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The Relationships between English Language Acquisition of Young Children in a Korean Private Kindergarten and Their Gender, Teacher–Student Relationship, Temperament, and Intrinsic Motivation

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Abstract

Few studies have investigated the relationships between various concurrent variables regarding young children and their foreign language acquisition although a number of Asian parents show a great interest in early childhood English language education. Accordingly, this exploratory study aimed to investigate the role of multiple variables (learners' gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation) in English language acquisition of young children in a Korean private kindergarten. The results of the correlation analyses revealed that English language acquisition of the young children was closely related to their level of task orientation and level of intrinsic motivation; consequently, these as individual variables seem to play the most critical role. In addition, surprisingly, the findings of multiple

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regression analyses revealed that task orientation, including conflict as a suppressor variable, had a significant impact on English language acquisition of the kindergarten students. In other words, young children who had concurrent high task orientation and a conflictual relationship with their teachers showed high performance in English language learning.

Keywords: English acquisition, Temperament, Teacher-student relationship, Intrinsic motivation, Gender

Introduction

Globalization makes countries interconnected and interdependent in many fields such as politics, economy, culture, technology, and education. This requires global citizens to possess foreign language abilities for their survival and prosperity through effective communication with those in other countries. Of the numerous languages in the world, English may be regarded as the most influential and widely used, given the number of countries where it is spoken and taught as a foreign language (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Ronen et al., 2014; Phillipson, 1998). Consequently, many non-native English speakers strive to learn English in order to gain a professional competitive advantage (Crystal, 2003; Fishman, 1996; Park & Abelmann, 2004). In addition, some people show much interest in the benefits of English education from early childhood because they think that this can maximize their efficiency in learning English (Cho & Lee, 2009; Hu & McKay, 2012; Jun, 2011; Nunan, 2003).

Many studies have investigated whether there is a critical period for foreign language acquisition. Some studies show that there is no difference between early (younger) and late (older) learners (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999; Bongaerts, 1999); other studies support that younger learners are better at foreign language acquisition (DeKeyser & Larson-Hall, 2005; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003). Moreover, some researchers argue that it is critical for the adequate phonological and lexical development to learn a foreign language at a very young age (Flege, Yeni-Komshian, & Liu, 1999; Mayberry & Eichen, 1991; Lederberg & Spencer, 2005). Although there are inconsistent research findings regarding the critical period for foreign language acquisition, most studies support that young children are more efficient foreign language learners than their older counterparts, teenagers and adults (Scovel, 2000; Larson-Hall, 2008).

Many Korean parents believe that early childhood English language education is much more effective and efficient (Yun & Kim, 2014) because there are considerable language differences between the Korean language and English in terms of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic systems (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Despite this interest among Korean parents in early childhood English education, it is not included in the Korean national kindergarten curriculum. However, many Korean private kindergartens have adopted an English immersion program as an extracurricular activity to respond to the wishes of parents. As a result, approximately 90% of the children who attend private kindergartens are enrolled in such programs (Lee, 1997). In general, in the English immersion program, children learn to sing a children's song, draw a picture, and appreciate a children's classic story in English, including phonics. In Korea, many stakeholders, including English teachers and parents of young children, are eager to gain more insight into English language acquisition of young children. However, there is very little academic research on the topic.

Some researchers have attempted to investigate factors related to foreign language acquisition. Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2000) found that academic achievement measured by grade-point average (cognitive variable) best predicts foreign language proficiency among college students, followed by foreign language anxiety (affective variable), then gender (demographic variable). Ehrman and Oxford (1995) also revealed that, through investigating the influence of each variable separately, the cognitive, affective, and personality variables, respectively, showed the strongest correlations with foreign language proficiency among adult learners. These two studies exhibit similar findings. In addition to the research by Onwuegbuzie et al., other studies have shown that female college students outperformed males in foreign or second language learning (Andreou Vlachos, & Andreou, 2005; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). However, few studies compared the foreign language learning performance of male and female kindergarten students. These studies were limited to adult learners, including college students, so some variables used in those studies are inappropriate for predicting young children's foreign language acquisition. For example, children who attend kindergarten are reported to experience little foreign language anxiety because they learn a foreign language with open and positive attitudes (Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2009). This implies that foreign language anxiety does not have to be regarded as a major variable when investigating the predictors of foreign language

acquisition of young children, even though it is one of the most critical factors (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 2000). In addition, grade-point average as a cognitive variable cannot be obtained in a kindergarten setting because young children are not formally evaluated in all of their class activities. Therefore, cognitive variables such as grade-point average were also not included in the current study.

On the other hand, some researchers (Bramlett, Scott, & Rowell, 2000; Dixon & Smith, 2000; Karrass, 2002; Salley & Dixon, 2007) have looked at the role of temperament as a personality variable in first language development. Temperament is a relative and stable individual characteristic, behavioral style, and tendency of responding to various stimuli and events, which continues to be reinforced and modified with other psychological attributes and interaction with the environment (Teglasi, 1998; Thomas & Chess, 1977). Previous studies (Bramlett et al., 2000; Dixon & Smith, 2000; Karrass, 2002; Salley & Dixon, 2007) concluded that children's temperamental traits are significantly associated with their early native language development. A few studies (Salmani Nodoushan, 2011; Sun, de Bot, & Steinkrauss, 2014) focused on the relationship between learners' temperamental characteristics and their second or foreign language acquisition. Sun and her colleagues (2014) found that children's temperamental characteristics are closely related with their learning behaviors in the process of early second language development, not as second language learning outcomes. Salmani Nodoushan (2011) revealed that introvert college students outperformed their counterparts with other temperamental traits in proficiency in speaking a foreign language. Although temperament—as one of the critical variables in predicting learners' native and foreign language development—has attracted the increasing attention of researchers, few studies have investigated the relationship between temperamental traits of young children and their foreign language acquisition.

Furthermore, many researchers contend that motivation, as a psychological variable, is one of the main factors that affect foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Wu, 2013). This implies that it might be difficult to achieve learning goals without sufficient motivation to learn a foreign language, although learners possess outstanding cognitive abilities. In other words, a learner's positive attitude and sufficient interest can be the most critical prerequisites for successful foreign language learning

(Gardner et al., 1997). According to some research findings (Brumen, 2011; Carreira, 2006; Nikolov, 1999), young learners tend to be more intrinsically motivated than older learners to learn a foreign language. Therefore, it is worth investigating further the relationship between the degrees of young children's intrinsic learning motivation and their foreign language acquisition.

Some research studies found that the teacher-child relationship as an affective variable is one of the most critical determinants of academic performance of young children in addition to their social, emotional, and behavioral development and school adjustment (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009; O'Connor, 2010; Pianta, 1999; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012). According to the findings of previous studies (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, 1999), teacher-child closeness is positively related to children's academic achievement while teacher-child conflict is negatively associated with their motivation and learning. In particular, Gillanders (2007) revealed that young children in positive teacher-child relationships show more progress in second language learning than their counterparts in negative teacher-child relationships. However, opposite results were found about the role of the teacher-child relationship in some research studies (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; McCormick, O'Connor, Cappella, & McClowry, 2013). There were mixed findings about the relationship between the teacher-child relationship and children's academic achievement. In addition, a few empirical studies showed the association between teacher-child relationship and foreign language learning. Accordingly, further investigation of this issue is needed.

While most previous studies focused on foreign language acquisition of adult learners, college students, and secondary school students, limited attention has been given to kindergarten students. In addition, a few studies investigated the relationships between various variables and foreign language acquisition concurrently and the significant predictors of foreign language acquisition among college students, not young children (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Gardner et al., 1997; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000). In order to address the insufficiency and inconsistency issues in the previous studies, this study explored the relationships between multiple variables (i.e., learners' gender, temperament, teacher-student relationship, and intrinsic motivation) and English as a foreign language acquisition of young children in a Korean private kindergarten.

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is English language acquisition of young children in a Korean private kindergarten correlated with their gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation?
2. Which variables have a significant impact on English language acquisition of young children in a Korean private kindergarten over and above other variables?

Methods

Participants

In order to investigate the relationships between English language acquisition of young children and multiple variables (i.e., gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation), this study employed a convenience sampling technique as a method to recruit the participants. More specifically, we intended to recruit participants who belonged to one kindergarten providing a typical English immersion program because we wanted to exclude the effect of confounding factors, such as instructional approaches and learning environments, and because we had to obtain close cooperation from young children and their English teachers in collecting data through the multiple instruments consisting of many items.

A director of a private kindergarten in the affluent area of southern Seoul in Korea indicated a willingness to participate in this study because she is very interested in English immersion education for her students. A total of 110 children, aged four to five years, attended the kindergarten in the academic year 2015. Sixty-nine children were taking an English immersion program as a selective extracurricular activity at that time. However, 14 children dropped out of the English immersion program in the second quarter of academic year 2015. Most of the parents whose children did not take the English immersion program or had dropped it planned to transfer them to an English language kindergarten at that time. Some students who did not take the extracurricular program needed to concentrate more on Korean language learning, rather than English learning, because they had been in English-speaking countries for a long time. As a result, 56 children participated in the study with their parents' consent. In addition, all four English teachers in the extracurricular program and regular class teachers indicated a willingness to participate in this study because they were interested in the subject.

Out of 56 participants, 28 were four years old, and 28 were five years old. They belonged to one of four classes based on their age: two classes for the four-year-olds and other two classes for the five-year-olds. There were 24 boys (42.9 %) and 32 girls (57.1%). All children spoke Korean as their first language and were learning English as a foreign language through the extracurricular English immersion program. All four teachers (two males, two females) of the English immersion program were native English speakers and graduated from universities in the USA or Canada. They taught their students English through the English immersion program for three hours a day, from Monday to Friday. The English immersion program mainly focuses on providing young children with a variety of art experiences, conducting nature inquiry activities, and experiencing Western culture and plays in English, including phonics.

Instruments and Data Collection

First, this study employed the Student–Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), a teacher-report instrument (Pianta, 2001), to measure the relationship between English teachers and their students through the teachers’ perceptions. The most crucial reason why we selected the STRS for this study was that it has been widely used by many scholars (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Webb & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2011) as a major tool for measuring the relationship between teachers and their students. In addition, the STRS targets on measuring teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with young children between the ages of three and twelve corresponding to the participants of this study. The STRS has a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one (definitely does not apply) to five (definitely applies), and consists of three subscales (conflict, closeness, and dependency) and 28 items. The conflict, closeness, and dependency subscales consist of 12, 11, and five items, respectively. The STRS has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 for the total scale in the current study. The native English teachers in the kindergarten completed the STRS for their students during the 2015 summer break.

Second, this study adopted the Short Form of the Teacher Temperament Questionnaire (TTQ–SF) to assess the children’s temperaments. Many researchers (e.g., Keogh & Burstein, 1988; Klein, 1991; Mobley & Pullis, 1991; Pullis & Cadwell, 1982) have employed the TTQ–SF in their research studies because teachers observe students’ behaviors every day and know their relative characteristics based on observations. In addition, it is not easy for children to answer questions on their own

individual characteristics. Accordingly, it was most appropriate for this study to assess children's temperament from a teacher's perspective by using the TTQ-SF. Keogh et al. (1982) developed the TTQ-SF based on the original Teacher Temperament Questionnaire (TTQ) by Thomas and Chess (1977). They reduced the 64 items in the original TTQ to 23 items in the TTQ-SF through factor analysis while keeping its basic framework. As a result, the practical value of TTQ-SF in educational contexts has been improved drastically (Keogh, Pullis, & Cadwell, 1982). The TTQ-SF with a six-point Likert scale is composed of three factors (task orientation, personal-social flexibility, and reactivity) and nine dimensions (activity, persistence, distractibility, approach-withdrawal, adaptability, positive mood, threshold, intensity, and negative mood). Each factor of the TTQ-SF contains three dimensions: the task orientation factor consists of the activity, persistence, and distractibility dimensions; the personal-social flexibility factor consists of the approach-withdrawal, adaptability, and positive mood dimensions; the reactivity factor consists of the threshold, intensity, and negative mood dimensions. During the 2015 summer break, four native English teachers in the kindergarten completed the TTQ-SF as well as the STRS for their students. In the present study, Cronbach's alphas for the task orientation, personal-social flexibility, and reactivity factors were 0.94, 0.80, and 0.83, respectively.

Third, a survey questionnaire with a three-point Likert scale was used to measure the children's perceived intrinsic motivation because it is not easy for young children to select one of the five or seven detailed choices regarding their psychological feelings. This questionnaire was derived from an existing instrument that was originally based on the intrinsic motivation part of the motivation instrument of Schmidt and Watanabe (2001). It consisted of seven items, and its highest possible score was 21. The main reason we utilized this survey questionnaire for this study was because it was appropriately customized to measure young children's intrinsic learning motivation. This questionnaire was slightly different from the original version of Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) in terms of word choice, so that the features of this study could be well reflected. In the current study, the survey questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79. In the second quarter of the academic year 2015, the regular class teachers in the kindergarten asked their students to answer each question by selecting one of the three choices ranging from a drawn face (disagree) to a

smiling face (agree). The teachers completed the questionnaire for each student as soon as they responded to the questions during indoor free play time.

Lastly, this study employed a student progress report in the English immersion class to measure the children's English language acquisition (i.e., English learning performance). Each month teachers assessed their students' English language acquisition in terms of listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and in-class work completion based on the checkpoints they had systematically refined with the cooperation of a famous university in the USA and used over a long period of time. Each day they carefully observed whether their students expressed their opinions or experiences by using the appropriate words and sentences, correctly understood the instructions for various class activities, and successfully accomplished their given tasks. The comprehensive results of a student's English language acquisition were synthesized in their student progress report written at the end of the first half of the academic year 2015. The student progress report with a five-point Likert scale ranging from excellent (5) to unsatisfactory (1) consisted of five items, documenting the teachers' perceptions of their students' listening, speaking, writing, and vocabulary skills and the degree of in-class work completion.

Data Analysis

As a preliminary analysis, quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and an independent *t*-test. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the means, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores on four variables (i.e., teacher-student relationship, temperament, intrinsic motivation, and English learning performance) as a brief overview of the quantitative data. To compare the differences in temperament, teacher-student relationship, intrinsic motivation, and English acquisition (i.e., English learning performance) between boys and girls, an independent *t*-test was used. In addition, the data used to answer the first research question was analyzed using a bivariate correlation analysis, which reveals the relationships between two variables and the degree of each relationship. A multiple regression analysis was performed to answer the second research question identifying statistically significant predictors that affected English language acquisition of the kindergarten students.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores on the teacher–student relationship in terms of conflict, closeness, and dependency; students’ temperament in terms of task orientation, personal–social flexibility, and reactivity; and students’ intrinsic motivation; and students’ English language acquisition in terms of English learning performance.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Subscales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Teacher–student relationship	Conflict	23.32	11.18	12	55
	Closeness	40.77	8.18	21	54
	Dependency	10.27	3.25	5	20
Temperament	Task orientation	33.80	13.51	9	54
	Personal–social flexibility	34.79	8.01	18	48
	Reactivity	15.75	6.75	6	36
Intrinsic motivation		17.68	3.39	8	21
English learning performance		20.02	2.77	13	25

N = 56, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *Min* = Minimum score, *Max* = Maximum score.

The quantitative data for teacher–student relationship, temperament, intrinsic motivation, and English learning performance were analyzed with an independent t-test to present the differences in the four variables between boys and girls. The teacher–student relationships were analyzed in terms of conflict, closeness, and dependency. Students’ temperaments were analyzed in terms of task orientation, personal–social flexibility, and reactivity. The mean of conflict, a factor of teacher–student relationship, was 26.79 in boys and 20.72 in girls. The difference of means was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2

Independent T-test

Variables	Subscales	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher–student relationship	Conflict	Boys	24	26.79	12.38	2.070	.043*
		Girls	32	20.72	9.58		
	Closeness	Boys	24	39.83	8.42	−0.737	.464
		Girls	32	41.47	8.06		
	Dependency	Boys	24	10.71	3.57	0.878	.384
		Girls	32	9.94	2.99		
Temperament	Task orientation	Boys	24	31.04	14.51	−1.334	.188
		Girls	32	35.88	12.54		
	Personal–social flexibility	Boys	24	34.71	8.43	−0.062	.951
		Girls	32	34.84	7.81		

Reactivity	Boys	24	17.58	7.69	1.797	.078
	Girls	32	14.38	5.68		
Intrinsic motivation	Boys	24	17.42	3.35	-0.497	.621
	Girls	32	17.88	3.46		
English learning performance	Boys	24	20.21	2.83	0.442	.660
	Girls	32	19.88	2.77		

* $p < .05$.

