The Asian EFL Journal
Professional Teaching Articles – CEBU
Conference Issue (1)
April 2011
Volume 51

Senior Editors:
Paul Robertson and Roger Nunn
### Table of Contents:

1. **Jie Xiaoping**
   - Understanding Your Students: An Investigation on Topics of Interest to Chinese EFL Graduate Students

2. **Furqanul Aziez**
   - Examining the Vocabulary Levels of Indonesia’s English National examination Texts

3. **Kuang Yu Chen**
   - The Impact of EFL Students’ Vocabulary Breadth of Knowledge on Literal Reading Comprehension

4. **Reima Al-Jarf**
   - Creating and Sharing Writing iRubrics

5. **Diane Nagatomo**
   - The Impact of “Imagination of Students” in the Development of the Professional Identity of Four Japanese Teachers of English in Japanese Higher Education
Understanding Your Students: An Investigation on Topics of Interest to Chinese EFL Graduate Students

Jie Xiaoping

Graduate School at Shenzhen, Tsinghua University

Bio Data:
Jie Xiaoping is currently a lecturer at Graduate School at Shenzhen, Tsinghua University, China, and has taught EFL courses to Chinese graduate students for four years. She has an MA in applied linguistics, and her research interests include EFL learning and teaching, language assessment, and psycholinguistics.

Abstract
This paper is an illustration of a tentative study conducted to investigate the areas and topics Chinese Non-English major graduate students are interested in speaking, writing and reading about. A total of 172 Chinese Non-English major graduate students participated in this study. Each of the participants was required to (1) give an English mini-speech in public to their classmates on a topic chosen by the speaker, which should be interesting to themselves as well as their audience; (2) spend at least 20 minutes each week reading any English text chosen by themselves and at least 10 minutes each week writing in English on a free topic to the writer’s interest, and briefly record their English reading and writing activities each week for 4 weeks. Based on the written speeches and weekly reports submitted by the participants, the obtained data are analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis to identify and categorize the types of topics that the students have chosen to read, speak and write about according to their own interests. Implications are discussed for the design of syllabus, textbooks, programs and classroom activities for teaching English to non-English major postgraduate students in China.

Key words: topic of interest; EFL teaching; Chinese graduate students

Introduction
As early as the beginning of the 19th century, Herbart (1965, as cited by Hidi, 1990) recognized that a close relationship exists between interest and learning, and stresses that it is first and foremost interest that allows for correct and complete recognition of an object, leads to meaningful learning, promotes long-term storage of knowledge and provides motivation for further learning. When put in a holistic picture of education, interest plays a vitally important role in effective teaching and learning. According to
Information Theory, the information source, the teacher should impart information that is of interest to the information receiver, the student. If the information provided by the teacher is not relevant to the interest of the student, the information channel will be blocked. Besides, the application of needs analysis in English education initially gained its importance and wide use in the field of ESP (English for special purposes) teaching, which encourages the design of course syllabus, textbook design and classroom activities to follow an analysis of student’s needs, interest, and expectation from the course and the teacher. Worthy, Moorman and Turner (1999) raise a crucial issue about the decline of student performance in school, and argue that attitudes about reading, writing and school decline steadily, partly because students’ interests do not typically match the books that schools provide and recommend. Worthy (2000) suggests that students are more motivated to learn when educators listen to their interests, and problem students might be highly motivated learners whose interests do not fit into the traditional curriculum. Thus this paper is attempted to address a critical issue: Do our textbooks match our students’ interests? What are the topics that our students are interested in?

II. Review of Relevant Studies

2. Relevant studies of the role of interest in learning

Many researchers have attempted to explain the relationship between individual interests and learning, and interest has been found to have a positive effect on learning and academic achievement, attention, concentration, persistence, text comprehension, immediate and delayed information recall, cognitive organizing and writing. At the beginning of the 20th century, famous psychologists advocated that interests were the most important motivational factors in learning and development (Claparede, 1911; Dewey, 1913). Renninger and Wozniak (1985) found that particular interests varied widely among young children, but nonetheless they had strong, stable, and relatively focused individual interests, that served as powerful determinants of their attention, recognition, and recall. Renninger (1988) found that students tended to be more competent in both their reading and mathematical performances when the passages or
the word problems involved contexts that included both high levels of knowledge and high levels of interest contexts rather than contexts that involved high levels of knowledge but low levels of noninterest contexts. Hidi (1990) has pointed out interest-based activities are seen as highly motivating and involve attention, concentration, persistence, increased knowledge, and value. Interesting as well as important information tends to be learned more readily than uninteresting and/or unimportant information. Estes and Vaughan (1973) reported that fourth graders scored significantly higher on a test designed to evaluate retention and inferencing when they read passages they rated as personally interesting versus passages of low interest. Fransson (1977) showed that interest factors also strongly affected college students’ comprehension and recall. Interested and personally affected students showed superior comprehension of text and author intentions, when compared to students not so affected. Students spontaneously mentioned interests as the predominant subjective reason for their recall of ideas. Bartlett (1932) also stressed that interest plays a major role in human remembering, indicating that only interest has a powerful effect on immediate as well as delayed recall. Schiefele, Wild and Krapp (1995), through a study of 144 university students with different majors, demonstrated that student interest would result in more time and efforts put in the study, as well as more use of elaboration strategies which are aspects of deep processing approach.

2.2 Studies on topics of student interest

From a literature survey, it appears that most recent studies on learner interest focus on investigating specific methods or techniques to boost and motivate students’ interest in a subject (Cheng, 2010; Driscoll, Gelabert, & Richardson, 2010; Mohammed & Mohan, 2010; Philips & Bonsteel, 2010), but rather little attention has been paid to the study of topics of student interest. Worthy (2000) proposed that students who work individually, in pairs, or in groups to research topics of interests will gain improved school performance as well as willingness to do school work. Yu, Fan and Li (2008) made a questionnaire survey on topics of interest to Chinese undergraduate students with different gender, perceptual learning styles, proficiency
levels, and found that topics of interest to those students are closely related to their daily life, such as campus life, friendship, entertainment, career and profession, success. The results of their study also reveal that the students are not interested in serious issues such as marriage, terrorism, cloning. Xu (2004) conducted a research on the relationship between university students’ interest topics with their learning styles, and found that students with similar learning styles are interested in similar topics.

2.3 Research Objective and Significance

This study attempts to elicit Chinese graduate students’ interest topics from their voluntary English work, with a hope that the topics could provide references to English classroom teaching and textbook design. The objective of the research is to provide EFL teachers and researchers with reading, speaking and writing topics that involve graduate students’ individual interests, thus helping EFL students enhance learning and achievement.

The significance of the research lies in the following aspects: First, this study is addressed to the Chinese EFL learning context, where a large number of graduate students are learning English, and English has gained more and more importance. The study of topics of interest will have implications for EFL teaching and learning; second, the study of the interest of graduate students, the highest grade level in the current education system, may carry greater weight than study of interest of lower grade students. That is because a closer relationship between interest and academic achievement at higher grade levels has been found (Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992). This can be explained by the fact that with growing age, specifically after puberty, students begin to identify more seriously with selected fields of knowledge and competence and tend to reject others, and thus learning efforts are concentrated on selected topics and yield better learning results (Todt, Drewes, & Heils, 1991). Third, the few studies that have been carried out to investigate topics of student interest only demonstrated student interest in general, without addressing the topics that students are interested in writing, speaking and reading about. This study investigated the students’ interest topics in writing, speaking and reading. Fourth, the
methodology employed in this study is different from what is adopted in other interest studies. This study collected data from the reading, writing and speaking tasks that the students have chosen to do out of interest. Topics of interest to them are elicited and identified from their voluntary tasks.

Research Design

3.1 Participants

A total of 172 Chinese non-English major graduate students with different majors were randomly recruited to participate in this study. All of the participants were all first year graduate students when they took part in the study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 35.

3.2 Research process

In one semester, each of the participants was required to (1) give an English mini-speech in public to their classmates on a topic chosen by the speaker, which should be interesting to their audience as well as themselves; (2) spend at least 20 minutes each week reading any English text chosen by themselves and at least 10 minutes each week writing on a free topic of interest to the writers, and briefly record those English learning activities each week for 4 weeks. At the end of the semester, topics of speeches made by all participants as well as their records of reading and writing activities were collected to identify their topics of interest.

3.3 Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted in the study to induct and analyze the topics that the first year graduate students are interested in. Based on the written speeches and weekly reports submitted by the participants, the obtained data are analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis to induct, identify and categorize the topics that the students have chosen to read, speak and write about based on their own interests. The constant comparative method, or grounded theory, proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is an inductive method, and follows the procedures from comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, refining and writing the theory. In this study, topic
categorizing begins with an analysis of initial observations, and as the topics are classified, they are compared across categories to generate a list of categories of topics and their subcategories. This process is completed by the researcher with a reference to UDC (The Universal Decimal Classification), Chinese Library Classification, the Dewey Decimal Classification as well as the book classification adopted by Amazon, an online bookstore.

After the topic categorizing process is finalized, a frequency test was given to the categories of the topics students have chosen to read, speak and write about. Besides, subcategories are given for some topics according to the country and region that the topic is about. In addition, the topic category of relationships subsumes the topics of family relationship, love and romance, friendship, relationship between colleagues.

**Research Results**

The main results of the frequency test are given in the following tables.

