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A Learner Corpus Investigation of Filipino L2 English Article Use: The Way Forward for Language Teachers

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Abstract

It is well-documented that L2 English learners from article-less languages, such as Mandarin and Korean, have trouble appropriately marking definiteness/specificity in L2 English, causing numerous breakdowns in referential coherence. The status of Filipino / Tagalog as an article or article-less language is up for debate, with ANG, NG, SA markers used to signal definiteness, indefiniteness and genericity according to context. This paper presents a learner corpus analysis of L2 English definite article use by L1 Tagalog speakers, collected from the International Corpus of Learner English (ICNALE, Ishikawa, 2013), totalling 24,253 words from 94 essays. Using Pica's (1983) Target Language Use as a measure of article accuracy across the production of zero, indefinite and definite articles across four types of obligatory contexts (generic, specific definite, specific indefinite and non-specific indefinite), the results show that Filipino L2 English users struggle with the use of the definite article in generic contexts, much like the findings reported for Mandarin, Korean and Thai in the author's and others' previous research. Based on the results of this analysis, a number of suggestions for pedagogy are presented, looking at how Filipino learners use articles successfully, when they do not, and what can be done to improve Filipino L2 English learners' accuracy and range of definite article use.

Keywords: L2 article acquisition, learner corpora, Tagalog, Filipino, ICNALE

Introduction

It has been well attested that the English article system is one of the most difficult features of the language for L2 learners (Master, 1987; Thomas, 1989; Young, 1996; Robertson, 2000; Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004, Chuang & Nesi, 2006; Ekiert, 2004, 2007, 2010; Diez-Bedmar & Papp, 2008, Ionin, Baek, Kim, Ko & Wexler, 2012; Snape, Leung & Ting, 2006; Snape, García-Mayo and Gürel, 2013; Crosthwaite, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b; Diez-Bedmar, 2015). English indefinite and definite articles have a variety of associated functions, with Ekiert (2007) describing the article system as 'a complex set of abstract distinctions which are, to some extent, arbitrarily mapped onto surface forms' (p.1). Their associated usages lie at the heart of the syntax/semantic/pragmatic interface, leading to problems of second language (L2) learnability (Sorace, 2011). Despite suggestions in second language acquisition literature that frequency is an essential factor in L2 learning (e.g. Ellis, 2010; Filipović & Hawkins, 2013) the high frequency of article use leads to a constant decision-making process on the part of the L2 learner during L2 production (Master, 2002; Ekiert, 2004, Świątek, 2013). In the case where form and function of definiteness between L1 and L2 is dissimilar, the opportunity for positive transfer is thus reduced, with L1s with an

article or article-like system ([+ART] languages) finding article acquisition easier than those who come from L1s without an article or article-like system ([-ART] languages) (Master; 1987; Diez-Bedmar & Papp, 2008; Chrabaszcz & Jiang, 2014; Crosthwaite, 2016a), L2 learners from article-less languages frequently incorrectly encode definiteness and/or specificity of reference with the article system, overusing indefinite articles where definite articles are expected (Leung, 2001; Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004), overusing definite articles where indefinite articles are expected (Master, 1987; Young, 1996), or overusing indefinite/definite articles where zero articles are expected (Barrett & Chen, 2011, Author, 2016a)

In a recent study, Crosthwaite (2016a) looked at the production of English articles by L2 English learners from Mandarin Chinese, Korean and Thai backgrounds (all considered article-less languages in the literature) at four L2 proficiency levels, using data sourced from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE, Isihkawa, 2011, 2013). Speakers from all three L1 backgrounds experienced difficulties with the overuse of the definite article in generic contexts (e.g. *the students usually have part time jobs in college), although L1-group-specific differences were found in the overall accuracy and accuracy order (definite, indefinite, zero) of L2 article use. Cross-learner group variation in accuracy was considered to be dependent on the relative grammaticalisation of an 'article-like' system of demonstrative and numeral + classifier NPs to locally encode definiteness, with Mandarin Chinese claimed to be the closest to an article-like system in this respect. Mandarin L2 English learners thus enjoyed significantly better L2 article accuracy than Korean and Thai L2 English learners, who had no such opportunity for positive transfer from their L1.

With the above finding in mind, the goal of this paper is to consider L2 English article production by students from another Asian L1 context, namely Filipino L2 English learners. The choice to study this particular L1 group is because the status of the markers *ANG, NG* and *SA* in Tagalog/Filipino as equivalent to the English definite/indefinite article system is up for debate, with some researchers suggesting that Tagalog is a article-less language, with others claiming that Tagalog/Filipino is much closer to an article language than other Asian L1s. In addition, English is an official second language of the Philippines (although it is only spoken by just under 50% of the population) (Bolton, 2008) while Tagalog/Filipino, despite making up 90% of words in

the national language (Filipino) is only spoken by 1/3 of the population, given that there are 180 languages spoken in the Philippines – creating a 'linguistic power struggle' (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014, p.17) in the Philippines which is likely to have a major impact on L2 English production. Thus, this paper presents a learner corpus analysis of L2 article use among L2 English learners from L1 Tagalog backgrounds at the four L2 proficiency levels specified in the ICNALE (A2 Waystage, B1-1 Threshold Lower, B1-2 Threshold Upper and B2+ Vantage or Higher), in order to answer the following research questions:

1) How do L2 English learners from L1 Tagalog/Filipino backgrounds manage the production of English articles in the L2 at the four proficiency levels specified in the ICNALE?
2) What is the accuracy order of L2 English article production by L2 English learners from L1 Tagalog backgrounds?
3) What are some possible implications of accuracy order and proficiency effects on L2 article production for English language teaching in the Philippines?

Definiteness in English

While definiteness is considered a linguistic universal, the encoding of definiteness varies across different languages. English is typically considered as the stereotypical 'article' language in terms of the article/article-less language divide, in that (in) definiteness is clearly marked over a range of definiteness contexts. Language such as Mandarin, Korean and Thai are labelled as 'article-less', in that while (in)definiteness may be marked via demonstratives or numerals, it is typically less marked than in English, leaving the task of understanding definiteness to the listener/reader.

As mentioned in the introduction, the status of Tagalog/Filipino as an article-less language is up for debate, with some suggesting that the status of certain grammatical markers share many similarities with those of English form/function mappings for definiteness encoding. However, recently, other researchers have noted subtle differences between Tagalog/Filipino and English form/function mappings for definiteness, which as seen in studies on other article- and article-less languages, may cause L2 English learners from particular L1 contexts to have difficulties with L2 articles. .