However, there were no statistically significant differences in closeness and dependency factors of teacher–student relationship, task orientation, personal–social flexibility, and reactivity factors of the temperament, intrinsic motivation, and English learning performance between boys and girls. The mean of reactivity, a factor of temperamental traits, was 17.58 in boys and 14.38 in girls.

This means that the male students in the kindergarten had a stronger tendency to become very annoyed or overly upset in a stressful situation in comparison with female students. Although this result is not statistically significant, it is noticeable when considering the fact that this study is exploratory. The detailed results are shown in Table 2.

Research Question 1

Table 3 indicates the results of correlation analyses to answer the first research question exploring whether English language acquisition of young children is associated with their gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation in a Korean kindergarten. English acquisition (i.e., English learning performance) of young children showed statistically significant positive correlations with their task orientation ($r = .36$) at the $p < .01$ level and intrinsic motivation ($r = .26$) at the $p < .05$ level. These results show that young children who show higher English learning performance might have higher task orientation temperamental characteristics and higher intrinsic motivation. In other words, a child’s temperamental traits to sit quietly during class or work and to persist on work until he or she finishes it without being distracted (Keogh et al., 1982) were strongly related to his or her English acquisition in the kindergarten. In addition, the levels of learners’ intrinsic learning motivations were closely related to their English learning performance. Conversely, English language acquisition of these young children did not have statistically significant correlations with their gender, teacher–student relationship, and certain temperamental characteristics (i.e., personal–social flexibility

and reactivity). However, it is noticeable that the young children’s temperamental characteristics were related to the relationships with their teachers. The specific results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Results of Correlation Analyses

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	–							
2. Conflict ^a	-.27*	–						
3. Closeness ^a	.10	-.32*	–					
4. Dependency ^a	-.12	.52**	-.04	–				
5. Task orientation ^b	.18	-.73**	.19	-.39**	–			
6. Personal–social flexibility ^b	.01	-.16	.53**	-.28*	-.10	–		
7. Reactivity ^b	-.24	.71**	-.15	.57**	-.69**	-.12	–	
8. Intrinsic motivation	.07	-.16	.17	-.09	.24	.12	-.15	–
9. English learning performance	-.06	-.04	.26	.16	.36**	-.05	-.12	.26*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ^a Factors of teacher-student relationship, ^b Factors of temperament.

Research Question 2

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of demographic, affective, personality, and psychological variables (i.e., gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation) on the overall English acquisition of young children in a Korean kindergarten. In other words, the results of multiple regression analyses indicated the answer to the second research question. As shown in Table 4, the young children’s gender, temperament, teacher–student relationship, and intrinsic motivation accounted for 38% of variances on their overall English acquisition (i.e., English learning performance), which is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

However, the test of a single regression coefficient showed that only two variables, task orientation (i.e., a factor of temperament) and conflict (i.e., a factor of teacher–student relationship), could account for a significant portion of variances on the overall English acquisition of the young children when controlling for other variables. This means that conflict had a partial correlation larger than the zero-order correlation

with English acquisition because conflict did not have a statistically significant correlation with English acquisition of young children in the results of correlation analyses. In other words, the magnitude of the relationship between task orientation and English acquisition of the young children became larger when conflict was included. Therefore, conflict is “a suppressor variable that increases the predictive validity of another variable (task orientation) by its inclusion in a regression equation” (Conger, 1974, pp. 36–37). In other words, conflict was weak as a predictor itself, but the prediction of conflict was shared with that of task orientation.

In conclusion, task orientation, including conflict as a suppressor variable, had explained a significant amount of variances of the kindergarten students’ overall English language acquisition, over and above what other variables (i.e., learners’ gender, closeness and dependency as teacher–student relationship factors, personal–social flexibility and reactivity as temperamental characteristics, and intrinsic motivation) accounted for, even though other variables had a significant relationship with their overall English acquisition.

Table 4
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2 (adj. R^2)	<i>F</i> (<i>p</i>)
Gender	– 0.45	0.67	– 0.08	– 0.67	.506	.381 (.276)	3.62 (.002)**
Conflict ^a	0.12	0.05	0.48	2.35	.023*		
Closeness ^a	0.09	0.05	0.28	1.81	.077		
Dependency ^a	0.19	0.13	0.23	1.47	.149		
Task orientation ^b	0.13	0.04	0.65	3.26	.002**		
Personal–social flexibility ^b	– 0.01	0.06	– 0.02	– 0.14	.891		
Reactivity ^b	– 0.04	0.08	– 0.09	– 0.50	.623		
Motivation	0.12	0.10	0.15	1.24	.222		
Constant	5.93	3.72		1.59	.118		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ^a Factors of teacher-student relationship, ^b Factors of temperament.

Discussion

This study performed an empirical exploration of the relationship between English language acquisition of students in a Korean kindergarten and their gender, teacher–student relationship, temperament, and intrinsic motivation. We collected the data on 56 young children who were taking an English immersion program as an extracurricular activity. The data were analyzed using a bivariate correlation and

multiple regression analyses to answer the two research questions. In addition, an independent t-test was performed as a preliminary analysis. The results of an independent t-test indicated that male students in the kindergarten had more conflictual relationships with their teachers than female students. This means that the native English teachers in the kindergarten tended to struggle more with male students than with female students because they regarded male students as unpredictable and angry. According to some empirical studies (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992), negative teacher–student relationships such as conflict and dependency were closely related to children’s lower academic performance. Regular class teachers as well as English teachers should pay attention to these findings of the previous studies. Consequently, the result of the current study implies that kindergarten teachers should focus on improving relationships with the boys who are unpredictable and angry by using various activities that will have a positive impact on their behavior.

On the other hand, there was no significant difference in English language acquisition between boys and girls in the current study. This result is supported by some previous studies. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) found that gender was not related to language learning. In addition, some studies (ErdemKeklik, 2011; Fakeye, 2010; Medina & Escamilla, 1994; Tella, Indoshi, & Othuon, 2010) revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in terms of academic achievement in English. As previous studies addressing gender differences in academic performance in English revealed inconsistent findings, the result of this study contributes to removing a gender stereotype that female students learn a foreign language more easily than male students.

The results of the correlation analyses to answer the first research question revealed that English language acquisition (i.e., English learning performance) of the kindergarten students were closely correlated to their levels of task orientation, a subscale of temperamental characteristics, and intrinsic learning motivation. As for the temperament characteristics, a higher task orientation (i.e., children’s tendency to be immersed in a task and work without being distracted) was associated with higher English learning performance (i.e., English language acquisition) among the kindergarten students. On the other hand, personal–social flexibility factor (i.e., children’s individual characteristics to react and respond positively to new situations or stimuli and modify their behaviors easily in the right direction) and reactivity factor

(i.e., children's tendency to become very annoyed or upset in a stressful situation when they could not do something they wanted) were not related to English language acquisition of the young children. These findings show that young children's adaptability to a new learning situation (i.e., learning English) and choleric personality, except for task orientation, were not directly related to their English learning performance in the kindergarten. Some previous studies (Bramlett et al., 2000; Dixon & Smith, 2000; Karrass, 2002; Salley & Dixon, 2007) indicated that children's temperamental traits were significantly related to their early development of first language. In particular, Bramlett et al. (2000) found that the level of task persistence was closely related to the reading proficiency in the first language among first graders. On the basis of the findings of previous studies and the current study, we can make a conclusion that children with higher task orientation have the potential to show higher second language performance as well as first language performance. Consequently, the finding of the current study expands the knowledge base about the role of children's temperamental traits in their language development from the first language to the foreign language domains.

The finding of the present study that the young children with a high intrinsic motivation to learn a foreign language tended to show a high English learning performance is supported by previous studies. Some empirical studies (e.g., Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner et al., 1997; Wu, 2013) found that motivation was one of the key factors positively affecting foreign language learning as a psychological variable necessary for all kinds of learning; that is, these previous studies emphasized that the level of learners' attitude, interest, and efforts to learn a foreign language can determine their success or failure. In particular, Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that a language learner's motivation could be a more critical factor than their aptitude. The finding of the current study might be significant in that it revealed the relationship between learners' intrinsic learning motivation and their foreign language (i.e., English) acquisition, particularly among young children who are more intrinsically motivated than older learners (Brumen, 2011; Carreira, 2006; Nikolov, 1999).

The results of multiple regression analyses to answer the second research question revealed that task orientation (i.e., a factor of temperament), including conflict (i.e., a factor of teacher–student relationship) as a suppressor variable, significantly affected English language acquisition of the kindergarten students over and above other

variables. More specifically, the young children who possessed higher task orientation characteristics and had a conflictual relationship with their teachers concurrently tended to show higher English learning performance (i.e., English acquisition) than those who did not in the kindergarten. While the finding related to task orientation is supported by previous studies as stated above, the finding related to conflict is somewhat surprising. However, the result related to conflict is partially supported by some previous studies where mixed results were reported. McCormick and colleagues (2013) recently found that teacher–child relationships did not significantly affect first language reading proficiency among kindergarten students. Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) also revealed that there was no significant impact of teachers on learners’ academic performance through analyzing research studies using value-added measures of teacher quality. In addition, the finding that the young children with high task orientation who had a conflictual relationship with their teachers concurrently showed high English learning performance may be interpreted from the perspective of over-parenting.

In Korea, the increasing trend of one-child households tends to yield numerous “helicopter” parents who display overly involved, strict, controlling and non-normative parenting without allowing for their children’s autonomy (Sorensen, 1994; Lee & Brinton, 1996; Park & Abelman, 2004). The children of overprotective parents may show maladaptive and challenging behaviors because they tend to have difficulty in handling stressful situations (American Camp Association, 2013). This implies that the children of overprotective parents are more likely to have conflicts with their teachers. In addition, in Korea, most “helicopter” parents are more likely to be “tiger” parents who focus on and are deeply involved in their children’s academic performance (Cho & Shin, 1996; Chua, 2011). The children of tiger parents who have high educational expectations for their children tend to outperform the children of normative parents in academic achievements (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998) although they had a conflictual relationship with their teachers. Therefore, it is understandable that the young children who showed high task orientation and had a conflictual relationship with their teachers concurrently showed high English learning performance.

The results of this study have the following implications. First, teachers and parents should keep in mind that task orientation played the most critical role in children’s English language (i.e., a foreign language) acquisition. This implies that

they need to help children immerse in a task and work without being distracted during an appropriate time, through various interventions to improve children's task orientation. Next, children's intrinsic learning motivations seemed to be a critical prerequisite of their English language learning, because they can learn a foreign language when they show positive attitude, considerable interest, and hard work (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner et al., 1997; Wu, 2013). This implies that it can be disadvantageous for children to learn a foreign language without sufficient intrinsic learning motivation. Therefore, teachers and parents need to encourage adequate intrinsic motivation before the children learn a foreign language by providing them with various experiences.

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Free online high - stake English test exercises: The evaluation, the learning, the teaching, and the model

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Abstract

TOEFL has been one of the most notable types of high stake English tests used to measure the level of non – native speakers' English competence. Individuals, prospective students or employees wanting to go to the English speaking countries, are pushed to gain acceptable level of English test. To achieve the required score,

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many attend special preparation classes that at times are costly. For those who choose not to attend preparation classes could opt to do independent learning by either studying from books or from available online exercises. With students having 24 hour access to internet, the later may become an easier, more cost-effective option. But how reliable are these online exercises? We conducted a study on free TOEFL exercises available on the internet, aiming to find a model of reliable online set of exercises. We analyzed an immense number of websites offering free TOEFL exercises and had students of three different universities in Jakarta area try them. The three groups of students were then asked of their opinions on the sites they tried on the reliability, the accessibility and the impacts on their learning. The study was then extended to find the method of using the available online resources from the teachers and students' perspectives. The study found expected categories for a reliable free - TOEFL exercise web site as well as a model of teaching and learning in the blended classroom setting.

Keywords: Online TOEFL materials, English proficiency, Web-based learning, Model

Introduction

The mastery of English is deemed necessary for many who seek to pursue career or get a degree in higher education in an English speaking country. Before the emergent of other types of English proficiency tests, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) has been used to measure people's level of English since 1947 when ETS (Educational Testing Services) was first established. Since its introduction, TOEFL has been developed, administered and scored, at least, 50 million tests in a year, in a more than a hundred country in the world (ETS, 2015). In the Indonesia contexts, two type of TOEFL tests that have been widely used are Paper Based Test (PBT) and Internet Based Test (IBT), both of which can be in the form of hardcopy/books or online. The differences between PBT and IBT do not only lie in the medium of delivery i.e. PBT uses paper and IBT uses internet, but also the materials. In general, it consists of four items i.e. listening, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and grammar, but the structure test of IBT are reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The results of PBT can be converted to IBT or vice versa.

ETS regularly reports the attainment of the average performances of test takers based on their countries of origin to the public. In the year of 2011, it was reported

that the average TOEFL – IBT scores of Indonesians taking the test were 78 (equal to 500) with the strong item in writing (<http://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf>). If the score was attained by one test taker, then it is guaranteed that he / she did not meet the minimum test score that most foreign universities require their prospective students to get, which is 90 (equal to 550 PBT).

After years of English lessons taken at both schools (Junior high school to university) or at additional classes, we found that the average scores performed by Indonesian test takers were hard to believe. It is not conclusive to as why such average scores were performed by Indonesian test takers. We assume that the mixtures of failures in the English classroom pedagogy, lack of learning facilities, and minimum incorporations of reading and writing in our curriculum as the major factors that lead to low performance at English high stake test.

This article aims to investigate the possibilities that the World Wide Web has to offer to Indonesian students in improving their TOEFL scores. As internet offers a big number of resources for independent learning, we seek to find reliable free TOEFL exercises that are selected by both teachers and students based on some categories that lead them to success in improving students' scores. Both teachers and students assess the following categories: the content of the materials, level of difficulty, structure of exercises, clarity of instructions, and the general appearance of the web, in the web sites they used. We assumed that if students can make the best of the websites, they will be able to improve their scores faster, and they will be able to study not only when they are at school, but also anywhere at any time using their IT communication such as handphone. It is expected that later on they become lifelong learners. The selected TOEFL websites also help the lecturers as students are able to study by themselves and just report the results to them.

Two research having different results regarding the relationship between student TOEFL scores and other academic performance. Wait and Gresses (2009) found that except for engineering area the relationship was significant. The results of Yi-ting, and Chen-Chen' research (2006) also showed that students having high scores of TOEFL obtained high GPA but the relationship was not significant. Setiono (2012) put forward his opinion that TOEFL was not enough to measure one's overall English mastery. In 2011 (January – December), Educational Testing Service (ETS) as the formal international institution conducted a research listing down the TOEFL scores from various countries based on the participants' mother tongue. In this test, there

were 140 mother tongues and they only took the mother tongues which had at least 30 participants. The results showed that the highest TOEFL scores in IBT version were 100 (600 in PBT), and the lowest were 63 in IBT (500 in PBT). The average of people with Indonesian mother tongue was 78 or almost 500 in PBT.

In a study on students' web preferences for language learning and its implications for instructors, Rifai (2014) found that students expect a website used for language learning should make it possible for collaborative learning to take place and that it also provides external links, multimedia and references to keep them well informed. The study also found that web-based learning, for two groups of 18-20 years old students, is not something new and that they can easily adapt to the patterns of the webs they were exploring for learning. The finding stresses two main points; first, that students are now more technology – savvy, hence integrating technology into learning is not only a natural thing to do, but a must. The second important point is that instructors should adapt to the changing nature of their students and embrace their ways and media of learning as tools to enhance their learning. By asking students to use the available TOEFL exercises online, instructors have fulfilled the students' right for their preferred learning styles.

Literature Review

Studies on TOEFL are mostly related with concerns over performance on certain skills like writing (Singhs, 2015; Wachadee, 2013;), reading (Tanyeli,2008), methods of teaching (Jung, 2012; Carlosn, 2014; Chang, et. al, 2013), and vocabulary attainment (Kaneko, 2014).

What is the impact of using web-based media for language learning? Chang, et al. (2013) studied how web-based discussion tool can facilitate serious discussion outside of the classroom and resulted in the affective enhancement and cognitive enhancement to improve students' language production to 27 of their college students' participants. With the enhancements, the study found that students could produce more meaningful sentences and tend to apply higher levels of cognitive skills more frequently when they have to. The study shows that web-based tool does not only benefit language learners cognitively, but also affectively.