**Table 1. Frequency of Reading Topics of Interest to Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health &amp; Mind</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics &amp; Commerce</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Problems &amp; Social Services</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs, Etiquette &amp; Folklore</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the frequency of the top 10 topic areas chosen by the students to read. It reveals that students are most interested in reading materials regarding mental health and mind, such as ways to deal with pressure, keys to success, cultivating personal traits, etc. Politics ranks No.2 in the topic frequency list, which is different from the results of Yu, Fan and Li (2008)’s study, which concluded that
undergraduate students are not interested in serious issues. The difference may be due to the reason that graduate students have more experiences with the society, and are more concerned with state and world affairs than undergraduate students. Students’ high interest in social problems and services also reflect their concern with the society. Biographies, economics, and English textbooks are also popular among the materials the students have chosen to read about, and each of these topic categories accounts for more than 5% of the total topics chosen by the students. In addition, a calculation has been made on the country and region that students are interested in when reading. The frequency test results show students are much more interested in reading English materials about the whole world, US, China and UK than other countries or regions.

An examination was also made on the subcategories of the three topic categories: relationships, textbooks, and biographies. Results show that among all English readings about relations, graduate students are most interested in family relationships and love and romance, that among English textbooks, they are more interested in ESP textbooks than in general English textbooks, and that students are willing to read biographies of business talents, politicians and music stars.

Similar tables are complied for writing and speaking topics that the students are interested in. The following table 2 shows the 10 most popular topic areas students have chosen to speak about. It can be seen from the table that topics regarding mental health and mind are most favored among the students in their mini-speeches, with 45.6% of the participants choosing this category as the topics of their speeches. Topics regarding relationships rank the second in the frequency list, and have been chosen by 15.6% the students. The other topic categories are much less to the students’ interest, with each chosen by less than 5% of the participants. As for the subcategories of relationships, family relations is most frequently chosen by the speaker as the topic, love and romance and interpersonal relations being the 2nd and 3rd most frequently chosen subcategories.
Table 2. Speaking Topic Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental health &amp; Mind</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and Profession</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Other Professional Skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Problems &amp; Social Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment (music, plays, TV shows, movies)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Living (habits)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following Table 3 summarizes the 10 topic categories that students are most interested in writing about. Mental health and mind tops the frequency list, and relationships ranks No. 2, accounting for 13.6% and 9.7% of all the topics respectively. A total of 8.8% of the participants have chosen to write about their school life and problems in daily life. Problems and difficulties in study is the 4th most frequently chosen topic in the students’ writing, accounting for 6.6% of all the topics. Quite a number of students write about their extracurricular activities, dreams and goals, English study and current hot issues around the world. As for the subcategories of Relations, Love and Romance is most frequently written about, with Friendship and Family Relations being the 2nd and 3rd most popular topic subcategories.
Table 3. Writing Topic Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental health &amp; Mind</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The School Life and Problems in life</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems and Difficulties in Study</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Activities</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams and Goals</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Study</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Issues</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorable Experiences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

As interest-based activities need to be involved in teaching and textbook design, topics of student interest should be known. By eliciting students’ individual interests from their voluntary work, this study aims to provide EFL teachers with topics that involve student individual interests.

1. When selecting EFL reading materials, priority should be given to the following topic categories: mental health and mind, politics, biography, economics and commerce and textbooks. Geographical areas that students are interested in reading about include US, China, UK and the world.

2. Topics for oral English practice can be chosen from the following: mental health and mind, family relations, love and romance and interpersonal relations.

3. Topics recommended for EFL writing tasks include mental health and mind, love and romance, friendship, family relations, school life and problems in life, problems and difficulties in study, extracurricular activities, dreams and goals, English study and hot issues.


Limitations
The results of the research should be viewed with the following limitations in mind. First, the number of the participants is quite limited. Second, since the data are collected from students’ assignments, a question comes whether these assignments reflect the students’ real interest, although the students are asked to do the tasks based on their own interests. Therefore, the results need to be confirmed with further research. Third, other social variables need to be considered in future research, such as student’s English proficiency levels, gender, major, learning styles, and other student characteristics. Fourth, listening topics that the students are interested in are not investigated in this research, and the study of listening topics should be taken into consideration in future research design.

References


Worthy, J. (2000). The Intermediate Grades: Conducting Research on Topics of
Student Interest. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(3), 298-299.


Examining the Vocabulary Levels of Indonesia’s English National Examination Texts

Furqanul Aziez  
*Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto, Indonesia*

**Bio Data:**  
Furqanul Aziez is a lecturer at Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto, Indonesia. He has been teaching for the university for twenty one years. He mostly teaches on BA and MA courses in Lexical Study, Language Testing, and Innovations in Education. His main research interests include vocabulary, TEFL, and language testing.

**Keywords:** Junior and senior high schools, National Examination, corpus, vocabulary levels, AWL

**Abstract:**  
This study is designed to create a corpus of junior high school (JHS) and senior high school (SHS) English National Examination (NE) texts used in Indonesia throughout four years of administration to form the basis of analysis. By means of corpus analysis, it sought to find out the vocabulary levels of junior and senior high school English NE texts (distribution among the K1 – K20 vocabulary levels, where K refers to the one-thousand-word band in the word frequency list), the number of interdisciplinary academic words the texts contain, and the number of words beyond the 2,000 high frequency English words the texts hold. Research results show that while JHS students are presumed to have lower English proficiency NE vocabulary of the level indicates the opposite. Though both JHS and SHS NE texts belong to the same K4 (4,000-word) level (the number of words required for the 95% comprehension of these texts), the 4,000 words cover only 95.80% of the running words in JHS NE texts and 95.96% of that of SHS NE texts. With regard to the words beyond the 2,000 basic words, the coverage in JHS NE texts is 7.83% compared to that in SHS NE texts, which is only 7.61%. However, SHS NE texts contain more interdisciplinary academic words in Coxhead’s AWL, where they contain 3.85% while the JHS NE texts contain 2.47% of the tokens in the texts.

**Introduction**  
National examination (NE) was first initiated in Indonesia in 1985 for four core subjects: mathematics, science, Indonesian language, and English. The purposes of its administration are firstly to map the quality of education service across regions and secondly to set criterion for graduation. For English subject, despite changes in curricular approach, reading has been the dominant skill tested. On the basis of
reading passages, such language components as vocabulary and grammar are tested as well. In SHS level, however, listening is also tested.

In JHS level, listening skill is not tested. Examination questions make use of texts, which may amount up to 16 texts of varied length. At the last part of the test, six questions are given on three different tasks, namely arranging words, arranging sentences, and filling in missing words in cloze procedure. Since 2006, along with a curriculum switch to School Level Curriculum (KTSP), reading texts supplied in SHS NE cover a variety of genres: narrative, descriptive, recount, procedure, report, news items, spoof, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, anecdote, and review. As for JHS NE, texts are limited to five genres: narrative, descriptive, procedure, report, and recount.

Texts are generally adopted from authentic material, such as newspapers, reference books, emails, short stories, and magazines. There is indeed some concern over the situation, as this may pose candidates with texts filled with plenty of words beyond their vocabulary level. Under such circumstances, reading might no longer be a meaning-focused activity because in contexts other than examination so much attention will be given to dictionary work. Though successful comprehension involves more than being able to decode vocabulary in a text, a lack of familiarity with more than 5% of the running words in a text can make reading a formidable task (Laufer, 1989).

Literature Review

As Nation (2001) states, non-fiction texts have four vocabulary categories: (1) high-frequency or general service vocabulary, (2) academic vocabulary (also called sub-technical or semi-technical vocabulary), (3) technical vocabulary, and (4) low-frequency vocabulary. High-frequency vocabulary refers to the general service English words which constitute the majority of all words occurring in all types of texts. West’s (1953) General Service List of English Words (GSL) is the most well-known list. The GSL’s 2,000 most frequent word families of English (comprising
3,372 types) constitute approximately 75% of the non-fiction tokens and around 90% of the running words in fiction (Hirsch and Nation, 1992; Nation and Hwan, 1995). Interdisciplinary academic vocabulary (i.e. somewhere between the high-frequency words and technical words) with medium-frequency of occurrence serve some rhetorical functions and communicative purposes. Coxhead’s (2000) 570 academic word families were claimed to cover almost 10% of the total words in a general academic text. Her study suggested that for English learners who wish to pursue academic goals, the knowledge of 570 academic word families would give more significant return than the knowledge of further 1,000 words. This is because the third 1000-word level accounts for only 3 – 5% coverage. Technical vocabulary as defined in Nation’s (2001) study refers to words used in specialized field and considerably different from subject to subject. Around 5% of the running words in an academic text are made up of technical vocabulary, with each subject containing roughly 1,000 word families (Nation, 2001).

In one of Chujo’s studies (2004), using his self-created non-fiction corpus of TOEFL and TOEIC preparation tests to gauge vocabulary levels of the proficiency tests with the assumed text coverage of 95% in the BNC HFWL 1st – 14th 1000-word levels, TOEFL is reported to hold more vocabulary than TOEIC (6,000 – 6,500 vocabulary level for TOEFL versus 4,500 – 5,000 level for TOEIC).

A study in Taiwan (Hsu, 2009) revealed that General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which is regularly administered at four levels, i.e. elementary, intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced level, involved 2,263 words, 4,947 words (including the 2,263), and more than 8,000 words (2,263 and 4,947 are inclusive) respectively. The GEPT elementary level is presumed to be appropriate for students who have studied English through junior high school (Grade 7 – 9). The GEPT intermediate level is seen suitable for senior high school graduates (Grade 10 – 12) or university freshmen. The GEPT high-intermediate level is considered to be suitable for university graduates majoring in English. The GEPT advanced level is considered adequately difficult such that only someone with a graduate degree from a university in an English-speaking country would be able to pass it. Following Taiwan’s Ministry
of Education guide (Hsu, 2009) that set vocabulary goal of 2,000 basic English words for primary and secondary schools, it was therefore presumed that in order to pass the senior high school examination a student had to have a vocabulary size of at least 2,000 words.