With this in mind, it is necessary to determine a universal method for the encoding of definiteness that covers all potential obligatory (and by extension, non-obligatory) article use contexts, so that one can compare how speakers of different languages encode definiteness across each context and to then make generalisations or predictions regarding L2 learnability of form and function. Previous accounts of definiteness in English such as Hawkins (1978) suggests a variety of syntax/pragmatic functions of definite article use, including visible situation (pass me *the water*), immediate situation (don't go in there, *the dog* may bite you), associative (*the book* …. *the author*), and inclusive functions (bring (all of?) *the wickets* in after a game of cricket). Later approaches to definiteness marking are presented along a gradient of usage dependent on a) the familiarity (Prince, 1981), b) identifiability (Gundel, Hedberg & Zacharski, 1993) or c) accessibility (Ariel, 1991, 2008, 2010) of a given referent as a discourse unfolds. However, Hawkin's categories are related only to English article use and may not be consistent across all L1s, and Crosthwaite (2014a) and Hendriks (2003) have shown that L2 learners often struggle to produce texts that allow for a comparative givenness/accessibility-based account of form/function mappings for definiteness.

With this in mind, the approach to the encoding of definiteness taken in this study follows Ekiert (2004), Diez-Bedmar and Papp (2008), Winward (2012, 2014) amongst others in using Bickerton (1981) and Huebner's (1983, 1985) semantic / pragmatic approach to article use, dependent on whether the nominal element is being specifically referred to [+/-SR] or is known to the hearer [+/-HK] as highlighted in Table 1:

Table 1: Four contexts for article use in Bickerton (1981), Huebner (1983, 1985), as shown with examples from Ekiert (2004), Thomas (1989) and Goto Butler (2002)[1].

Context 1 - Generics [-SR, +HK][2]	**Context 2 - Referential definites [+SR, +HK]**
Ø Fruit flourishes in the valley	Pass me the pen
Ø Elephants have trunks	The idea of coming to the UK was…
The Grenomian is an excitable person	I found a book. The book was…
They say the elephant never forgets	The first person to walk on the moon…
A paper clip comes in handy	
An elephant never forgets	
Context 3 - Referential indefinites, first mentions [+SR, -HK]	**Context 4 - Non-referentials – Attributive indefinites, non-specific indefinites [-SR, -HK]**
Chris approached me carrying a dog	Alice is an accountant
I've bought a new car	I need a new car
A man phoned	I guess I should buy a new car
I keep sending Ø messages to him	A man is in the ladies, but I haven't seen him
I've got Ø friends in the UK	Ø Foreigners would come up with a better solution
I've managed to find Ø work	

Thus, Table 1 summarises how English articles are used to encode (in) definiteness along these four contexts. The definite, indefinite and zero article may be used in generic contexts depending on whether the target referent is singular definite ('The Grenomian'), singular indefinite ('A paper clip') or plural/mass nouns ('Elephants'/'Fruit'). Only the definite article is used in referential definite contexts, and the indefinite and zero articles may be used in non-specific referential and non-referential contexts. The next section covers how speakers of Tagalog/Filipino handle the encoding of (in) definiteness across each of the four contexts outlined above, via a grammar-based contrastive analysis in the absence of comparative L1 data to the L2 data analysed in the present study.

Definiteness in Tagalog/Filipino.

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[1] Later work such as Leńko-Szymańska (2012) includes a fifth context of phrasal/idiomatic usage of zero, indefinite or definite articles such as 'on *the other hand*', but these uses will not be referred to again in the present study.

[2] [+/-SR] reference is made to a specific referent, [+/-HK] referent is known to the hearer [+/-HK]

In the majority of cases, Tagalog/Filipino *appears* to clearly fall on the 'article language' side of the spectrum, with the earliest attribution of the *ANG* marker as a *de-facto* definite article suggested as far back as Humboldt (1

836-1839). The *NG* non-topic/instrument/goal marker and *SA* dative / benefactor / locative markers can be used to signal both indefiniteness and definiteness depending on whether the target referent is topical or non-topical as with the following examples:

(1) a. Magbibigay ANG babae NG bigas SA bata.
     AF-will give ANG woman NG rice SA boy
     'The woman will give rice to a/the boy.'
   b. Ibibigay NG babae ANG bigas SA bata.
     GF-will give NG woman ANG rice SA boy
     'A/The woman will give the rice to a/the boy.' (Adams & Manaster-Ramer, 1998, p.80).

In 1a, the ANG-marked actor (the woman) is the topic, while the NG-marked 'rice' is indefinite, leaving the SA-marked 'boy' either indefinite or definite depending on the prior context. In 1b, the ANG-marker is associated with the 'rice' (making this the topical referent), leaving the NG-marked non-topic 'woman' and the SA-marked 'boy' either indefinite or definite. In this respect, the ANG-marked topic referent is always considered definite (Schachter & Otanes, 1972). However, the ANG marker can also be used with non-definite generic reference:

(2) Lubhang mapanganib ANG sawa [TOPIC, Ø NUM/lND], at napakalaki naman ANG elepante
   [TOPIC, Ø NUM/IND]

   'A boa constrictor is a very dangerous creature, and an elephant is very cumbersome' (Al-Malki, Majid & Omar, 2014:16)

NG-marked referents functioning as objects are unmarked for definiteness as with the storekeeper in (3) below, while NG-marked oblique referents in transitive clauses such as the rice (4) below are considered as necessarily indefinite (Schachter, 2013)

(3) Aalisin   [NG tindero]erg. [AND bigas]abs. [SA sako.]loc.
   will.take.out A storekeeper P   rice   sack
   'A/The storekeeper will take the rice out of the sack.'

(4) Aalisan   [NG tindero]erg. [NG bigas]obl. [ANG sako.]abs.
   will.take.out.of A storekeeper   rice   P sack
   'A/The storekeeper will take some rice out of the sack.' (Schachter, 2013, p.837-838).

In (1a), (1b) and (3), the reading of the locative SA marker is definite with respect to the discourse or situational context, but without such context, the (in) definiteness encoded by SA is unmarked:

(5) Mag-alis tayo   NG bigas SA sako.
    take.out abs.1.ipl. obl. rice loc. sack
    'Let's take some rice out of a/the sack.' (Schachter, 2013, p.844).