Writing is also another skill that is often a challenge for non native users of English. Sings (2015) and Wachadee (2013) specifically studied the condition and progress of non-native users of English in the academic context for English score

improvement. Singhs found that international graduate students in Malaysia did not quite grasp the new and different academic expectations in graduate programs. They concluded that to overcome such issue, these students needed to be accustomed to English – speaking countries’ culture, education system, and then, to navigate the differences in a foreign language or second language. Singhs also found that IELTS and TOEFL were not consistent reliable indicators of language ability in the academic setting. The study also reaffirmed the idea that “an understanding of literacy requires detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings” (Street, 1993, in Maher, 2015). Meanwhile, Wachadee found that the use of collaborative learning could help improve students’ summary writing skills. He concluded that through the online collaboration, students realized that their written work was read, reviewed, and corrected by all team members. Both studies on writing improvement underlie two important points. First, is the need to regular exposures to the culture /conventions of the targeted language. Second, is the significant role of web-based collaboration to enhance language learning.

In the reading issue, Tanyeli (2008) found that there are some areas of improvement in the reading comprehension scores achieved by students who joined the online reading instructions. They also found that students showed belief in the effectiveness of online reading activities and that they enjoyed taking part in the online activities since they could learn from a variety of tasks to complete.

Some studies have also investigated the impacts of the TOEFL internet-based test to the students. Kaneko (2014), found that Japanese students’ vocabulary mastery is lower than the one tested by TOEFL, found that that:

“ Japanese high school graduates with a vocabulary of 3,000 word families would be expected to comprehend nearly 50% of reading passages in the TOEFL iBT and that learning a vocabulary beyond the 10,000-word frequency level may not be necessary unless 98% or more text coverage is required (2014)”.

In other words, if a Japanese student wants to pursue a degree in an English speaking university, they will need to improve their vocabulary level to meet the requirement. In terms of preparation or coaching class, Carlson (2014) found that coaching or TOEFL preparation classes have fair or weak relationship with the reading and listening skills assessed by the TOEFL iBT and has almost no relationship with the improvement of students’ writing and speaking competence.

Two things that can be concluded from the two studies are first, in terms of content, Asian or EFL learners test takers would require some reinforcement program to improve their language mastery. The second, with Carlson finding, it seems that the reinforcement should not stop on the coaching face to face / coaching programs. With the support of technology, the learning can be expanded from teacher-centered (conventional TOEFL per class), to blended and online learning schemes. The design of a web – based for an internet – based test TOEFL prep class would benefit from the following CALL model of learning where instructor does not become the sole source of information.

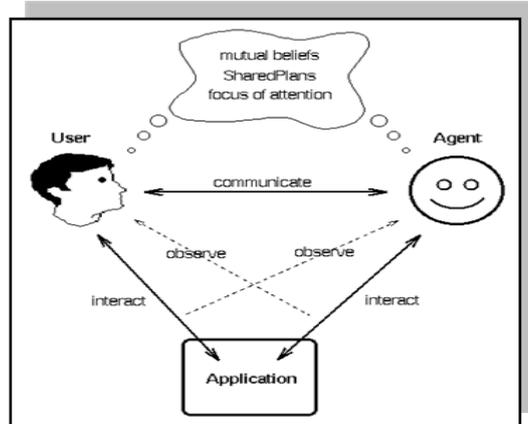


Figure 1. CALL model from http://www.tcnj.edu/~mmmartin/TCNJ_Pres.html

An EFL student wanting to improve their English competence by doing online TOEFL exercise would likely meet the following webs promising “FREE TOEFL EXERCISES”. Here are the types:

Table 2

Types of Online TOEFL exercises

No	Type of Service (FREE / COMMERCIAL)	Web Characteristics	The kinds of exercises
1	FREE	More exercises; lack of updates with many ads	Multiple choice questions and Free styles of questions
2	COMMERCIAL	Limited with links to the main product	Following the main style of TOEFL

In the web-based learning world, the usability of the online learning tools are assessed by the availability of facilities for courses and associated information, communication, and features for submitting tasks or quizzes (Storey, et.al., 2002) .

Bong & Zhang (2008) on their study on students' preferences on online web-based learning materials found that test takers' various styles of learning may influence their preferences over the types of web learning resources. For example, a visual learner will benefit from online tools that provide videos, animations, online charts and graphics, and many other online tools that have visual content. However, with students taking preparation classes, the nature and their motivation might be different from their friends doing regular web-based learning. The pragmatism or the nature of wanting to pass the test may change their expectations of the facilities that a web has to offer.

Dudeny & Hockly (2007) suggest that in web technology-mediated language learning, both learners and instructors pay attention to the following points: first, to check the accuracy of the websites. One needs to study the author of the web? Is he/she a reliable person? Does this web affiliate with an educational institution or only a certain web offering commercial products? On webs that offer free TOEFL exercises one may often find that the websites are just the front pages of commercial offers. The certain kinds of websites do not usually offer a lot of reliable exercises. The second question that one needs to address is the question of the currency of the materials uploaded onto the web. Are they pretty current? Are they re-posted from other webs? Are they regularly updated? A good web site usually has a regular schedule for updating its content. A student wanting to do IBT exercises may not learn a lot from a web that offers only paper-based TOEFL exercises.

The third thing to note, according Dudeny & Hockley (2007) is the content (content) of the web page. The meaning of the content in this context is the view of the training materials. Does the site offer content that is interesting and inviting for access? Is easy to use? Two of these factors is essential considering the ease or difficulty accessing training materials will tend to affect users in doing TOEFL IBT training. In our opinion, a good TOEFL instructor also pays attention to the accuracy of the use of English in the website that offers TOEFL training.

The 4th factor to consider in selecting the TOEFL training material available online is functionality or the functioning of the training provider's website. Things that could be examined are, among others: whether all the menus on the page work? Are there any broken links that make them inaccessible? Does the site use a technology that can be accessed by the instructor and the learner TOEFL?

In accessing TOEFL IBT websites available on the internet, we find that it is necessary that to have a kind of learning model that makes the design of learning becomes regular and systematic. Bonk and Zhang (2008) offers an Internet-based learning model that has been widely practiced. This model they refer to as a model R2D2, which consist of *Reading*, *Reflecting*, *Displaying*, and *Doing*. Here is a model that they have made popular.



Figure 2. R2D2 Internet - based learning model

The first phase of this model requires learners to read and explore materials that are online. This phase is believed to help meet the learning styles of auditory and verbal learning style students. The second phase is the phase *Reflecting*. In this phase, students reflect on the readings and internet exploration. Reflection of the students poured in the form of reflective writing, blog or self - testing. At *displaying* stage, students are expected to create a visual representation of the results of learning. The result can vary. Some students can produce work of animation, or info graphic timeline. The last phase in this model is *Doing*. It is a phase of doing that condition them to get experience doing what they read, reflect and display in a real work. One is in the form of simulation. According to Bonk and Zhang, this model will help instructors, especially instructors who have students of different backgrounds and different experience in using the Internet. Bonk and Zhang also believe that all four phases in this model facilitates a variety of different learning styles of students.

By reflecting on the above model, we wish to see students' preferences on the web – based TOEFL exercises available online and the impacts of using them as means to improve their English their TOEFL- like scores.

Methods

This study explores the relationship between the English language ability of students and their model of learning. Students were given 10 webs of TOEFL practices to try individually and they reported their score to the team. The descriptive statistics analysis was used in this research.

The steps made in the search for the data are as follows: First, the team searched webs that offer free TOEFL exercises from the internet that can be used by students as references. Then, students are given these ten webs to try out. Students are free to choose at least 3 of the 10 available webs. After that, students report the webs they tried including the scores to the team of researchers. From the students' report, the team counted the number of students and chose each web and lastly, the team will analyze the webs mostly used by the students from their quality, accuracy, and their usability.

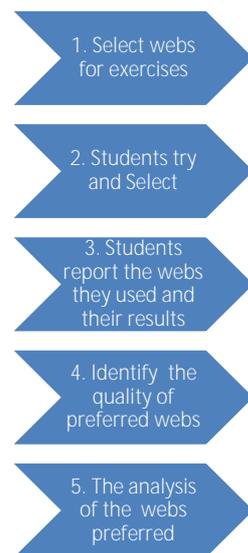


Figure 3.1. Stages of data collection

Results

After searching, the team determined 10 webs for students to do the test. The list as follows:

1. http://www.examenglish.com/TOEFL/toefl_structure_1.htm
2. http://www.examenglish.com/TOEFL/toefl_reading.htm
3. https://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL_ITP/html/Section%201,%20TOEFL%20ITP,%20Listening%20Comprehension.html
4. http://www.learn4good.com/languages/toefl/structure_underl_sntc1.htm

5. <http://www.4tests.com/exams/questions.asp?exid=23032697&googlebot=57>
6. <http://www.testden.com/challenge/free-toefl.asp>
7. http://www.testmagic.com/toefl/gramm_quizzes/201_210/quiz.htm#test
8. <http://www.grammarbank.com/toefl-practice-test.html>
9. http://demo.toeflibtcourse.com/toefl_R11s.htm
10. <http://www.testpreppractice.net/TOEFL/Free-TOEFL-Practice-Tests/Sentence-Completion-1.aspx>

The 10 links were given for students to try. Instructors assigned to select 3 out of 10 and then they did all the exercises available there. Link number 1 was the most tried link (65 out of 76 or 86% students tried the link). 76 students have reported links that they have tried. In average, students have tried 3 links. Of the 76 students who undertake this trial, 73 of them did 3 links, two students did 4 links and one student did 9 links. Of the 10 links provided, in general, all links have been tried. The most widely used links are link Number 1 (65 students from a total of 76 or 86%) that the percentage of the number of students who do trial there on table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Numbers of Links and the usage by students

Link no.	Number of students tried	Percentage of students who tried (%)
1	65	85,53
2	53	69,74
3	12	15,78
4	21	27,63
5	5	6,58
6	2	2,63
7	26	34,21
8	42	55,26
9	3	3,95
10	7	9,21
Total	236	

From the table, it can be seen that link number 1 is the most popular link. Yet, it is not a guarantee that it is the most preferred web as there is no data that says it. From our questionnaire question on “which web link do they like the most?” most students do not respond to the question. It is assumed that the link was put as a number 1 link off the list so that students used it as the first web they tried. The exercise on the web

was at the low level of difficulty. The second link is also quite popular. It is also assumed that the number 2 link was also chosen because of its early order because the exercises are not difficult. Ranked third is link no.8. Although the order of the link is 8, many students have tried it (55.26 %).

We assigned two groups of students to try these webs. First group is the students with entrance TOEFL test score below 500 and second group is the students with entrance TOEFL test score above 500. First group's students are learning the TOEFL material in the classroom and in this research; we compare the final exam score to the trial result score. Whereas group two has higher ability in English and they are not learning TOEFL material anymore.

76 students reported the webs that had been tried. The 76 students consist of 47 students group 1 and 29 students group 2. Each student tried at least 3 webs. Of the 76 students who did this trial, 73 of them did 3 webs, 2 students did 4 webs and one student did 9 webs. In general the 10 provided webs have been tried. Web no 1 is the most preferred (64 students of 76 or 85%).

Table 3.2

Comparison of the students who did the trial and the scores

Web No.	Total students tried the web	% student chose the web (of 76 students)	Average Score (%)
1	64	84.21	77
2	53	69.74	74
3	13	17.11	81
4	21	27.63	81
5	5	6.58	72
6	2	2.63	60
7	26	34.21	72
8	42	55.26	74
9	3	3.95	50
10	7	9.21	64
Total	236		70.5

Average score in total 70.5%. In groups, average score of group 1 is 70 and group 2 is 82. It shows the proficiency (at least the background of English knowledge and ability affect to the test achievement). Although some students from group two got low score, it could be because of the level of difficulty of the test.

The table shows that web no 1 is the most widely tried but it is not certain if web no 1 is the most preferred or the easiest. Students did not mention which web they preferred and the average score for web no 1 is not the highest. Students generally

did not answer our questions regarding the most preferred web. Only 7 students of 76 students mentioned the preference, so it is not certain whether web no 1 is the most preferred.

Table 3.3

Data of the first choice

Web no.	Group 1	Group 2	Total	%
1	45	18	63	82.89
2	2	4	6	7.89
3	0	3	3	3.95
4	0	1	1	1.32
7	0	2	2	2.63
8	0	1	1	1.32
Total	47	29	76	100

From our observations, web no 1 is the most preferred probably because this web is number one in sequence. The score of web number 1 is not the highest. It means the material is not the easiest. Students who attempted a trial is usually started from the web provided based on the top number. Once they tried and it is easy to access, then they will continue to try.

The second most preferred web is web number 2. It is predicted that web number 2 was chosen because of the sequences too. The web can be accessed easily and the material is not hard (the average score is 74)

Table 3.4

Data of the second choice

Web no.	Group 1	Group 2	Total	%
2	33	11	44	57.89
3	2	3	5	6.58
4	3	5	8	10.53
5	1	0	1	1.32
7	7	3	10	13.16
8	1	7	8	10.53
Total	47	29	76	100

The third most preferred web is web number 8. Although web number 8, many students tried this web and chose it. This is assumed because students prefer grammar than others (i.e. listening as in web No. 7 and No. 4). The third choice varies, all web are chosen.

Table 3.5

Data of the third choice

Web no.	Group 1	Group 2	Total	%
1	0	1	1	1.32
2	0	2	2	2.63
3	3	2	5	6.58
4	5	7	12	15.79
5	2	0	2	2.63
6	0	1	1	1.32
7	10	3	13	17.11
8	21	10	31	40.79
9	3	0	3	3.95
10	3	3	6	7.89
Total	47	29	76	100

The choice of the web in group 1 and 2 is almost the same. It means no relationship between the English proficiency and the web chosen. It depends on the level of difficulty and the accessibility of the webs.

The Models

Based on the close observation and the teaching activities by one of our team members, our study has produced two models. The first one is the blog model that we tried to students of two universities in Jakarta. In this web blog, students and their teachers extended their classroom interactions to the online world in which students responded to the tasks given by the instructors or among themselves. The weblog functions as meeting point for both teachers and students. We provide the link and the appearance of our model web-based learning on the next page.



Figure 2. Web blog Model for TOEFL exercise online learning.

Link : <http://toeflexpert.blog.binusian.org>

The second model is the model of web-based learning for improving performance in the English high stake tests. Having observed the process in the blended setting classes, we figured out that teaching and learning happening continuously, starting from *selecting activity*. During this stage of activity, students are expected to find reliable webs that meet the quality standards. The next stage of learning is the *Doing* stage. At this stage, students are to do the exercises provided by the web. During this stage, students are expected to perform independence in learning and are given times to do the exercises outside of the classroom interaction with the teachers. The third stage of the model is the *Reporting* stage. When reporting, through the mediation of the web blog, students can report the result of their independent learning to both their friends and teachers. This stage is directly linked to the following stage, which is the Seeking for *feedback* and *reflecting*. Through the mediation of the web blog, students can seek feedback from their friends and teachers. By discussing it in public space like the web, it is expected that students will learn from their mistakes and the mistakes of other students without being embarrassed.

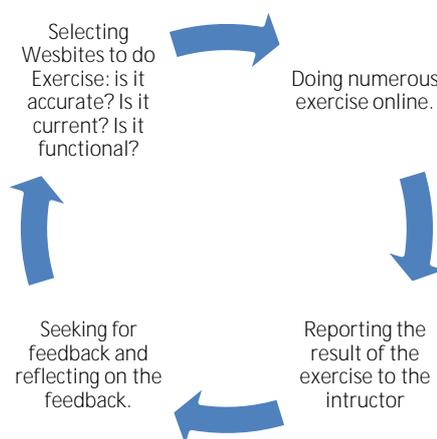


Figure 3. Model of TOEFL-Prep Class by using Online Materials

Conclusion

From the discussion above we can conclude that students tend to choose model of learning based on the list given by the teacher, start from the top in the list. They will try number 1 in sequence, once it is easy to access the web and easy to answer the questions, they will choose the web and continue to next number. The websites selected by students are those which contain simple exercises, cover one area of study such as listening, are easy to understand in terms of instructions, and are interesting to

see. Regarding the relationship, it has been found out that there is no significant relationship between scores of the online TOEFL exercises and the students English proficiency ($P > 0.05$).

Giving students the opportunity to select their preferred web sites, give them the motivation and the control to their own learning. However, we do realize that students must be directed to try other skills as they tend to stay / choose to work on the skills they like. Students should too be guided to do exercises which vary in level of difficulty. Instructor should supervise students and make sure that they are responsible and take charge of their own learning.

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Expectation vs. Reality: Voices of Thai Scholars Regarding the Demand for International Publications

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Abstract

The “publish or perish” rule plays a pivotal role in lecturers’ tenure contracts and Ph.D. students’ graduation requirements. In Thailand, despite the incentives offered and the pressure placed on novice researchers, their publication outputs remain low. This paper highlights voices from 84 doctoral students and new faculty members regarding the demand for international publication. The triangular analysis was derived from focus group discussion data, students’ written work and questionnaire responses. Additionally, insights gained from the in-depth interviews with prominent

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Thai educational researchers, who have been successful in publishing their work internationally, were also analyzed to provide a complete picture of what is needed to develop scholarship among Thai graduates.