Method
This study was conducted to examine the vocabulary profile of Indonesia’s JHS and SHS English NE texts. By means of corpus analysis of JHS and SHS NE texts, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the vocabulary levels of JHS and SHS English NE texts (distribution among the K1 – K20 vocabulary levels)? In addition, what percentage of the words in JHS and SHS English NE texts do the K1 – K20 vocabulary levels cover?
2. If 2,000 English word families are required to accomplish 80% comprehension of a text, how many new words should one learn to attain the 95% comprehension?
3. What percentage of the words in JHS and SHS English NE texts does Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word List cover?

To answer the questions this research took place in three main stages. First, English NE documents from four years of administration were selected as the corpus creation basis. The four NE documents were selected as they were set under the same current curriculum. Second, vocabulary levels of the JHS and SHS English NE texts were measured using Web VocabProfilers program developed by Cobb (2009) from UQAM. Third, using the same program, the 2,000 basic English words and the interdisciplinary academic words (Coxhead’s AWL) coverage were gauged.

3.1 The Instrument
Cobb developed Web VocabProfilers program which was inspired and based on RANGE program. RANGE itself was created by Heatly, Nation and Coxhead (n.d). RANGE program incorporates the General Service List of English Words (GSL), Academic Word List (AWL) and British National Corpus High Frequency Word List
VocabProfilers program has some sub-programs and this study used two of them. The first sub-program used is VocabProfile BNC which compares targeted texts with 20 1000-word bands (K1 – K20). The outputs of this sub-program include the number of word families, types, tokens, text coverage, cumulative coverage, type-token ratio, tokens per type, tokens per family and types per family. The second sub-program used is VocabProfile Classic, which compares targeted texts with the 2,000 basic English words (K1 – K2) and Academic Word List (AWL). This program generates the number of families, types, tokens, and percentage that the K1 and K2 levels and AWL cover.

3.2 Creating a corpus of NE texts

The first step in creating the corpus as the basis of analysis is selecting the NE texts at the two education levels: JHS and SHS. Since the NE under the current curriculum began in 2006, there are then eight documents for analysis, i.e. 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 English NE texts for the two levels. All the eight documents were used as the material for corpus building.

Excluding questions and listening section texts, the passages were scanned into eight computer files and proofread for completeness. Upon completion of the raw corpus, exclusion of some words was then carried out (see Table 1). This was done because if some words were not excluded the vocabulary size may be inflated and text coverage may shrink.

Table 1. Words excluded from the raw corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of speech</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Proper nouns</td>
<td>Jakarta, Denny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Numerals</td>
<td>1950, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interjections</td>
<td>Oh, Gosh,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Unclassified</td>
<td>er, www</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alphabetical symbols</td>
<td>a, b,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Units</td>
<td>km., mm,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Abbreviations</td>
<td>TV, Ltd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike Chujo’s (2009) exclusion, this study did not exclude days of the week, months of the year, numerals in words, and prepositional phrases. This is mainly due
to the fact that all the items mentioned are included as parts of the English learning goals at the primary education. The number of types and tokens in these NE documents are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Types and tokens in JHS and SHS English NE texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>1,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>1,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>1,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>1,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>1,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>1,583</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows JHS English NE reading texts hold more tokens and types. In total the tokens in JHS texts amount up to 6,605 and the types 2,605. In the meantime, SHS English NE texts contain only 6,160 tokens and 2,484 types.

3.3 Measuring English NE texts

The next step was to measure the vocabulary levels of each text shown in Table 2 by comparing each text with the 20 1000-word bands of VocabProfilers List, partly taken from the BNC HFWL. For the purpose, the author established the percent level of comprehension coverage. The comprehension level targeted was 95%. As discussed above, Nation (2001) and other leading researchers emphasis that learners would need at least a 95% coverage of the running words in the input in order to gain reasonable comprehension and to have reasonable success at guessing from context (Laufer 1989, Laufer 1992, Schmitt & McCarthy 1997, Read 2000).

Using the 20 1000-word bands of BNC HFWL, the researcher assessed how many words from the top of the bands that a reader would need to know in order to achieve a roughly 95% coverage of the targeted texts. In other words, each targeted text vocabulary level was determined in terms of the number of words counted from the top of BNC HFWL that account for 95% or more of the running words in that text. Each 1,000-word band’s text coverage over the targeted text was measured by
counting the number of 1,000-word bands needed until the total coverage reached approximately 95%. However, since the number of words within the 1,000 words may cover more than 1% of the words in the targeted text, vocabulary level of each text could not be determined precisely. To give an example, a text may gain its 94.05% comprehension at 3,000-word level, but at 4,000-word level its comprehension percentage has already reached 97.18%. The same procedure was taken to assess the 2,000-word level and AWL coverage.

Results and discussion

4.1 The vocabulary levels of NE texts

Vocabulary levels in this study were defined as the number of words counted from the top of BNC HFWL accounting for 95% of the running words in that textbook if we accept the assumption of 95% text coverage as the minimum for successfully guessing meanings from context and gaining reasonable comprehension (Hsu 2009). The text coverage of each 1,000-word band in the target NE text was measured by calculating the number of 1,000-word bands accumulated to reach the total coverage of 95%.

After running the NE texts one by one on the base words, the BNC HFWL 20, the results show that the level of JHS 2007 NE texts was roughly 4,000, but at this level the cumulated text coverage already reached 95.51%. And then, as shown in Table 3 the vocabulary level of JHS 2008, 2009, and 2010 NE texts was 4,000, though at this level the text coverage already attained 95.52%, 95.66%, and 96.31% for each text respectively.

The 4,000-word level implies that reading these texts would lead candidates to working on quite a number of new words. However, a different picture is displayed in 2010 NE texts, where at level 4,000 JHS texts reaches the coverage of 96.31% and for SHS texts only 94.47%. This hints that it needs more word knowledge for the candidates to read SHS texts with 95% comprehension than it needs for JHS texts. Because the BNC 1\textsuperscript{st} – 20\textsuperscript{th} 1,000 English words are ranked in accordance with their frequency of occurrence, with the 1\textsuperscript{st} 1,000 words being the most frequent and correspondingly the 20\textsuperscript{th} 1,000 words the least frequent, a text with a higher
vocabulary level can be translated as having more English words occurring in the latter 1,000-word bands. Table 3 lists the vocabulary levels that the JHS and SHS NE texts of 2007 – 2010 administration might belong to.

Table 3 Vocabulary level of English NE texts by year of administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Levels</th>
<th>1,000</th>
<th>2,000</th>
<th>3,000</th>
<th>4,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE 2007</td>
<td>83.23%</td>
<td>91.84%</td>
<td>93.90%</td>
<td>95.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>80.10%</td>
<td>89.60%</td>
<td>93.25%</td>
<td>95.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>80.72%</td>
<td>90.18%</td>
<td>93.97%</td>
<td>95.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>80.07%</td>
<td>90.18%</td>
<td>94.59%</td>
<td>96.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE 2007</td>
<td>81.45%</td>
<td>90.52%</td>
<td>94.05%</td>
<td>97.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>79.88%</td>
<td>90.26%</td>
<td>93.97%</td>
<td>96.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>83.90%</td>
<td>92.79%</td>
<td>95.35%</td>
<td>96.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>80.42%</td>
<td>89.36%</td>
<td>92.45%</td>
<td>94.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the total JHS and SHS NE texts of the four years of administration were run on the base words through the VocabProfiler BNC program, the outputs depict a converging profile. As Table 4 shows, the 4,000-word level covers 95.96% of the running words in SHS NE texts, but only 95.80% of the JHS NE texts. This is quite surprising since JHS graduates are presumed to have lower English proficiency than the SHS graduates.

Table 4 Vocabulary level of English NE texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Level</th>
<th>1,000</th>
<th>2,000</th>
<th>3,000</th>
<th>4,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE 2007 – 2010</td>
<td>80.83%</td>
<td>90.35%</td>
<td>93.98%</td>
<td>95.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE 2007 - 2010</td>
<td>81.40%</td>
<td>90.78%</td>
<td>93.98%</td>
<td>95.96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The situation implies that test constructors may not apply a systematic approach to the selection of words in developing the reading passages.

4.2 Interdisciplinary academic words in English NE texts

Coxhead’s (2000) 570 interdisciplinary academic words in AWL are claimed to cover almost 10% of the total words in a general academic text. Because its coverage is around 10%, it gives more return to learners who wish to pursue further study than the next 1,000 words after the 2,000 basic English words.
The right column in Table 5, which displays the AWL occurrence in tokens, shows the coverage of interdisciplinary academic words in each document of English NE administration. It shows that 2010 NE texts bear the most academic words for both levels of education (3.18% for JHS and 4.80% for SHS) and 2007 NE texts the least (1.79% for JHS and 1.92% for SHS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>AWL occurrence in tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE</td>
<td>2007 1,115</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 1,450</td>
<td>2.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009 1,955</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010 2,076</td>
<td>3.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE</td>
<td>2007 992</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 1,859</td>
<td>4.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009 1,721</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010 1,583</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Running in total the JHS and SHS NE texts resulted in almost the same picture, where JHS NE texts contain less interdisciplinary words than the SHS NE texts. This is in contrast with the total number of tokens in both texts.

Table 6 AWL coverage in English NE texts in total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>AWL occurrence in tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE 2007-2010</td>
<td>6,605</td>
<td>2.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE 2007-2010</td>
<td>6,160</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 demonstrates that in 6,605 tokens of JHS NE texts AWL words cover 2.47%, while in 6,160 tokens of SHS texts AWL words cover 3.85%. The 2.47% of AWL in JHS texts translate into 163 words and 3.85% in SHS NE texts translate into 237 words.

4.3 Words beyond 2,000-word level contained in English NE texts

As the word list used in this study is BNC HFWL, the number of words contained in the list is exactly 2,000 word families. Provided the 2,000 basic English words are considered the minimum number of words known by senior high school students, the
question is then “How many new words would a candidate encounter in NE texts and how many of them would enable them to comprehend the texts?”