While NG and SA can be used in specific and non-specific indefinite contexts similarly to the English indefinite article, the ANG, NG and SA markers in Tagalog can all be used in generic AND specific definite contexts where the discourse or situational context allows, unlike English where only the definite article can be used in specific definite contexts:

(6) Iniabót ng manggagamot sa sundalo ang itlóg
    hand   NG doctor   SA soldier ANG egg
    'The physician handed the egg to the soldier.'(Cortes, Milambiling & Paul, 2012:1)

From the above, it is still unclear as to whether Tagalog speakers will significantly benefit from positive transfer from L1 to L2 production. While the ANG, NG and SA markers are all used to encode various definiteness contexts, the form/function mappings of the three markers do not exactly follow those of English, leading to potential over/underuse of specific forms in non-obligatory (i.e. erroneous) contexts.

Methodology

The L2 data are drawn from the written version of the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) (Ishikawa, 2011, 2013). This corpus was preferred over similar large learner corpora such as the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE - Granger, Dagneaux, Meunier and Paquot, 2009), the Asian Corpus of English (ACE, 2014) for two main reasons, namely that the ICNALE contains L2 data from L1 Tagalog speakers spread over four L2 proficiencies but covering only two potential task types per proficiency. These advantages will be described in more detail in the following sections.

Proficiency levels

The ICNALE's design criteria (following Ishikawa, 2011) include texts drawn at four L2 English proficiency levels for the assessment of pseudo-longitudinal development. These proficiency groupings are *claimed* in Ishikawa (2011) to be equivalent to the levels A2-B2 of the Common European Framework (CEFR, Council for Europe, 2001). However, there are a number of different measures of proficiency used in the construction of the ICNALE, with some students' proficiency measured by standardized tests such as IELTS® and TOEFL®, but with other students (who had not previously taken a standardised test) having their proficiency measured via a converted score following Nation & Beglar's (2007) Vocabulary Size Test. For this reason, the present study makes **no** assumptions regarding ICNALE proficiency distinctions and CEFR equivalency, and has replaced the ICNALE-defined distinctions of proficiency with new labels, namely 'Beginner', 'Pre-Intermediate', 'Intermediate' and 'Upper Intermediate' .

Task types

Despite issues with the designation of proficiency levels, one advantage of the ICNALE is that the corpus is composed solely of discursive texts of just two types, which is preferable for inter- and intra-group comparison. The prompts for these tasks are shown below:

'Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Use reasons and specific details to support your answer.

[Part-time job] 'It is important for college students to have a part-time job'

[Smoking ban]:'Smoking should be completely banned at all the restaurants in the (country' [3]

Each essay averages about 300 words, and the essays are largely equivalent to that of a high school essay in that there are no citation or referencing including and the works are generally of an informal, non-academic tone.

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[3] taken from http://language.sakura.ne.jp/icnale/about.html

Corpus Sample

The following table describes the corpus sample of the Filipino ICNALE dataset analysed:

Table 2 – Corpus Sample of Filipino ICNALE dataset analysed

Prompt/Level	Texts	Words	Mean words per composition	Obligatory contexts[4]
Part-time job				
Pre-Int.	11	2664	242.18	317
Int.	25	6166	246.64	792
Upper-Int.	11	3092	281.09	389
(Total)	47	11922	256.63	1498
Smoking ban				
Pre-Int.	12	2792	232.67	387
Int.	24	5865	244.38	904
Upper-Int.	11	2874	261.27	450
(Total)	44	11531	246.10	1741

The ICNALE sample for Tagalog is heavily skewed towards Intermediate level, with 50 texts per task in the Tagalog subcorpora with much smaller numbers at other levels. In order to make the L2 proficiency subcorpora more equal, a maximum of 25 ICNALE texts were randomly selected from the Intermediate level dataset for each task. The number of texts for Pre-Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate level reflects the total ICNALE sample for those levels, which, while relatively small, still represent over 600 (Pre-Int.) / 700 (Upp. Int.) obligatory article contexts, and thus are still worthy of investigation. There were too few ICNALE texts at Beginner levels (2 per task) and so these have not been included in the analysis.

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[4] Includes all obligatory article context types 1-4 as shown in Table 1.

Annotation

All source texts were compiled into a searchable corpus using UAMCorpustool (O'Donnell, 2008), version 3.2. For corpus analysis to take place, it is necessary to code or 'annotate' the corpus data so that one can extract and quantify the different linguistic features one is coding for across the four L2 proficiencies. Annotation for each text followed the scheme created in Diez-Bedmar & Papp (2008) and modified in Diez-Bedmar (2015), which has been used to code for the four article contexts (generics, referential definites, referential indefinites and non-referentials) under investigation in the present study.:

Table 3 - Tagging system for correct uses of articles (Diez-Bedmar & Papp, 2015)

	Article used by the learner			
	Generics	Referential definites	Referential indefinites	Non-referentials
Definite article (DA)	1DA	2DA		
Indefinite article (AI)	1IA		3IA	4IA
Zero article (ZA)	1ZA		3ZA	4ZA

Table 4 - Tagging system for incorrect uses of articles (Diez-Bedmar, 2015)[5]

	Article used by the learner			
	Generics	Referential definites	Referential indefinites	Non-referential
Definite article	1GAIA 1GAZA	2GAIA 2GAZA		
Indefinite article	1GADA 1GAZA		3GADA 3GAZA	4GADA 4GAZA
Zero article	1GADA 1GAIA		3GADA 3GAIA	4GADA 4GAIA

Both tables above thus cover all of the obligatory and non-obligatory (error) uses of English articles across the four definiteness contexts outlined in the literature review. All obligatory and non-obligatory article uses in all texts were manually annotated by the researcher (a native speaker of English) and a non-native speaking

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[5] GA=grammatical article, 1GAIA = grammatical article error with incorrect use of indefinite article in context 1 (generics), 1GADA = grammatical article error with incorrect use of definite article in context 1 (generics), 2GAIA, grammatical article error with incorrect use of indefinite article in context 2 (referential definities), etc.

research assistant with an M.A. in applied linguistics. The researcher manually double-checked all coding for accuracy. Two native English speaking raters then analysed a random sample of 50 texts for correct/incorrect codings, producing an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of .836, of which a figure of greater than .740 is considered 'excellent' (Fleiss, 1981).