Keywords: International publications, English for specific purposes, needs analysis, Thai academics

Introduction

The number of international publications has been used as an indicator to evaluate the quality of higher education institutions around the world. For example, the QS world university ranking uses factors such as publications and citations per faculty as major indicators among others to rank top universities in the world (QS World University Rankings, 2014). Consequently, pressure has been placed on universities around the world to competitively increase their number of scholarly publications.

Ranked no. 372 in the world according to the ranking web of universities, Kasetsart University (KU) is the largest university in Thailand and has been considered one of the nine national research universities. The university policy indicates that research development and international publication must be promoted. Lecturers, researchers and Ph.D. students who have their work published internationally will be rewarded with monetary benefit and recognition. (KURDI, 2015). In addition, research publications, preferably international ones, are included in the university quality assurance imposed by the Higher Education Commission. However, the numbers of publications are still considered low. In 2013, KU academics in the field of education published only seven papers in international journals (KURDI, 2015) despite the fact that there are 1,400 graduate students and 108 faculty members in the School of Education. The low ratio between the numbers of KU academics and the number of international publications is consistent with the national statistics. Jaroongkongdach, Todd, Keyuravong and Hall (2012) stipulated that even Thai academics who teach English at the tertiary level may have problems publishing their papers as seen by the low number of article publications in the Scopus database.

It could be easily assumed that English language proficiency is the main obstacle for most academics, at least at KU, especially in the Faculty of Education where this study took place. All doctoral programs are taught using the Thai language for instruction. Doctoral candidates' exposure to the English language is quite limited

since minimum English language scores from standardized tests are not required for entry to the doctoral programs. The students have to take only one English preparatory course during the first semester of the program.

However, skills associated with academic tasks such as writing for international publications are more complicated than the development of English writing skills. The literature in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) informs us about the factors related to the success of writing for publications such as knowledge and expertise in the field, research methodology, stylistics and authoritative voices.

This study identified and addressed the needs for EAP among Thai scholars and Ph.D. students in the Faculty of Education at KU. The needs analysis included in-depth interviews, focused group interviews, analysis of students' dissertations, and a questionnaire to identify the areas of difficulties and the prioritized skills needed. The results from the needs analysis were used to develop appropriate programs, models and other measures to provide support to these academics.

Literature Review

Needs analysis has become a fundamental step in the design and implementation of any language curriculum (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Brindley, 1989; Graves, 2000, Richard, 2010). An EAP course design should be based on the information from a needs analysis of the target population. According to Richards (2010), the goal of needs analysis is to collect information that is useful in making decisions on the goals and content of a language course to best serve the learners' language needs. However, the actual process of carrying out the needs assessment is not always carefully conducted. It has been reported that the majority of English language training courses may not include an in-depth needs analysis of the target group level in developing the content and methods (Lung, Moraru, Balazsi, Both & Aluas, 2014) due to time constraints and resources limitations.

It is important to understand what is to be analyzed in the needs assessment as there are many types of needs. The meaning of "needs" is not limited to only "want", but also includes desire, expectation, motivation, constraint and requirement. Brindley (1989) divides needs into objective and subjective categories. Objective needs refer to the factual information about the learners such as scores from standardized proficiency tests, learners' profiles and background training courses. Subjective needs, on the other hand, refer to the affective and cognitive factors of learners such

as attitudes and learners' personalities. Munby (1978) introduced a model for needs analysis called the Communicative Needs Processor (C.N.P) mainly to identify the needs of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners under which EAP is developed as a branch. The model consists of several categories that needs analysts can use to identify different aspects of the learners' needs such as purpose, setting, interaction, instrumentality, target level, communicative event and communicative key. The needs analysis according to the C.N.P model gives a comprehensive profile description of what learners will be expected to do at the end of the course. The C.N.P model provides a detailed analysis of the needs that lead to the planning of a language course. However, according to Brindley (1989), it is important to distinguish between needs specified by analysts and those experienced by learners themselves. Needs can be defined as learners' *wants* or *desires* about what the students want to learn in addition to the program requirements (Brindley, 1989). Needs can also be defined as learners' *deficiencies* or *lacks* (West, 1994) by investigating the gap between the current and target skills of language learners.

Therefore, the extensive data collection method of needs analysis will provide a better picture of the learners and contexts. The methodology used to solicit needs should not be limited to only a questionnaire, but a variety of instruments would provide more in-depth information about learners (Kaewpet, 2009). Needs analysis for EAP should be done through multiple perspectives of the people involved to cover a wide range of different variables. The situation and context in which the writing practice takes place should also be critically analyzed as they influence the needs of the target groups. Factors such as institutional commitment and policy, academic writing practices and existing curriculum can impact the areas and skills needed.

The starting point for the needs analysis to thoroughly comprehend the problems and situations affecting the publication output among Thai scholars begins with the definition of the desired characteristics of good and successful researchers. This point is confirmed by Hamp-Lyons (2001) that "by understanding what 'experts' do, novice academics can shape their own academic language towards those models (p.128)".

Identifying essential core skills for international researchers is quite a complicated task. There are various interrelated skills involved in enabling competent researchers to productively publish their work and to establish themselves as international scholars. Interestingly, though language skills are identified as a major core competency, the literature related to academic training skills suggests otherwise. For

example, European research institutions are expected to train Ph.D. candidates to be inquisitive, independent researchers who can develop and implement a wide range of professional and personal competencies in different research and work environments (LERU, 2010 cited in Lung, Moraru, Balazsi & Both, 2014). According to Stefanadis (2006), Arora, Mittal, and Pasari (2011), Toledo-Pereyra (2012) and Thongthai (2012), common characteristics and practice of good researchers may include: 1) a deep understanding of the research topic and methodology; 2) English proficiency; 3) competencies in technology, management, communication and integration; 4) critical thinking; 5) research collaboration; 6) responsibility and work ethics; 7) involvement with professional development such as attending academic conferences; and 8) be considered as excellence in one's research area. In addition, in a recent article regarding a Thai university's expectation for the lecturer position, Graham (2015) added creative thinking along with other core skills as required characteristics of a faculty member. He also argues that the current system including heavy workload, lack of easy access to English academic databases in Thai higher education institutions make it difficult for academics to publish high quality research in international journals.

Even though the numbers of papers published in local journals in Thailand continue to increase, the quality of the published articles needs further investigation. Jaroongkongdach, Watson, Keyuravong and Hall (2012) conducted a careful analysis of the academic outputs and scholarly publications to identify information on deficiencies among Thai academics by comparing the quality of Thai academic publications written by English Language Teaching (ELT) academics based in Thailand with academic publications written by other ELT academics elsewhere in international journals. The results showed marked differences in the literature review and discussion sections between Thai and international articles. Those sections in the two published papers were significantly different in terms of coherence and awareness. Most Thai articles were rated low due to the lack of informativeness, reflection and especially "authorial comments" which are valued in international research communities where argumentative and critical writing styles are expected. Jaroongkongdach, Watson, Keyuravong and Hall (2012) mentioned that "Writing a literature review as a list implies that the researchers may have failed to use the previous literature to construct an argument to convince the reader." (p.8)

The background training of Thai academics may affect their writing practice in academia. Currently, there is a lack of research on academic writing in Thailand, but a similar situation can be found in other comparable EFL contexts, like Vietnam. The analysis by Luu (2011) of the writing practice in English classes in Vietnamese universities revealed the fact that students are often asked to paraphrase a few sentences or just select the best answer from multiple choice exercises, but students have few opportunities to perform compositional writing (Luu, 2011). This situation is similar to the Thai academic contexts where the students do not have a lot of opportunities to actually write. Such writing practice does not prepare writers to deal with the highly demanding task of academic writing that requires ability to summarize and paraphrase from the evaluation and interpretation of a text as well as the academic discourses appropriate for the specific knowledge in a discipline. Recent literature supports the view of academic writing in association with the disciplinary content (Hyland, 2013; Kuteeva & Airey, 2013). It has been widely acknowledged that differences in disciplines may result in a wide array of language used in EAP (Airey, 2011). Hyland (2013) challenges the current view of academic literacy's belief that focuses on general, everyday life writing skills and points out that writing in academia should actually reflect the conceptualization of the subjects and establishment of claims and arguments. Good academic writing should express the understanding of the discipline, the conventions and the academic genres to represent knowledge in that particular discipline (Hyland, 2013).

Methodology

The exploratory design of this study aimed: 1) to examine the desired characteristics of an international researcher to determine what skills should be involved in preparing the academics for the publishing demand of the institution; and 2) to identify the problems among Thai academics and Ph.D. students in publishing their work in international journals.

Population

Data on the characteristics of international scholars and problems in academic skills and in English were collected from 12 academics and 84 doctoral students in the Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University, Thailand.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of semi-structured interview questions, questions for a focus group, a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, and a data record form for students' writing analysis. All research instruments were approved by experts in educational research and evaluation.

The data collection comprised three steps: 1) exploring the desired characteristics of an international researcher, 2) examining the difficulties and needs of novice scholars and 3) examining the difficulties and needs of doctoral students.

Exploring the desired characteristics of an international researcher

A method of documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with three prominent Thai educational researchers who have been successful in publishing their work internationally was conducted to investigate the desired characteristics of a good international researcher and the skills involved. The semi-structured interviews were used to make the data collection not too rigid as a means of discovering the informants' broader perspectives. The informants were also asked to answer closed-ended questions in a survey form on the skills that researchers should have.

Examining the difficulties and needs of novice scholars

A focus group was used in this step to explore the novice lecturers' difficulties and their needs in developing international researcher characteristics. This focus group was composed of 12 novice lecturers, selected purposively, based on the criteria that they had tried to publish in international journals but without success. This sample group was selected because the lecturers had had direct experience with the publication process while most Ph.D. students usually had not. The qualitative data gained in the second step were analyzed and used as a guideline for the questionnaire design in the next step.

Examining the difficulties and needs of the Ph.D. students

Closed-ended questions using Likert's five-point rating scale and open-ended questionnaires were used to quantitatively explore the areas of difficulties and needs of the Ph.D. students in developing international researchers' characteristics. The questionnaires were distributed to 100 Ph.D. students studying in the Faculty of Education with 84 questionnaire responses being returned. The majority of the

respondents were female (67%), aged between 26 and 35 years (47.6%). Most of the respondents (78%) had previous research experience. Half of the respondents had published their papers in domestic journals, but only eight students (9.52%) had previously published in international journals. Additionally, the analysis of students' written work was also analyzed to further examine the areas of difficulties in developing their academic writing skills.

Results

Expectation: Characteristics of International researchers

The results from the in-depth interviews with three prominent Thai educational researchers who have been successful in publishing their work internationally showed that a good international researcher has to possess: 1) a body of knowledge and expertise in specific academic disciplines; 2) knowledge of the research methodology; 3) a good level of English language proficiency in all four components, that is, reading, listening, speaking and writing; 4) research experience and strength in one's own research area; 5) international networking and collaborative skills, that is, being a reviewer for an international journal and attending conferences regularly; and 6) critical thinking skills.

Table 1

Characteristics of International Researchers Recommended by Prominent Thai Educational Researchers (N = 3)

Characteristics	Frequency
1. Expertise in one's own academic disciplines	3
2. Knowledgeable in research methodology	3
3. Competent in all four components of English language	3
4. Having research experience and strength in one's own research area	2
5. Having international networking and collaborative skills	1
6. Having critical thinking skills	1

Results in Table 1 shows that all prominent Thai educational researchers agreed that international researchers have to possess expertise in one's own academic disciplines, knowledge of the research methodology and a good level of English language proficiency in all four components. In addition, research experience, strength in one's own research area, international networking, collaborative skills and critical thinking skills are suggested as equally important. Whilst all agreed that English proficiency is

important, one of the interviewees emphasized critical thinking skills as more essential quality for conducting research. She de-emphasized the role of English skills for academic success as researchers could easily seek language assistance from translation services. She believed that critical thinking was something that was harder to promote, but it could have a tremendous impact the quality of research.

Reality

The analyses of the results from the focused group interviews, questionnaires and students' written work revealed five issues that affected Thai academics in developing themselves professionally to meet the demands of an academic institution, namely, linguistic knowledge, motivation, disciplinary knowledge, quality of article and academic support. The details are described in this section.

Linguistic knowledge

The results of the focus group discussion showed that the novice scholars' biggest concern in their goal to become international researchers was their limited English proficiency. They needed development in four skill areas:

- reading skills, including jargon, speed reading, reading strategies, guessing the meaning of words, reading comprehension, reading for evaluation of an article and online article searching;
- writing skills, including sentence structure, grammar, conventions, logical writing, style of writing, jargon;
- speaking skills, including confidence in speaking, fluency, grammar and jargon;
- listening skills, including English listening practice at a natural speed.

According to the KU Graduate School requirements, all students must pass the English exit exam in order to obtain a Ph.D. degree and they can submit a TOEFL, IELTS, CU-TEP or KU-EPT score to be exempted from an English exit exam (Graduate School, Kasetsart University, 2014). One criterion for the course exemption is that TOEFL scores cannot be less than 500. Each year, very few graduate students in the Faculty of Education are exempted from the English exit exam compared with students from other faculties. The results from the questionnaire confirmed the need to develop English language proficiency with 98.81 percent of the Ph.D. students identifying that they wanted to develop all four language skills.

The researchers also investigated the topics that the Ph.D. students thought would be useful. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed that a variety of academic genres is needed in the development of academic writing such as proposal writing (67%), manuscript writing (67%) and abstract writing (65%). Figure 1 shows the contents the Ph.D. students thought would be useful to achieve their international publication goal.

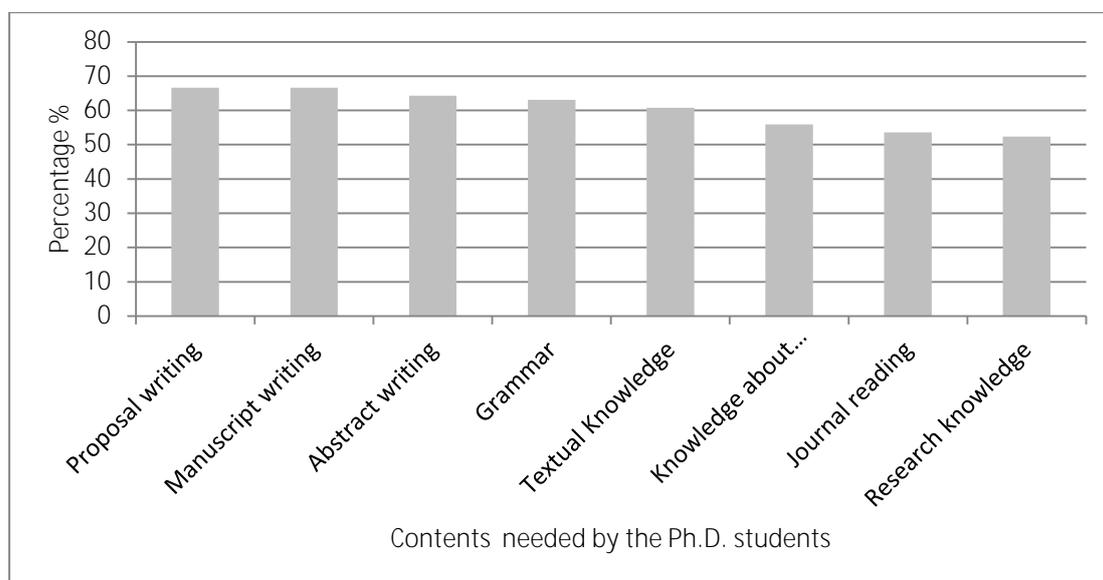


Figure 1. Contents Students Thought To Be Useful for International Publication

While the majority of the Ph.D. students thought that proposal and manuscript writing are most useful (66.67%), they perceived journal reading to be somewhat less prioritized (55%) which contradicts with the belief of faculty members. The interviews with the faculty members revealed that the most urgent skill in need of development was academic reading skill in English as it is essential at the earliest stage of conducting research to determine gaps in the research topic.

It was quite clear that the Ph.D. students realized their own limited English proficiency. One of the novice lecturers who had graduated from a Thai university admitted that English language is a major barrier in submitting international publications. Most of the novice scholars had never taken any academic writing courses in their Ph.D. program. Some of them improved their English writing skills as they had become a Faculty member after being a writing tutor at university.

Motivation

As motivation is considered one of the factors leading to success, the researchers also studied the activities students considered necessary for a researcher to engage in (Table 2).