Table 7 Text coverage by BNC HFWL 2000 at four years of NE administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NE Texts</th>
<th>BNC HFWL 2000</th>
<th>Not in BNC HFWL</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tokens/%</td>
<td>types/%</td>
<td>tokens/%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS 2007</td>
<td>1,024/91.84</td>
<td>399/84.35</td>
<td>91/8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS 2008</td>
<td>1,301/89.60</td>
<td>493/83.14</td>
<td>149/10.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS 2009</td>
<td>1,763/90.18</td>
<td>601/81.32</td>
<td>192/9.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS 2010</td>
<td>1,882/90.18</td>
<td>648/81.00</td>
<td>194/9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS 2007</td>
<td>898/90.52</td>
<td>371/86.68</td>
<td>94/9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS 2008</td>
<td>1,678/90.26</td>
<td>596/81.75</td>
<td>181/9.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS 2009</td>
<td>1,597/92.79</td>
<td>586/85.39</td>
<td>124/7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS 2010</td>
<td>1,419/89.36</td>
<td>537/83.39</td>
<td>169/10.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated in Table 7 above, the first column presents the number of words in the NE texts which belong to the 2,000 words in BNC HFWL, while the second column presents the number of words in NE texts which are beyond the BNC HFWL, and the third column presents the number of words in the NE texts. In JHS NE texts of 2007 administration, for example, of the 1,115 tokens, 1,024 words were familiar to the students and 91 were not. These 91 running words made up of 74 different words (types) could likely belong to university students’ vocabulary. In average, as we can see in Table 8, during the four years of administration, each JHS NE document contains 1,492 tokens and 340 types, out of which 159 tokens and 109 types are unfamiliar to students.

Table 8 The text coverage by BNC HFWL 2000 at NE texts of two education levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BNC HFWL 2000</th>
<th>Not in BNC HFWL</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tokens/%</td>
<td>types/%</td>
<td>tokens/%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS NE</td>
<td>1,492/90.35</td>
<td>340/75.70</td>
<td>159/9.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS NE</td>
<td>1,398/90.78</td>
<td>336/78.39</td>
<td>142/9.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the SHS NE document in average holds 1,398 running words and 336 different words, out of which 142 tokens and 93 types are unfamiliar to students.
Conclusion

On average JHS and SHS English NE texts belong to the 4,000-word level (the number of words required for a 95% comprehension of these texts). However, the VocabProfiler program analysis also shows that a slight margin exists in the text coverage, where the 4,000-word level covers only 95.80% of the words occurring in JHS NE texts and 95.96% of the words in SHS NE texts. That means if a learner knows the top 4,000 words in the BNC HFWL he/she will know 95.96% of the running words in SHS NE texts but only 95.80% of those in JHS NE texts.

Beyond the 2,000-word level, JHS NE texts require students to know 109 new word families or 24.29% of the total types (different words) in the texts, while SHS NE texts require them to know 93 new word families or 21.60% of the total types in the texts. This figure sends us a signal about the significance of considering appropriate vocabulary load, especially when we realize that the candidates will have to work unassisted. Interdisciplinary academic words in Coxhead’s (2000) AWL account for around 2.47% and 3.85% in JHS and SHS NE texts respectively. The difference in the figure may be caused by the proportion of text types covered in the texts. Larger proportion of dialogues for instance was found in JHS NE texts than in SHS NE texts.

Hopefully the findings of the present study are beneficial in raising awareness among teachers, textbook writers, and test constructors of the importance of vocabulary level when writing textbooks and constructing tests. That means taking care of the vocabulary load of every text they select. By so doing, the texts presented in textbooks and tests would be set at a reasonable level for the target learners and test takers.

References


The Impact of EFL Students’ Vocabulary Breadth of Knowledge on Literal Reading Comprehension.

Kuang Yu Chen  
YuanPei University, Taiwan

Bio Data:
Kuang Yu Chen holds a doctorate in bilingual education from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She is an assistant professor currently teaching at Applied Linguistics department of YuanPei University, Taiwan. Her research interests include foreign language learning, vocabulary knowledge, second language reading comprehension, and bilingualism.

Abstract
Second language reading is a challenging task for foreign language learners. The amount of vocabulary students store in their brains will assist them in understanding reading, especially when students’ first language is a non-alphabetic language. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether EFL students’ vocabulary breadth knowledge influences their literal reading comprehension. To accomplish this study, the mixed methods design was used. All the participants in this study were given a set of tests which included Vocabulary Levels Test and Reading Comprehension Tests. Individual interviews were conducted after the quantitative phase and were used as supportive data. The bivariate of regression analysis tools were used to interpret the correlations between vocabulary breadth knowledge within literal reading comprehension. The quantitative results indicated that vocabulary breadth of knowledge was positively and significantly correlated to literal reading comprehension. The qualitative findings showed that the majority of participants agreed breadth of vocabulary knowledge played a greater role in their literal reading comprehension process. The interview results determined the participants relied more on breadth of vocabulary knowledge than others, for example syntactic knowledge, during literal reading. Moreover, the interviewees who had better language proficiency tended to utilize more literacy skills in interpreting the content of reading passages than did lower language proficiency learners. Ultimately, the researcher hopes that the findings shown in this study will provide insight into the connection between EFL learners’ vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

Keywords: vocabulary breadth of knowledge, reading comprehension, literal reading, second language learning.
Introduction

Success in reading comprehension is usually seen as fundamental to the academic success of foreign language learners. Second language proficiency often assumes vocabulary and grammar as knowledge and reading as the ability to understand the text (Koda, 2005). Research consistently reveals that vocabulary knowledge heavily relates to reading comprehension moreso than other factors such as grammar knowledge (Koda 1989; Qian, 1999). Laufer (1997) has written, “No text comprehension is possible, either in one’s native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text’s vocabulary” (p. 20). Hence, without understanding the meaning of words, second language readers may have a hard time developing comprehension. Consequently, vocabulary seems to be an important factor in reading comprehension (Richard & Rodgers, 2001).

The primary role words play in language is to convey meaning (Balota, 1990). Moreover, Laufer (1997) indicated that the larger the vocabulary that learners have, the fewer the number of words that will appear to be “deceptively transparent” to the learner (p.31). Deceptively transparent vocabulary usually means the word that readers think they know, but they do not know. In other words, vocabulary itself seems to provide some clues that readers can interpret correctly but actually does not. For example, the word ‘shortcoming’ looks as if it is composed of ‘short’ and ‘coming’ and is misinterpreted as ‘short visit’. Another word, ‘outline’ sometimes was misunderstood as ‘out of the line’. These words are called deceptively transparent (Laufer, 1989). Deceptive transparency could be a serious problem in second language reading. Most researchers believe second language learners have difficulty understanding reading texts because of the limited breadth of their vocabulary (Laufer, 1998; Richard & Rodgers 2001; Schmitt, 2000). Therefore, researchers (Nation, 2001; Schmitt 2000; Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapnam, 2001) started measuring how big a vocabulary is necessary for second language readers to achieve certain levels of reading comprehension.
To achieve reading comprehension, readers must concurrently process different levels of the text. “Reading the line” refers to a basic literal comprehension by using fundamental knowledge of a given language to understand the surface concept that the writers try to convey to readers. “Reading between the lines” involves background knowledge to comprehend the text. The highest level of reading comprehension, according to Gray (1960), is “reading beyond the line”, which requires readers to make judgments and evaluate the writing context. A good reader should be able to read the lines, as well as between the lines simultaneously (Gray, 1960).

Laufer (1997) indicated that it is not possible to achieve comprehension, either for native speakers or second language learners, without understanding the vocabulary in the reading text. Laufer further claimed that second language reading comprehension is affected by vocabulary alone. The breadth of vocabulary knowledge usually is represented as vocabulary size, which refers to the numbers of the words that second language learners know, rather than emphasizing on how well learners know given words. How much vocabulary do second language learners need to know to understand what they are reading? Hirsh and Nation (1992) indicate that learners might need around 5,000 words to read a novel that had been written for English speakers. Put differently, for second language learners to achieve fluency in English, they need to gain at least 5,000 words, preferably 10,000 words (Nation, 2003). The stronger the vocabulary knowledge the EFL student has, the better reading comprehension the reader will achieve (Mecartty, 2000). Nation (2001) explained that in order to understand 95% of reading content, readers have to know at least 4000 word families, including 2000 high-frequency words, 570 general academic words, at least 1000 technical words, and proper low-frequency word families. Nation believes students’ reading comprehension will improve when their known words increase.

Nation and Coady (1988) acknowledged the relationship between vocabulary and reading. The researchers stated that vocabulary knowledge is the most identifiable subcomponent of reading ability. Perfetti’s (1985) verbal efficiency theory declared that becoming efficient in processing lower level reading skills, such as vocabulary knowledge and word recognition, will facilitate readers in the processing of higher
level reading skills in order to help them attain reading comprehension. Perfetti stated
that recognition of word accuracy is not sufficient to enable fluent reading
comprehension. The language learners must be able to process from a lexical level
toward high level reading automatically to achieve comprehension. According to the
threshold hypothesis, the readers need to know a certain amount of vocabulary to be
able to use higher level processing strategies to comprehend the text (Laufer, 1997).
In other words, learners know a certain amount of surface meaning of words and then
gain further understanding of the text. Nation (2001) indicated that if a learner has
crossed the threshold, then adequate comprehension may be possible for the reader.
On the other hand, if a second language reader cannot cross the threshold of
vocabulary, then the reader may not acquire comprehension sufficiently. Based on
these two theoretical perspectives, it can be projected that the second language
learners with large vocabulary sizes will process a reading text more efficiently and
then, according to the verbal efficiency theory, the readers’ abilities to understand
word meanings will help them to achieve a higher level of reading comprehension.