Target Language Use

After coding for appropriate and inappropriate use, it is possible to determine an overall measure of article accuracy. The present study follows Diez-Bedmar & Papp (2008) and Crosthwaite (2016a) in adopting Pica's (1983) measure of article accuracy in the form of *Target Language Use*, as shown in the equation below:

No. of correct suppliances in obligatory contexts

TLU= _____   X100

(No. of obligatory contexts)+(No. of suppliances in non-obligatory

contexts)

Under an approach that considers (non)obligatory contexts only, there is no need to normalise word counts across/between subcorpora, given that language users of different L1/L2 groups may use other kinds of NPs (such as demonstrative or quantitative NPs) that are, by their nature, non-obligatory contexts for articles. .

Results and Discussion

The following tables describe the Target Language Use (TLU) scores for the Filipino L2 English data for each task. Inter-level comparison was performed using Kruskal-Wallis comparison, with post-hoc pairwise comparison using Dunn's correction for adjusted *p* values, while inter-task comparison was performed using Mann-Whitney U tests. As the data is subject to non-parametric analyses, the medians and median absolute deviations are reported rather than the typical mean/standard deviations:

Table 5 – Target Language Use ratings by level and context for Filipino L2 English group [Part time Job]

		Generic contexts			Referential definite contexts	Referential contexts	indefinite	Non-referential contexts	
Level	Texts	1DA	1IA	1ZA	2DA	3IA	3ZA	4IA	4ZA
Pre-Int	13	M=0 AD=0	M=.80 AD=.80	M=.83 AD=.17	M=1 AD=0	M=.83 AD=.33	M=.86 AD=.14	M=.83 AD=.07	M=1 AD=0
Int.	49	M=0 AD=0	M=1 AD=1	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=.25	M=1 AD=0	M=.96 AD=.04	M=.91 AD=.09
Upp-Int.	22	M=0 AD=0	M=1 AD=1	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0

Table 6 – Target Language Use ratings by level and context for Filipino L2 English group [Smoking Ban]

		Generic contexts			Referential definite contexts	Referential contexts	indefinite	Non-referential contexts	
Level	Texts	1DA	1IA	1ZA	2DA	3IA	3ZA	4IA	4ZA
Pre-Int	13	M=0 AD=0	M=1 AD=1	M=.94 AD=.06	M=1 AD=0	M=.63 AD=.36	M=.89 AD=.11	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0
Int.	49	M=0 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=.91 AD=.09	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0
Upp-Int.	22	M=0 AD=0	M=1 AD=1	M=.89 AD=.11	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0	M=1 AD=0

From the tables, the Tagalog/Filipino L2 English learners have little difficulty with article use from Pre-Intermediate level onwards with one exception - the use of the definite article in generic contexts, which remains at 0 median TLU across each L2 proficiency and in both tasks. This suggests that these learners are either overextending the use of the zero article into definite singular generic contexts (*'[the] lion is dangerous'), or providing false specific readings with inappropriate definite article use (i.e. *the students need part time jobs). Given the very low frequency of definite singular generics in English discourse (e.g. Biber et al., 1999), the issue is likely to be the latter - namely massive over-production of definite article in generic contexts where the zero article (plural/mass NP) is appropriate. This trend was also seen in Crosthwaite (2016a) for Mandarin, Korean and Thai L2 English learners, although unlike those groups, the Filipino L2 English group in the present study do not appear

to have any difficulty with the indefinite article in generic contexts. These findings suggest severe optionality of L2 definite article use in generic contexts which lasts at least until the highest L2 proficiency surveyed. However, overall article accuracy is an average 15%-20% higher in all article contexts for the Filipino L2 English group than found for Mandarin, Korean and Thai L2 English groups in Crosthwaite (2016a), which suggests that despite the problems the Filipino L2 English learners experience with definite article overuse, their L1 affords them significant opportunities for positive transfer compared to speakers of 'true' article-less languages, presumably because the ANG, NG, and SA markers function similarly (although not identically) to English indefinite/definite articles.

Mann-Whitney U tests employed on the data showed no effect of task on TLU scores for any of the article contexts (alpha=0.00625, tests=8). There was also no significant effect of L2 proficiency on the pseudo-longitudinal development of any article form/context after Kruskal-Wallis tests (alpha=00625, test=8) across both tasks or within each task.

The following table describes the median TLU ratings and orders of accuracy across all article contexts for the Filipino L2 English group, using Friedman's test (Alpha=0.166 for Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate levels, tests=3, Alpha=1 for 'Across all levels' statistics). Where a significant Friedman's test occurred, post-hoc comparison is performed using Holm-Bonferonni correction.

Table 6 –Target Language Use ratings and orders of accuracy across all article contexts for Filipino L2 English group

Level	Definite article(DA)	Indefinite article(IA)	Zero article(ZA)	Result	Result (Friedman/Pairwise)
Pre-Intermediate	M=.72 AD=.25	M=.75 AD=.16	M=.92 AD=.07	ZA=IA=DA	$F_r(2)=1.014, p=.602$
Intermediate	M=.77 AD=.22	M=.94 AD=.05	M=.92 AD=.04	ZA=IA=DA	$F_r(2)=5.722, p=.057$
Upper-Intermediate.	M=.78 AD=.22	M=1 AD=0	M=.96 AD=.04	ZA=IA=DA	$F_r(2)=7.385, p=.025$ *No pairwise sig. after correction*
Across all levels	M=.75 AD=.25	M=.93 AD=.06	M=.93 AD=.07	ZA=IA>DA	$F_r(2)=9.022, p=.011$ (DA<ZA t(2)=-.375, p=.039

The findings suggest that the overall order of accuracy for the Filipino L2 English group has zero articles as the most accurate (Median=.93, AD=.07), and definite articles as the least (Median=.75, AD=.25), following the findings of Crosthwaite (2016a) for Korean and Thai L2 English learners. Accuracy of indefinite article use is comparable to that of zero article use, and so the overall order of article accuracy follows the order ZA=IA>DA found for Mandarin L2 English learners in Diez-Bedmar & Papp (2008) and for Korean and Thai L2 English learners in Crosthwaite (2016a). Thus, despite the accurate use of the definite article in referential definite contexts, the oversuppliance of definite articles in generic plural/mass contexts reduces the overall accuracy of definite article use for these L2 English learners.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study is the largest such study of L2 article use by Tagalog/Filipino L2 English speakers, highlighting the difficulties (and successes!) experienced by these learners as they attempt to produce grammatical articles in written discursive essays.