Table 2

Different Aspects of the Ph.D. Students' Needs

Different Aspects of Needs	Yes (%)	No (%)
Want to publish internationally	58.3	41.6
Want to be a presenter at an international conference	83.33	16.67
Want to have an international network	97.62	2.38
Want to participate in institutionally organized activities to develop language skills	97.62	2.38

The majority of respondents indicated that they wanted to have an international network (97.62%), to participate in institutionally organized activities to develop language skills (97.62%) and to be a presenter at an international conference (83.33%). However, only half of the respondents indicated that they wanted to publish internationally (58.33%). The reasons for not wanting to publish internationally included a lack of confidence in their research work, a lack of support and guidance, an overwhelming workload and difficulties in writing in English. One of the lecturers stated that most of her students are not interested in publishing their articles in English because of their low, perceived English proficiency.

Disciplinary knowledge

Information from the focused group interviews with the novice scholars indicated that most students did not sufficiently and extensively read academic texts and articles when conducting research. Consequently, they lacked an in-depth understanding of what they were studying. One of the lecturers said that before writing articles, she was compelled to read many related articles to learn numerous technical terms, sentence models and guidelines for writing academic articles. From her point of view, the technical terminologies in any specialized field are very important. Knowledge in disciplines is expressed through language that can successfully communicate with the target audience, specifically, with other researchers in research communities. Most students indicated that they relied on resources mainly in Thai language because of English reading difficulties.

In the analysis of the EAP coursework that all students were required to take at KU, the course did not adequately prepare students to deal with their disciplinary content. Reading passages the students encountered did not link to their academic disciplines. Most readings in the EAP course dealt mainly with general English expository text that students in any disciplines could usually involve. The majority of the content involved general reading strategies such as locating thesis statements, making inferences, analyzing patterns of organization, guessing meaning from context clues as well as vocabulary building. The existing EAP course also did not adequately provide students with opportunities to write academic genres. Most class writing exercises were short answers from reading comprehension exercises. As a result, the students did not have sufficient experience in academic writing practice.

Research quality

The dissertations of 10 Ph.D. students in the Department of Education at KU during the past two years were randomly selected and analyzed by examining each section of the proposal and dissertation: introduction, statement of the problems and the literature review. The data showed that students rarely referred to the principal theories and rarely identified the research gap when they wrote their introduction and statement of the problems. This shortcoming is consistent with the data from the focused group interviews with the novice scholars on reviewers' comments on submitted articles and the reasons why the manuscripts were rejected. The common shortcomings in rejected manuscripts were the lack of signaling a gap in previous studies and not addressing the gap to justify the problem in the current study. Furthermore, the reviewers' comments often pointed out a lack of authoritative voice in the discussion section.

The result of the analysis of students' written work showed that Ph.D. students needed to develop skills to write effective literature reviews. According to Ridley (2008), factors that are deemed important in writing a literature review include: selecting the writing purpose of the literature review, identifying sources of information, conducting searches, being critical and foregrounding the writer's voice. The analyses of the students' writings revealed the following important information:

1. The students did not have adequate searching skills. Most did not know how to locate academic research papers from trusted sources nor obtain primary information. They often searched and cited resources from Google, blogs, wiki or

- some corporate online websites which often included secondary information with anonymous authors.
2. The students lacked literature review writing skills. They did not critically analyze or synthesize the literature prior to writing their review. The copy and paste technique was often found in students' review writing which put many of the students' work at risk of being branded as plagiarism. Moreover, the jargon used was not consistent, partly due to the translation. This information was confirmed by the data from the interviews. Novice lecturers reported a weakness in students' writing in the literature review section and with their experience guiding students' theses, they agreed that most graduate students were not fully aware of the importance of the literature review.
 3. The students lacked critical assertiveness in argumentative writing. The students could not practically generate and critique arguments or claims from the sources they cited. The review of literature only demonstrated their basic understanding of the conceptual framework and relevant studies without rebutting, and defending their arguments.

Academic support

Data from the focus group interviews shows that academic advisors play an important role in supporting their students' development of good researcher characteristics. The successful researchers indicated that they were explicitly provided with guidance and support by their academic advisors during their Ph.D. studies to become better scholars, such as finding funds for short-term overseas studies, giving opportunities to co-author on research papers or to co-present at an international conference and planning long-term career goals.

Novice researchers also indicated that advisors should be role models to develop scholarly characteristics such as being inquisitive and regularly publishing. All of the lecturers stated that graduate students should be encouraged to present at a conference. Some young researchers received constructive feedback from their advisors on their papers before submitting them to a journal or to a conference in the form of a discussion group in which other faculty members and graduate students could participate.

However, all of these activities can only be implemented when students have invested in their studies full-time. Six of the ten Ph.D. programs in the Faculty of

Education are currently offered on a part-time basis. These graduate students attend classes during weekends while keeping their full-time jobs for financial reasons.

In order to summarize and emphasize the main findings of this study, the triangulation analysis from three sources, namely, focus group discussion data, doctoral students' written work and questionnaire responses were done statistically as shown in the following table:

Table 3

Triangular Analysis about Five Issues That Affected Thai Academics in Developing Themselves Professionally to Meet the Demands of an Academic Institution

Issues	Focus Group Discussion N = 12 % of agreement	Questionnaire Responses N = 84 % of respondents	Analysis of Students' Written Work N = 10 % of incidents found
Linguistic knowledge			
Students have limited reading skills	100%	98.81%	N/A
Students have limited writing skills	100%	98.81%	N/A
Students have limited speaking skills	100%	98.81%	N/A
Students have limited listening skills	100%	98.81%	N/A
Motivation			
Students want to publish internationally	25%	58.30%	N/A
Students want to be a presenter at an international conference	42.66%	83.33%	N/A
Students want to have an international network	83.33%	97.62%	N/A
Students want to participate in institutionally organized activities to develop language skills	83.33%	97.62%	N/A
Disciplinary knowledge			
Students do not have in-depth understanding of what they are studying	91.66%	N/A	90%
Students know limited technical terminology in their specialized field	91.66%	N/A	60%
Quality of article			
Students do not choose the credible sources	50%	N/A	70%
Students do not identify the research gap	66.66%	N/A	60%
Students do not write a clear problem statement	25%	N/A	30%
Students do not refer to the principal theories	50%	N/A	70%
Students do not write effective literature review	83.33%	N/A	10%
Students do not use jargon consistently	58.33%	N/A	60%
Students do not have critical assertiveness in argumentative writing	100%	N/A	100%
Students do not create authoritative voice in the discussion section	100%	N/A	90%
Students do not cite primary sources	75%	N/A	60%
Students do not paraphrase to avoid plagiarism	100%	N/A	100%
Academic support			
The advisors play an important role in supporting their students to develop the good characteristics of a researcher	100%	51.19%	N/A
The advisors should be role models to	100%	51.19%	N/A

develop scholarly characteristics			
The graduate students should be encouraged to present at a conference	100%	30.94%	N/A
The provision of a discussion group in which faculty members and graduate students could participate	100%	44.03%	N/A

The quantitative results are found in table 3. In this study, triangulation entails the comparison of across data sources, namely, the focus group discussion with twelve novice scholars, eighty- four questionnaire responses from the Ph.D. students and analysis of students’ theses and dissertations. Issues concerning linguistic knowledge were investigated by focus group discussion and questionnaire responses, whereas issues concerning disciplinary knowledge and quality of article were done through the focus group discussion and analysis of students’ written work.

Discussion & Conclusion

The data obtained indicates that English language deficiency is the main factor for the low publication outputs among Thai novice scholars. The result was in accordance with Rasool’s study (2006) pertaining to English problems as the critical reason why many Latin American scientific articles do not meet the requirements of the international journal reviewers. Nonetheless, this study reveals that motivation, disciplinary knowledge, quality of article and academic support are the equally important factors for international publication.

The analysis clearly indicated that a provision of English language skill instruction to Thai novice researchers is not sufficient to increase the numbers of English publications. Rather than a sole emphasis on linguistic knowledge and language accuracy, the Ph.D. programs needs to target a bigger goal to prepare young, aspiring academics, that is, to develop an awareness of academic discourses, critical reading and writing, developing arguments and training students to develop life-long academic careers.

To reach this goal, many factors need to be realized by program administrators, and curriculum developers. To develop a good international scholar requires time and effort. Based on the findings, a main factor that affects the current Ph.D. students on publishing in international journals is that most of the students are in special programs or weekend programs. These part-time Ph.D. students face multiple challenges regarding time management and work-related stress. Some students do not appreciate

the demanding academic task and eventually lack motivation to deal with any tasks beyond the curriculum requirements. Accordingly, they cannot devote time to writing an English article for an international publication. In fact, a number of students are not interested in publishing articles in international journals when it is enough to publish in Thai local journals with a less rigorous review process.

What the researchers found out in this study is that there is a big mismatch between expectation and reality within the academic culture in Thailand. The expectation at the institutional level as well as on the national agenda is to increase the rankings of Thai universities and this is not an attainable goal in the near future. The reality is there is a tremendous lack of support with misdirected emphasis for managing future potential Thai academics.

The findings of this research also provide significant implications for redesigning the Ph.D. curriculum. Program administrators and people in charge of developing the curricula must realize the qualities of the Ph.D. program by offering increased, wider research experiences. The next step as an implication for this research study is to develop an EAP course to help these new scholars with the publication task through an instruction model that covers the set of identified skills, especially the reading and writing in their disciplines, academic writing skills and critical research skills. Design and possible future standpoint of EAP curriculum should aim to equip Ph.D. students' professional experience and academic support by developing their sense of research inquiry while simultaneously improving their language proficiency.

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A study on goal orientations of English teaching and learning in a Chinese language learning centre

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Abstract

Over the past ten years, the number of English learners is increasing dramatically across the world, with the number of high-stakes tests candidates growing exponentially each year. Studying in a language learning centre provides these candidates with sufficient language resources. However, research on learning goal orientations of the stakeholders in the language learning centers is scarce. This study

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aimed to explore how the learning goal orientation influences English teaching and learning. The study used a semi-structured interview design to collect data, aiming to investigate the interviews' goals, strategies and achievements in English teaching and learning. The study found that the manager and the teachers took learning goal orientations and spared efforts to achieve their goals, but they failed to help students achieve their goals. Findings were discussed in relation to the strategies relating to learning goal orientations.

Introduction

English as a lingua franca has been utilized in various domains like business and education all across the world. This has consequently spread sweeping trends of English learning and given birth to many private English language learning centers across non-native English speaking countries. There, teaching and learning English in these English language learning centers across the world face a dilemma situation: a learning goal orientation or a score goal orientation. These two goal orientations represent two different teaching and learning approach. A learning goal orientation focuses on mastery the language skills and the process of improvement, while a score goal orientation emphasizes on the results of English learning and the final scores of an English test. As these private English language learning centers are profit-making which, in order to make profit, should satisfy students' needs in learning. However, a large amount of evidence in research supports that teachers and students adapting learning goal orientation enables students to have more proficient English skills and a higher English test results.

English language learning centers in China were able to provide experience of learning goal orientations shifting. In the history, Chinese education system once adopted score goal orientation. Scores of the examinations were the only requirement for students entering into the next section of study which leded them learning to pass the examinations and achieved exact scores in English.

Dissatisfied with the results of score goal orientation and enlightened by the western studies, the government of China gave rise to a top-down movement to reform English learning and teaching in China since 1980s, an endeavor to introduce and promote learning goal orientation into Chinese English teaching context. In 1992, the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) proposed a new national unified syllabus which set "competence to use English for communication" as its goal

(SEDC, 1992). The SEDC, as Liao (2000) has pointed out, as the representative of the central government, has the power of making educational policy, setting the goal, curriculum, course books and even teaching methods throughout the country. Thereafter, curricula at various levels of education were revamped, communication-oriented textbooks were written and tested, learning orientation was developed and teacher training about language-teaching theories and pedagogies were offered (Adamson & Morris, 1997). Nevertheless, the tremendous efforts and resources expended to adopt a learning goal orientation have failed to meet authorities' expectation. The learning goal orientation has been inhibited by many constraints in Chinese English teaching context including class size, excessive linguistic demand on teachers, impact of examinations evaluating students' linguistic proficiency rather than communicative competency and lack of teaching materials (Jin, 2007) and cultural resistance (Hu, 2002).

Foreign language teaching in private educational settings was no exception, or even worse, causing a dilemma for both teachers and students. Students who would like to pursue overseas studies should also take part in some compulsory English examinations, such as IELTS. They attend the private English language centres to study English to pass the examinations. This leads some private English language centres to have difficulties in setting their goal orientations: whether to adopt a learning orientation advocated by the government or the score orientation to appeal the students. More importantly, they lack the experience of how to implement learning goal orientation and why they should employ relative strategies. The past decades have witnessed in China an exponential increase in the amount of publications and research into a wide range of variables impacting the effectiveness of English learning. However, few studies have investigated this topic in China and among the few studies none of them were able to provide insights to guide these private English language learning centers. Being subject to fierce market competition and deprived of any government financial support, factors related to the learning environment in private sector can be substantially different from that in a public sector. Among which most carry out in-depth exploration into one specific variable or correlation between two or more variables and a few from holistic perspective (Nguyen, Warren & Fehring, 2014; Renandya, 2013). Hence, this study aims to narrow the gap by exploring the goal orientations in English teaching and learning in

a private English language centre in China. The findings of this study are also expected to provide references for English teaching and learning in similar contexts.

Theoretical Background

Goal Orientation

Goal orientation is about how individual interpret and respond to achieve expected situation (Brett & Walle, 1999). It is a relatively stable dispositional variable that assume two forms relating to English language learning and teaching: (a) a learning goal orientation (LGO) in which learning is to cope with tasks, mastery, or a learning goal (Klein, Noe, & Wang, 2006) and (b) a score goal orientation (SGO) in which learning is to achieve the results for their learning performance or demonstrating their abilities (Wolters, Pintrich, & Garcia, 2005). Based on the concepts of the two goal orientations, in this study, a LGO refers to that students learning English is to improve their English performance and abilities, and SGO means that students set an exact score of the test and pay efforts to achieve this exact score.

LGO and SGO represent different reasons for engaging in learning (Gardner, Diesen, Hogg, & Huerta, 2016). Specifically, there is huge amount of evidence of research shows that individuals who hold a LGO can learn new skills, acquire experience and develop their competence. LGOs are more likely to use strategies to regulate their attentions, emotions, and efforts in achieving goals. Comparatively, individuals who have a SGO show a strong desire to focus on the outcome of their performance rather than the process. SGOs tend to hold the views that the scores of study is more important than the learning process and getting a higher score is the aim of study.

The influence of LGO and SGO on students' English learning is also different. The influence of a LGO that works on the positive aspects of students' English learning is strongly relating to the intrinsic interest (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). In the process of achieving the goals and mastering the tasks, LGOs show a higher level of self-efficacy and perceived competence (Ames, 1992), which lead them to have fewer anxieties of failures (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). A LGO also has a positive correlation to the quality of students' cognitive engagement. Comparatively, the SGO is related to students' extrinsic interest in learning (Ames 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Some studies suggest that it was less effective than a LGO in motivational

beliefs, cognitive engagement, and performance, specifically (Klein, Noe, & Wang, 2006; Ames 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Namely, the goal to achieve grades and rewards is less likely to have positive results in scores and performance than those with LGO aiming to improve competence and gain an understanding of knowledge (Ames, 1992; Graham & Golan, 1991). With above explanation, in this study, we focused on LGO.

Strategies of achieving the learning orientation goal

Meta-cognition and self-regulation

Strategies are behaviours or thoughts influencing individuals' encoding, storage, organization, and retrieval of knowledge in achieving a learning goal (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). Studies (e.g., Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992; Graham & Golan, 1991) have shown that the LGO is related to meta-cognitive and self-regulatory strategies. Meta-cognition is defined as an individual's knowledge of and control over his or her cognitions (Flavell, 1979). Metacognition comprises three involvements, namely planning, observing and altering goal appropriate behaviors (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983). Meta-cognitive skills facilitate learners' learning efficiency as the progress can be observed, problems can be found, and then learning can be adapted if these learners have these skills. Research on strategies in LGO also focuses on self-regulatory mechanism (Pintrich, 2004; Noordzij, Hooft, Mierlo, Dam, & Born, 2013). Highly self-regulated students also engage in increased effort by completing supplemental problems, completing extra work via online tutorials, achieving mastery over the material, and giving up avoidance behaviours (Abara & Lokena, 2010).

Motivation

Williams and Burden (1997, p120) define motivation as:

[Motivation is] a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal.