**Purpose of study**
The study was conducted using instruments that measured how EFL students’
vocabulary breadth of knowledge affects their literal reading comprehension. To
accomplish this purpose, a mixed method design (Creswell & Plano, 2007) was used.
The mixed method approach involved collecting quantitative data, as well as
qualitative data. The main reason for collecting the qualitative data is to help explain
and strengthen the quantitative results. The primary data are the quantitative data, and
the qualitative data were designed to help explain the quantitative results in order to
make the research more sufficient.

**Research Question**
1. What correlation, if any, is there between EFL students’ vocabulary and their
   literal reading comprehension?
2. What are the EFL students’ perspectives on vocabulary breadth of knowledge, and how do these affect their literal reading comprehension?

Methodology

Seliger and Shohamy (1989) stated that tests are generally used to collect data about the subject’s ability or knowledge in second language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension or general language proficiency. In order to assess the second language students’ language knowledge and to best answer the research questions, this study employed the Vocabulary Levels Test and the Reading Comprehension Test for a quantitative method analysis.

The original Vocabulary Levels Test (hereafter, VLT) was designed by Paul Nation (1983, 1990) in order to measure language learners’ vocabulary sizes. In 2001, Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham (2001) developed two new versions of VLT to present valid evidence for the tests. This study adopted Version 1 of the VLT (Schmitt, 2000) to examine the participants’ general vocabulary sizes and academic vocabularies. To examine EFL students’ vocabulary knowledge correlation with reading comprehension, the researcher used the selected reading tests. The passages were applied to vocabulary software called Range, designed by Nation (2003). According to the instruction manual (Nation, 2005), Range will analyze and check the text content and scope, word frequency, and range of the passages. The Range must be run to ensure that the reading passage is suited for the participants. The participants were varied in their levels of vocabulary according to the VLT; the passage needed to be favorable for participants at varying levels.

In this study, the researcher targeted students who had learned English as a foreign language in Taiwan for at least three years. Interviewees were randomly selected from the pool of participants in order to question students for deeper insight regarding the qualitative research questions. The qualitative data were collected through individual open-ended interviews with randomly selected students. The Atlas ti. 5.0 software was used to assist the researcher in analyzing the qualitative data. The open-coding and
code-manager functions were the two major tools of Atlas ti. that were used in the present study.

**Results / Conclusion**

The research question investigated to what extent the EFL students’ vocabulary breadth of knowledge related to their literal reading comprehension. To answer the research question, the researcher used a multiple regression analysis to compute the data. The regression model explained the correlation among the variables, and indicated the variance of one variable from another. The VLT was considered as independent variables; literal reading comprehension was seen as a dependent variable. According to Tables 1.1, statistically significant differences were found between VLT (p=.000 <.01) and literal reading comprehension. Tables 1.1 showed a 25% ($R^2 = .247$) variance in literal reading comprehension.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted R square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VLT</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dependent variable: literal reading comprehension. Independent variable (predictor): Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

The qualitative research question emphasized the students’ perspective of how vocabulary knowledge and syntactic knowledge affected their reading comprehension.

As shown in Table 1.2, all interviewees said that vocabulary breadth of knowledge consisted of a number of words they know. Six out of the eight interviewees (S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, and S8) reported that vocabulary breadth related to surface meaning of words, and six interviewees (S1, S2, S4, S5, S7, and S8) answered breadth of vocabulary might be related to those are easy to understand and memorize.
Furthermore, the researcher asked the interviewees to explicate how vocabulary breadth of knowledge helps them in reading. From the interviewees’ points of views, vocabulary breadth knowledge affected the English language learner’s reading comprehension. For instance, interviewees who had a certain amount of vocabulary breadth felt reading is easy; moreover, they desired to increase their vocabulary depth of knowledge. Those interviewees who did not have basic vocabulary breadth of knowledge tend to struggle in reading. In other words, they were too busy expanding their vocabulary breadth and did not have any motivation to enhance their vocabulary depth of knowledge or other reading skills. With distinct levels of English proficiency, the students tended to have different attitudes toward vocabulary breadth and depth knowledge when reading. For lower level English proficiency learners (S1, S2, and S3), vocabulary breadth was the main concern when they comprehend the reading. On the other hand, higher level English proficiency learners (S4, S5, S6, S7, and S8), believed that development of depth of vocabulary knowledge improved their English abilities and enabled them to accurately gather information from the article. Through the interview report, interviewees (S3, S4, S7 and S8) agreed vocabulary breadth not only assisted them in comprehending the text, but also provided them with the chances to enhance their other vocabulary knowledge when reading.

In this study, the findings of the quantitative and the qualitative research questions were presented within the mixed method design. In regard to literal reading, the vocabulary breadth of knowledge was found to be positively and significantly correlated to literal reading comprehension. After examining the relationship between vocabulary breadth of knowledge and literal reading comprehension; the vocabulary breadth of knowledge appeared to offer strong predictive power. The study
determined that vocabulary breadth of knowledge was the most powerful predictor of literal reading comprehension. In other words, participants relied less on depth of vocabulary knowledge or other language skills during literal reading. When asking about the importance of vocabulary breadth of knowledge to second language learning, lower English proficiency learners have a tendency to expand their vocabulary size. Higher English proficiency learners place more emphasis on increasing their other language knowledge, for example, vocabulary depth of knowledge. Moir (1996) pointed out that lower language proficiency learners focus on the meaning of words from the text rather than exploring the range of collocations and uses. Unlike lower language proficiency learners, higher level learners tended to use literal skills in determining the unknown vocabulary, and the lower English proficiency learners struggled more in translating each meaning of the words into their native language. Nevertheless, the findings showed that the higher English proficiency learners with larger vocabulary breadth knowledge still experienced difficulty in determining the words. There is no ambit on vocabulary knowledge learning, and students are encouraged to increase both their vocabulary breadth and other vocabulary knowledge by using language tools, such as a dictionary or learning strategies.

The study showed that once students have a certain amount of vocabulary, they tend to dig deeper into more subtle meanings of words. Their motivations for acquiring the knowledge reflected their abilities to comprehend the text. Finally, regarding the strategies of second language learners use when reading, the participants with higher English proficiency focused more on using their literacy skills, prior knowledge or schemata skills, to interpret the content of reading passages. The lower language proficiency learners preferred to understand the meaning of each word in the text before reading. Due to this, these learners slowed down their reading rate, which resulted in unpleasant reading experiences. The traditional method of vocabulary teaching asks students to memorize words; however, it is nearly impossible to teach every single vocabulary word in the reading material. Instead of encouraging memorization, instructors have to provide students with some other vocabulary
learning strategies, such as analyzing word parts (affixes and stems), using context clues, and consulting a reference source (Gu & Jonshon, 1996). Moreover, the holistic reading approach exposed students to more words than the analytic reading approach which would have limited word exposure. In this study, all participants were taught similar reading comprehension strategies by their teachers. However, lower English proficiency participants obviously were not familiar with top-down reading method or higher level reading strategies. The suggested activities for the language classroom involve developing learners’ knowledge of word collocations, associations, comprehension, concepts and referents of words and constraints on use of the words. Other strategies may also be used, including question and answering sessions, role playing, and audiovisual resources that offer language learners opportunities to practice their vocabulary knowledge in verbal and in written language.

Reference:


nation.aspx


Creating and Sharing Writing iRubrics

Prof. Reima Al-Jarf

King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Bio Data

Prof. Al-Jarf has been teaching EFL, ESP and translation at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for 23 years. Her areas of interests are: Technology integration in language teaching and teaching methodology and course design. She has 6 books and 120 articles published in refereed journals and has given 210 presentations and conducted 30 workshops in 48 countries. She is an international journal editor and reviewer of translated books, grant and conference proposals, and faculty promotion research. In 2008, she won the Excellence in Teaching Award at the university, college, and department levels.

Abstract

Rubrics are scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established performance criteria, used in evaluating student work. iRubric is a comprehensive rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool. It shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. Rubrics can be collaboratively assessed with colleagues, classes and other individuals. Students and colleagues can be engaged in building classroom activities, assessing ePortfolios, or may use the powerful collaborative assessment tools as surveys and evaluation mechanisms. iRubrics also empower schools with an easy-to-use system for monitoring student learning outcomes and aligning with standards, show level of performance, serve as a guide for beginning instructors & students, show what is expected from students, save grading time and student get a copy of the scored rubric securely. Rubric scores are automatically adjusted to the coursework grading scale and posted on the gradebook in an online course. This article shows how rubrics can be created for writing courses in English as a foreign language by teachers and students using the iRubric tool of Rcampus. Sample writing iRubrics are used for illustration.

Key Words: Rubric, scoring guide, iRubric, expectations, scores, online, gradebook

Introduction

Rubrics are tools for assessing instruction and performance according to a set of predetermined scaled expectations and criteria. Rubrics have been popular in assessing learning outcomes in education for over two decades. They are being used in countless classrooms to evaluate an individual work or a student's entire body of
work. A review of the literature has shown that Rubrics have been identified as an important tool for assessing student performance, teacher effectiveness, and program quality. For example, Jonsson & Svingby (2007) reviewed 75 empirical research studies on rubrics and concluded that rubrics had the potential of promoting learning and/or improving instruction because they make expectations and criteria explicit, and also facilitate feedback and self-assessment. In addition, rubrics enhance the reliable scoring of performance assessments, especially if they are analytical, topic-specific, and complemented with exemplars and/or rater training. Jonsson & Svingby pointed out more benefits of using scoring rubrics in performance assessments such as increased consistency of scoring, and the possibility to facilitate valid judgment of complex competencies, and the promotion of learning.

Other studies have found that using a rubric for self-assessment can help elementary school students produce more effective writing. Instructional rubrics also enhanced class engagement behaviors of students with mild mental retardation drastically. The achievement of lesson objectives by all the participants evaluated through rubrics was statistically significant (Lee & Lee, 2009; Andrade Du & Wang 2008).