In terms of difficulties, the use of the definite article in generic contexts is particularly problematic, with Filipino L2 English learners overproducing the definite article where the zero article is expected for plural/mass NPs. This leads to numerous false definite readings (with inappropriate definite article use, i.e. *the students need part time jobs). However, in terms of success, the overall accuracy of L2 article use by L1 Tagalog/Filipino speakers is substantially higher than that reported in the literature for article-less language such as Korean and Thai at equivalent L2 proficiencies. Thus, regarding the status of Tagalog/Filipino as an 'article' language and the L1 transfer effect such a label might suggest for L2 English acquisition, one might suggest from these findings two possible conclusions.

Firstly, if we are take into account the potential (or lack of potential) for positive transfer effects regarding L2 English article acquisition that have been shown in previous studies on article vs. article-less languages, the status of Tagalog/Filipino as an 'article' language is not entirely clear cut. That is, one would not expect Tagalog/Filipino L2 English learners to achieve an average median definite article accuracy of 75% even at Upper-Intermediate level if their L1 configuration of articles

was the same as that of English. It appears as though the L2 learners fluctuate between readings of definiteness/specificity for generic mass/plural NPs, incorrectly providing the definiteness marker where definiteness is not assumed. This, however, then appears to be more of an issue with mass/plural vs. singular distinctions on the NP rather than definiteness marking, given that the *only* area where the Tagalog/Filipino L2 English learners struggle is with definite article use in generic mass/plural contexts, but not with indefinite/zero article use in generic contexts, and with other article forms in their respective definite/indefinite/non-referential contexts.

However, the second conclusion one can make is that the overall article accuracy is *higher* than that reported for L2 English learners from article-less L1s in Author (2016). Thus, L1 Tagalog/Filipino speakers certainly have the advantage over speakers of true 'article-less' languages. Thus, it is increasingly apparent that one needs to consider the relative grammaticalisation of form/function relationships for article acquisition, considering a continuum of syntactic to pragmatic approaches to definiteness marking over the labelling of languages as either 'article' or 'article-less' if one is to make any transfer-based claims regarding relative L2 article learnability across different L1 speakers.

Pedagogical Implications

Given the above finding that Filipino L2 English learners experience problems with the inappropriate use of definite articles in generic contexts, English teachers in the region need to devote special attention to driving improvements in this area. Snape García-Mayo and Gürel (2013) suggest that EFL instruction has neglected article use in generic reference in favour of a one-form one-function mapping of the definite article to specific definite readings. Thus, the first hurdle to overcome is to create materials that ask students to focus on form to make them aware of whether a referent is being referred to generically or specifically, and the implications that count/mass nouns have on article assignment, given that the majority of article errors occur when the writer provides a definite reading to a generic count/mass NP. Before producing a nominal element, students should ask themselves whether they are referring to 'all' entities in a set (i.e. [All] 'students'), a previously mentioned entity ('the students' [that I mentioned already]), a single specific entity ([there was] 'a student' [who I will mention again]),

or a description ([I was] 'a student'), covering Bickerton's article contexts 1-4 respectively.

Once students have mastered recognising when they are or are not referring generically and in what capacity, L2 learners should continue to associate the definite article with definite referential contexts only, given that the TLUs for this context is almost at 100% for these Tagalog/Filipino speakers. One way that this can be stressed is via frequency of input, given that the definite singular generic is very rare in English production (Biber et al, 1999). However, outside of input considerations, the quickest and easier improvements can be acheived by converting any singular generic reading (definite or indefinite) to a bare plural/mass generic, i.e switching from '*the potato* was first cultivated in South America' / 'It is usual for *a person* from Italy to drink wine with his/her meal') to '*potatoes* were first cultivated in South America' / 'It is usual for *people* from Italy to drink wine with their meals' (Snape, García-Mayo and Gürel, 2013). This would then leave the use of the definite article reserved for referential definite contexts, and the indefinite article reserved for referential indefinite / non-referential contexts, potentially improving L2 learnability of all three article forms across their respective contexts. Given the frustration the majority of EFL teachers experience when trying to teach the English article system (and the even greater frustration experienced by EFL students when trying to learn it), teachers can do themselves and their students a great service by minimizing the variety of functions associated to individual article forms, at least in the initial and intermediate stages of L2 acquisition. By recognising that appropriate article use in generic contexts appears to be a criterial feature of advanced L2 proficiency levels (and apparently regardless of whether the learners' L1 is a 'article' or 'article-less' language), teachers should also be able to tailor their assessment of student performance in article use, and not penalise students who make inappropriacies in generic article use too heavily. The value of the present study is in increasing awareness of the difficulties encountered by Tagalog/Filipino L2 English learners during the acquisition of the English article system, and this, hopefully, should lead to tailored materials design and pedagogy, and ultimately increased accuracy in article production by learners from this region.

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Developing Community and Active Participation in a Mixed-level Language Class via Self-learning Portfolios

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Abstract

As the globalization of English sweeps through Asia, the complex challenges of dealing with heterogeneous classes is an increasing issue. Divergent levels of competency and motivation often result in imbalances in student learning and participation. How does one get an entire class engaged with challenging content without leaving strugglers behind? Can discussion be generated between unlikely consorts? How can all students become motivated to be more active toward their own learning? To address such questions, this paper demonstrates how community and meaningful scholarship can be built through the creation of a self-learning portfolio system, which cultivates student preparation, self-reliance, and maximum involvement in the classroom. Through this mechanism, community membership can increase interaction, promote learning responsibility, stimulate motivation, and reduce anxiety. Consequently, a presence of cooperation is established, developing the foundation on which a successful course can be built.

Keywords: mixed-levels, community, participation, student-centered, independent learning

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Introduction

Much is written in the realms of autonomous learning and class participation (e.g., Jones, 1999; Benson, 2007; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011). Little is said, however, that specifically connects a strong link between independent study and how it can be used to generate active classroom participation, particularly among classes with mixed English levels. In the interest of addressing this gap in the literature, the following paper starts with some of the benefits of self-learning portfolios and their relationship to a more inclusive classroom community. It seeks to demonstrate that while encouraging classroom interaction, students' ongoing construction of portfolios concomitantly fosters, in them, a cooperative spirit with multiple opportunities for each member of class to participate. The second part explores the conceptualization and creation of self-learning portfolios. Created mostly outside of class by students, self-learning portfolios are effective tools for creating community-oriented classes that are inclusive to various levels of competency. This, the author contends, supports the notion that autonomous study, combined with the development of exchanges between students in the classroom is indispensable to the process of learning.