It is widely proved to be one of the key determinants for the success of LGO and second language acquisition (Dornyei, 2001; Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001;

Oxford, 1994; Ushioda, 1994), since learners who are motivated are willing to expend efforts to master the language skills and while demotivated ones will not. Since 1960s investigations into LGO in English language learning motivation have undergone four stages, with the most recent socio-dynamic stage seeking both a person-in-text (Shoaib & Dornyei, 2005) and a complex system (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011) approach to investigate language learning motivation. Studies in this field cover cognitive, affective and socio-cultural factors concerning language learning motivation (Butler, 2015), demotivation factors (Ghadizadeh, Hashtroudi & Shokri, 2013; Hu, 2011) and strategies aimed at boosting motivation (Fu, 2014; Wong, 2014) in learners of different age groups and in different contexts. Most studies reveal that demotivation mainly stems from teacher-related factors like monotonous teaching, lack of enthusiasm and poor class management (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Song, 2005). Hence, just as a dominant researcher Dornyei (2001) calls for, improving the quality of English teaching is the most effective way in energizing motivation in language learners to achieve learning goals.

To sum up, goal orientation does have much of role to play in the process of learning. When it comes to English learning, its effects can be discussed in two forms, a learning goal orientation and a score goal orientation. Studies discussed above have shown that the former is more likely to facilitate learners' progress and to maintain their enthusiasm. In order to achieve this, meta-cognition, self-regulation and motivation can be implemented as the major strategies, and consequently, the study was conducted and discussed within these theories.

Research Design and Methods

This study aimed to explore how the learning goal orientation influences English teaching and learning in China. Based on the research aim, the research questions guided this study were:

1. What strategies the manager and teachers of the English language learning centre employed when they adopted learning goal orientation?
2. To which extent, these strategies influence on English teaching and learning?

Guided by the research questions, a qualitative method was used in this study. Qualitative study is able to provide deep insights of a complex issue (English teaching and learning) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Case study was adapted to collect

information on the practices of managing and teaching and their influence on students' learning in the English language centre context (Yin, 2009).

Sampling

This study used the single-case study method to provide a “typical case” (Yin, 2009: p.48) that is assumed to be informative about how the learning goal orientation influence English teaching and learning in the Chinese context.

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the case study school. The selection criterion is those English language learning centre that have set learning goal orientation to improve students English language skills rather than promoting the test scores. To seek to answer the research questions, we looked for English language learning centres in China in which the manager and teachers come to a compromise to adapt LGO. Eventually, we gained access to one English language learning centre which adapted LGO. That language centre was selected as the case in this study because it could provide detailed information about how the LGO influence English teaching and learning.

Data Collection

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection tool in this study to collect perspectives from one manager, two teachers and four students. Beside one manager in this English language learning centre, teachers and students were randomly selected to participate in the interviews. As there was only one manager in the English language learning centre, The detailed background information of the interviewees is displayed in Table 1 and Table 2. Each interview lasted for about an hour. All of the seven interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word by word as interview transcripts.

Table 1
The profiles of the manager and teacher interviewees

	Working Experience	Duty in the school
Manager	4 years	Managing
Teacher A	3 years	Teaching and curriculum development
Teacher B	1 year	Teaching

Table 2

The profiles of student interviewees

Students	English Learning Years	Enrolling months	Finally Test Score
Student A	13 years	2 months	Band 6
Student B	15 years	4 months	Band 5.5
Student C	9 years	2 months	Did not sit the test
Student D	13 years	3 months	Band 6

Data analysis

The data analysis process was followed by Miles and Huberman's (1994) guidelines, including three main stages: data reduction, data display and conclusion verification. All of the three researchers participated in the data analysis. The data was analyzed separately and back checked with each researcher to make sure the alignment.

Findings

Findings of the study will be presented in this section. Following the three research questions, findings of this study include the goals of the manager, teachers and students, strategies the manager and teachers had used to achieve the goals, and to which extent had the teachers and students achieved the goals.

Goals

From the interview transcripts, goals of the manager and the teachers in the language centre were in line with each other. The manager set his goal on changing the status quo of the language training market in Chinese context, which was test-oriented and commercialized. He would like to strengthen the connection between teachers and students, and improve the language centre by LGO, that is, promoting students' English abilities. The manager said,

We want to change the status quo of the industry, which is too commercialized. This sacrifices students' values. Therefore, [we] want to give more services to students, for example, focusing on their learning process rather than only improve their test score.

Teachers set their goals not only on improving students' test score, but also on promoting students' English abilities that would enable them to accommodate their

further overseas life. Teacher A was responsible for teaching training, curriculum design and the development of teaching materials in the school. She said,

I definitely have to improve their basic language skills, and I believe our school is also trying to achieve this goal, not only helping students improve test scores, but also adapting to life abroad easily.

When talked about the goals, all the students in this study pointed out to the exact test score as their goals. The scores were different based on the language requirements for their prospective overseas study. Only one of the students mentioned the need of improvement of language ability, but this student regarded the improvement of language ability as the way to improve test score. Here is the explicit interview transcripts given by that student,

[I] want to get band 6.5. If I can understand listening, comprehend the whole reading passage, then it's OK. I want to get band 6 in listening. Also, I hope that I could become more fluent in speaking and more natural in writing.

Strategies

In order to achieve the goals, the manager and the teachers had done some efforts. Aiming to improve students' English abilities, the manager allocated students with extra resources. These resources were to extend students' English learning hours and personally facilitate their learning, including a learning zone in the language learning centre for student to use freely, a tutor assigned at the learning zone for solving students' personal learning problems and providing professional advices for students, and extra free online courses provided to student to assist them to review what they had learned and helped them in practice. The manager provided an explicit example of assigning teachers to provide the personal guidance for students learning,

Tutors and teachers will be in charge of evening self-study time till 9:30p.m. Then teachers will be here every day. If it is a class of about 3-6 students, students need to attend a dictation class, and they will be supervised.

The manager claimed that teacher professional development was also emphasized and personal coaches were employed to train new teachers:

When you become a new employee, the first few months will be training period, during which time you need to give presentation about the subject you teach on a weekly basis. A coach will tell you how to prepare for the class and give you suggestions on curriculum design. This takes time and practice.

The efforts the teachers had done were mainly about dividing the goals as measurable steps (testing score) and standardized students' learning process. For example, Teacher A provided the information:

For example if you teach people how to practice speaking, you need to assign specific topics in day 1, day 2, day 3, so help them set exact days. For example, topics in day 1, how to record, and use what apps to record, and then where to send the recordings. Teachers need to quantize all of these, and it is standardized.

They also would like to change their teaching based on students' reactions and their own professional reflections. Teacher B once changed her way of teaching writing. She said,

I once changed my teaching methods. I found out the way of teaching writing, which was to teach them to imitate. I found that it improved more effectively on students' writing and had better results than stressing how to respond to questions in class.

Goals achievements

The manager assessed the goals based on the reports given by the teachers, while teachers assessed the goals by their learning process in class as well as the scores they get in the mocking test. This assessment was both learning oriented and test oriented. Teacher A provided the explicit example of assessing students' learning process in class,

I can give a general feedback based on their performance in class. I can know a student's speaking performance right after he or she speaks.

Teachers also used mocking tests to probe the learning and predict their IELTS scores. Teacher A said,

Students will take mocking test to see how well have they been prepared for the test at the end of the course.

However, the manager and all the teachers mentioned that it was hard to improve students' test scores simply through the preparation courses. They expected students acquire more knowledge about English after class while few of them followed the feedback and suggestions given for students to further improve their language skills after the mocking tests. Teacher B provided,

When students are in school, they are supervised by teachers and tutors, but when they go home after the whole course, they cannot insist on practicing. It is extremely rare to see someone keep doing this.

After the courses, three student participants took part in the IELTS test. From the results provided by the students, all these three students failed to achieve their goals. One of the students even gave up overseas university application because she thought English was difficult to her. When talked about the studies in this language centre, all the students claimed that they improved their English skills steps by steps, and all the teaching contents were effective in promoting their test scores. Student A gave the information,

I think advanced course is more academic, more difficult. Taking writing as an example, you need to learn new phrases and also some structures. This may help me improve my writing skills. I think it can also help get my test scores.

However, by learning oriented study, they felt that it was too slow for them to achieve their ideal scores. Student B explained,

I think that you cannot reach the sky in a single bound, so you need to achieve your goals step by step. You cannot just achieve it by attending intermediate classes. In these classes, students learn basic stuff, and improve slowly. I think it takes time to understand language. I feel that it's impossible to achieve your goal just by attending one class.

The manager explained the reasons why it was hard to achieve the learning goal and he attributed to the lack of motivation in teaching and learning. As a manager of a profit-making language centre and holding learning goal orientation, he should consider teachers' energies in teaching and learning as well as the cost of providing extra psychological motivation to students. He said,

I think it's due to the lack of psychological motivation to students... But in the end if you change and focus on this psychological motivation, you end up struggling to achieve. If you want to put more effort on this, you may find that you don't have financial support, because you are not a non-profit organization but a for-profit organization.

Overall, the manager and teachers had the unique goal to improve both students' test scores and English language abilities through providing various forms of teaching assistance, including both online and face-to-face teaching resources as well as good

learning environment. Comparatively, students regarded the exact scores as their goals. To them, improving language skills was a means to enable them achieve the scores. Students' learning achievement were assessed by teachers' observation on students' learning process as well as the scores of mocking tests provided to students, while students claimed that they only used the IELTS scores as the measurement for their learning at the language learning centre. The manager realized that lacking of motivation in teaching and learning result in the failures of students' tests.

Discussion

This English language learning centre adopted LGO which aimed to improve students' English language skills and abilities rather than the test skills to increase test scores. Based on the findings of this study, in order to achieve the learning goal, the manager allocated extra learning resources for students, including setting a learning zone to extend students' studying hours, arranging tutors to provide personal tutoring to facilitate students learning and solving their questions, and offering online resources for students to learn English flexibly. The manager also noticed the importance of teacher professionalism and continuously providing teachers diverse kinds of professional development opportunities to improving teaching. Efforts paid by teachers were dividing the learning goal as measurable steps and standardizing students' learning process. They observed students' learning processes and changed their teaching strategies based on students' reactions and learning situations. The strategies they employed to achieve learning goal can be categorized as meta-cognitive strategies, which means an individual's knowledge of and control over his or her cognitions and includes planning, observing and altering goal appropriate behaviors (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983). Through meta-cognitive strategies, the manager set the plans of achieving LGO by focusing on improving students' learning, and strategies to achieve the goal can be categorized as 'what the students needs in improving English skills?' and 'what the situations of students' learning?'. The behaviors they acted to achieve the goal were around these two areas. Meta-cognitive strategies facilitate managers and teachers to observe students' learning efficiency, find the problems, and then adapt teaching and learning (see Section 2.2).

The manager understood that it was impossible for students to learn English well only for definite hours per week at the English language learning centre. He allocated

extra resources for students to learn English out of class in and out of the English language learning centre. With the extra resources, students were able to continuously access to English study at the learning zone in the English language learning centre or at home with professional tools. However, a problem arose here. From the findings of this study, the extra resources allocated for students to study was to extend their learning hours which required students to have high self-regulations, while the students expected to improve English skills and achieve their goals only attending class at the English language learning centre. As tremendous literature on English learning and LGO studies, self-regulation is one of the main determinations to English learning (Pintrich, 2004). Self-regulated learning enable students engage in increased efforts by completing supplemental problems, completing extra practices, achieving mastery over the material, and giving up avoidance behaviours (Abara & Lokena, 2010). The manager and teachers understood the importance of self-regulation in English learning, but provided a handful of efforts on fostering students' self-regulations.

From the findings of this study, the manager admitted the importance of motivation in students' English learning and the difficulties to evoke students' motivation. As mentioned earlier (in the conceptual background), previous studies discovered the differences of effects of the learning orientation and score orientation may mainly attribute to the different levels of motivation. Different levels of motivation lead to the different levels of cognitive engagement and then make the performance to be different. In this study, from the second section of the findings, the efforts given by the manager and the teachers paid less attention on stimulating students' motivation. They regarded the strategies of learning orientation as extending students' English learning hours and provide more facilities on helping them learn by themselves, but they ignored the importance of motivation which is the vital factor of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990) and leads the differences of performance. We suggest that English educator may put more efforts on stimulating students' learning motivation, which has been found as the most effective way to improve English learning (Dornyei, 2001). Notwithstanding not a few studies on second language motivation in China, the majority of them were situated in public education systems at different levels from primary to tertiary education. Therefore, taking into account the massive number of test-takers in non-native countries, a paucity of motivation

research of this sort in the context of private language training centers about learners preparing for tests like IELTS or TOEFL is inappropriate.

In the first section of findings, the manager and the teachers were taking the LGO, while the students only took the SGO. For the students, their purpose to study English in the English language learning centre was to pass the examinations and achieve an ideal score to apply for the overseas universities. It was reasonable for them to exclusively take a SGO. From the interview information and students' final test scores, all of the students failed to achieve their goals. It is unsurprising that score orientation which relates to students' extrinsic interest in learning and has less significant effects in motivation and cognitive engagement easily leads to the failure in performance (Ames, 1992; Graham and Golan 1991). In China, it is difficult to set the real LGO in learning English, even though the reform of English teaching and learning clearly pointed out the methodology and exact practices to guide the implementation of learning orientation in English teaching and learning. This is because of the cultural and social contexts in China. China has long been influenced by Confucianism which advocates selecting elites by examinations only in all walks of life (Hu, 2002). In education, the final examination is the only requirement for applying for the higher level education with the limitation of class size, excessive linguistic demand on teachers, impact of examinations evaluating students' linguistic proficiency, and lack of teaching materials (Jin, 2007). Not surprise that teachers and students tend to adapt a SGO in English teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how the LGO influence English teaching and learning in Chinese private English language learning centers. Using a case study method to interview the manager, teachers and students in one language centre in China, the study found the manager and teachers employed meta-cognitive and self-regulative strategies to achieve goals of improving student English language skills. Misunderstandings existed in their conceptions of the strategies of LGO and ignored the importance of motivation.

This study has the potentials to be referenced by both LGO and English language learning research in similar contexts. For those studies on LGO, it provides the mechanism of strategies of LGO influenced on teaching and learning. For those studies on English teaching and learning, it may inspire the educators and students on

goal settings, strategies adopting, and paying attentions on students' self-regulation and motivations. The contexts which are influenced by Confucianism and the SGO, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea, may reference this study to future explore how to motivate students to improve English skills with the LGO.

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A Blended Learning Approach to Teaching Writing: Using E-mail in the ESL Classroom

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Abstract

Approaches that blend brick-and-mortar modes with face-to-face methods in language teaching are recently reshaping the educational landscape across various contexts. Anchored on the tenets of TPACK Framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) and Blended Learning Framework (Horn & Staker, 2014), this study explored the viability of using e-mail in facilitating topical discussions via e-mail exchanges among six ESL writing classes of 198 students in a private university in Manila, the Philippines during the first semester of the academic year 2014-2015. Students were first required to have their individual e-mail accounts; then, they were assigned with e-mail exchange partners whom they communicated with on a weekly basis for a total of five

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weeks. E-mail thread discussion topics ranged from personal to societal issues covering local, national and global concerns. Data from student reflections, interviews, survey and focus group discussions revealed that despite some motivational and technology-related limitations, using e-mail in the classroom may help develop students' interest and confidence in writing, enhance their technological and social skills, develop learners' autonomy, and improve students' attitudes towards English language learning. Pedagogical insights and implications are provided for ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers and researchers in the light of these findings.

Keywords: e-mail, ESL writing, blended learning, computer-mediated communication, media in education

Introduction

“Integrating technology with face-to-face teacher time generally produces better academic outcomes than employing either technique alone.” (Edutopia, 2016)

Digital technology permeates the lives of students and teachers almost everywhere. With the advancement of technology (e.g. computer technology, internet technology, mobile technology) comes some moves and shifts in education such as the emergence of blended learning approaches which aim to integrate brick-and-mortar modes with online methods (Horn & Staker, 2014). In recent years, technological advancements have been applied in education and have been playing an increasingly significant role in foreign/second language teaching and learning (Kupelian, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998 as cited in Shang, 2007). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) offers a number of features in the improvement of foreign/second language learning, such as more language functions (Wang, 1998), greater levels of participation (Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998), more motivation and interest (Skinner & Austin, 1999), opportunity to improve foreign language performance and skills (Hung, 2007), increased motivation and decreased anxiety (Foroutan & Nooreen, 2012), more student participation and substantive discussion (Gutierrez, 2016), authentic material in the second language learning and teaching context (Foroutan, Noordin, & Hamzah, 2013), and authentic communication settings to

practice language skills (Erkan, 2013), thus making CMC “beneficial for communication and learning” (Leh, 2001, p. 126).