Educators accustomed to using rubrics as a tool for improving students' writing are applying the same strategy to monitoring and assessing a range of authentic learning tasks. Rubrics set the standards for assessing both teaching practices and student achievement. They encourage students to shift their thinking from "What have I learned?" to "How well have I learned it" (Yoshina & Harada, 2007).

The effects of teacher knowledge of rubrics on the achievement of students were studied by Schafer, Swanson Bene & Newberry (2001). Results favored the achievement of students whose teachers had received rubric training. Interviews with teachers who were mentored to use rubrics showed that those teachers found rubrics useful for grading assessments and for conveying assessment expectations to students (Maxwell, 2010).

Results of a study by Silvestri & Oescher (2006) showed that there is a need to develop and use rubrics to ensure the reliability of assessments addressing critical
thinking skills. The author also observed that is also a need for using rubrics in the teaching of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) to college students. For example, at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, students majoring in translation take 4 levels of English language courses (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary building, and grammar) in the first 4 semesters of the translation program. At each level, each course is offered to several sections taught by different instructors. EFL instructors teaching the same course offered to the different sections of a particular level vary from semester to semester. Those EFL instructors have varying backgrounds, experiences, expectations, assessment tools and assessment criteria. In addition, results of an exploratory study conducted by the author showed that students in the different sections of language courses often receive tests and homework assignments with little or no description of how they will be graded. They complete their assignments and the instructor grades them based on some unseen criteria. For students, parents, program coordinators and college administrators, this method of student assessment seems vague and sometimes unfair.

In addition, many instructors are unable to accurately and dispassionately assess the projects that they want their students to explore, such as posters, skits or plays, PowerPoint presentations, websites and videos (Shepherd & Mullane (2008). Another problem is discrepancies in scoring. These discrepancies appear to be related to whether the task contained familiar or unfamiliar content and the mix of procedure and explanation the task required. Several factors related to discrepancies, such as leniency errors, teacher knowledge, and the halo effect are also discussed (Meier Rich &Cady, 2006).

To help EFL instructors follow reliable and valid assessment criteria, the present study proposes the use of digital rubrics to assess students’ exams and assignments in the different language courses offered by COLT, especially writing courses. This article shows how digital rubrics can be created for writing courses in EFL using the iRubric tool of Rcampus, an open access Online Course Management System (www.rcampus.org). It defines rubrics and iRubric, gives types of rubrics and
iRubrics; explains the components of a digital rubric; shows the steps of building a digital rubric; shows how a digital rubric can be applied to an assignment, how to analyze and report digital grading results to students, other instructors, program coordinators and administrators and gives the benefits of using digital rubrics.

According to the Rcampus Online Course Management system, digital rubrics have several advantages: They show levels of performance and what is expected from students. They serve as a guide for beginning instructors and students. They save grading time. They empower schools with an easy-to-use system for monitoring student learning outcomes and for aligning with standards. Rubrics can be collaboratively assessed with colleagues and classes and can be shared with other members through the Rcampus rubric gallery. Students and colleagues can be engaged in building classroom activities and assessing ePortfolios, or they may use other powerful collaborative assessment tools as surveys and evaluation mechanisms. Students get a copy of the scored rubric securely. The digital rubric scores are automatically adjusted to the coursework grading scale and posted on the gradebook in an online course. Teachers can bookmark rubrics for future reference. They can showcase their rubrics on their Rcampus website. Teachers can find a rubric that they like and re-purpose it for their use.

Several researchers such as McGatha & Darcy (2010); Allen & Tanner (2006); Callison (2006); Wang & Rairigh (2006); Lunsford & Melear (2004); Andrade (2000); Arter (2000); Boston (2002); Crawford (2001); Foley, Remley, Morales, Grega, Lantz, Haughton & Shalyefu-Shimhopileni (2001); Kist (2001); Schafer, Swanson, Bene & Newberry (2001); Montgomery (2000); Smith & Hanna (1998); and Taggart, Phifer, Nixon & Wood (1998) indicated that development and use of rubrics in assessment have the following benefits:

1. Instructional rubrics are easy to use and explain, communicate instructor expectations clearly, provide students with constructive feedback, and support learning, skill development, understanding, and good thinking. Rubrics are helpful in specifying which criteria student performance and proficiency levels should be
evaluated against. Rubrics can be designed to formulate standards for levels of accomplishment and can be used to guide and improve performance. They can be used to make these standards clear and explicit to students.

2. For instructors, rubrics can be valuable in helping them ensure that they are teaching the important points in a subject and that their students are learning them (Cooper & Gargan, 2009). They are useful as a formative assessment tool. They can use rubrics to analyze student work, so that they can plan their instruction and provide beneficial feedback to students that will lead to higher quality work. When good rubrics are used well, EFL instructors and students receive extensive feedback on the quality and quantity of student learning. When scoring rubrics are used in large-scale assessment, technical questions related to inter-rater reliability tend to dominate the literature. Well developed rubrics help instructors define learning objectives so that they can plan instruction more effectively, be more consistent in scoring student work, and be more systematic in reporting student progress. Rubrics also allow the instructor to create something unique to local needs, yet fulfill the mandate of having a system that is uniform and consistent. Teachers in different subject disciplines have successfully used rubrics to achieve educational goals.

3. Rubrics, scoring guides, and performance criteria help define important outcomes for students. Using instructional rubrics promotes student learning and improves the quality of teaching. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner (Yoshina & Harada, 2007). Rubrics guide students in their work and assist teachers with grading. They help students to evaluate the quality of their work as they progress through a class. They may be very helpful to educators in helping to evaluate the Uniform Portfolio that must be kept on every student within a program, according to the Performance Accountability System. Rubrics offer productive opportunities for enriching student-teacher relationships and improving writing instruction (Martins, David, 2008).

4. They serve as a blueprint to communicate the high expectations of Public Instruction for all schools, as an internal self-assessment tool to be used by the
educational community at the local level, and as an external assessment tool to be used by ADE Solutions Teams. They may also be used in other appropriate external assessment activities. Rubrics help schools, departments and colleges assess the strengths and limitations of their instructional practices and organizational conditions. Developing and using rubrics gives educators access to valuable information about student performance that cannot be obtained from traditional assessment approaches.

**The Writing Curriculum at COLT**

Students majoring in translation at the COLT, King Saudi University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia take 4 English writing courses in the first four semesters of college: Writing I (4 hours), Writing II (4 hours), Writing III (3 hours) and Writing IV (3 hours) where they practice the process of writing. In addition, they take 4 listening, 4 speaking, 4 reading, 3 grammar, and 2 vocabulary building courses.

The textbook used in the freshman Writing I course is *Interactions I: Writing (Silver Edition)* by Segal and Cheryl Pavlik & Margaret Segal (2007), McGraw-Hill Higher Education which was assigned by COLT. The aim of the book is to develop the students’ ability to write a cohesive paragraph that has a topic sentence and supporting details with minimal grammatical, spelling, punctuation and indentation errors. The book consists of 10 chapters. Each chapter has a theme and is divided into the following parts: exploring ideas, building vocabulary, organizing ideas, developing cohesion and style, some grammatical points, writing the first draft, editing practice, writing the second draft and journal writing. In each chapter, tasks and skills are practiced one step at a time, before the students put them all together in their paragraph.

**Use of Rubrics in Writing Assessment**

**Definition of Rubrics**

Rubrics are rating scales - as opposed to checklists - that are used with performance assessments. They are scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established
Rubrics are scoring instruments used to evaluate student performance or products resulting from a performance task (Mertler, 2001).

Rubrics can generally be divided into holistic or analytic rubrics, and task-specific or general rubrics. Holistic rubrics consist of a set of generalized descriptions of "above average," "average," and "below average" that are in the developer's mind; what is being evaluated is put on a continuum of stages and require the teacher to score the overall process or product as a whole, without judging the component parts separately; whereas analytic rubrics allow one to measure something against several different criteria. They are preferred when a fairly focused type of response is required (Nitko, 2001; Kist, 2001).

Prior to designing a specific rubric, a teacher must decide whether the performance or product will be scored holistically or analytically (Airasian, 2000 & 2001). The process of developing an analytic rubric has several steps: (i) making a list of desired characteristics; (ii) looking at each characteristic, deciding what "excellent," "above average," "average," and "below average" look like; (iii) weighting each criterion (Nitko, 2001; Kist, 2001).

Digital Rubric Makers

There several Online Rubric Makers/Builders on the web such as:

- [http://rubistar.4teachers.org/](http://rubistar.4teachers.org/)
- [http://www.mcasmentor.com/rubrics.htm](http://www.mcasmentor.com/rubrics.htm)

What Is iRubric?

iRubric is a comprehensive digital rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool (maker/builder). It shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. The following are the basic terms used in an iRubric and their definitions:
• **Analytical Rubric**: Articulates levels of performance for each criterion.
• **Holistic Rubric**: Assesses performance across multiple criteria as a whole.
• **Rubric Criteria**: Characteristics of a performance. They are generally listed in rows.
• **Criteria Descriptors**: Describe what is expected at each level of performance.
• **Levels (of performance)**: Describe quality of work. They are generally listed in columns.
• **Divider**: Is a special row that divides a rubric into sections. A *simple divider* only divides the section without changing the levels, whereas a *weighted divider* allows changing of level titles and weights for a section of a rubric.

**Steps of Building and Using Digital Rubrics**

Steps for building a digital rubric using the iRubric tool of Rcampus, for applying the digital rubric to an assignment, for entering the grades, for viewing the students’ grades, for sharing and discussing the rubric with other instructors, and for categorizing the rubric are shown in webpages 1-15 below.