Methodology: Approaching Self-learning Portfolios

The self-learning portfolio process can be fashioned to fit various levels and courses primarily in universities and adult classes. In the author's classroom experience, it has proven to be an effective learning mechanism for conversation, discussion, reading, vocabulary building, writing, speaking, presentation, debate, and content-based courses. The system is most suitable for classes ranging from four to thirty students and works with pre-intermediate to advanced learners. It is designed to

include the contributions of weaker members while stronger students assume leadership roles.

While students are invited to own the learning process, the ultimate goal of using the portfolio system is to create fully engaged, community-oriented classes that are inclusive and student-centered. Students first do independent, self-directed study with their assignments before engaging with their classmates and refining their newly acquired knowledge. Learner to learner interaction is then heightened as all students arrive to class with something to contribute. This process at the same time fosters a cooperative spirit with opportunities for group consensus, providing the means to build a sense of community that is vital to the process of learning.

Benefits of Self-learning Portfolios for Building an Inclusive Community

Increased Interaction

For language classes, community should go beyond traditional definitions to be inclusive, self-reliant, respectful of others, and have responsibility to each other for learning. Self-learning portfolios provide the foundation on which to build such traits as all participants are expected to arrive prepared to interact. Students quickly realize that their notes are effective tools for communication as they disperse into pairs or groups to re-engage with their work in the classroom. More importantly, students are able to boost their knowledge and ingrain concepts deeper into their minds as they teach and learn from each other. The act of teaching enables the student teacher to improve his or her comprehension of the subject through clarifying, simplifying, and generating examples (Nutt, 2014). By sharing their work with their counterparts, everyone is engaged while reviewing what they wrote in their notes.

Community is further developed as students arrive equipped with opinions and questions to exchange. As each person has numerous chances to participate, discussions become inclusive and student-centered. Moreover, even the most reluctant participants have something contribute, building community through total involvement. Through this process, students bring much more than just a notebook with them. They also bring non-visible things such as their experiences, background, yearnings, and disappointments. They carry their memories, hopes, dreams, and more as they learn multifaceted approaches to questions and issues from a variety of angles. The more diverse their thoughts and opinions, the more students learn how to listen and include the voices of their community. In a congenial spirit, people learn to value viewpoints from various perspectives.

Promoting Learning Responsibility

One of the biggest benefits of the portfolio system is that it compels learners to assume responsibility for their own learning. It demands that they are involved in what they learn, which leads to deeper understanding of the content. This knowledge is then reinforced and expanded beyond what students independently gain as they use their work to interact in the classroom. Their learning is an interactive, social process that creates a kind of community in which it can develop. A person who merely studies in isolation, without exercising it in a social setting, may be less likely to make meaningful gains. The social aspect of learning entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person (Little, 1995).

Person to person interaction is paramount to language development, and the portfolio system provides the means for every member of a mixed-level class to

conjugate. Independent learners must develop and practice the ability to interact with, engage with, and derive benefit from a classroom that is not entirely dictated by the instructor. In class, individuals collaborate to share what they learned both linguistically and logically. This joins student independence with interdependence. Students operate independently with the assignments and then put language to use by sharing their portfolio entries. Moreover, by asking questions and sharing opinions, they use their thought processes to communicate personal, real-life situations. In short, they share responsibility for the learning process. If one person arrives unprepared, it affects the entire group. Conversely, if everyone arrives fully prepared, the classroom becomes a lively place with full participation by all.

Stimulating Motivation

One might wonder if students will buy into such a system and find the motivation to do their portfolio work before class. Through using portfolios as tools for engagement, higher motivation is conceived as students are accountable to each other for learning. A body of peers, more often than not, can instill better incentive to learn than one teacher alone. Moreover, a good student community will consist of individuals who are willing to contribute their own effort into the collective learning process. By doing so, learners become more invested in the class as they all have a personal stake in it. Success does not necessarily come to those whom language comes easy, but for those who are willing to take on challenges in order to heighten their own knowledge. In turn, it boosts the growth of both the individual and the group. Learners are more eager to give as well as to receive. Such collaboration transforms into encouraging vigor for learning tasks, facilitating learning as a result.

Interest in learning rises when students gain autonomy and take ownership in their work. The author finds this to be true in both heterogeneous and homogeneous classes. When learners choose their own vocabulary, write questions, and record opinions, they tend to focus more on their individual needs rather than merely the interests of the teacher. In doing so, students find purpose in their work as they take responsibility for their acquirements and exert more effort. Managing one's own learning is a prerequisite for learning; and learning itself is impossible without the learner actually taking charge (Trebbi, 2006). Consequently, students are stretched, and incentive for quality work increases as students delve into their portfolio work.

Reducing Anxiety

A sense of community increases student motivation, and, therefore, reduces extreme anxiety (Tryofymenko, 2000). With effective use of the portfolio system, apprehension among the less-proficient students can be lowered through interacting and learning through relevant lexical and communicative tasks. It is additionally helpful to more introverted students who tend to shy away from the group. Self-conscious people should never be forced to participate. However, as levels of comfort among peers develop, interaction increases as apprehensiveness among reluctant, weaker learners declines. Concurrently, stronger students are less likely to dominate dialogue and take on roles of student teaching. When students have the opportunity to help and be helped by their fellow students, they gain feelings of satisfaction and status which themselves become powerful sources of reward and motivation (Stevick, 1998). Moreover, a spirit of cooperation is fostered, making the learning experience more relaxed and meaningful for learners with anxiety.

When a comfortable environment for learning is established, interdependence develops among students. The repercussions of this are not only social but through the portfolio system in action, learners are compelled to take more responsibility for their learning. This gives rise to their own meaning and self-worth which in turn reduces anxiety and fear. The ultimate consequence is that students are compelled to invest more effort into an inclusive learning process.

The Teacher Becomes a Facilitator

As the instructor becomes a facilitator of learning more than an imparter of knowledge, the class tends to run itself. Students are therefore enabled to take charge of their learning as they learn to work independently. As small groups are separately on task, the instructor is freed to address weaknesses in individuals and groups. Additionally, the teacher can devote valuable time to teaching concrete discussion skills such as giving diplomatic opinions, asking open-ended and follow-up questions, and multiple ways of reacting both positively and negatively. While the instructor attends to one group, the rest of the class has a sufficient amount of material to progress with. He or she is accessible to address questions and make rounds to various groups while students engage each other with their portfolios. This is another great strength of this system as natural leaders emerge, yet reserved members still participate to the best of their abilities. The result is full student participation as the students do more speaking than the instructor. Therefore, instructors are not necessarily required to have dynamic or charismatic characters to run a successful class. Their primary task is to keep the students focused on the content and engaging with each other.