Among the various forms of CMC in language teaching, e-mail (electronic mail) has been so far considered the most popular and useful tool for foreign/second language teaching and learning (Chaffee-Sorace, 1999; Levy, 1997) and considered to be one of the most successful computer applications (Whittaker & Sidner, 2000). Several researchers have explored the beneficial features of using e-mail in the classroom by analyzing the functions and the content and context of written language produced by EFL/ESL learners via e-mail. For instance, Hoffman (1994) maintains that e-mail is efficient to use in the classroom because it provides learners immediate feedback and allows them to communicate with others anywhere in the world easily and cheaply. Other researchers (Beauvois, 1994; Hackett, 1996; Silvia, Meagher, Valenzuela, & Crenshaw, 1996; Wang, 1998; Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez, 2000; White & Baker, 2004; Shang, 2007; Wang, 2010) believe that the authentic, contextualized and immediate interactions involving real people that e-mail technology offers may replace less communicative situations and activities in the classroom and provide an alternative and effective communication channel for enhanced interaction (Hassini, 2006), and effective, efficient, and engaging (e³) learning (Kim, 2008).

Considered as the “mother of all internet applications” (Warschauer, Shetzer, & Meloni, 2000, p.3), e-mail has been explored in second/foreign language instruction. Beauvois (1994) believes that communication via e-mail allows students more freedom of expression. Kroonenberg (1995) and Erkan (2013) maintain that the online discussion offered by e-mail can help timid students to become more active participants in the learning process – an idea that is supported by Belisle (2002) who argues that shy students can develop confidence and may improve their writing skills when they engage in electronic writing than in traditional in-class pen-and-pencil methods. This creates what Liu et al. (2003, p. 263) refer to as “positive affective states” such as enjoyment and anxiety that add motivation to students to learn and help increase their enthusiasm in the subject matter.

While incorporating e-mail technology in the teaching and learning of English language skills has been explored in many parts of the world, research regarding the applicability and viability of e-mail writing within the ESL context in the Philippines is scarce – a similar concern reported by Liaw (1998) and Li (2000) in EFL setting in Taiwan and in other countries (Smith et al., 1999; Boles, 1999; Hassini, 2006).

In her book *Rethinking University Teaching*, Laurillard (1993) emphasized the mediating role of instructors between students and knowledge, and posed a significant question, ‘how teachers are to perform this mediating role?’ (Laurillard, 1993, p. 5). As a response, Reeves (1998) recommends that educators conduct more research-focused studies for “improving teaching and learning through media and technology...” However, 21 years later, Laurillard (2014) remarks that despite a myriad of learning technologies, they remain “hopelessly underexplored.”

It is this gap that prompted the researchers to explore the pedagogical potential of teaching ESL writing with e-mail technology. Drawing from Koehler and Mishra’s (2009) TPACK Framework (Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge) and Horn and Staker’s (2014) Blended Learning Framework, this study aimed at investigating the pedagogical viability of blending traditional in-class writing and outside-of-class e-mail writing among ESL students. TPACK attempts to capture some of the essential qualities of knowledge required by teachers for technology integration in their teaching. It shows the complex interplay and interconnections of the three primary forms of knowledge – Content (C), Pedagogy (P), and Technology – that results in the following intersections: Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK). TPACK guided this study in developing sensitivity to the dynamic and transactional relationship among all three components and in flexibly navigating the spaces defined by these key elements in the utilization of e-mail technology in a writing class. In delivering brick-and-mortar (offline/f2f or face-to-face) classes with online classes, Horn and Staker (2014) propose different models of blended learning: *rotation*, *flex*, *a la carte*, and *enriched virtual models*. Each of these models can be adapted/adopted considering the nature and needs of the learners, target learning outcomes, classroom contexts, and level of subject complexity. For the purposes of this study, the researchers adapted the principle of flex model, which suggests complementarity of off-line and on-line methods in teaching. The present study investigated the usefulness of using e-mail in teaching English writing skills to Filipino ESL learners via the *E-mail Project*, which was designed to provide opportunities for the students to perform both in-class pen-and-paper writing and outside-of-class e-mail writing.

Research Questions

An inter-class e-mail project was carried out in this study in order to address a pedagogical concern of helping students develop their confidence and competence in writing using e-mail as a platform. This study also aimed to explore the pedagogical viability of integrating technology into a traditional approach in writing in an ESL classroom setting. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do students view the use of e-mail as a writing platform in an ESL writing class?
2. What are the advantages of online writing via e-mail?
3. What are the challenges and limitations of using e-mail as a writing platform?
4. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of blended approach in performing in-class writing and online writing via e-mail?

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 198 sophomore college students (152 females and 46 males; ages range from 17 to 18 years old) enrolled in a *Writing in the Discipline* class, from six degree programs, BS Accountancy (n=24, 12.12%), BS Business Management (n=38, 19.19%), BS Customs Administration (n=38, 19.19%), BS International Relations (n=44, 22.22%), BA Multimedia Arts (n=34, 17.17%), and BS Psychology (n=20, 10.10%), in a private tertiary institution in Manila, Philippines. They have an average English learning experience of 12 years, and their English proficiency levels at the time of study ranged from lower intermediate to intermediate based on their TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores. The course aimed to develop students' discipline-specific writing skills by providing a range of genres and topics. Each class session ran for 1.5 hours with two sessions per week. This study was conducted during the first semester of academic year 2014 – 2015, from July to August, covering five weeks.

The E-mail Project was announced to all classes as a midterm project and all students were encouraged to participate in the e-mail interchange. Prior to the conduct of the study, participants' "virtual profiles" were determined by identifying the social networking sites that they maintained. The survey revealed that the three most popular social networking sites among the respondents are *Facebook* (198, 100%), *Twitter* (115, 58%), and *Instagram* (83, 42%). In a day, they accessed their social media for at

least an hour (18, 9.09%), more than an hour but less than five hours (112, 56.56%), and more than five hours (68, 34.34%). Their social media activities include posting, reading, and commenting on their and their friends' status updates, chatting, uploading photos and videos, and sharing information. All of them have active e-mail accounts with Yahoo! (165, 83.33%) and Gmail (33, 16.67%).

Research Instruments

Survey

Two surveys were administered to the respondents. Prior to the implementation of the project, a 'pre-project' survey questionnaire consisting eight items was administered to the respondents in order to gather personal information and to determine students' exposure and access to technology. This was conducted to ensure students' readiness to participate in the e-mail project. The responses from this questionnaire were used to organize the project in terms of what e-mail platform to utilize, how much e-mail interchange the learners should do per week, what topics should be included, and how much background knowledge learners had of e-mail. A 'post-project' open-ended survey questionnaire consisting five items was administered to the participants in order to determine their attitudes about the E-mail Project as well as the challenges that they encountered while doing it. A question was also asked inquiring their preference to in-class or online writing and the reasons for such choice.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Thirty students, five from each of the class, volunteered to be interviewed individually after the completion of the study. The same students participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs) with the researchers to discuss the e-mail project. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were administered to the participants, while open-ended questions were asked to the students during the FGD to determine their perception on the benefits, limitations and challenges of the E-mail Project. They were also asked to provide suggestions and recommendations on how the E-mail Project could be improved. Students' responses were recorded and transcribed for content analysis.

Procedure of the Study

The E-mail Project commenced in the first semester of AY 2014 – 2015 after seeking consent from the college, students and their parents/guardians. As aforementioned, a pre-project survey questionnaire was administered to the participants. The project ran for five weeks with two e-mail interchanges on a weekly topic between e-mail partners.

Students' active e-mail accounts were listed in a class e-mail directory, and each student was provided his/her e-mail partner from another class. The students underwent orientation and were familiarized with the syntactic and rhetoric patterns of e-mails (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993 in Wang & Aaltonen, 2004). The researchers were CC'd to ensure that they were able to track all the e-mail thread discussions of the students.

An exclusive 'closed' Facebook group account was also created to serve as the E-mail Project virtual convener, which was administered and maintained by the researchers. Instructions, guidelines and topics were posted on the group's wall post. Students were also encouraged to post on the group's wall, message or chat with their teacher teachers or e-mail partners for any E-mail Project concern.

For weekly e-mail interchange, students followed this format: Student A sends e-mail to Student B on a weekly topic provided and asks a question at the end of the e-mail regarding the topic; Student B responds by answering the question posed by Student A and asks a question at the end of the e-mail regarding next topic. Student A responds to Student B's question and ask a question again about the topic. The students followed this format throughout the duration of the E-mail Project.

Students were instructed to engage in e-mail topical discussions with their e-mail partners on weekly topics provided, which included the following: Week 1 – Personal Introduction; Week 2 – National Issues; Week 3 – Open Topic; Week 4 – Global Issues; and Week 5 – Collaborative Essay on Academic Socialization.

After five weeks of biweekly e-mail interchanges students responded to a post-project survey and participated in the individual interviews and FGDs. Open-ended questions were asked; for instance: *"How would you describe your E-mail Project experience?" "Do you think writing online through e-mail interchange helped you improve your English skills particularly writing? If yes, could you cite some of these improvements?" "What did you learn from this E-mail Project?" "What were the challenges that you encountered while doing the E-mail Project?" "Did you*

*like/enjoy the E-mail Project? Why or why not?” “How can this project be better?”
“Would you continue doing e-mail interchanges with your e-mail partner?”*

Data Analysis

To determine students' attitudes towards the use of e-mail as an online writing platform and their viewpoints on advantages and disadvantages of the E-mail Project, the survey questionnaire responses and reflections were subjected to content analysis to identify themes and patterns. Interview and FGD results were transcribed, coded, analyzed and qualitatively described to validate survey results.

Results

Throughout the five-week implementation of the E-mail Project, the researchers gathered important data as regards the quantity and quality of students' e-mail interchanges about weekly topical discussions via their e-mail threads as well as students' perceptions on writing online through e-mail as an alternative writing platform.

In terms of the quantity of e-mail, the 198 participants who complied with the project sent 752 e-mail within the duration of four weeks, with an average of 188 e-mail per week, which is equivalent to 226,247 words. Among these e-mail, the maximum number of words is 1,300, while the least number of words in an e-mail is 20. On the average, e-mails are composed of 228.53 words. These figures showed the pedagogical potentialities of e-mail as to its effects in motivating learners to express their ideas, emotions and opinions freely through online writing. Despite having no 'strict' guidelines in e-mail such as paragraph structures, style and word limits, and despite the absence of any evaluative measure or grading system for each of the e-mail, it can be seen that students manifested significant interest in writing and sending e-mail.

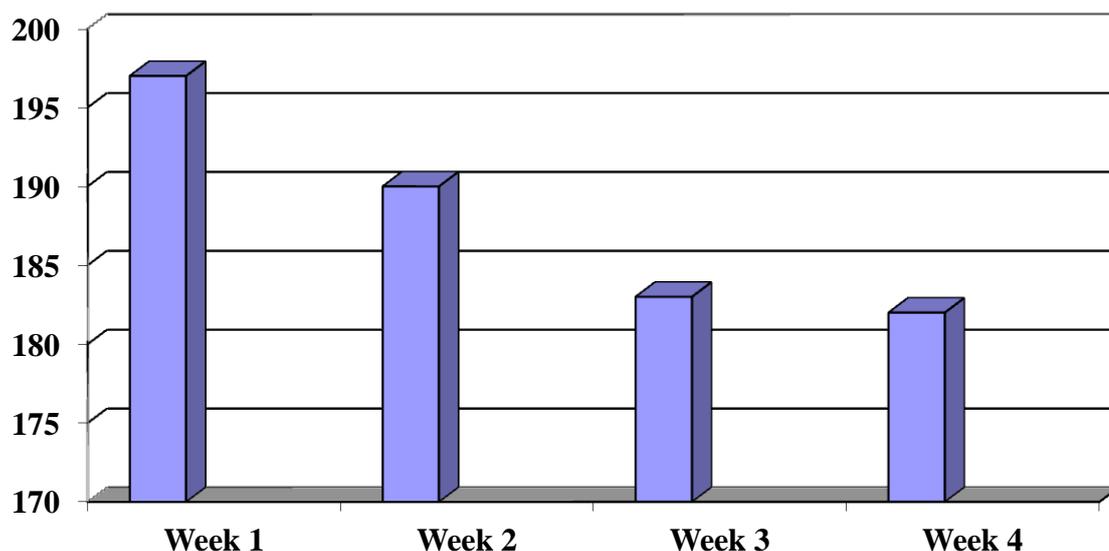


Figure 1. E-mail count per week

Figure 1 shows the e-mail count per week. This data shows a downward trend from the onset of the E-mail Project. On the Week 1 of the E-mail Project, 197 (26.20%) e-mail were sent, showing students' wide acceptance of the project, despite some limitations reported by the students such as lack of technical know-how of using e-mail, unavailability of technological resources such as personal computers at home, and weak internet connectivity at home and in the campus. Some students reported that they had to rent computers in internet shops in order to accomplish the project. Some students also confessed that they were hesitant to send their e-mail due to lack of confidence of their own writing and for fear of criticism from their e-mail partners. Erkan (2013) also reported similar drawbacks such as loss of Internet connections especially when sending e-mail. To address these concerns, students were advised to maximize the resources provided for them by the university such as free Wi-Fi connection within the campus, free computer and internet usage at the university electronic library as well as free use of computer tablets within the library premises. Students who reported having 'shyness' and 'fear of criticism' in doing the E-mail Project started to participate in the actively more actively. Wang (2010) suggests that exposing students to this kind of virtual learning environment gradually eradicates students' shyness in using e-mail.

In general, there was a consistent downward movement of e-mail interchanges throughout the E-mail Project, as indicated in the weekly e-mail count: Week 2 (190

e-mail, 25.27%), Week 3 (183 e-mail, 24.34%), and Week 4 (182 e-mail, 24.20%). Week 5 was solely dedicated to e-mail interchanges among student participants for an embedded task, the Academic Socialization Project, where students had to interview a prominent figure in any field or profession, and write a collaborative essay as their final output. Hence, the researchers only included the topical discussions from weeks 1 through 4 and excluded the e-mail interchanges for week 5. This downward trend can be attributed to several factors such as increasing school tasks and projects to attend to in preparation for the midterm grading period, pressing concern for technology-related limitations, students' lack of motivation in doing e-mail interchanges regularly, and students' negative attitude towards English writing via e-mail. Warschauer (1995), Kupelian (2001), and Erkan (2013) also shared a similar concern and suggested careful planning and design of e-mail project such as matching students' levels and interests, providing multiple e-mail partners to students, and setting up a mailing list.

In terms of quality of students' e-mail interchanges, the researchers observed diverse yet relevant topical discussions on the weekly general topics provided. Students observed basic structures of e-mail as well as employed conversational and personal but not overly informal style in writing. The tripartite structure of e-mail that consisted of introduction, body of the message and closing was generally followed in all of the e-mail interchanges, although there is variation in terms of length in writing, as some students tended to provide explanations and examples to their points, while some students tended to answer questions posed but did not provide elaborations. Since this study is only exploratory in nature, the researchers will not present content analysis of the e-mail interchanges; rather, only general observations of the E-mail Project are discussed. Future studies may investigate students' e-mail outputs and describe whether they reveal certain rhetorical patterns and structures.