**Conclusion**

The effective use of Rubrics requires that rubrics be of high quality in order to have positive effects in the classroom. A well-constructed rubric identifies the criteria for a successful performance and describes the qualities of strong, adequate, and weak performances. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner (Yoshina & Harada, 2007; Shepherd & Mullane, 2008). In order for raters to use digital rubrics effectively, they should be well trained on how to design and employ rubrics (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). -
Appendicies

Webpage 1: Go to the Rcampus iRubric Homepage at http://www.rcampus.com and register for an account.

Webpage 2: To build a new digital rubric, click “Build”. Option (A) Create a new rubric from scratch; (B) Revise an existing rubric; (C) Duplicate and re-purpose an existing rubric.
Webpage 3: Rubric Building Page. Click “add row (criterion)”, “add simple divider (section)”, or “add full divider (sub-rubric)” underneath the rubric.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph rubric</th>
<th>Excellent - 2 pts</th>
<th>Average - 1 pt</th>
<th>Poor - 0 pts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic sentence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph has a well-developed, clearly defined, engaging topic sentence.</td>
<td>Topic sentence may be incomplete, partially inaccurate.</td>
<td>Topic sentence is missing or faulty. Topic sentence is unintelligible and does not state what is being defined.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Detail 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.</td>
<td>Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial, whole-part order.</td>
<td>Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Detail2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.</td>
<td>Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, abstract, uninteresting, or unspecific. May lack logical, spatial, chronological, whole-part order.</td>
<td>Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Detail 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.</td>
<td>Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial, whole-part order.</td>
<td>Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion summarizes content.</td>
<td>Conclusion does not adequately restate topic.</td>
<td>No concluding sentence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Cohesion and Coherence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excellent</strong></th>
<th><strong>Average</strong></th>
<th><strong>Poor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas are well-connected. Details are organized logically, chronologically, spatially, sequentially, inductively, or deductively, whole-part. Writing is smooth, coherent. Sentences are strong, expressive with varied structure. Transitional words and conjunctions are used appropriately.</td>
<td>Some ideas are not well-connected. Writing may not be smooth, coherent. Some transitional words and conjunctions are missing or misused. Some sentences are not strong, some lack variety.</td>
<td>Details are not well-connected, lack order. Writing is confusing and hard to follow. Contains fragments and/or run-on sentences. Transitional words and conjunctions are either missing or misused.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Grammar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excellent</strong></th>
<th><strong>Average</strong></th>
<th><strong>Poor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 4 errors in grammar. Correct use of word order, articles, verb tense, phrasal verbs, subject-verb agreement …etc.</td>
<td>Between 5-9 errors in grammar. Errors do not affect legibility and understanding.</td>
<td>More than 10 grammatical mistakes or 2 errors per line.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Spelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excellent</strong></th>
<th><strong>Average</strong></th>
<th><strong>Poor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 3 errors in spelling,</td>
<td>Between 5-9 errors in spelling. Errors do not affect legibility and understanding.</td>
<td>More than 10 spelling errors or 2 errors per line.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Punctuation and Capitalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excellent</strong></th>
<th><strong>Average</strong></th>
<th><strong>Poor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 3 errors in spelling,</td>
<td>Between 5-9 errors in punctuation or capitalization.</td>
<td>Punctuation and capitalization are missing or incorrectly used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Format & Layout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excellent</strong></th>
<th><strong>Average</strong></th>
<th><strong>Poor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph is well-formatted with proper indentation and centered heading. Handwriting is very easy to read</td>
<td>Handwriting is mostly legible. Paper is somewhat neat.</td>
<td>Heading is not centered. No indentation. Handwriting is mostly illegible. Paper is messy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Webpage 4:** A Paragraph Writing Analytic Rubric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph Writing</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>Paragraph has a title, a well-developed, clearly defined, engaging topic sentence. It has 3-5 interesting, concrete and specific, relevant details, organized logically, chronologically, spatially, sequentially, inductively, or deductively, whole-part. Paragraph has a conclusion that summarizes content. Writing is smooth, coherent. Ideas are well-connected. Sentences are strong, expressive with varied structure. Transitional words and conjunctions are used appropriately.</td>
<td>Paragraph has some of the following weaknesses: Topic sentence may be incomplete. Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial, whole-part order. Conclusion does not adequately restate topic. Writing may not be smooth, coherent. Some ideas may not be well-connected. Some transitional words and conjunctions are missing or misused. Some sentences are not strong, some lack variety.</td>
<td>No title or messy title. No topic sentence or faulty topic sentence. Topic sentence is unintelligible and does not state what is being defined. Details are wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete. No concluding sentence. Details are not well-connected, lack order. Writing is confusing and hard to follow. Contains fragments and/or run-on sentences. Transitional words and conjunctions are either missing or misused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph form</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>Paragraph has fewer than 3 errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or indentation. Correct use of word order, articles, verb tense, phrasal verbs, subject verb agreement, etc. Correct use of punctuation, spelling, or capitalization. Handwriting very easy to read. Paper is neat</td>
<td>Between 4-9 errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, and/or indentation. Grammatical and spelling errors do not affect legibility and understanding. Handwriting is mostly legible. Paper is somewhat neat. Paper somewhat neat</td>
<td>It has more than 10 grammatical, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or indentation errors. Distracting or errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Handwriting is mostly illegible. Paper is messy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Webpage 5: A Paragraph Writing Analytic Rubric (Continued).
Webpage 6: These action buttons appear underneath the rubric after saving it. Click any of the links if you need to preview, edit, copy, print, categorize, bookmark, test-run, grade, collaborate, publish, e-mail, or discuss the rubric that you have built. An explanation of each action button is given.

Webpage 7: To apply the rubric to an online assignment, click “apply to” in the menu above the saved rubric.
Webpage 8: To apply the rubric to coursework or an object for collaborative assessment such as a document, a website, a book or any object, click the required one from the list.

Webpage 9: To apply the rubric to a coursework, select the course title and type of coursework to be evaluated from the drop-down menus.
Webpage 10: To enter the grades, click on the rubric in front of a student’s name. This will transfer you to the rubric page.

Webpage 11: To score a student’s assignments (i) Click on one level per criterion to select it. (ii) Once finished, click on [save] below the rubric. (iii) Student grade will be calculated and entered in gradebook.
Webpage 12: Students’ gradebook.

Webpage 13: To view an individual student’s gradebook, click on a student’s name on the list.
Webpage 14: To share a rubric with other teachers, select one of the options on this page.

Webpage 15: To discuss a rubric with colleagues or students, write a subject in the subject area and the issue to be discussed in the message box as in a typical online forum or e-mail.
To categorize a rubric, select the subject area and the type of task to which the rubric applies.
Reference


The Impact of "Imagination of Students" in the Development of the Professional Identity of Four Japanese Teachers of English in Japanese Higher Education

Dr. Diane Hawley Nagatomo
Ochanomizu University

Bio Data:
Diane Hawley Nagatomo has been living and teaching in Japan since 1979. She is an Associate Professor at Ochanomizu University. She has a PhD in linguistics from Macquarie University and is currently interested in teachers' professional identity, teachers' beliefs, and EFL materials development.

Abstract
This study investigates how relatively new Japanese teachers of English in higher education in Japan develop their professional identity. Teachers’ professional identity has come to be seen as one of the most critical components in shaping classroom practices (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). Language teachers, who were previously viewed as technicians who applied appropriate pedagogical methodologies, are now recognized as individual agents who hold individual beliefs, knowledge and attitudes toward teaching, learning, and their students, all of which affect every aspect of classroom teaching (e.g. Woods, 1996; Golembek, 1998; Gatbonton, 1999; Borg, 2003; Tsui, 2007).

Key words: Japanese teachers, professional identity, beliefs, attitudes

Introduction
In the Japanese context, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the teaching practices, beliefs, and identity of secondary school English teachers (e.g. Browne and Wada, 1998; Sato and Kleinsasser, 2004; Gorsuch; 1999, 2000, 2001; Sato, 2002, Sakui, 2004), but relatively few focusing on tertiary teachers (e.g. Matsuura, Chiba and Hilderbrant, 2001, Sakui and Gaies, 2003, Simon-Maeda, 2004a; and Stewart, 2005, 2006). The paucity of such studies is unfortunate because Japanese university English teachers have a strong influence over English language education in Japan. They teach English language to enormous numbers of tertiary students, they conduct teacher-training courses, and they are responsible for creating the English component of university entrance exams, which is said to shape
secondary school teachers’ practices (Brown and Wada, 1998; Gorsuch, 2001). This study, therefore, aims to contribute to a greater understanding of English language education in Japan by looking at the professional identity of four relatively new teachers, who are embarking upon their careers at a time when tertiary education in Japan is undergoing a great deal of reform. University reforms, which began in 2004, include privatization of national universities, establishment of a rigorous assessment system for receiving public funding, and emphasis on transparency and accountability in higher education institutions. These reforms have shaken the Japanese academy by questioning the traditional role of professors, who had been well known for their apathy toward teaching and preference for conducting research (Amano and Poole, 2005).

A further difference that exists between older and younger teachers concerns academic backgrounds. Prior to the 1990s, few Japanese university teachers had completed their doctorate degrees, (Nagasawa, 2004), but universities now prefer to hire new recruits who already have PhDs, often obtained from abroad (Hada, 2005). Those entering the profession today may thus have a completely different outlook toward English language teaching, which is bound to shape the future of English education in Japan. The research question that guided this study is the following:

- How do Japanese teachers of English in higher education construct their professional identity as they become members of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) of English teachers?