While students interact with their portfolios, it is also imperative for instructors to foster a sense of belonging. They must promote a supportive and stimulating

environment which is conducive to learning. This does not imply that the teacher is over-lenient or easygoing. Rather, instructors are to encourage students to make sense of their work, never over-criticizing them for what they contribute to the discussion. Additionally, students should be emboldened to do most of the talking and prompted to speak without intimidation. Moreover, teachers must be sensitive to various learning styles, overcorrection, sarcasm, and know each student as well as possible. Once a climate of amenity is achieved, the level of student output rises, enabling greater participation in class.

A big part of facilitating an inclusive environment is to create a culturally sensitive classroom that reflects diversity. Instructors need to be discerning toward the kind of materials and topics that are presented in the content and assignments. A good teacher leads through example to show that the classroom community needs to be inclusive, tolerant, and respectful of others. Through this process, minority students add much more than just their ethnic backgrounds with them. They also bring attributes such as their experiences, values, beliefs, and attitudes. They share with the majority students multifaceted approaches to questions and issues from new angles. The more variant their thoughts, opinions, and questions, the more their counterparts learn how to listen and value viewpoints from different perspectives.

Developing a Self-learning Portfolio

Essentially, the portfolio is a notebook or file containing the contents of what students independently acquire outside of class. It is then used in class as a catalyst to the learning process to stimulate a class of mixed levels to work in a communal spirit. It is designed to be a study companion as students become the architects and engineers of their own learning while at the same time recording their personal world perspectives

into the process. Students are encouraged to personalize their books, fashioning it according to their own tastes but ultimately focusing on the content. They are encouraged to consider what they write on the inside which is a story or journal of what they learn and think throughout the course. The more intimate students are with their notebooks, the more useful they become as tools for keeping a record of their learning and engaging with their peers in class. Not one book is alike.

Weekly assignments, such as an article, film, or text excerpt, are assigned to prepare students for discussion and engagement in class. Students should make entries in their portfolios based primarily on their own findings. Consequently, this self-learning portfolio system serves as a narrative of their journey in learning that is centered on four main sections on which the foundation of a lively class is built: key words or phrases; main points; questions; and opinions (Carlson and Tanaka, 2015).

Key Words and Phrases

Learners become more efficient and effective when they are given the opportunity to study independently as they take responsibility for their learning (Najeeb, 2012). When it comes to acquiring vocabulary, instructor or text-selected words often sets limits on how far students can progress. Consequently, higher-level students often put forth minimal effort and gain little from the course, while less-competent students trail behind, remaining silent or unengaged. To rectify this problem, students are advised to compose their own lists of vocabulary from the assigned text or articles. This strategy promotes word consciousness as students actively engage in identifying important words from their reading to share with members of their class (Haggard, 1986).

When selecting words students should use their best discretion, keeping in mind the following criteria:

* Vocabulary selection should apply to understanding assignments.

* Selected words and phrases should be suited to commonplace usage.

* Choices must generally be at the level of individual capabilities (Carlson, 2015).

Once familiarized to the process, students learn to filter what words are important to comprehending the assignment. With teacher guidance, they learn to select words that are relevant to understanding the text and useful for expanding their own vocabulary. Accordingly, they stop spending disproportionate time and energy trying to understand irrelevant words and start focusing on those that help them grasp the core meaning of the text. Consequently, they naturally tend to select high-frequency words over ones that are less-commonplace. However, high-level students are encouraged to choose unfamiliar, lower-frequency words in order to help stretch his or her vocabulary.

It is immensely productive for students to create authentic sentences to accompany each word on their list. The reason is that students need multiple exposures to a word before fully comprehending the words and applying them. They must learn words in context, not just teacher or text-selected lists that come and go each week. Although initially time-consuming, it serves two important purposes: first, it ensures correct usage and context of the words; second, it internalizes the words, creating ownership of the usage the student created. To assist in achieving these outcomes, sentences should be brief and easy to commit to memory, rather than lengthy and complicated.

To reinforce and incarnate new vocabulary, students should actively review their word selections and sentences with their peers in class. In principle, they advise

each other on the vocabulary that they have acquired through their own research and thought processes. Through the act of peer teaching, a deeper level of understanding is achieved as learners consolidate what they have learned. By doing so, words are ingrained in their memories by demonstrating their knowledge of the vocabulary. It also acts as an inclusive teaching method for all members of the class, regardless of their levels. Furthermore, in cases when students select the same words as their counterparts, they share varied usages of the words while at the same time fortifying what they acquired through further repetition. Such interaction clarifies and corrects the meanings of the words, resulting in either affirmation or further deliberation.

Summarizing

Routinely, students are instructed to summarize their reading in a list of full, cohesive sentences. Non-essential portions may be bypassed, but most assignments should provide several pertinent points to the topic at hand. Advanced learners can be asked to summarize the entire article in paragraph form rather than making a simple list of summarizing sentences.

When processing reading content that is above the student's level, it is crucial to grasp the essential data and skip nonessential information. It is commonplace for students to become so preoccupied on comprehending single words and meanings that they entirely miss the crux of the reading. Extracting the fundamental points from certain passages, however, heightens student's comprehension skills and saves valuable time on their assignments and tests. Accordingly, instructors must devote time to teaching concrete skills for filtering information and determining what is essential and what is negligible. Respectively, ample room should be given for students to make

judgments independently and to progress naturally, as a substantial part of the learning experience involves becoming self-reliant.