Learner-perceived Advantages of the E-mail Project

Table 1

Benefits of using e-mail in ESL writing classroom

Advantages of the E-mail Project	Responses	%
Develops, enhances and practices English writing skills	44	25.00
Promotes socialization	34	19.30
Is an innovative way of teaching writing	18	10.20
Develops ICT skills	17	9.66
Is fun/enjoyable	12	6.82
Promotes knowledge sharing via online discussions	12	6.82
Is a new experience	9	5.11
Is interesting, exciting and challenging	6	3.41
Develops self-confidence	5	2.84
Motivates to write more	4	2.27
Is hassle-free way of writing	4	2.27
Develops collaborative skills	3	1.70
Helps learn new words	3	1.70
Promotes learners' autonomy	2	1.14
Encourages self-expression	2	1.14
Develops critical thinking skills	1	0.57
Total	176	100.00

Table 1 presents students' responses regarding the benefits of the E-mail Project. Students' reflections as well as the results of survey, individual interviews and focus group discussions revealed that all of them "enjoyed" the E-mail Project overall. When asked about the benefits of the project in their English writing skills, reasons why they enjoyed the e-mail interchange, and what they learned from the project, students reported a variety of responses. Of the 176 total responses, 44 (25%) students agreed that they enjoyed doing the e-mail interchanges because they believed that the project was a good way to develop their English writing skills. Their weekly e-mail discussions with their e-mail partners provided them an opportunity to practice and enhance their writing skills. These findings are consistent with the established findings favoring the use of e-mail as a tool for developing effective writing skills (Hannafin & Dalton, 1987; Mabrito, 1990; Fey, 1994; Mowrer, 1996; Hassini, 2006; Zaid, 2011), for improving students' fluency in writing particularly in content, language, and vocabulary (Albakri et al., 2003; Hung, 2007), and for making teaching more fun and allowing variation in teaching (Brandstrom, 2011). Thirty-four (19.3%) students shared that the project promoted socialization with other students in other colleges and disciplines through their constant interactions via e-mail. Some of them

even reported connecting with their e-mail partners in other social media sites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*, and even met with them personally for project-related discussions and socialization. Wang (2010) also noticed that e-mail interchanges could help enhance student-student interactions that allow them to share ideas and information. Eighteen (10.2%) students agreed that the project is an innovative way of teaching the English language; they mentioned that it was a “new and exciting experience” for them to engage with other students online via e-mail while developing their English writing skills. The following students’ avowals support these findings:

Table 2

Students’ avowals on the advantages of e-mail

Perceived benefits of e-mail	Interview and FGD transcripts and reflections reflecting students’ perceptions on the benefits of e-mail
Develops, enhances and practices English writing skills	<i>The e-mail project helped me to construct more sentences, develop unity in my writing, and work on writing with precision by thinking about the proper words to use in my e-mail.(S1-M-17)</i>
Promotes socialization	<i>I was happy collaborating and exchanging ideas with my e-mail partner because I could learn other things from him that we don’t tackle in my course major. (S5-F-18)</i>
Innovative way of teaching English writing skills	<i>I like the new idea of the E-mail Project because I could write without worrying too much about time pressure inside the classroom. Plus I could just write anytime anywhere on my free time and whenever I am ready. (S12-M-17)</i>
Develops students’ ICT skills	<i>The E-mail Project taught me to be better at sending e-mail. I also learned that Facebook groups and e-mail could help me improve my English. (S20-M-18)</i>
Fun and enjoyable	<i>Although I struggled in the beginning of the E-mail Project, I discovered that it was actually fun and exciting. I loved the idea of sending e-mails to other students in the university that I have not met before because I could learn from them and make new friends with them. (S44-F-17)</i>

Challenges and Limitations of the E-mail Project

As with any other educational endeavors, the E-mail Project also has its own drawbacks. Table 3 lists the challenges encountered by the students while doing the E-mail Project. Thirty-nine (19.7%) students reported that despite their strong interest in accomplishing the E-mail Project, they were limited by lack of personal computers and internet access at home or in the campus. They had to do the project in the computer shops, which incurred them additional expenses and required more of their time after school. This finding corroborates with the observations of some authors (Stine, 2004; Van Roekel, 2008; Brandstrom, 2011; Mayes, Natividad, & Spector,

2015; Rabah, 2015) who posit that access problems remain to be a barrier to learning with technology.

Table 3

Challenges encountered by the students in the E-mail Project

Challenges Encountered by the Students	Responses	%
No internet access at home or school	39	19.70
Lack of active participation of the e-mail partner	24	12.12
Time-consuming	22	11.11
Misinterpretation of ideas; lacks immediate feedback	17	8.59
Late response from the e-mail partner	16	8.08
Limited ICT skills (e-mail know-how)	14	7.07
Lacks personal interaction	15	7.58
Weak internet connection at home/school	9	4.55
Plagiarism issues	9	4.55
Limited English proficiency	8	4.04
Requires more effort than traditional writing	8	4.04
Conflict in schedule with the e-mail partner	4	2.02
Requires collaboration	3	1.52
E-mail account problems	3	1.52
More expensive than traditional writing	3	1.52
Mismatch of interest in topics with the e-mail partner	2	1.01
No disadvantage	2	1.01
Total	198	100.00

Meanwhile, 24 (12.12%) students complained that their performance in doing the E-mail Project waned due to the lack of active participation among their e-mail partners. They reported that despite their prompt sending of their e-mail to their partners, they would usually receive delayed and short responses. As a result, their enthusiasm in finishing the project decreased, and they gradually believed that it was impossible to accomplish the project successfully. Roberts, Rice, & Thorsheim (1994) and Kupelian (2001) share a similar sentiment in their classes and suggest that teachers should plan carefully on integrating e-mail in the ongoing coursework and work in building students' positive attitude towards the use of e-mail technology. These findings are supported by the following statements from the students:

Traditional In-class Writing versus Modern Online Writing via E-mail

After drawing the pros and cons of the E-mail Project from the students, they were asked whether they would prefer writing in English online via e-mail or in-class via the traditional pen- and-paper mode. Students' responses through survey, interviews and FGDs generated different answers. Of the total 129 responses, 78 (60.46%)

students preferred writing online via e-mail, 38 (29.46%) students chose the traditional in-class writing, while 13 (10.07%) picked both modes.

Table 4

Students' avowals on the limitations of the E-mail Project

Challenges encountered by students in the E-mail Project	Interview and FGD transcripts showing the limitations and challenges of doing the E-mail Project
No internet access at home or school	<i>The biggest problem I had with the E-mail Project is that we didn't have a computer at home, so I had to walk far to a computer shop to access the Internet, which is very time-consuming. (S63-M-18)</i>
Lack of active participation of the e-mail partner	<i>My e-mail partner was always late in sending his e-mail responses, so we got delayed all the time. I already contacted him on Facebook but he just kept on 'seen-zoning' me. (S55-F-17)</i>
Time-consuming	<i>I'm not familiar with using technology, so I spent most of my time accessing my e-mail and sending e-mail responses. Sometimes the Internet connection was lost so I had to redo everything again. (S101-M-17)</i>
Misinterpretation of ideas; lacks immediate feedback	<i>I experienced asking my e-mail partner to clarify his question, but I got his reply after three days. It was just a very simple question but I had to wait that long. I disliked the idea of checking of e-mail all the time just to see whether he had already replied to my question. (S34-M-17)</i>
Limited ICT skills	<i>I'm not very familiar typing in the message area of my e-mail. One time I panicked because I could not access my e-mail, so I worried too much for my project. I had a hard time retrieving my username and password, but I was happy that my classmate helped me out. (S46-M-18)</i>
Lacks personal interaction	<i>Although we could socialize with our e-mail partners through online interaction, I still think that face-to-face interactions are better and more engaging. (S80-F-17)</i>

Students gave various reasons for choosing online writing via e-mail in developing their English writing skills. Of the total 78 responses in favor of online e-mail writing, 29 (37.18%) students agreed that the most significant advantage of using this mode is that it is easy and convenient for them, as it offers flexibility and freedom for them to do English writing at their preferred time and place. Eleven (14.1%) students concurred that they liked the online writing via e-mail because it gives them an opportunity to access online resources to proofread their grammar and spelling errors such as *Grammarly* (www.grammarly.edu) and *Paper Rater* (www.paperrater.com). Ten (12.82%) students believed that online writing is appropriate and suitable to their nature and needs because of the availability of modern technology that they use for educational purposes such as PDAs (personal digital assistants), mobile phones, personal computers, portable laptops, tablets, phablets, and public and personal Wi-Fi access. They stressed that their always-on-

the-go and always-on-line lifestyle is compatible with modern teaching methods such as the one they experienced with the E-mail Project. These findings delineate the remarks of some researchers that the e-learning experience promotes learners' engagement, motivation, and preferences (Olojo, Adewumi, & Ajisola, 2012), enhances students' attitudes towards learning English (Zaid, 2011), takes learning beyond classroom borders (Erkan, 2013), and meets students' expectations and improves students' productivity (Mayes, Natividad, & Spector, 2015). Students' responses in favor of modern online writing via e-mail are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Reasons given by the students who prefer online writing via e-mail

Reasons for choosing modern online writing	Responses	%
Is easy & convenient	29	37.18
Availability of online resources (e.g. grammar and spelling checker)	11	14.10
Is appropriate to modern learners	10	12.82
Develops ICT skills	8	10.26
Saves time	7	8.97
Promotes independent learning	4	5.13
Is practical	2	2.56
Promotes socialization	2	2.56
Is environment-friendly	2	2.56
Is presentable	1	1.28
Is less time pressure	1	1.28
Provides online consultation with my teacher	1	1.28
Total	78	100.00

The following students' avowals substantiate these findings:

Table 6

Students' avowals on e-mail writing preference

Reasons for choosing e-mail writing	Interview and FGD transcripts showing students' preference for modern online writing via e-mail
Easy and convenient	<i>I prefer online writing via e-mail because it is more comfortable to do; I can do it at home, in the campus, or even at the bus terminal. In fact, I can do it anywhere as long as I have internet access. (S112-M-18)</i> <i>Online writing via e-mail is easier to do because I can control my time unlike writing in the classroom, which always gives me pressure to rush, and so my writing output is usually of less quality. (S160-F-18)</i>
Availability of online resources	<i>I choose online writing because it has some perks such as free access to online grammar and spell checkers, which allow me to correct my writing on the spot. (S172-F-17)</i> <i>The e-mail message area alone offers grammar revision and spelling checker. These are just some things that I like about e-mail writing. (S6-M-17)</i>
Appropriate to modern	<i>Students like us nowadays are different from the students in the past</i>

learners

because we have unlimited access to modern technology, and I think our class E-mail Project is appropriate for us because we know how to use technology. (S47-M-18)

I choose online writing via e-mail because I usually use my gadgets and access the Internet. I like the idea of submitting my written outputs using technology. (S68-F-19)

While majority of the students prefer online writing via e-mail, some still chose the traditional in-class writing. Of the total 38 responses in favor of traditional in-class paper-and-pen writing, 17 (44.74%) students believed that it is more focused and objective. The time pressure given by the writing teacher encourages them to concentrate on the writing task and finish it on time, preventing them from procrastination, which is more likely to happen to them when they are asked to do the online writing outside the classroom. Furthermore, they argued that in-class writing is more objective and original, as the teacher is assured that the students are the ones writing the task, unlike online writing, which encourages plagiarism. Some students may commit academic dishonesty by plagiarizing e-mail content and even asking their friends to do the online writing for them. Seven (18.42%) students agreed that one of the strengths of traditional in-class writing is the presence of the English writing teacher who will guide them in finishing the writing task successfully and give them immediate feedback on their writing performance. Moreover, the teacher can offer them suggestions or recommendations to improve their writing through consultations and mini-conferences. These responses echo the findings of some authors that in-class writing can facilitate focused writing (Stine, 2004) and help students become better writers (Gooblar, 2014). Table 7 presents the reasons given by the students for choosing traditional in-class writing over modern online writing via e-mail.

Table 7

Reasons given by the students who prefer traditional in-class writing

Reasons for choosing traditional in-class writing	Responses	%
Is focused and objective	17	44.74
Availability of writing teacher for consultation	7	18.42
Is original	5	13.16
Is convenient	4	10.53
Is less time-consuming	2	5.26
Improves handwriting	2	5.26
Availability of peers' assistance	1	2.63
Total	38	100.00

The following students' affirmations validate these findings:

Table 8

Students' avowals for in-class writing preference

Reasons for choosing traditional in-class writing	Interview and FGD transcripts showing students' preference for traditional in-class
Focused and objective	<i>I choose traditional method of writing inside the classroom because I want to be pressured to complete my writing task. If I do it outside I'm sure I won't be able to finish it because there are a lot of distractions. (S2-M-18)</i> <i>I choose in-class writing because it is more objective; the teacher knows who is writing or not and he knows that the students themselves are the ones writing their essays. (S35-F-17)</i>
Presence of a writing teacher	<i>I like in-class writing more than online writing via e-mail because in the class, my English teacher can guide me. I can ask questions and get the answers right away. (S191-M-18)</i> <i>I feel more focused and active writing inside the classroom because I know that my teacher is there who will call my attention whenever I'm not on the task, and my teacher is always there if I have questions to ask. (S8-M-17)</i>
Original	<i>I choose traditional in-class writing because it assures us 100% that the students' writing is original and not plagiarized, unlike online writing where students can just copy sentences from the Internet.</i>

As shown above, some students prefer modern online writing via e-mail and some still choose traditional in-class writing for various reasons. However, to some students, the issue does not lie on which mode is more effective in developing students' English writing skills; they believe that the two methods can work complementarily to improve their writing in the English language. Thirteen students stated that they prefer both modes of writing because they think that they can be utilized by English teachers to encourage them to write by providing them variation or alternatives in performing their writing tasks. They further emphasized that both online and in-class writing can be used together by English language teachers in the classroom to help their students develop confidence and competence in writing. This is supported by some researchers (Stine, 2004; Kirtman, 2009; Ni, 2013) who maintain that a hybrid model of integrating in-class teaching with online pedagogy may provide student satisfaction, increase student positive attitude and motivation towards learning, minimize potential problems, and maximize learning opportunities.

Discussion

Findings suggest that students view online writing via e-mail as an academic tool that can help them develop their English writing skills in context, a social tool that can

provide them opportunities to engage, collaborate, and learn from and with their peers, and a technological tool that can afford them additional means of learning along with in-class learning. These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies citing the efficacy of e-mail as a popular and useful tool in language teaching and learning (Wang, 2010; Thevasigamoney & Yunus, 2013; Foroutan et al., 2013), efficiency of e-mail in allowing students to discuss and communicate directly and cheaply anywhere (Hoffman, 1994; Hassini, 2006), and viability of using e-mail in communicative situations with more genuine interactions involving real people (Hackett, 1996; Wang, 1998; Shang, 2007; Erkan, 2013).

Furthermore, these findings corroborate with the results of other studies highlighting the pedagogical viability of using e-mail in developing students' writing ability by developing their confidence in expressing their opinions on various topics more openly and without fear (Belisle, 2002), encouraging L2 writing development through increased participation, engagement, confidence, and responsibility (Strasma & Foster, 1992; Gutierrez, 2016), providing more writing practice (DiMatteo, 1991; Gooblar, 2014), creating an authentic purpose and audience for writing (Silvia et al., 1996), increasing motivational benefits (Van Handle & Corl, 1998), providing authentic and contextualized communication (Kupelian, 2001), and producing a greater amount of words as well as of student-initiated interactions (Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998). Findings suggest that considering its merits, the online writing space that is afforded to the students via e-mail interchange can complement with the in-class writing, facilitating students' writing connections from the physical to the virtual space.

However, as with any educational endeavors, the E-mail Project also poses problems such as the issue on peer's non-response (Kupelian, 2001), which may have a profound negative impact on some students' motivation to participate actively in the e-mail project – a threat in the success of integrating e-mail in the writing classroom. Another concern is the lack of “access at home” (Project Tomorrow, 2014), and the possibility of unattained class writing objectives due to the interplay of motivational, technological, and instructional factors.

Students' positive attitude towards e-mail writing may have led their preference to that mode of writing as they regard it flexible, efficient, and convenient. Being techno-savvy “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001), modern students have been exposed to new technologies at a very young age and have been living in a digital era and

space where access to technology, information, and digital media is a part of their daily lifestyles. Their technological access is greater than that of prior generation; hence, they are comfortable working in technology-rich environments, making them comfortable to perform technology-embedded activities. McMahon and Pospisil (2005) enumerated characteristics of millennial students: 1. 24/7 connectivity with information across web-based platforms, 2. a predilection for environments that provide opportunities for multi-tiered and multi-tasking activities, 3. preference for group and collaborative activities, and 4. appreciation of the social aspects of learning. With these characteristics, students are likely to embrace modern means of language learning that support their preferences and help them develop their language skills effectively and meaningfully.

Conclusion

This study explored the viability of integrating in-class writing with online writing via the E-mail Project, allowing students across disciplines to engage in weekly e-mail interchanges on different topical discussions. Findings suggest that e-mail can be an academic, social and technological tool that may help develop students' English writing ability, provide a social space for students' engagement, collaboration and interaction, and increase students' positive attitude and motivation towards the English language. These findings illustrate what Prensky (2008) suggested about the role of technology in the classroom as a 'pedagogical support', optimizing language instruction by harnessing the power of technology, enabling students to learn how to use technology to learn language for themselves, and shifting the traditional paradigm for language educators from being the "Sage on the Stage" to being the "Guide on the Side". Furthermore, these findings substantiate research on ICT in the classroom that highlights the move of some educators to use technology to "substitute, augment, modify, and redefine" their practices (Puentedura, 2014) – going beyond the "functional fixedness" of technologies by creatively repurposing them to be pedagogically viable (Koehler & Mishra, 2009), and integrating technology to enhance pedagogy and curriculum (Means, Penuel, & Padilla, 2001; Schofield & Davidson, 2002 as cited in Kozma, 2003; Shyamlee & Phil, 2012).

Teaching with technology is no longer an option today. Cognizant educators living in this digital era cannot simply ignore the myriad modern technologies available for exploration, experimentation, and integration into their traditional

classroom pedagogies. If the so-called responsive, relevant, and realistic 21st century education for 21st century learners needs to be successfully realized now, then what we need are 21st century educators who have “situational creativity, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, and a desire to “play” with technology in the classroom” (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

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