication (CMC) that revealed that Age is the most consistent predictor of CMC participation. Currently, she is working on her doctoral thesis entitled “Analysis of Online Debates: Examining Social Construction of Knowledge in Computer Conferencing”.

References