**METHODOLOGY**

*The Participants*

The four teachers in this study, introduced in Table 1, were selected from a wider pool of participants in my research on the professional identity of Japanese teachers of English in higher education, on the basis of their status as relative newcomers in their universities where they teach full-time and/or have tenure.
Table 1 Participants’ Biographical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Type of University</th>
<th># of yrs. at university</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>PhD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taka</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Non-academic Private</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Urbaniii</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumiko</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Mid-level Academic Private</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kana</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Prefectural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regionaliv</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miwa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Contract</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Interviews, loosely following Seidman’s (2006) model for in-depth interviews, were held between December 2007 and December 2008 at times and places convenient for the participants throughout Japan. Seidman argues that three ninety-minute interviews over a period of several weeks are optimal for obtaining meaningful data to study teachers’ lives. The first interview aims to understand the interviewee’s experiences through their life histories, the second to understand the context of the workplace, and the third aims to create an overall picture of the interviewee’s lived experience through reflection over past experiences and how these experiences connect to their present and future lives. Due to the participants’ busy schedules and their physical locations throughout Japan, only Taka and Miwa were interviewed three times, Kumiko twice, and Kana once. Nevertheless, all of the interviews followed Seidman’s suggested interview protocol.

Process of Analysis

To “make sense of the data” (Silverman, 1993), the interviews were uploaded into a qualitative software analysis program called NVivo, and were analyzed by coding them into two categories that NVivo calls “free nodes” and “tree nodes” that can be conceptually linked to other nodes and other data stored in NVivo (See Bazeley,
2007 for a comprehensive explanation of NVivo software). Because the aim of the study was to investigate the principle activities relatively new teachers engage in and how they construct their professional identity as university English teachers, the second phase of the analysis followed a concept-driven approach using Wenger’s (1998) framework of social identity to establish thematic categories. First, I examined the interviews to establish categories of engagement that emerged from the participants’ day-to-day work-related practices. The three main categories that were found are:

- Engagement in teaching
- Engagement in the context of the university
- Engagement in the wider community

After these categories were established, I looked for instances where ‘imagination’ and ‘alignment’ seemed to influence the participants’ perceptions of themselves and of others around them. Various themes emerged during this process, but due to space limitations, however, this paper will focus only on three areas where identity as a teacher was formed in part through imagination of students under the category of engagement in teaching:

**Discussion**

*Imagination of students in relationship to themselves as students*

The first theme concerned these teachers’ perceptions of their students in relation to how they remember themselves as students. These powerful memories are shaped by their wide array of experiences, as well as their educational, socio-cultural, and gendered backgrounds, and they not only influence their perceptions of their current students, but also their alignment of their teaching practices and their satisfaction in teaching.

Miwa and Kana, for example, perceive a wide gap between themselves and their students, which results in tension in teaching. As students, both women struggled due to their low socioeconomic backgrounds. As the first in their families to go to
university, they studied hard, making the most of their education, justifying to themselves and to their parents that the expense of higher education was worthwhile. They felt disadvantaged as students in comparison to their more affluent classmates, and worked hard to raise their communicative and academic skills, enjoying classes taught by their Japanese professors who focused on detailed lexical and grammatical explanations of literary works.

Miwa thus wants her students to develop an understanding of English from a similar perspective, saying that if they do not, their language study is only superficial and they will merely become “secretaries or office workers.” She feels her students are unwilling to make the same effort for self-study that she did, and as a result, she is dissatisfied having to spend class time reviewing what students should have studied alone. Miwa’s comment below, where she compares herself to her students, shows how differently she perceives her students’ attitudes toward study compared to her own attitudes:

I didn’t have problems in finding motivation to read […] I remember I was reading Newsweek and Time when I was in the freshman year. Of course I had to look up the dictionary very often, but I could still read it and understand it…by myself. I didn’t need anybody explaining what the expression means or anything back then. But most of the students I teach, they need guidance in that area, too.

Taka and Kumiko also believe their students lack interest and motivation, but they seem to have a greater degree of empathy for their students because they perceive that they have much in common with them. Kumiko and Taka had a much easier time during their college days than Miwa and Kana did. They came from financially secure, middle class backgrounds, and thus, for them, university life was a time for self-fulfillment and self-exploration.

When asked about study, Taka laughed and said, “Study? No! No! No! Play? Yes! Yes! Yes!” His history as a happy-go-lucky student enables him to empathize with his students, whom he describes as unmotivated and with inferiority complexes due to their previous lack of academic success, which resulted in them only being
able to attend an academically low-level university. Compared to Miwa, who feels frustrated at having to teach what the students should have studied at home, Taka does not mind doing this. He knows his students will not self-study, so he willingly devotes class time in teaching the basics. His experiences of learning to communicate in English by memorizing useful expressions in a travel phrase book influenced his attitudes toward language learning. Unlike Kana and Miwa, he didn’t learn English through hard study but from having to survive during his travels throughout Asia. Therefore, he teaches his students “tricks” in order to “get by” in English. Because Taka understands that his students are unmotivated, he attempts to teach them in ways that may be more appealing to them than by, for example, studying a reading text in depth.

*Imagination of what the participants believe their students think of them*

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis concerning the participants’ relationships with their students centered on what they believe their students think of them. All of the teachers want to be liked by their students, and Kumiko, Kana and Taka, try to cultivate personal relationships with them. They like it when students drop by their offices friendly chat. This popularity does, however, come with some drawbacks, and these teachers are learning how to create a balance between being a “friendly teacher” and the students’ “friend.” Kumiko, for example, had to learn to turn students away from her office when she is busy with paperwork, and Kana had to learn to discipline some students who took advantage of their friendly relationship when they skipped class and failed to submit assignments.

What the students think of the teachers is also found in the form of explicit feedback on teacher evaluation forms. Kumiko, for example, reports receiving positive feedback on these forms and she is proud that her classes are among the most popular in the university. Negative feedback from students, on the other hand, is generally implicit, and is reflected in students’ behavior: they do poorly on quizzes and exams, they are passive or sleep during class, or they skip class altogether. Interestingly, the teachers note that they can receive positive and negative feedback from the same students at different times. Students may seek out teachers during
office hours to chat but still do poorly on a test.

The teachers’ interviews seem to suggest that if identification as a teacher is strongly connected to the transmission of knowledge, as in the case of Miwa, negative feedback in the form of poor test scores may undermine confidence as a teacher. On the other hand, if identification as a teacher is strongly connected to building personal relationships with students, poor test scores may not have the same negative impact.

*Imagination of what the participants believe their students can and should learn*

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis concerns the teachers’ imagination in relation to their students’ learning, and in particular, what they imagine their students can and should learn in their classes.

None of the teachers are particularly optimistic that their students will achieve English proficiency as a result of their teaching. They feel that students fail to make sufficient effort and they lack purpose for studying English, which contributes to passive classroom behavior. Kana is irritated by this passivity, and wants to tell students, “Come on come on, you are young and energetic, and you are wasting your energy.” Miwa says it seems that students “almost took a vow of silence” in their determination to “just sit there.” For her, the “toughest part is to make them work, make them at least be there. Not just physically, but mentally.”

Although pessimistic about the outcome of their students’ English language learning, the teachers have attached importance to other pedagogical goals, which include helping students to develop critical and independent thinking skills, to gain a broader perspective of the world, to develop more self confidence, and to improve communication skills (in Japanese).

Kumiko, who dislikes classes that focus solely on language teaching, prefers classes where students are encouraged to develop their opinions, believing that it is the *content* of the class that the students will remember rather than the language learning. Her lessons center around controversial topics, especially those related to gender. She feels that such knowledge will help prepare her female students in particular for the sexual discrimination she is sure they will face in the real world.
Miwa teaches her students about the impact of gender on society as well. For her, choosing such topics for reading and discussion enables her to connect her personal and academic interests to teaching English language, as the following comment illustrates:

I notice I think one of the things I have to tell you about being a teacher is that mostly probably I told you that I’m not really happy about being a teacher. I feel like I have to do, a kind of mission. I have to. I’m a feminist and my specialty is gender studies and women’s literature. I have to teach young girls how to respect themselves, and how to insist what they truly are, you know, in relation to men and in society.

Kana echoes this idea, and wants her students to learn how to apply what is learned in one context to another. Without such skills, she is afraid they might be “easily taken to a cult.” Critical thinking skills will help them become less passive, which she perceives to be a cultural trait that is especially predominant among her female students.

Taka also feels that his students are unable to articulate their ideas because they are accustomed to being passive followers of teachers, and because they lack confidence due to their previous lack of academic success. Therefore, he places priority on helping students learn independent thinking by exposing them to a wider perspective of the world.

Surprisingly, all four teachers place priority on improving students’ communication skills in Japanese, as well as in English. Kana believes that although her students may not learn much English, English study can empower them because it introduces an alternative communication style and will help them overcome some of the limitations of Japanese, which she says encourages humility, passiveness, and silence.
Conclusion

This study has discussed ways that four teachers draw upon their imagination of their students in order to construct their identities as beginning teachers. The narratives are congruent with Tsui’s (2007) findings that identity is “relational as well as experiential” (p. 678). Professional identity for these relatively new teachers develops through their real and imagined relationships with their students and through their lived day-to-day experiences.

The most striking finding was the overall pessimism the teachers had concerning the outcomes of their English language teaching, resulting in the teachers’ priority placed on non-linguistic pedagogical goals. One reason for the pedagogical shift away from language teaching may be each teacher’s weaker identification as an English language teacher and a stronger identification as a university teacher with an English-related specialty. Their identities are strongly bound by their academic specialties, and English language teaching is something that they do but this does not determine who they are. More studies are needed to determine if such beliefs are prevalent among other Japanese teachers of English in higher education. Investigations of these teachers may provide much insight into the state of English language education in Japan.

REFERENCES


NVivo. (2002). QSR International Pty. Melbourne, Australia


---

i In this study, I use the term “teacher” to refer to all those teaching in higher education, regardless of the academic position they may hold.

ii All names are pseudonyms.

iii Urban areas in this study refer to those that are within the greater Tokyo area.

iv Regional areas in this study refer to all other places outside of urban areas.