Another key rationale for the students to write summaries is for quick review and recollection. At the start of class, students can use their summaries to recall instantly what they read or watched as they convene in small groups. They are then able to correlate notes, observe what others came up with, and fill in the gaps of what they might have overlooked. Learners who struggle with determining the essential points get some assistance from their comrades and upgrade their notes. Through this process, the overall content of the texts is better comprehended as stronger students support the less adept. Furthermore, those who may have missed the assignment entirely can receive a quick update brought up to speed almost instantaneously, enabling them to participate to some degree. Subsequently, significant class time is saved, enabling instructors to dedicate more time to verbal exchange rather than the listless task of analyzing the assignment. As a result of summarizing with peer assistance, much of the analysis is done before class, affording teachers and students more time to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Questions

With each assignment, students should contrive three text-related questions to fuel group discussion. It takes several weeks to condition students to perform the task of creating compelling questions independently. By mid-semester, however, students can form concrete, meaningful questions to contribute to extended dialogue in class. To be able to teach students to generate meaningful questions and engage in spirited discussion, teachers should demonstrate how to form hypothetical and open-ended questions that demand more than one-word answers. These questions should not focus

only on reading comprehension or vocabulary – such inquiries are rarely stimulating or conducive to initiating substantial dialogue. Instead, students should compose questions that connect the reading to their daily lives, current issues, and personal experiences. This lays a foundation for an extended conversation with follow-up questions, viewpoints, and even merriment. A self-running group of five people with three questions each can generate at least 15 questions that power their own, distinct discussion. Some questions might overlap, but there should still be more than enough to sustain a lasting exchange. Moreover, what might normally be a 30-second conversation can evolve into several minutes if students are specifically taught to ask open-ended and follow-up questions. Instilling the ability to ask relevant questions can become a meaningful and useful technique that establishes extended dialogue. It is also a skill that they carry with them when they have to communicate in English in the world outside of class.

Opinions

With each assignment, students are instructed to write an opinion on the assigned topic. These impressions should be contributed for analysis and discussion in small groups. Less-competent learners might provide little at first, but as the course progresses, they learn to write examples that fortify their ideas with more details. More astute students are encouraged to consolidate what they write with facts, data, and their own research. This provides an abundance of ideas for discussion and empowers even the least language-proficient students to arrive with ready-formed ideas to contribute. Furthermore, participants have the opportunity to engage in "real life", meaningful dialogue about their assignments. Students should quickly obtain the capability to

connect the text to their personal experience, making the class more stimulating and momentous.

For the sake of expressing one's views and sentiments, it is of utmost importance to teach students exactly how to give an opinion. Although many students have opinions inwardly, they often do not know how to formulate their ideas into a verbal, rhetorical response. Consequently, ample time must be devoted to teaching exactly how to form strong, mild, and even diplomatic opinions comfortably in the foreign language. Practicing this skill can become one of the most enjoyable moments of the course and help learners develop practical, critical thinking skills.

Overall, opinion sharing is used as a tool to activate extended discussion and encourage students to engage in a meaningful way. Equipping students to share various perspectives provides interaction, requires the acquisition of information, gives multiple opportunities for participation, invigorates the lesson, and, above all, pushes students to think more broadly on the topics provided in their assignments.

Assessment

Through trial and error, the author of this paper quickly learned that the primary obstacle to success for the portfolio system is if students fail to do their assignments on time. A lack of preparation can certainly impede the class, so instructors must do their upmost to inspire students to do their work. Rather than relying on fear or pressure to prod students into action, it is better to let the students invest in their learning through three main ways. First, instructors should help students realize their accountability to each other. It can even be effective to allow the students to let their compatriots down by arriving with little to contribute to their peers. After disappointing their peers once, they are less likely to repeat their neglect. The second is implementing a system of

points for each complete assignment. For example, a total of 50 points could be awarded for homework assignments that are worth five points each. If there are 11 assignments over a 15-week course, the students would be able to miss one and still gain full credit. If they complete all 11 assignments, they can receive a bonus of five points which could spell the difference between an A and B grade. A third motivator is simply the sense of achievement when students start to realize that they are gaining knowledge on their own. When the author of this paper gave official university post-course teacher assessment surveys over four years, it was shown that, on average, 92.06 % of the students said that they "strongly agreed" that they could learn independently from homework and examples given in the class. The remaining 7.94% said that they "agree." For the sake of their learning, therefore, it is imperative that they complete their assignments and gain a sense of accomplishment.

Table 1. Could you learn independently from homework and examples given in class without always being told what to do? (Jyugou Anketo Shukeikekka 2011-2015)

Strongly Agree	58
Agree	4
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Admittedly, success is completely hinged on the student's attitudes and effort. To gauge student incentive and effort, the author made a comparison between two classes in two universities over sixty weeks. Although the content differed, all classes were a relatively equal number of mixed-level students. One course applied the self-

learning portfolio system while the other focused on text-selected learning. At the end of each semester, 63 students were simply asked to write how much time they committed to homework and self-study. Passive students who did only one hour, or less, of homework per week, averaged 47 % for those with text selected learning as opposed to 8% who used the portfolio system. The number of people who spent over two hours a week on studying was more than double for those who kept portfolios (66%) than those who did not (31%). Finally, 26% of the students with personal portfolios invested three to four hours per week in study compared to 22% from their counterparts. The outcomes conclude, therefore, that the classes implementing the portfolio system yielded significantly higher student effort than those in the text-selected system.

Conclusion

The use a self-learning portfolio in the classroom provides a way for learners to engage actively in their own knowledge construction and use the information they gain in a meaningful way. Furthermore, it is an effective medium for creating an inclusive community where participants are personally and collectively invested in what they learn. Students with disparate levels of competency can arrive to class equipped with material to actively engage with their peers. Discrepancies in abilities are mitigated as students engage with various topics in their own creative ways. With full participation, an atmosphere is created where learning becomes a collective, communal process that is real, unrehearsed, and purposeful. As relationships within the classroom strengthen, higher motivation results as each have a stake in the learning process. Consequently, the educational climate is inclusive, positive, and progressive. More than relying on the instructor's methodology and teaching techniques, learners accept interdependence in

the learning process. It is the student's attitudes and contributions that carry the class to increased interaction, learning responsibility, motivation, and self-esteem. The ultimate result is a student-powered, interactive, communal process where students realize their capacities to learn, participate, and lead.

There are many ways to construct portfolios, and instructors should tailor them to suit their respective classes and needs. They should contextualize their practice linguistically, culturally and academically to meet the needs and goals of their students. The author of this paper does not claim that his way of constructing a self-learning notebook is better than any other. Nor does he consider the keeping of portfolios a form of pedagogy that works for all teaching styles. What is suggested, however, are some methods that enable learners to put their individual studies into effect in the classroom. Further development and implementation is an ongoing process that never stops as long as portfolios are in use. Some potential glitches may emerge when first implementing this system. However, with practice, it can become an effective tool for building community and creating an inclusive environment for students with divergent backgrounds and English levels.

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